The examined religious life is a life of . . . failed but fruitful attempts to capture in words and images that elusive but real something only our hearts know.

—Elbert Eugene Peck

When Daniel H. Rector joined the Sunstone Foundation in early 1986, he couldn’t have known that less than two months later, he’d succeed Peggy Fletcher as president of the premier forum for independent Mormon intellectual expression. “I came on as business manager,” he recalled for this history; “that was my only expectation.” After more than a decade at the magazine, Peggy looked exhausted, friends remembered; the never-ending stress of balancing people, finances, and deadlines had clearly taken a toll. More important, however, Peggy at age thirty-four had fallen in love with Sunstone staffer Michael Stack, who’d told friends he didn’t want to be known forever after as “Mr. Sunstone.” By late spring 1985, after much soul-searching, Peggy had concluded it would be in her and Michael’s best interests to leave. They had decided to marry that October and then relocate to Africa to work for a humanitarian relief agency. Peggy informed members of Sunstone’s board of trustees that she intended to resign by May 1986, broke the news to her surprised office staff one by one, then told the foundation’s major supporters of her decision.

Initially, after announcing her decision to leave, Peggy hoped to convince Elbert Eugene Peck to rejoin the foundation, where for eight months in the early 1980s, he’d helped to edit the Sunstone Review. However, Elbert was opposed to shoulerding the burdensome responsibility. The experience had been hard on him, and shortly before the demise of the Review in 1984, he’d returned home to Virginia to pursue a career in urban planning. (He’d graduated from BYU in 1982 with a master’s degree in public administration.) He also hoped that distance from one of the hotbeds of independent Mormonism would allow him to regroup—“I took a little sabbatical from life,” he recalled.

Given his background with Sunstone (and earlier with the independent, BYU student-run Seventh East Press), Elbert appreciated the challenges facing any new poster child for Mormon intellectual studies. “Peggy didn’t see a successor coming, and the board of trustees wasn’t really doing anything about it,” he explained for this history, “so finally she said to them, ‘I’m leaving on this date. You’ve got to deal with it.’” In response, the board appointed a search committee, wrote a job description, and again approached Elbert, who, again, said no. With only a few weeks left, Peggy and the board jumped at the obvious solution and invited Daniel to serve as the foundation’s new full-time director/publisher. “I felt inadequate,” Daniel remembered, “from the perspective of being responsible for both the financial side and especially for the editorial side. But I was flattered and confident I’d be able to find someone to take over the editorial side. So I didn’t really hesitate.”

Ambitious, sometimes stubborn, yet immensely likeable, Daniel at age twenty-nine brought to Sunstone more real-world business experience than had any previous SUNSTONE publisher. He’d graduated from BYU in financial and estate planning, started a master’s program, sold tires, worked for financier and Sunstone booster Steven Christensen, then briefly for the short-lived Mormon Heritage magazine in Utah Valley. However, Daniel didn’t have a background in editing, design, printing, or magazine production, nor much direct personal interaction with the Mormon intellectual community. To fill that void, he and board members aggressively lobbied a still reluctant Elbert.
promising that he wouldn’t be responsible for fundraising or finances. “I came to Peggy’s farewell party in early May 1986,” Elbert recalled, “knowing that I’d probably sign up with Sunstone. Daniel was taking over and recruited me to come on as editor. That seemed much easier than being editor and publisher, which was an overwhelming, burn-out kind of job.” Three years Daniel’s senior, a reinvigorated Elbert agreed and commuted between Utah and Virginia for the next several months before relocating permanently to Salt Lake by mid-August. Thanks to previous staff editors, especially Ron Bitton, the new team started with a backlog of issues ready for press.

AS THE FIFTH child of nine of an LDS general authority (his father, Hartman Rector Jr. was a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy), Daniel sensed the fine line he walked between his own commitment to independent thought and his family’s deference to the institutional Church. “I remember talking to my mom and dad about taking the job with Sunstone,” he later reported. “And Dad encouraged me to do it. He gave me his blessing, so to speak. He supported me in that decision. I remember his saying that it would be good to have someone with a testimony at Sunstone. He knew that I wanted to do it, and he’s always been supportive of that sort of thing.” However, Daniel continued, “I never really asked my siblings what they thought about it at the time. I found out later in conversations that some of them did have some concerns about it. But I think they too were more or less supportive.”

Daniel also knew that some of SUNSTONE’s readers feared, given his background, that he’d bring an explicitly conservative orientation to the pages of the sometimes free-wheeling magazine. “One advantage of growing up in a General Authority’s home,” he wrote in late 1986 in his first editorial for the magazine, “was that I never shared the popular conception of Church leaders as nearly infallible authority figures. I therefore tend to be quite independent in my views. . . . I am a believer,” he added, “most of whose beliefs are constantly changing.” Of his plans for the magazine, he promised long-time supporters: “Our content will remain essentially the same,” then added for his more mainstream constituency, “with perhaps a better balance of articles reflecting the values and attitudes of our predominantly believing readership.”

UTAH-BORN BUT East Coast-educated, Elbert Peck combined an infectious romanticism with a sense of street-smart politics. (In one of his editorials, he half-jokingly termed this mixture his “chameleon manipulative tendencies.”) “I am acquainted with the disillusionment that comes from discovering that things are not as I was taught and believed,” he confided in his first issue; “with the despair from realizing that nothing in heaven functions as it ought; and with the cynicism from concluding that things may never change.” But, though now believing “fewer things than I did before,” he continued, “in what I believe, I am more certain.” For Elbert, Sunstone was “a tent into which all people gather who thirst to explore the Mormon Church’s doctrine, culture, past, present, and future.” Thus Elbert knew that satisfying the sometimes competing expecta-
Daniel knew his primary strengths were common business sense and fundraising, that his first priority was getting control of the foundation's roller-coaster finances. (“It was forced on me.”) His predecessor, especially toward the end of her tenure, hadn't always rigorously monitored salary structures, met state and federal payroll withholding requirements, or tracked accounts payable. In fact, according to board of trustees minutes, Sunstone's corporate charter was temporarily suspended in June 1986 for failure to file an annual report and renew its license. Consequently, Daniel found the financially strapped organization he'd inherited in worse shape than even he'd expected, eventually owing the Internal Revenue Service nearly $20,000 in back taxes and fines, with other debts totaling approximately $24,000. (At first, Daniel thought the foundation owed the IRS only $7,000; other payables wouldn't be discovered until months later.) One vendor garnished the foundation's bank account during the 1986 August symposium, catching both Daniel and Elbert completely off guard (“It was a blow,” Daniel remembered, “I wasn't even aware of it”), and Daniel was required to guarantee personally all payments owed the IRS.4

“Peggy must have mentioned Sunstone's financial situation to me before she left,” Daniel stressed for this history, “and I may have forgotten about it. I don’t remember specifically. But it didn’t come to a head until I was on my own.” Even so, “I don’t remember it being particularly weighty on me. But it was a major effort to get that paid off.” His wife's reaction was different: “The whole affair was hard on my wife, Lisa, financially, socially, and religiously. But I was oblivious to it, and she probably felt there wasn’t a whole lot she could do to dissuade me.” Still, he “certainly didn’t have any illusions about its being an easy job to keep Sunstone afloat. I knew that bills had gone unpaid, that dealing with creditors was an issue, and that payroll was a problem. But while Peggy had been fully disclosing of the situation, some of the details did come as a surprise at the time.”

Faced with such problems, Daniel quickly moved to identify and prioritize all outstanding debts, arranged a repayment schedule with the IRS, and negotiated other payables down by fifty cents or more on the dollar. He also considered—but ultimately rejected—having the foundation take out a bank loan that would be guaranteed by at least three Sunstone supporters. In March 1987, he cut payroll by almost $25,000, reducing three employees from full-time to part-time status, while letting two others go altogether. Gradually, due in large measure to a combination of creative fundraising (including helping broker in-kind tithing donations to the LDS Church), directed mass mailings and subscription incentives (free back issues, free books, free subscriptions), and periodic vendor and donor arm-twisting, the foundation's total long-term indebtedness began to shrink—though it wouldn't disappear completely until 1991. (Unfortunately, as will be detailed in Part II of this article, Sunstone would again run into trouble with debt.)

Not surprisingly, the reductions affecting Sunstone's employees proved painful. Particularly upsetting was the fact that no one received advance notice before Daniel announced—imperiously, some felt—the personnel changes as a “fait accompli in a staff meeting. “I handled that situation very poorly,” he later admitted. “I was insensitive. I lacked experience. I really didn’t know how to handle it. I feel very badly about it still.” If some employees felt that the reductions didn’t affect Daniel and Elbert, they were mistaken. Before the cuts, Daniel was earning $26,000, Elbert $20,000. (By comparison, Peggy took home about $5,000 in 1985, her last full year.) After the cuts, both salaries were reduced by 25 percent. (Fourteen months later, following a financial upswing, both were restored to their previous levels; the next year, each was increased by $2,500.) During Daniels first three full years, from 1987 to 1989, the foundation’s net income increased 85 percent, income from sales of the magazine quadrupled, total expenses rose 75 percent, payroll as a percentage of expenditures dropped from 64 percent (75 percent in 1986) to 50 percent, while the foundation’s annual net operating surplus/deficit (-7 percent in 1986) ran +6 percent (1987), +6 percent (1988), and +11 percent (1989).

Much of Sunstone’s improved finances may be directly attributed to an increase in subscriptions, one of Daniel’s most impressive achievements. “I believe that the bulk of the increase in subscriptions,” he explained, “can be accounted for

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**Table:**

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*Includes salaries, wages, and taxes
**Includes some IRS and Utah state payroll-related penalties (including interest)
***May include other costs (such as typesetting)
simply in how we went about marketing the magazine. We got mailing lists we hadn't had access to in the past. (This People's list, for example, was very good for us.) My goal was to try to reach the natural audience I believed was out there but that had been largely untapped. There were some things that people were interested in, and we used those as a hook. But I also think that if we'd used another come-on, we still would've been successful. The other issue that was important to me was to try to broaden the readership of SUNSTONE. I felt that SUNSTONE is a leavening influence in the Church, that it does good things, but that its effect is proportional to its readership."

**Controversy equals cash flow**

WHERE DIRECT SOLICITATION—letters, telemarketing, and personal endorsements—didn't always sell new subscriptions, controversy and timing did. Without question, in terms of sales, the two most successful issues produced during Daniels's tenure were August 1989, which featured the first publication of George P. Lee's letters to the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve following his excommuniation for apostasy, and the cluster coverage in September 1991 of Elder Paul H. Dunn's fabrication of some of his best-known baseball and war stories. Daniel used both issues as incentives to attract new subscribers, assuming they'd stay on board once they began receiving copies. As a result, from 1998 to 1989, total income from magazine sales rose 127 percent, and in 1990, the number of new subscriptions outpaced renewals by two-to-one. Total sales likewise increased in 1991, with new subscriptions again accounting for more income than did renewals. "It made a big difference in our cash flow," Daniel acknowledged. During these three years, 1989–91, the magazine generated nearly 40 percent of the foundation's total revenues, an accomplishment that has not been repeated since. By the time of Daniel's departure in late 1991, the total number of subscriptions had jumped from 3,500 to an all-time high of 10,000.

The downside to this aggressive approach was three-fold. First, the increased print runs boosted total expenditures more than 75 percent from 1989 to 1992, while net income climbed only 44 percent. Consequently, Sunstone's annual operating surplus/deficit began to reverse, from a high of +11 percent in 1989, to -6 percent in 1990, -8 percent in 1991, and -8 percent again in 1992. Second, many readers who subscribed primarily for the Lee letters and Dunn exposé didn't renew when their subscription expired. Some even complained in private and public letters to the editor that they'd been tricked into buying a liberal rag. Third, according to Daniel, "I don't know but what the increase in subscriptions also had the negative impact of drawing more attention to us from the Brethren, or perhaps making us seem a more credible threat in certain respects, because we were growing." Elbert concurred: "I long believed that if the Brethren couldn't participate in the kind of conversation Sunstone champions, they at least would appreciate overhearing it and knowing what people are talking about. I don't think they saw it that way, however. I think they saw us as lobbying them, and eventually took umbrage."

**THE CALM BEFORE THE STORMS**

"Let's simply discuss important subjects."

AFTER TWO YEARS, Elbert had mastered most of the technical aspects of producing the magazine and running the office, aided by long-suffering staffers such as Ron Bitton, Connie Disney, Marti Esplin, Charlotte Hamblin, Hinckley Jones, Melissa Sillitoe, and Robin Smith-Winchester, among others. This allowed him to focus increasingly on editorial content. With almost as many opinions regarding the magazine's "philosophy" as SUNSTONE had readers, he hoped to involve the foundation's board of trustees in a wide-ranging discussion of Sunstone's future in late 1988. Historically, the board had provided little input regarding submissions, leaving virtually all such decisions to the editor. Elbert explained to board members that the magazine was divided into the following categories: features (including fiction, drama, and interviews), columns (short, "provocative" essays and cartoons), reviews (usually of books), and news stories. "We try to have a balance of history, contemporary issues, liberal and conservative perspectives," he reported in the board's minutes. With pride, Elbert could point to past articles that represented the magazine at its best: Karl Sandberg on "Pascal's Wager on the

Barring some egregious transgression or ultracontroversial topic, the board reaffirmed its continuing hands-off policy concerning the magazine's contents, preferring instead to oversee finances, help develop issues and encourage writers, brainstorm sessions for the annual symposium, and conduct year-end merit reviews for the foundation's paid officers. "The board always trusted Elbert to make prudent decisions," former trustee Kent Frogley noted for this history. "Elbert exercised a pretty strong hand in making all editorial determinations. He did it understanding the wishes of the board and taking their advice. But he's ultimately the one who made those decisions. I can't remember any time when the board said to Elbert, 'You can't publish this article, or you can't talk about this topic.'"7 Notable articles that followed these discussions included Hugh Nibley on "What Is Zion?," Armand Mauss's "Alternate Voices: The Calling and Its Implications" and Scott Kenney's "God's Alternate Voices," Eugene England on "Prejudice Against Blacks and Women in Popular Mormon Theology," and Todd Compton's "Non-Hierarchical Revelation."8

"My position," Elbert later explained to an online discussion board and taking their advice. But he's ultimately the one who made those decisions. I can't remember any time when the board said to Elbert, 'You can't publish this article, or you can't talk about this topic.'"7 Notable articles that followed these discussions included Hugh Nibley on "What Is Zion?," Armand Mauss's "Alternate Voices: The Calling and Its Implications" and Scott Kenney's "God's Alternate Voices," Eugene England on "Prejudice Against Blacks and Women in Popular Mormon Theology," and Todd Compton's "Non-Hierarchical Revelation."8

"My position," Elbert later explained to an online discussion group, "is that the magazine and the symposiums should host a healthy variety of perspectives on Mormon issues. We try very hard to achieve that; although, to be candid, there are many more so-called liberals than so-called conservatives who participate. Many conservatives are uncomfortable with being on the same platform with liberals, whose views some see as heretical. I find many liberals who see themselves as open and tolerant to be just as intolerant of conservative views as liberals. It's a sorry polarization among Mormon intellectuals. But I guess it's understandable because religion is so much closer to our heart than even politics. . . . Because of the imbalance, ironically, conservatives actually have an easier time getting into Sunstone [symposiums] than do liberals, who have to be more competitive for the available slots. Frankly, I'm tired of the liberals who continually assert their right to discuss things independently. I say, let's quit being so defensive and hierarchy-preoccupied and simply discuss important subjects."9

"One of the things I think I brought to Sunstone," he added for this history, "was a strong connection to BYU faculty, so I was able to get a lot of them to speak at the symposium and write for the magazine." Within some Church circles, the magazine was occasionally seen as challenging to the faith. "So I wanted, not to eliminate those testimony-challenging articles, but to supplement them with affirming pieces, which Peggy had also tried very hard to do. In retrospect, those first years were simple compared to what they are now [1999]." The same can't be said for running the office during those early years. "At the time," he continued, "it seemed to me that I was working every waking minute. After Daniel reduced the number of staff, I managed our database, including subscription lists, while trying to do everything else with the magazine. There wasn't a lot of time to focus on all the things we wanted to do."

Elbert's quest for balance wasn't always easily pursued in the LDS community, especially during the sturm und drang of the late 1980s and beyond, when probing treatments of problematic issues in Mormon history, or personal confessions of disbelief, were increasingly demonized as anti-Mormon. On the one hand, as Elbert pointed out, Sunstone was sometimes seen by conservative Mormons as "liberal," even "heretical." On the other hand, offering a variety of views, including conservative responses, would help ensure Sunstone's independence. It wasn't unusual for especially controversial articles to generate both new subscriptions and angry cancellations. (Elbert always viewed this development as a sign that he was succeeding in his quest for balance.)

The politics of homosexuality

ONE OF THE most direct responses to Elbert's editorial policies came in early 1990. Since 1989, Elbert had been running an occasional column, entitled "A Changed Man," by former Sunstone staffer Orson Scott Card. Elbert felt that Card, a nationally award-winning science fiction writer, brought a thought-provoking conservative voice to the pages of the magazine. Card's fourth column, which appeared in the February 1990 issue, was called "The Hypocrites of Homosexuality." In it, Card declared that "the Church has no room for those who, instead of repenting of homosexuality, wish it to become an acceptable behavior in the society of the Saints. They are wolves in sheep's clothing, preaching meekness while attempting to devour the flock." He continued, "If we accept the argument of the hypocrites of homosexuality that their sin is not a sin, we have destroyed ourselves."9 Signature Books, which distributed the magazine to bookstores and other retailers, informed Sunstone that if it continued to publish, in Signature's view, such irresponsible opinions, it might need to find another distributor. Some at Sunstone saw this as an attempt to stifle Card's and the magazine's freedom of expression.10 Signature responded that just as SUNSTONE published what it wanted to, so Signature was free to distribute what it chose to.

Reader reactions to Card proved equally divisive, with most published letters condemning the fabulist's views. Card never again submitted another column, and eight years later, he castigated the magazine for reprinting without his permission an excerpt from one of his earlier SUNSTONE articles.11 (According to Elbert's published history of Sunstone, Card "refuses invitations [to participate in the annual symposium] as long as 'apostates' are allowed to speak." As for the magazine, Elbert insisted that SUNSTONE's policies wouldn't be determined by outsiders; while Signature, which remains the magazine's distributor, hasn't abandoned its position on distributing only what it chooses.)
Ironically, in the same issue as Card’s article was H. Wayne Schow’s “Homosexuality, Mormon Doctrine, and Christianity: A Father’s Perspective.” As evidence of the sensitive nature of the topic, where Card’s piece appeared without an editor’s notice, Schow’s column featured Elbert’s disclaimer: “While most of our readers do not agree with [Schow’s] revised theology, all can empathize with his struggle. We present this essay only to enhance understanding of a growing challenge for the Church.” When some readers complained about the discrepancy in approach, Elbert apologized for “insulting our reader’s judgment and intelligence,” and for “prejudicing [Schow’s] excellent essay.” He was “only trying to assure an unencumbered presentational tone,” he explained, “for an article whose speculation that Christ approves of gay marriages might engender reader outrage that the magazine was forcing ‘its agenda’ on them.” Clearly, many interpreted Elbert’s action as his being more concerned about the potential fallout resulting from Schow’s revisionist musings than he was about Card’s name-calling.

The Paul Dunn dilemma

THE SINGLE MOST controversial issue published during Daniels and Elbert’s five years was their treatment of Paul Dunn’s war and baseball stories. When word of Utah journalist Lynn Packer’s investigations into the veracity of Elder Dunn’s background began leaking in 1989, SUNSTONE decided, according to board meeting minutes, not to weather the repercussions that would be sure to follow were they to be the first to publish the sensational story. Instead, they decided to wait for someone else to run it; they would then cover it as a news story. When the news of Elder Dunn’s fabrications finally broke two years later in 1991 in the Arizona Republic, SUNSTONE devoted almost the entire September issue to the topic. “Although this episode is a painful one,” Daniel and Elbert explained in their preface, “we believe that a sympathetic yet thorough inquiry into the matter is salut[ary], helping us to become a stronger and more honest community.” That issue’s coverage included the republication of a string of national news stories about the incident, Lynn Packer’s comprehensive “Paul H. Dunn: Fields of Dreams” as the lead story, Elder Dunn’s rejoinder comments to the Arizona Republic, and finally a series of thoughtful, personal reactions by Richard Eyre, Kent Frogley, Roger D. Plothow, William A. Wilson, Robert E. Sayre, Richard D. Poll, and Lawrence A. Young.

The decision to devote almost an entire issue to the subject wasn’t an easy one; some of the foundation’s trustees had serious misgivings about the inevitable ‘gotcha’ tone of such an undertaking. Following the issue’s release, more than a few long-time subscribers announced they were either canceling or not renewing their subscriptions, and at least one prominent, previously sympathetic historian promised he’d never again submit an article for publication. “We paid dearly for that issue,” Elbert recalled during his public interview with former staffers Brian Kagel and Bryan Waterman at 1999’s Salt Lake symposium. “It was an important thing to do, and I think we did it responsibly. But we suffered deeply. We lost maybe two hundred canceled subscriptions, and maybe another three or four hundred renewals.”

Who’s in charge?

BY JANUARY 1990, Elbert became concerned about a lack of clarification between Daniels’ position and his, including the disparity in salaries. Believing he had Daniels full support, Elbert drafted the following statement for the board of trustees: “Given the diverse nature of Sunstone’s activities and the need to establish financial, editorial, and symposium contacts, Sunstone must commit to supporting competitively salaried positions for its full-time directors. The organization’s troubled business and editorial history emphatically makes this point. Of course the amount of the salary must partially be determined by the financial health of the organization and by comparative salaries in similar organizations.” Of what he viewed as the blurry relationship between his role and Daniels’, Elbert
wrote tactfully, “Obviously, [we have] worked well together but now feel a need to clarify organizational lines.” He proposed that the board create two separate-yet-equal positions: Daniel as president, responsible for “the business aspects of the foundation’s projects,” and Elbert as executive director, responsible for the “program/content aspects of the projects.” Regarding the magazine, these two positions would be publisher and editor. He also recommended that the annual salaries for the two positions be equalized at $35,000 each. “This proposal gives each position the autonomy it needs,” he wrote, “(editorial not being compromised by business motivations and vice versa) and encourages the essential collaboration necessary to execute the foundation’s projects.” The board adopted both recommendations, with the increase in salary to begin the next month, though it stressed that it was “not committing itself to a policy of always paying its officers the same amount.”

While Daniel and Elbert expressed satisfaction with the outcome, Daniel later voiced some regret that Elbert and he had not been able to resolve the problem privately. “I wish Elbert had been more direct with me,” he reported for this history. “I don’t think it was necessary to have involved the board. I would’ve been open to clarifying our relationship and coming to the same conclusion without having the board render a decision. Elbert’s action was a surprise. I was unaware of the depth of his feelings about it. If I was hurt at all at the time, it’s only because I wish Elbert would’ve dealt with me directly.”

Reporting on Temple Changes
“There must be consequences”

The most far-reaching challenge to Sunstone’s editorial independence erupted later in 1990 following its publication of a news story about the Church’s recent changes to the temple endowment ceremony. Several months earlier, news of the changes had appeared in print nationally. Church members who had been quoted in these stories as being favorable to the modifications soon found themselves answering to their bishops and stake presidents for having commented publicly about the ceremony. In some instances, their temple recommends were confiscated because, ostensibly, they had violated the temple oath of secrecy (a charge each denied strenuously). In July 1990, Daniel and Elbert asked their board for advice, since they were planning on running a news story about the episode and feared that outside influence might quash the article. The board told them it would support whatever they decided. Two months later, shortly after the story appeared, Daniel and Elbert were summoned to meet with their respective stake presidents, who chastised each for running the article and seized their temple recommends. Kent Frogley remembers the foundation’s trustees were “outraged” that a simple news story should have elicited such a coordinated response from the Church. News of the discipline quietly spread, but Daniel and Elbert declined to comment publicly. Both worried about the possible impact of the news on their families, and they feared a public confrontation might damage Sunstone’s reputation.

“I didn’t expect the action taken against me,” Daniel later explained. “Although it wasn’t too devastating to me, I think it was a real turning point for my wife. I’m also sure it was painful to my parents, although I don’t remember them making an issue of it. I thought it was somewhat obligatory on the part of my stake president. I don’t think it was something he wanted to do. He was doing it because he’d been asked to. Ironically, he was released the next Sunday.” Elbert’s reaction

### PRINCIPAL SOURCES OF INCOME, 1985–92

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*Includes registration, tables, advertising, and other.
**The August 1989 issue, featuring the George P. Lee letters, was used as a subscription incentive in 1990.
***The September 1991 “Paul Dunn” issue was used as a subscription incentive in 1991-92.
was more personal: “I was shocked when my stake president called me in,” he admitted. “It was particularly hard on my relationship with my stake president, who I later found out, from my area president, had lied to me when he said he was acting on his own. The whole experience was very distasteful.”

Shortly afterward, Elbert happened to run into a member of the Church’s First Council of the Seventy on the University of Utah campus. According to Elbert’s notes of the exchange, the General Authority “said that while there is good and bad in the magazine, it is becoming increasingly bad. . . . To illustrate he cited the ‘editorial’ in the most recent issue. After some confusion, it turned out he was talking about the unsigned news story on the temple changes. He said the story was ‘hostile’ towards the Brethren and mean-spirited. He said that since it was obvious that the authors knew that the Brethren disapproved of talking about the temple, even to the extent reported in the article, to do so did not sustain them nor recognize their keys. He said that was just not his opinion but ‘all the Brethren’s.’ As a result, he said, there must be ‘consequences,’ clearly alluding [to] the removal of Daniels and my recommend.” Writing to another long-time Sunstone supporter and future trustee, this same General Authority was equally blunt: “The Church has a right and duty to grant or withhold special privileges of a sacred and confidential nature. . . . [W]ith SUNSTONE of late, the tone is critical and cynical towards sacred spiritual things. It is of concern to almost all of the Brethren. Yet, in a spirit of tolerance and forbearance, the Brethren do not command, but rather suggest.”

Of his own experiences with his stake president and, ironically, with the same General Authority, Daniel recorded: “****** told [me] that the temple is not the main issue that got our recommends revoked. He thinks the leading Brethren are sending us a message to get out of Sunstone. He was confident that some action would have come soon in any case because the Church leaders ‘all’ disapprove of what we’re doing. He didn’t seem to be clear about how to proceed from here. He said he would find out what options we have in solving the situation. . . . [My] stake president had never read SUNSTONE before he was given our current issue. He had never heard of Dialogue either, in spite of several years in CES [Church Educational System]. He was more open than Elder ******; admitting the fallibility of Church leaders, but he said he didn’t like this issue of SUNSTONE and that he wouldn’t have it in his home. [Nevertheless,] he said that he could be a fighter, but that I’d need to give him some ammunition if he is going to be able to fight for me.” Daniel also met privately with two members of the Quorum of Twelve Apostles. “I wanted to know,” he recalled, “if another shoe was going to drop.” It didn’t—at least, not then, and not for Daniel.

During this turbulent period, Elbert wrote an uncharacteristically candid editorial for the December 1990 issue of the magazine, entitled “Weeping by the Waters of Zion.” In it, he recounted a crisis of faith—not unlike the one he was now facing—which he was going to work on the Sunstone Review. “[A] dramatic crescendo . . . caused me, reluctantly and sorrowfully, but honestly, to question the teachings, testimonies, and personal experience of my past,” he wrote. “I faced these terrifying possibilities alone, not choosing to burden, or frighten, friends and, correspondingly, I felt increasingly estranged not only from my religious tradition, friends, and personal history, but also from God and from rich attributes which I knew existed in me, and which I celebrated, but which did not animate me now.” After a tearful encounter with his own existential demons, Elbert concluded that the compelling truth of Mormonism for him lay not in “any abstract gospel principle” but in a “ward of imperfect Christians whose crazy lives demand our binding moral responses.” (He would write eight years later, “More and more, I see my spirituality primarily as glimpses of the Divine through interpersonal and social relations.”) Elbert no doubt found solace in similar thoughts as he now contemplated the possibility of future Church action against Daniel and him.

As it turned out, however, Daniel asked for and received back his recommend early the next year. “I didn’t have to make any promises or apologize or anything else,” he said. While his stake president “made it clear he didn’t like Sunstone, there were no conditions on giving it back.” At the same time, Elbert never asked that his recommend be returned, and he has never applied for one since. “I didn’t want to engage my stake president in anything else after that,” he said, “and I didn’t want to be beholden to the Church.” (Elbert wouldn’t discover until later that his stake president had decided to leave the difficult case for his successors to resolve.)

THE “STATEMENT ON SYMPOSIA”

“Lamentably, the debate has consumed much energy—enlivening some scholars, demoralizing others.”

In addition to the personal price they were paying for their association with Sunstone, Daniel and Elbert continued to combat the growing impression that independent Mormon thought in general, and Sunstone in particular, were detrimental to Mormon faith. Although the Church had long been leery of unsupervised intellectualism, until Elder Dallin H. Oaks’s general conference “alternate voices” talk in 1989, the official rhetoric had largely focused on content. With Elder Oaks’s watershed sermon, however, the field expanded to include warnings against, not just topics, but forums for discussion. Following the August 1991 symposium, the First Presidency and Quorum of Twelve Apostles issued a proclamation cautioning members about “recent symposia” (which SUNSTONE dutifully reprinted in its September 1991 issue). “We appreciate the search for knowledge and the discussion of gospel subjects,” they wrote, in part.

However, we believe that Latter-day Saints who are committed to the mission of their Church and the well-being of their fellow members will strive to be sensitive to those matters that are more appropriate for private conferring and correction than for public debate. . . . There are times when public discussion of sacred or personal matters is inappropriate. . . . There
are times when it is better to have the Church without representation than to have implications of Church participation used to promote a program that contains some (though admittedly not all) presentations that result in ridiculing sacred things or injuring The Church of Jesus Christ, detracting from its mission, or jeopardizing the well-being of its members.16

In the wake of the rare joint statement, Daniel and Elbert tried to remain positive, stressing publicly, “We believe that, in the long run, an open and honest examination of the varied perspectives of the Latter-day Saints and their friends helps to build the kingdom of God.” But privately, the effect was devastating. “It was a big deal,” Elbert recalled. “We were very surprised and reflected on it on almost every decision we made.” The board of trustees worried that further action might be taken against Daniel and Elbert; feared that subscriptions would plummet, symposium attendance drop, donations tided and reflected on it on almost every decision we made.” The board of trustees worried that further action might be taken against Daniel and Elbert; feared that subscriptions would plummet, symposium attendance drop, donations cease. They fretted that many of the magazine’s contributors, especially BYU faculty members, would no longer submit articles and reviews or participate in or even attend the symposium. (In fact, according to Elbert in his interview at the 1999 Salt Lake Sunstone Symposium, the number of BYU teachers and staff participating annually in the Salt Lake symposium fell from a high of sixty to about five.) Trustees brainstormed how best to respond, wondering if they should try to meet again with President Hinckley to explain their position, mobilize a letter-writing campaign to Church headquarters, or write a group letter to all or selected General Authorities, “perhaps moderating our stance on talking about the temple in the magazine and symposiums.” At the same time, several Sunstone supporters complained in local newspapers about the Church statement, and in some cases, they were relieved of their ward callings or threatened with official Church discipline for “speaking against the Brethren.”17

Pressed for a response to the apparent crackdown, a Church spokesman elaborated that Mormons guilty of open dissent—meaning “conflict, discord, strife, objection, protest, rebellion, contradiction, or to differ, disagree or oppose”—“subject themselves to the possibility of Church discipline, whether it be formal or informal.”18 Ranking Church leaders agreed: “If doctrines and behavior are measured by intellect alone,” Apostle Boyd K. Packer said at that October’s general conference, “the essential spiritual ingredient is missing and we will be misled. . . . There is safety in learning doctrines in gatherings which are sponsored by proper authority.” “Those who would ‘add upon’ could well be guided by the anchor question of, do my writings, comments, or observations build faith and strengthen testimonies?” warned Apostle Marvin J. Ashton (whose son John had chaired Sunstone’s board of trustees during the latter years of Peggy’s and the early years of Daniel’s directorships). “Oftentimes,” he continued, “we can cause confusion and misdirection in our lives and in the lives of others if we promote the startling and unorthodox.” “Do not turn to public discussions and forums,” Elder Charles Didier added.

Obviously, ranking Church leaders were convinced that the freedom of thought and unfeathered intellectual exchange promoted by Sunstone and its defenders—or at least that which they perceived was being promoted—could weaken, if not damage, the faith of its weaker members and the authority of its leaders. “I think to some degree,” Elbert admitted in his interview with Brian Kagel and Bryan Waterman during the foundation’s 1999 symposium, “we weren’t as responsible and careful as we needed to be.” With equal conviction, however, many Sunstone supporters believed that restricting the freedom of Mormons to express their opinions violated the very essence of their cherished religious beliefs.

It is difficult to zero in on the exact cause of any rift or heart-felt difference in outlook. Some of the tension may be attributed to the fact that busy Church leaders often rely on the reports of subordinates or lay members, neither of whom may accurately reflect the content of the magazine or sessions of the symposium, rather than attend sessions or read issues themselves. Also partially responsible are those Sunstone participants and contributors who criticize Church teachings, policies, even personalities, but then cry “coercion” and “censorship” at the first sign of institutional displeasure, whether expressed by the Church or Sunstone organizers. The potential for misrepresentation in such situations is virtually unavoidable. Sadly, the belief in a so-called organized Mormon intellectual agenda or underground bent on “modernizing” Church doctrine and practice is as prevalent in some quarters as it is false. “Inevitably,” Elbert wrote in an early draft of his history of the foundation, “this discussion diverted Sunstone’s attention somewhat away from the general exploration of things Mormon to focusing on how, why, and (sigh) if we should talk about and research Mormonism. Lamentably, the debate has consumed much energy and many magazine pages and symposium hours—enlivening some scholars, demoralizing others.”

DANIEL MOVES ON
“A victim of timing and circumstances”

F OR SOME MONTHS prior to the Church’s statement on symposia, Daniel, now thirty-five, had been wresting (much like predecessors Scott Kenney and Allen Roberts before him) with the belief that given his growing family, he could no longer afford to stay at Sunstone. Financial and other pressures were beginning to mount, and with the equalization of his and Elbert’s status and salaries, future significant pay raises didn’t look promising. Nor did it appear that Church leaders (his father included) would lessen their appeals for him to leave the foundation. Thus, in September 1991, after more than five years as foundation president and less than a month after the Church’s statement on symposia, Daniel informed the board of trustees that he’d accepted a job elsewhere and would be reducing the amount of time he could devote to fundraising to one day a week. The board decided to separate fundraising from the rest of the publisher’s responsibilities and retain Daniel on a six-month renewable contract as president of a development board at an annual salary of $7,000 plus a 10 percent commission on donations over $110,000 (a challenging but not unreachable
was getting pressure from the Brethren to 'set his own house in
order.' The situation was very hard on me. First of all, it made
me very angry that they would lean on my dad in a way that I
thought was completely inappropriate. Then I was sad that my
dad felt he had to say or do something about it. I think he was
just afraid for me. I know that it strained his relationship with
his associates. It was a hard time for everyone. And at the time,
I was in denial about my real motives for leaving. I didn't want
to leave under pressure, but I did want to move on. I felt, I
think, that I was a victim of timing and circumstances."

Of the effect on his religious beliefs of his five years as pub-
lisher, Daniel noted: "Those years had a salutary effect on my
faith. I was very much engaged in faith. I know that I felt a re-
ponsibility to be a role model, and not be a bad example. But

READER'S FORUM
Excerpts from Letters to the Editor, 1987–1992

I would sure feel better about a lot of things if the Church leadership
would be more open, candid, and honest in their dealings with
their fellow man, especially their fellow 'gentile' saints.
—Abe Van Luij, Richland, Washington, Jan. 1987

Historians in the Church need to overcome the temptation to write
about history as they would like it to have been, or to court the favor
of those in positions of authority to the detriment of candid disclosure—or to give support to a philosophical position which encourages
authoritarianism and hero worship.
—Ron Priddis, Salt Lake City, Utah, July 1987

There are no advantages for women under patriarchy. However, I
can think of plenty of disadvantages for both sexes under patri-
archy—primarily, stressed and unbalanced lives.
—Rebecca England, Salt Lake City, Utah, June 1990

I appreciate SUNSTONE's providing a forum for sometimes contro-
versial ideas. I recognize that not everyone shares my attitude, but I
believe your availability as a means of expression is important for the
health of the Mormon community.
—Edward L. Kimball, Provo, Utah, Oct. 1990

Dialogue merges respect for Mormonism with respect for
academe. SUNSTONE does this, too, but goes one step further: incor-
porating a respect for and commentary upon Christian ecumenism.

What kind of faith is it that must fear for its existence every time
one of its historical figures is discovered to have had blemishes?
—Wayne Sandholz, Claremont, California, June 1991

I feel challenged, stimulated, and gratified in the knowledge that I
am not alone in the poignant suffering that comes from asking too
many questions in a church where many think it is sinful to question.
—Adrienne Foster Potter, Corona, California, June 1991

Obedience does not mean blind faith or silence when there is the
need for opinion, scholarship, discussion, and experience. But it does
mean to be true to the call to increase faith, to serve, and to live the
commandments.
—Thomas D. Coppin, Tacoma, Washington, June 1991

It doesn't seem that helping each other become one with Christ is a
prime focus of SUNSTONE. Instead, it seems to be a steam valve for
those who need to spout off (and probably justifiably so in many in-
stances). I really don't feel your publication justifies the amount it
takes to publish it, although I do feel it is important to be informed
and use discernment.
—LaPrele Olsen, Richfield, Utah, Sept. 1991

With a universe of information sources, SUNSTONE's strange mix
of information, destructive, and babbling messages does not merit
support. While I welcome the enlightenment it provides, one of the
advocacy's most effective tools is the half-truth.

We must have empathy for those who struggle over the question of
whether the Book of Mormon is true or whether the gospel has been
restored. And there is a place in the kingdom for such as these. But it
is a rather different matter when someone proclaims that their unbe-

lief must become the norm for the believer and that the Church must
now begin to conform to their whims.

Nothing should be so sacred that opinion and belief are quashed
and suppressed. That is an infringement on the sanctity of the soul.
We need to keep breathing room in the Church for many sincere and
honest viewpoints.
—Gabby Adams, Sierra Madre, California, Nov. 1991

The Lord has often preferred the unlearned to be his servants.
The intellectuals are too busy listening to themselves to listen to God. This
is why they will never sit in the high councils of the Church.
—Mike Lovins, Bountiful, Utah, Dec. 1991

As Sunstone becomes a haven for thinkers, it must assume a re-
ponsibility to inform the widest possible audience.
—Chris Sexton, Crowthorne, United Kingdom, Feb. 1992

Leaders who discourage questioning encourage the suppression of
feeling, stifler personal revelation and growth, and undermine free
will. The admonition "follow your leaders and you will be blessed," says that the rank and file do not have the ability to determine truth.
Truth is determined by the heart of each recipient; everyone has that
ability.
—Scott Mulvay, Salt Lake City, Utah, Sept. 1992
aside from that, I've always been invigorated and challenged in a positive way by Sunstone. I didn't come to the foundation with any illusions about the Brethren. I came naive, and left with my naivete intact. My experience was faith-affirming. However, the later experience on me of the excommunications of September 1993 was detrimental, even devastating in certain respects. I was estranged from the Church and still am in many ways as a result of that. I never felt that way while I was at Sunstone.”

After several years of relative inactivity in the Church, Daniel agreed to teach a special Sunday School class in his home ward for other semi-disfranchised or struggling members. He also continued to derive considerable pleasure, even nourishment, from bicycling, skiing, hiking, and camping. Tragically, during the early morning hours of 4 September 2002, Daniel fell while rock climbing in Little Cottonwood Canyon, near Salt Lake. He died from massive head trauma. He was forty-six.19

LINDA JEAN STEPHENSON, 1991–92
From Ms. to SUNSTONE

WITH DANIEL’S DECISION to leave, trustees began soliciting replacements, looking for someone who would “have general charge of the business and financial affairs and property of the Sunstone Foundation and have supervision over related officers, employees, and agents regarding those areas. Represent Sunstone to clients and the media. Be the publisher of SUNSTONE magazine, including responsibility for the printing, advertising, and subscription fulfillment.” After meeting with three promising candidates, the board settled in November 1991 on Linda Jean Stephenson, hoping to woo her from her home in New York City with a starting salary of $31,500. Some were even prepared to wage, if necessary, “a strong lobbying campaign” to secure her involvement. Other trustees tried to commit the board to a backup choice should Linda Jean refuse, but the majority preferred to wait for her answer.

Linda Jean boasted an impressive background in publishing and assured the board she could help Sunstone attain new levels of professionalism. According to her résumé, since 1978, when she had moved from Utah to New York City, she'd worked in a variety of positions, from sales and advertising to copywriting to managing special events, and for a variety of periodicals from Metropolitan Home to Ms. Magazine to the Meredith Design Group. Most recently, she'd directed the special events and promotional staffs, including freelancers, of

Metropolitan Home, Traditional Home, and Country Home magazines in planning and coordinating promotions and events at major department stores and trade shows throughout the United States. She'd worked closely with publishers, sales staffs, and clients of each magazine to generate sales and marketing ideas. She'd devised and helped implement new marketing opportunities for her clients, and she'd helped raise $1.8 million for an AIDS charity. Her only apparent drawback, like Daniel previously, was her lack of familiarity with and participation in the Mormon intellectual community and Sunstone's loose network of supporters. Otherwise, both she and the board were confident that her combination of publishing-related skills was exactly what the foundation needed. Ready to relocate to Utah for a variety of reasons, Linda Jean eagerly accepted the board's invitation and was in Salt Lake City looking for a home by December 1991.

In the meantime, trustees greeted Daniel's once-a-week development work with mixed feelings. A year-end fundraising letter generated some $11,000, “about what we generally receive.” But, according to the board's minutes, some trustees worried that the text of Daniel's letter, which hadn't been reviewed before mailing, “inappropriately challenged some readers to choose between the Church and Sunstone and polarizes supporters. Sunstone's public strategy to the recent statement on symposia should be to act as if it didn't mean us.” They also thought that the letter should've noted that a telephone call for support would follow. Others wanted to know why Daniel, who wasn't present for the discussion, hadn't yet accounted for the time he'd spent fund raising. They asked that he be reminded to submit written quarterly reports of his activities, to provide “a list and report of individuals he has met with since becoming president of the development board,” and to keep them regularly apprised of the development board's and other fund raising projects.

At the next trustees' meeting, two months later in March 1992, Daniel reported that his year-end giving campaign had in fact brought in more than $12,000, “an all-time high.” (According to later board minutes, the net amount was closer to $5,500.)20 As requested, he also submitted a report of his contacts with individual donors and told about his “very positive results from telephone contacting.” Pleased with the presentation, trustees extended Daniel's contract another four months but, the minutes note, “working with the development board is [his] primary focus during his one day a week work,” and that he is “to give a report at every board of trustees meeting.” They asked Linda Jean to remain responsible for ongoing fundraising projects, “such as end- and mid-year giving campaigns,” but
agreed that she could collaborate with Daniel to help her with “mailer design and follow-up phone calls.” “Linda Jean is to keep track of fundraising in a direct way,” the board instructed; “she is the point person in determining fundraising needs, projects, and knowing who is involved and what is being done.” Daniel understood the reasons for his reporting to Linda Jean but feared it might hamper his ability to raise money. (In fact, despite some good years, organized group efforts at fundraising never really blossomed, and the development board silently disappeared from the magazine’s staff box in 1996.)

Despite the high hopes and hoopla surrounding her hiring, Linda Jean soon found managing the foundation was more challenging than she’d assumed or was prepared for. Having to navigate daily a myriad of office-related minutiae, an unremitting need for fundraising, calls from creditors, and juggling the sometimes conflicting advice of Sunstone’s well-meaning staff and supporters eventually proved to be too difficult. True, her year with Sunstone had seen the publication of such important essays as Malcolm Thorp’s “Reflections on New Mormon History,” Eugene England on “Healing and Making Peace,” retiring Sunstone trustee J. Bonner Ritchie’s plea to “Let Contention Cease,” and Scott Abbott on “Tensions Between ‘Religion’ and ‘Thought’ at BYU.” But by year’s end, Linda Jean was struggling to keep her head above water, and on 23 December 1992 she decided to resign, fearing the effect of her continuing association with Sunstone on both her health and the foundation’s. The parting, she and the board agreed, was generally amicable but necessary. Unlike Daniel, she did not subsequently join the board of trustees.

**Part II follows in the next issue.**

### NOTES

1. The sources for this essay include back issues of **Sunstone** magazine (staff boxes, letters to the editor, editorials, articles and essays, and news stories); annual year-end financial statements prepared by Brian C. McGavin and Associates, and later by McGavin, Siebenhaar & Reynolds, minutes of Sunstone’s board of trustees (usually prepared by Elbert Peck), as well as internal memoranda and other correspondence; interviews (some tape recorded), conversations, and correspondence with Lavina Fielding Anderson, John Ashton, Martha Sonntag Bradley, Kent Frogley (interview 5 Dec. 1998), Maxine Hanks, Elbert Peck (interview 7 Jan. 1999), Ron Priddis, Daniel Rector (interview 5 Jan. 1999), and George D. Smith, among others; my own and others’ recollections; Elbert Peck’s “The Origin and Evolution of the Sunstone Species: Twenty-five Years of Creative Adaptation” (early drafts, which included the subtitle “or Funny Things Happened on the Way to Alternate Forums,” as well as the version published in **Sunstone** 115–16 (June 1999):5–14; and the Elbert Peck interview during Sunstone’s 1999 Salt Lake City Symposium, “More Light or Heat?: Conversation with Elbert Peck about Sunstone,” Brian Kagle and Bryan Waterman, interviewers, 16 July 1999. Financial statements and board of trustees’ documents are currently in the Sunstone Education Foundation offices, 343 N. Third West, Salt Lake City, Utah. The remainder of Sunstone’s official archives is in Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City.

Elbert Peck, Daniel Rector, Peggy Fletcher Stack, and Linda Jean Stephenson, among others, reviewed portions of this essay for accuracy. While I’m certain this history is not what some of them would have produced, I benefitted greatly from their advice and suggestions. All errors are my own.


4. Financial troubles were not the only kind of challenges facing Sunstone at this time. Shortly after Daniel discovered the extra tax burden, an out-of-state printing subcontractor refused to publish the cover of the current issue, not because of money problems, but, according to Sunstone’s minutes, because “of its Mormon orientation.”

5. Peggy had been a benevolent autocrat,” Daniel quipped. In fact, Sunstone never had a fully functioning board of trustees until mid-1986, when its by-laws were reworked to better reflect the legal requirements of non-profit foundations.


7. In at least one instance, however, Daniel recalled a trustee intervening to block an offer to Paul Toscano to write a continuing opinion-oriented column for the magazine.


10. Card’s own defense of his position is found in his A Storyteller in Zion: Essays and Speeches (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1993), 187–94.

11. Card was upset that **Sunstone** had for its June 1998 issue published in its regular “Twenty Years Ago in Sunstone” feature an excerpt from Card’s “Saints-Eye View” column from the July-August 1978 **Sunstone** Letter from Orson Scott Card to Elbert Peck, undated (circa summer 1998); copy in the Sunstone Education Foundation files at the Sunstone offices.

12. In the course of my research for this story, Elbert Peck and others shared several things in confidence with me. As part of my agreement with them, I have chosen not to reveal the name of this historian.

13. At the time of Daniels and Elbert’s appointments, the board of trustees was a relatively recent creation and, according to Daniel, reported to the president/publisher. Consequently, the relationship between the new president and editor wasn’t specified when the two took office. According to Kent Frogley, a trustee from 1985 to 1997, some insiders assumed that “Elbert essentially re- ported to Daniel.” However, Elbert felt from the beginning that his and Daniel’s positions were co-equal. As Elbert later wrote to the board: “[W]e operated under two different organizational assumptions. Elbert assumed he was an organizational equal to Daniel, hired and responsible to the board; Daniel thought that he had full oversight of the organization, that Elbert reported to him.”

14. In as the case with the historian discussed above (note 12), I obtained this information and was allowed to view a copy of the letter referred to here on the basis that the names of the parties involved would be kept confidential.

15. A full account of Elbert’s battle to retain his Church membership will be forthcoming in Part II of this article (scheduled for the May 2003 issue).


17. Ibid., 39.

18. Ibid.


20. I have been unable to determine what led to this discrepancy. Perhaps pledged donations didn’t materialize, or monies received from this solicitation campaign might have been later tracked under a different budget line.