

Kirby: No ticket needed for outside show
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This is my 174th Semiannual LDS General Conference report. Exactly how much of it was prompted by the Spirit is easy. None. I tried to keep the Spirit. In an effort to avoid last conference's brief bout of parking-related atheism, I rode TRAX to Temple Square. My motive was pure, but it was still fraught with risk.

Two hours early on Saturday, white shirts and ties still crammed every TRAX stop. UTA put on extra trains. More sorely needed were additional ticket machines. Conference-goers bunched around them in wide-eyed confusion.

You have to appreciate the irony of a people who profess to understand what God expects of them, yet are so easily baffled by ticket machines. English, Spanish, Braille, prayer; none of it helped. Trains came and went while we waited for them to figure it out.

Eventually those experienced with modern idolatry started reaching over timid shoulders and pushing the correct buttons for them. I can only hope they will return the favor at the Pearly Gates.

Forty minutes later, I got off at the Temple Square stop along with every other Mormon in the world. We thronged and mobbed and packed our way toward salvation with the same paradoxical behavior we live our lives.

Where harried cops directed traffic, faithful crowds obediently waited to cross streets. Absent authority, the mob jaywalked with abandon. They darted ahead of trains and through traffic, blithely ignoring horns and the interdenominational gesture of impatience from drivers.

Authority around Temple Square was both real and imagined. The street screamers were out in force with their usual Hitler-at-Nuremberg pronouncement of God's merciless love. They bellowed and waved signs and did whatever it took to get noticed by Mormons and, more importantly, the media.

One saw me taking notes and came over to comment for the record about "Mr. and Mrs. Hinckley and all Mormons" eventually burning in the fiery pit.

I shrugged. "Then maybe we should just give them credit for behaving themselves before it happens." "The Word says I cannot," he shouted, waving a ratty-looking Bible at Satan's well-dressed minions. "They are already DAMNED!" "Well, be careful then. If they ever start believing you, there'd really be no reason for them

NOT to kick your [butt]." Miffed, he moved off looking for someone with a less flexible view of The Word. You just can't talk religion with some people. Not all Mormons suffered in silence. One or two lost their bead on love and shouted back. Most simply ignored their critics and hurried inside to vote unanimously on two new apostles.

Conversely, not all non-Mormons were jerks. Standing Together, an evangelical Christian group - "sugar-coated or pansy Christians" to the street screamers - showed up to wish Mormons a happy Conference.

Eventually, I had to leave the show outside for the one inside. But as usual, when I got to the door of the Conference Center, I didn't have a ticket. Worse, there were no machines selling them.

It's the story of my spiritual life. I rode an empty TRAX car back home and watched Conference on television where I belong. It wasn't a complete loss. In my own personal hell, at least there was diet Coke.

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For information, see www.standingtogether.org