

*Would God deceive us for our good?*

# DOES GOD ALWAYS REVEAL THE SAME THING TO EVERYONE?

## ON SUSTAINING PEACEFUL CONTESTS OVER RELIGION

*By Charles Randall Paul*

**I**N A COMMUNITY TRYING TO BE OF ONE HEART and one mind, are serious conflicts always a sign of ignorance, stubborn pride, or outright evil? Can important disagreements exist between people who are living as God wants them to live? In confessional language, can there be conflict between those who have the Spirit of God with them? I believe the Latter-day Saints offer some interesting insights to these questions—insights that can help us improve the way we engage in honest conflicts within our religion and with other religions.

### I. THE KEY WITNESS IS INVISIBLE

WHILE MOST BELIEVERS respect God's divine right to remain silent and invisible, they wish—especially in times of serious conflict between believers—that God would make his will more clearly known to everyone. When people in religious conflicts are willing to bend their wills to the will of God, why does God not make his will more clearly evident to them? In Christian terms, why didn't Jesus make his divine identity clearly and obviously known to all, and why today is the truth of God transmitted by a Holy Spirit that is not clear and obvious to all sincere believers? In the spirit of an honest child who asks, "Where is God?" an adult Christian might ask "Why is the key witness to the will of God invisible?"<sup>1</sup>

To understand the key dynamics of how conflicts can and do still arise among leaders and congregants who are each nev-

ertheless acting in good faith, we must recall a basic tenet of Christianity: Even if we are born into a Christian tradition, we are each supposed to be "born again," to become a convert ourselves, to receive our own persuasive witness through the Holy Spirit. We as Latter-day Saints especially insist on this, pressing our young people to seek the conviction of Christ's divinity provided by an individual experience with the Holy Spirit.<sup>2</sup>

In the Christian tradition, the original apostles—who had spent forty days being taught by the resurrected Jesus—were accorded a special status of "eyewitness." Stephen's and Paul's subsequent theophanies also allowed them this same sort of special status of having seen the resurrected Lord. Jesus seemed to temper the importance of seeing him resurrected, however, when he told Thomas, "Because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed" (John 20:29). The evidence for believing without seeing was manifest on the Day of Pentecost when Peter explained to his mainly Jewish audience that the time Joel prophesied had finally come in which God would "pour out [his] Spirit upon all flesh" (Acts 2:17). Jesus had earlier told the apostles that, after his ascension, they would receive power when the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they would be his witnesses unto the uttermost part of the earth (Acts 1: 8).

The crucial moment for Christianity that occurred at Pentecost, and that has been repeated in millions of lives since, is the moment a person hears a witness for Christ's unique role in the world and is moved by the Holy Spirit to believe and convert to a new way of life. That God persuades people to change their hearts through an invisible yet palpable encounter with the Holy Spirit is the classic Christian model for conversion. The invisible Holy Spirit is experienced holistically as a conceptual/physical/emotional event that occurs to



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and within a person such that a change of one's deepest desire results.

Soon after Pentecost, conflicts arose over the correct way of leading a Spirit-inspired life, conflicts that are still with us. Pentecostal conversion did not provide each convert precise details about all aspects of moment-to-moment living. What does the Holy Spirit require after baptism and after we give our hearts to Christ? What does God will now? The history of Christianity is in large part a history of conflicting views over the response to that question. When people disagree about what the Holy Spirit is saying, they often find that the Holy Spirit affirms their own interpretations. Believing that God would not contradict himself, they then assume the other party's interpretation is wrong.

## II. THE ASSUMPTION OF BAD FAITH

A DIVINE SCANDAL seems inherent to religions that reveal Deity as one who cares for all persons alike. The scandal consists in God's apparently intermittent and uneven communication of truth. Should not a caring God make ultimate divine truth universally obvious to any sincerely seeking it? Many of us Latter-day Saints believe truth is universally clear. I sense this belief is at the heart of our most serious intra-religious conflicts. We assume that because God makes truth quite obvious and available to any who "lack wisdom," those people who do not want to admit the truth as we have understood it are acting in bad faith.

Many believers in universal truth, be they theistic or atheistic, do not trust those who disagree with them about truths which they believe are universally obvious. Many universalists believe that all have equal access and capacity to heed the Truth. Thus, often intra- and interreligious disagreements are based on the unspoken assumption of the interlocutor's stupidity, naiveté, or bad faith. This assumption—that is, believing that the religious or ideological opponent is either demented, duped, or devilish—leads the other to feel disrespected, patronized, or condemned. It insidiously undermines honest engagement of religious differences because people will not overtly admit such offensive beliefs about their opponents. Since the truth is not spoken, the communication has a sense of falseness and shallow civility.

Even if there is good will for those who disagree over religion within a religious community, there is an unavoidable difficulty that many times causes conflicts to become contentious. It begins with assuming there will be a very close correspondence between the thoughts and feelings of two or more people inspired by the Holy Spirit because that Spirit would not give contradictory inspiration. When people discover they disagree about what the Holy Spirit is saying, this assumption often fosters either self-doubt or suspicion of bad faith in the others' ability, character, or sincerity.

When two Latter-day Saints disagree seriously about what the Holy Spirit is saying to them, they often begin with the thought that the Holy Spirit could not be revealing contradictory information. Each therefore assumes only he or she has

interpreted the Holy Spirit correctly. They assume that if the others do not agree on this correct interpretation, those others either lack sufficient intelligent capacity to understand, or they are so habituated to false traditions that they do not sincerely consider the truth when presented to them, or they are cowardly or evilly rejecting the true religion which Deity desires them to embrace. This kind of persuasive engagement, be it ever so polite, is tainted by underlying assumptions of bad faith. The pious opponents' views of God and true religion seem to allow them no other alternatives.

Is there a way to overcome this disrespectful assumption of bad faith? Can we find a satisfying perspective to help keep intra-religious (and interreligious) conflict from turning bitter and disrespectful? Might we somehow understand conflict generated by differing—even contradictory—but equally holy revelation as a helpful *gift* from God, an appropriate practical communication that encourages us to learn (among other things) that we cannot reduce God to our forms of logical congruity nor figure out all his mysterious ways?

## III. CLOSE ENOUGH TO EDIFY

*We believe all that God has revealed, all that God now reveals, and we believe God will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the Kingdom of God.*

—ARTICLES OF FAITH, 9

IT APPEARS TRUE that God does not impose one view of reality into the world. On the contrary, as the Hebrew Bible reports, when humanity all spoke the same language and became one people desiring to work together to build a tower to take them to heaven, God thwarted their unified plan by multiplying their language into many tongues and scattering the people throughout the earth (Gen. 11:1–9). As Milton illustrated in *Paradise Lost*, even at the outset, if God had desired there to be only one opinion, he would not have created Eve. Further, if God had desired there to be merely two innocent opinions, he would not have let Satan slip into Paradise. More profoundly, if God had desired to assure no diversity of opinion in heaven, he would not have created angels with freedom to rebel and wage war against his love in his very presence (Rev. 12:7–10).

We Latter-day Saints understand opposition as a condition of existence itself, for God and all (2 Ne. 2:11). Further, we also understand that God wills that sincere love, not contentious envy, be manifest in the inevitable eternal tension of comparative differences (Abraham 3).

Joseph Smith was inspired to say to his people: "What power shall stay the heavens? As well might man stretch forth his puny arm to stop the Missouri River in its decreed course . . . as to hinder the Almighty from pouring down knowledge from heaven upon the heads of the Latter-day Saints" (D&C 121: 33). Our tradition's rather unique notions of continuous revelation and an open scriptural canon provide promising possibilities for patient attitudes in dealing with conflict.<sup>3</sup>

This doctrine of continual revelation anticipates new

learning about more great and important things. At the same time, it tempers any absolute certainty by calling into question any interpretation of God or truth that is final and total. If indeed many great and important things are yet to be revealed, the new revelation provides a broader context for the current knowledge of the Saints. Such a doctrine requires a perspectival humility for those who receive the truth from the Holy Spirit. It leads us to grasp divine revelation not as a final experience of mystical unity so much as an experience of infinite fecundity. God is not finished, but enormous and ever-growing.

Perhaps,  
in God's  
thought  
about his  
children,  
there lies  
a blessing  
in thinking  
that is  
never  
precisely  
sure, exactly  
the same,  
or totally  
complete.

President David O. McKay, quoting Alexander Pope, described his experience of the infinity of divine revelation as climbing up from the dark valley to the sunny mountaintop and being amazed to see more valleys ahead and Alps upon Alps!<sup>4</sup>

St. Paul said God granted different spiritual gifts of knowledge and power to human beings to edify them or build their strength, not to cause confusion (1 Cor. 14:26–33). In 1831, when some Latter-day Saints were receiving spiritual manifestations and gifts that seemed strange or without meaning, Joseph Smith pronounced the following revelation to them:

I, the Lord, reason  
with you that you  
may understand. .

. . he that re-  
ceiveth the word  
by the Spirit of

truth receiveth it as it preached by the Spirit of truth .  
. . [so] he that preacheth and he that receiveth, under-  
stand one another, and both are edified and rejoice to-  
gether. And that which doth not edify is not of God,  
and is darkness (D&C 50:12, 21–23).

Note this revelation does not say communion with the Holy Spirit of truth will produce complete certainty or identical mutual understanding. *The promised understanding is found in mutual edification and joyfulness, not in knowing the exact same thing in the exact same context.* I believe we Latter-day Saints provide a remarkable contemporary case study of how individuals can enjoy joint revelations from the Holy Spirit without requiring complete agreement that the Spirit has spoken exactly the same thing to those involved.

A personal story illustrates this idea: A few years ago, I had

the opportunity to speak privately with a current member of the Quorum of the Twelve. He had been talking about methods for interpreting the scriptures with the help of the Holy Spirit. I know the Twelve seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit in prayer and they require unanimous agreement before announcing any decision as inspired of God. Hence, I asked if he thought an inspired unanimous agreement of the apostles reflected that each one of them had received from the Spirit the *identical* idea and feeling in answer to their prayer. After a long pause to consider, this fine man responded, “Close enough.”

I think “close enough” might be a good catch phrase for understanding our tradition’s way of managing intra-religious conflicts. If precise agreement or identical understanding is not provided by the Holy Spirit in the apostolic councils, then we should not expect it either—whether in families, communities, or societies. When we have a serious difference of religious perspective, we should patiently wait for those who disagree with us to come “close enough” that we might stand loyally together without requiring a unanimous consensus. We can respect the effort and good will of others who are striving to change our views, and we can feel edified by our mutual longsuffering love for one another, even as we maintain the integrity of our differences. Just as we believe in a social Godhead in which God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are said to be three individual embodied personages, united in purpose and love, but not ontologically one person (D&C 130: 22), I hope it is not impudent to speculate that perhaps even members of the Godhead are free to have their own opinions as long as they are close enough for them to stand together in a loving loyalty that inspires faith and trust in those who look to them for salvation.

#### IV. ETERNAL AMBIGUITY

*[God] giveth not account of any of his matters. . . .  
he openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction,  
That he may withdraw man from his purpose, and hide  
pride from man.”* —Job 33:13, 16–17

A HINT IN the Hebrew scripture calls into question the fundamental assumption that a caring, communicating God will always reveal the same things in the same way to all righteous seekers. Said the prophet Isaiah: “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Is. 55: 8–9). Further, there are narrative examples in scripture and myth of divine communications that purposely confuse or benignly deceive men for some important purpose. Perhaps, in God’s thought about his children, there lies a blessing in the mortal state of lower thinking, partial thinking, contradictory thinking—thinking that is never precisely sure, exactly the same, or totally complete. Perhaps the veil (never a total concealment) between Deity and humanity is like clothing—a blessed partial veiling to help, not hinder, man.

Perhaps *full disclosure* that allows no possibility of miscon-

ception or misinterpretation is an oxymoron. *Total disclosure* would effectively display nothing because total disclosure of all actual and possible relevant differentiations or perspectives of an event would be so massive as to allow no human intelligibility, no referential frame between perspective differences, and no useful concealing of data that makes *this* and not *that* from one intelligible point of view. No man can see all of God and continue to live as a mere human, because this would mean seeing all that God sees as God sees it—to become God. What we call human beings are persons living between veils that partially cover God, others, and ourselves. In this regard, we as Latter-day Saints, even with our modern prophets, maintain Almighty God has plans for the world we know not of (Alma 29:3–8). Again, this idea suggests patient humility is prudent when engaging in conflicts over ultimate questions. Humility is a useful thing for eventual gods to understand, after all. It is an attitude of sincere interest in the creativity of other human and divine beings. It is a virtue in that it allows God to be more than he has been to us, but it also sets up tests of loyalty and love that defy a finished understanding of divine identity. (This is one moral from the story of the binding of Isaac.)

It seems possible that if, for the good of our souls, the divine economy requires humans to experience interrelated partiality—particularity and diversity—perhaps God’s method for accomplishing this involves inspiring humans with ideas and feelings that *are*, or *seem*, mutually incompatible. God *would*, therefore, affirm contradictory truths in the souls of diverse, sincere seekers. Paradoxically, to give all humans (who cannot grasp all the truth the way God can) the identical partial truth would give them a false sense of reality by misrepresenting to their feeble understandings some great truth they would find incomprehensible. The alternative to this possibility, total disclosure that does not allow the slightest misunderstanding or difference in meaning from that of God’s, seems beyond pos-

sible intelligible experience. Is it ever truthful to give the whole truth and nothing but the truth without any ambiguity? Is not infinite ambiguity itself also possibly the Truth?

#### V. ORTHOPRAXIS TRUMPS ORTHODOXY

AS LATTER-DAY SAINTS, we can be comfortable believing in the possibility of disagreement between good-hearted, intelligent, faithful souls who sincerely appeal to God for light and direction. A familiar story provides a midrash on this topic. It is the story of Joseph Smith’s chastening of Church leaders for excommunicating an elder who refused to stop teaching that before the Fall, animals could speak. Joseph said:

I did not like the old man being called up for erring in doctrine. [Others] have creeds which a man must believe or be asked out of their church. I want the liberty of thinking and believing as I please. It feels so good not to be trammled. It does not prove that a man is not a good man because he errs in doctrine (*History of the Church* 5: 340).

Joseph *did* agree to excommunicate Church members who slandered him or openly claimed that he was a fallen prophet or that the Church was a sham. For Smith, one might err in doctrine without sin, but it was sinful to err in disloyalty. Like most religious groups I have studied, we Latter-day Saints derive continuous strength from our social solidarity more than from our doctrinal unity. Loyalty to our current prophet and solidarity with our community trumps creedal agreement. Heresy of thought is not encouraged but can be tolerated if we live in accordance with the moral codes and do not publicly criticize Church programs and leaders. Orthopraxis outweighs orthodoxy, and we are considered orthodox if we hold a temple recommend. Still the orthodox confession of faith in order to hold the recommend is limited to stating that we believe in the Godhead, the atonement of Christ, and the restoration

of ancient priesthood authority to Joseph Smith and successor apostles. No further definitions or systematic theological explanations about the nature of God, Christ, atonement, or priesthood are required.

When we go to the temple together, all dressed in the same white robes, we listen to and privately ponder the ritual without open discussion. The temple ceremony underscores our social solidarity through group silence while allowing us to interpret the ritual and doctrine by ourselves. As we worship God in the “tangle of our minds,” theological thinking is, I believe, a delight to God—as long as it enhances our love for him and our fellow man.



VI. CONTESTATION VERSUS CONTENTION

LATTER-DAY SAINTS ARE taught that conflict in the form of contest is the way Christ engaged with Lucifer, and it should be the model for all our honest conflicts over ultimate matters of human belief and allegiance. The Savior did not revile in angry accusations against the devil but stated the truth with directness, and subsequently, went beyond the lecture to sacrifice himself in a loving act that aimed to move all devilish hearts to repentance. The Christian God shows eventually to all that his criticism of the world is coupled with a sacrificial love for the world.

God does not—indeed, cannot—force anyone to repent.

Let us  
not  
assume  
that all  
those  
opposed  
to our  
religious  
ways are  
opposed  
to our  
good.

Latter-day Saints believe that God, the Holy Spirit, works to entice and persuade the human heart without doing the heart's work of freely giving itself to God. After all, what is left but persuasion among eternal persons who cannot ultimately torture or kill each other to get their way?

Let me venture a very loose paraphrase of a very familiar passage of LDS scripture, D&C 121:41–44: “The power of God is his persuasive love that patiently, without compulsory means, leads people to desire to combine their souls with God to expand together eternally. No other power has thus far worked so well in moving intelligent souls. God's loving persuasion speaks the truth, which includes the offensive request that we change our

course to a higher one; but after his critique, he acts with such intense love for us that we are persuaded his loyal friendship will suffer even death for our good, and will even endure after this mortal life.”

The final verse from our well-worn hymn, “How Firm a Foundation” echoes these notions and adds the idea that God is also eternally patient: “The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose, I will not, I cannot, desert to his foes. That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake, I'll never, no never, no never forsake!” Even though the spirit of God will not always strive with man, I believe there is room for the possibility that *any* prodigal might come to himself, and be given a welcome homecoming. The Lord might even send an intermittent message into outer darkness from time to time letting Lucifer know, if he is looking up at the time, that God has not altogether given up on him.

I believe the most interesting contest of justice or righteousness is not between good and evil but between good and

better. It is a contest of patient, forthright persuasions. Let the contest continue with good will towards all—seeking discernment of those who are not interested in our good, and of those who are. Let us not assume that all those opposed to our religious ways are opposed to our good.

*Let such pure hate still underprop  
Our love, that we may be  
Each other's conscience.  
And have our sympathy  
Mainly from thence.*


*We'll one another treat like Gods  
And all faith we have  
In virtue and in truth, bestow  
On either, and suspicion leave  
To Gods below.*

—H.D. Thoreau

*Had it been God's will, he could have made all  
mankind of one religion.*

*Had God pleased, he could have made you one nation:  
but it is his wish to prove you by that which he has be-  
stowed upon you. Vie with each other in good works, for to  
God you shall all return. He will clarify to you what you  
have disagreed about.*

—Qu'ran: Counsel 42:8; The Table 5:48

**I** BELIEVE CONFLICT, as peaceful tension, will be found in Zion, where freedom and individuality will increase the love of God and man. Conflicts between God and those he loves are ultimately contests of loving persuasion. Only through sincere, long-suffering love does God truly win our hearts to freely love him; and in the long run of eternity, it seems that is how God expands joyfully himself. Might it not be so for us? 



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NOTES

1. As I spoke to a primarily non-LDS audience about how we as Mormons firmly believe it is possible to understand God's mind perhaps more easily than Christians, who tend to view humanity in terms of its fallen nature, I introduced it as follows: The English epic poet John Milton believes man is created in the image of God, meaning we humans are *theomorphic*, not that God is anthropomorphic. Joseph Smith attempted to explain how humanity and divinity are related, how we can somehow touch one another and communicate. He teaches that each soul is as old as God and is made of “divine intelligence” like that of God. Thus, what we are can resonate with the Holy Spirit. We can be held accountable for evil-doing because we have a divine core able to recognize the Holy Spirit when it is present and can choose to reject or accept its messages to us. Because we are *theomorphs*, we can feel or taste the truth of the witness of the Holy Spirit because part of ourselves is divine. We have taste buds for divine experiences that seem familiar. This feeling or taste is not usually overwhelming, but it provides a quiet witness to our hearts and minds that we can reject or accept depending on our free desire. (See D&C 93:21–39.)

According to LDS understanding, mortality is designed to be ambiguous, to test our most *fundamental desire* without God's obvious presence. Mortal life provides us as eternal persons an experience of memory loss whereby we can more freely choose to become authentically new creatures. God is apparently absent from the world, but the Holy Spirit quietly "tempts" us to desire to become more godlike while the devil and others tempt us to desire to be less. (See Alma 3: 26–27.)

2. In comparison with other world religions—traditions that emphasize the social solidarity and natural well-being of the community—the Christian emphasis on individual conversion and immortal salvation is remarkable. Over the centuries, the individualistic aspects of Christianity eventually infused the mores of Western Europe. These mores were compatible with Locke's concept of inalienable individual rights that became the main doctrine of the United States' deistic founders. Subsequently, most Americans hold as self-evident truth that individuals have "rights" at birth. It is possible that the American proclivity to distrust community demands over individual demands is also a derivative of the New Testament bias that places the Kingdom of God in a personal friendship in the end of time with Jesus. The priority of salvation in "personal relationship with" Christ trumps more traditional ways which flourish through prosperous relations in families, tribes, and nations. (See Matthew 10.)

3. Along with our affirmation of what God has revealed and our continual seeking for more light and knowledge, we Latter-day Saints have several social customs that also allow us to maintain social solidarity in the face of diverse opinions. Our customs tend to diffuse our desire for schism by allowing some conflicts to remain unresolved. What are some of these customs?

First, and perhaps most important, we as a Church have a preferential bias toward recent statements of the living prophet over statements of prior prophets and scriptures. We listen to our prophet in general conference every six months to grasp what God might have revealed to him for our benefit.

Second, we tend to distrust systematic theology based on rational analysis or historical exegesis of scripture. Requiring God to remain safely defined in a conceptual or legal box seems too confining and complete. We cannot purchase certain security. (Here the nominalist bias of our view of freedom shows itself. God simply must be radically free—so free as to be able to disobey or institute new laws.) We prefer homiletics to analytics and tend to seek our inspiration from the Holy Spirit in prayer and scripture reading for personal direction in daily action, not for a coherent "once and for all" understanding of the cosmos.

Third, we have no professional theologians nor theology schools. Every member is a closet theologian with opinions about the mysteries of the divine economy that carry no weight of authority for the Church.

Fourth, our lay clergy ensures that our congregational leadership will switch at least once every five years. This keeps any particular leader's view of reality or "how things ought to be" from becoming permanent. The same thing occurs subtly when our prophet dies and another replaces him. Revelation is continuously open to reinterpretation based on the changed perspectives of the people and the new prophets.

Fifth, we have fast and testimony meeting each month in which any of us can rise to speak from our heart what the Holy Spirit inspires. Here, under the influence of the Spirit, we can prophesy, chastise, or express truth as we see it, yet we have no authority to force the congregation to heed our view.

Sixth, like all lasting faith traditions, we describe our religion as essentially changeless even as it nimbly changes to meet new demands. Indeed, we talk of God who is the same forever in that he is always worthy of our trust no matter what changes he experiences.

Seventh, we preach from the Book of Mormon that contention is of the devil (3 Ne. 11:29). Therefore, the attitude with which we engage differences is crucial. We are urged to maintain soft voices and a gentle tone even when engaging in critical reprimands. We believe if humility and love prevail, conflict need not be contentious.

Eighth, we emphasize eternal salvation as an everlasting social experience of continual marriage, friendship, kinship, and spiritual/material procreativity, which are all interesting activities because of their infinite variety and beauty and their love-expanding results. This implies a need for continuous respectful negotiation of differences in heaven as on earth. This is the practical side of the LDS theological tension between those doctrines that lean toward a convergent rest in an all-is-one Deity and those that lean toward divergent infinitely adventurous Deities. The latter, one might suppose, will try to peacefully engage their differences eternally, or a war between heavens is possible.

Ninth, the LDS temple ritual is a social experience of symbols that are engaged mainly by participants in silence. This allows us as individuals to quietly interpret the most important mysteries of godliness in our own way without a forced con-

sensus. It leaves room for loyalty to the Church without precise agreement about true interpretations of doctrine.

Tenth, we believe in continuing charismatic revelation from God to individuals; however, we have developed a system of stewardship that keeps order among the millions of prophets in the Church. Only one prophet is called to receive revelations for the entire community. Our personal communications from God are given for our own stewardship, not for others. We might receive vast knowledge from God beyond the level of our small stewardship, but that knowledge is for our own expansion and is not to be shared with others. This practical system is one of the most powerful of all methods to avoid schism.

4. David O. McKay, *Gospel Ideals: Selections from the Discourses of David O. McKay* (Salt Lake City: Improvement Era, 1953), 113.



## IRREGULAR HEARTBEAT

for Jim Whitten

In January of the final year  
of the millennium, bypass surgery  
left my heartbeat wavering,

a winter wound thumping against  
my pillow hard enough to make me  
afraid to sleep, until the young

man with powerful shoulders  
said, "If I felt like that, I'd be  
kissing my wife every day."

Outside forsythia delivers  
Spring mornings, the goldenrod  
prepares underground to brighten  
road ditches in autumn.

Pileated woodpeckers ratchet  
holes in a beech tree we thought  
was healthy in the expectant hum  
of late summer and I lie awake,  
my wife's hip fused to mine

by body warmth, burning in the early  
bloom of a man who already lives where blue  
evenings meet the mountain granite.

—LARSEN BOWKER