

Pillars of My Faith

TO MAKE BIG SHADOWS

By Dan Wotherspoon

We want the most of what life has to offer. We say that we yearn for the fullness of experience. But, on the other hand, we are also fearful of success. We draw back not only from the cost of success, the courage and discipline required to achieve our highest potential. We retreat also from the obligations, the challenges, and the risks that follow high achievement. The fullness of life is too much. We are afraid to die, and we are afraid to live deeply and with great openness . . . We desire to be our own unique selves, and yet we want the comfort and safety of anonymity.

—BERNARD LOOMER ¹

LOOMER'S STATEMENT ABOVE TOUCHES UPON the single biggest struggle of my life and faith journey—one that is still a battle I must rise to fight every day.

Though my early life certainly had challenges, a lack of self-confidence was never one of them. I can't remember ever feeling anything other than that my potential was unlimited. I had a quick brain that made school a breeze. I made friends easily. I had natural leadership qualities. I didn't suck at sports.

Both my parents are educators and therefore always interested in what I was learning, always wanting to talk things through. Because I knew they might ask me about this or that at day's end, I developed the ability to pick out key ideas from my studies and, perhaps even younger than most kids, began to develop my own take on the subjects. I enjoyed



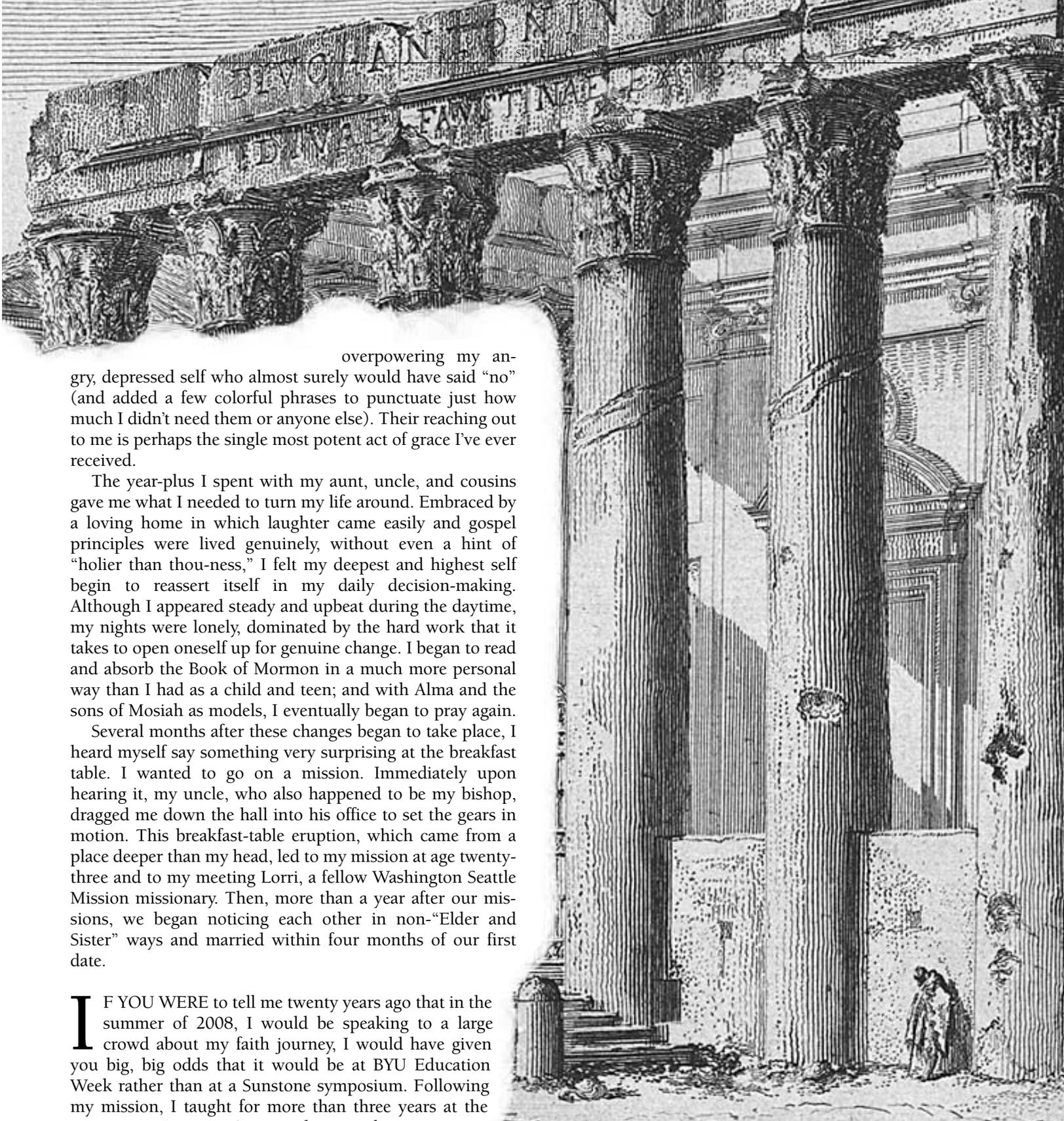
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learning scripture stories and gospel concepts, and I seemed to be able to recall references and who said what and in what context quite easily. I was president of all my Aaronic priesthood quorums. When I was a priest, on more than one occasion, a mother from the ward would tell me how much her younger son looked up to me and how grateful she was for my good example. Naturally, I ate it up.

Unlike my second movement away from active Mormonism (which I'll describe later), my first rejection of the Church had nothing to do with the gospel. I still believed all of it; I was simply rebelling against the adulthood that lurked just around the corner, against the coming time when I might actually have to work at something, when my wits alone might not be enough. It was rebellion against the expectations I'd created for myself and the expectations I had allowed to arise in others as I impressed them with my adolescent feats of mind or mature-beyond-my-years speech. Until age seventeen, with my unconquerable spirit, I just assumed I would climb straight to the top of both Church and professional ladders. However, as I began to peer into the years ahead, the dilemma Loomer speaks about hit me full force. I still wanted the fullness of experience, but I was afraid of the discipline it would take to achieve my highest potential. So I balked.

As those of you who've read a few of my SUNSTONE editorials know, within a couple of years, I'd chosen against almost every one of these good things, every gift I'd been given. For several years, I spiraled deeper and deeper into destructive patterns, growing continually more ashamed at how far I, the golden boy, had let myself fall. And just as I was sure I'd lost any ability to choose anything in my best interest again, an aunt and uncle, George and Janie Wright, offered me a lifeline—a chance to move away from the clubs and drugs and toxic friends and to live with them and their children.

It astounds me that they would extend this offer. And I vividly remember, despite the depression I was in, how forcefully my spirit leaped to say "yes," somehow briefly



overpowering my angry, depressed self who almost surely would have said “no” (and added a few colorful phrases to punctuate just how much I didn’t need them or anyone else). Their reaching out to me is perhaps the single most potent act of grace I’ve ever received.

The year-plus I spent with my aunt, uncle, and cousins gave me what I needed to turn my life around. Embraced by a loving home in which laughter came easily and gospel principles were lived genuinely, without even a hint of “holier than thou-ness,” I felt my deepest and highest self begin to reassert itself in my daily decision-making. Although I appeared steady and upbeat during the daytime, my nights were lonely, dominated by the hard work that it takes to open oneself up for genuine change. I began to read and absorb the Book of Mormon in a much more personal way than I had as a child and teen; and with Alma and the sons of Mosiah as models, I eventually began to pray again.

Several months after these changes began to take place, I heard myself say something very surprising at the breakfast table. I wanted to go on a mission. Immediately upon hearing it, my uncle, who also happened to be my bishop, dragged me down the hall into his office to set the gears in motion. This breakfast-table eruption, which came from a place deeper than my head, led to my mission at age twenty-three and to my meeting Lorri, a fellow Washington Seattle Mission missionary. Then, more than a year after our missions, we began noticing each other in non-“Elder and Sister” ways and married within four months of our first date.

IF YOU WERE to tell me twenty years ago that in the summer of 2008, I would be speaking to a large crowd about my faith journey, I would have given you big, big odds that it would be at BYU Education Week rather than at a Sunstone symposium. Following my mission, I taught for more than three years at the Missionary Training Center, where teachers are vigorously encouraged to consider a career in Church education. I enthusiastically took the various courses at BYU that lead up to being hired, including student teaching at a Utah high school seminary. While I very much enjoyed the idea of being a seminary teacher, I discovered through this process that I just didn’t really have a good feel for working with teenagers. I couldn’t understand why “Truth” just wasn’t en-

tertaining enough for them, why they needed a bunch of song-and-dance routines before they might allow you to get in ten minutes worth of solid stuff.

After realizing that a career as a seminary teacher wasn’t right for me, I entered a master’s program in religious studies at Arizona State University. I had become interested in this field of study from various world religions and early

Christian history courses I had taken at BYU, but also in the back of my mind was the idea that with a master's in religion, I might find my way into the Church Education System directly through the institute program, where I imagined that student maturity levels would be higher, making it easier to teach the gospel straight up.

My first semester at ASU was fascinating, but I almost immediately found myself faced with the decision of whether or not to let the theories and tools used in the academic study of religion to affect me personally. Right from the start, I sensed that doing so would spell danger to my faith as I then knew it. For a while, I toyed with just “getting by” in the program, learning and writing about religion in an objective manner without letting it come anywhere near my core beliefs, but eventually I found that I couldn't resist the power and insight of these academic lenses. Then, as I had feared, my faith became quite complicated, quite quickly. I remained highly active in the ward during our two years in Arizona, serving as ward mission leader and Young Men's president, but the ground under me was shifting wildly.

This time was even more difficult for Lorri, whom I used as my sounding board for various new ideas, some of which stuck with me while others fell quickly by the wayside. But she didn't know which were which, and all of a sudden, her idealized picture of being married to a rock-solid Mormon husband, and all the blessings that came with that, started to crumble. It upset her to hear me talk about these new perspectives, which naturally entailed explicit or implicit critiques of old ones, so I pretty much stopped talking to her about my beliefs. This, of course, created a mixed result. It meant fewer tense moments but also a creeping loneliness for both of us, with Lorri left to imagine just how deep my apostasy ran.

And by the second year into my program, my apostasy was indeed pretty deep. I won't go into specifics, but once I began applying historical-critical lenses to scripture, psychological and sociological approaches to spirituality, logic and analysis to doctrinal first principles, soon I didn't know which end was up. I'd shift wildly from optimism to despair and back again, sometimes hitting on a principle that seemed to hold promise for putting things back together. But inevitably it offered peace for only a few weeks, soon showing its limits—just like all the others.

My main grace during this period came in the form of a new friend, Charles Randall Paul. Meeting Randy during my second year at Arizona State was a godsend. I immediately recognized in him someone of similar temperament, who had been wrestling with my current questions for years. He couldn't do the thinking for me, but he would talk about ideas and approaches that helped keep him fully engaged with Mormonism. Though I'd certainly met spiritually mature people in my life before then, Randy offered me a glimpse of what might be possible if I hung in there and kept my mind and heart open to new possibilities.

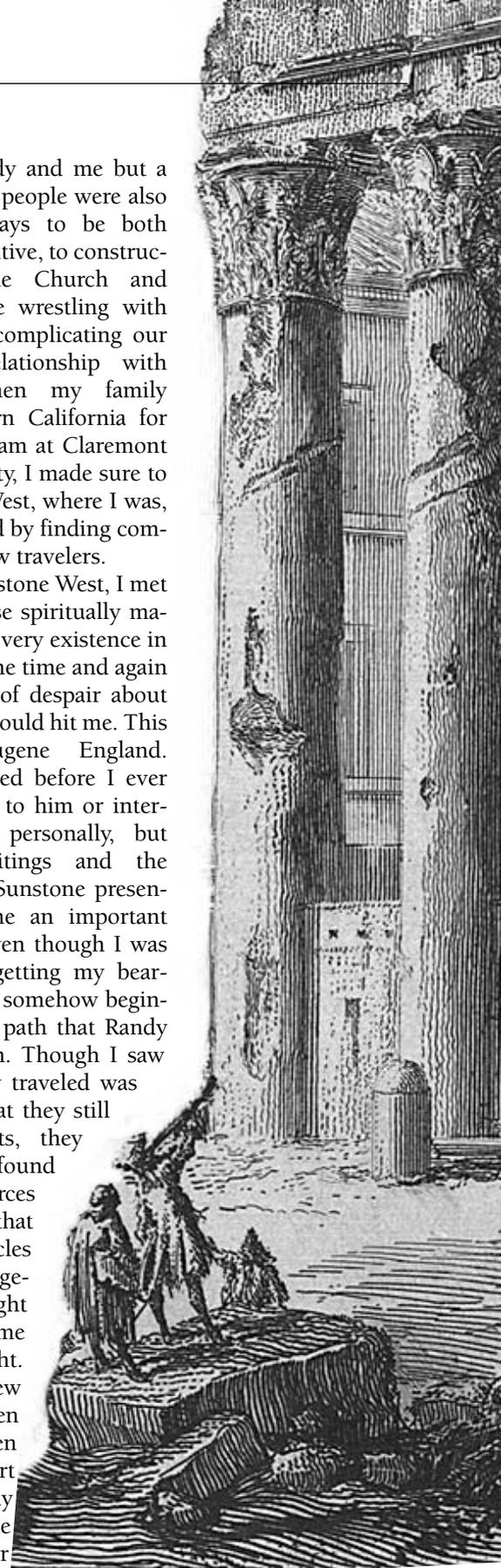
Randy suggested I read *SUNSTONE* and *Dialogue*, and I found them enormously helpful. They conveyed the sense

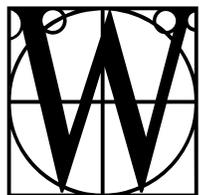
that not just Randy and me but a whole lot of other people were also trying to find ways to be both faithful and inquisitive, to constructively engage the Church and gospel even while wrestling with things that were complicating our earlier, easier relationship with Mormonism. When my family moved to southern California for my doctoral program at Claremont Graduate University, I made sure to attend Sunstone West, where I was, once again, buoyed by finding communion with fellow travelers.

At this first Sunstone West, I met the second of those spiritually mature people whose very existence in the world served me time and again when new waves of despair about staying Mormon would hit me. This person was Eugene England. Several years passed before I ever introduced myself to him or interacted with him personally, but through his writings and the recordings of his Sunstone presentations, he became an important part of my life. Even though I was still only barely getting my bearings, I knew I was somehow beginning on the same path that Randy and Gene were on. Though I saw that the road they traveled was very rocky and that they still stumbled in parts, they seemed to have found deep, inner resources and motivations that made the obstacles and climbs manageable. Perhaps I might have the same someday, I thought.

SUNSTONE's new editor, Stephen Carter, talks often about the short shrift we Latter-day Saints give to the Act Twos of our spiritual journeys,

how we prefer to rush quickly through the dark times to get to resolutions.² I very much appreciate his point and his call for more extended reflection on the details of the ups and downs of the battle itself. But the “Pillars of My Faith” tradi-





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tion calls for mostly Act Three expressions, where we discuss the things we have figured out. Before moving to that type of reflection, however, let me add that the most turbulent times of my Act Two (which I've only barely outlined here) lasted for about nine years. Even with the steady modeling of Randy, Gene, and others, I still had to fight my own fight—and though I encountered longer and longer moments of relative optimism about hanging in there as a Latter-day Saint, these years were dominated far more by conversations with myself and others about how “not really” Mormon I was, how different I was from the stereotypical, every-week-attending, know-the-Church-is-true-ing Latter-day Saint.

I've shared in past SUNSTONE editorials a few ways that James Fowler's books, especially *Stages of Faith*, helped me make sense of everything I was going through. Through his work and that of other developmental theorists, I came to understand that extended periods of dis-ease and dis-equilibrium are natural and healthy parts of every life as experiences force us to renegotiate answers that previously served us well but are no longer capable of handling the new complexities. I was likewise greatly aided by a brief but pivotal encounter with a Jewish religion professor who modeled for me the power that comes from being fully engaged both in one's religious tradition and in the life of inquiry.³ Together with Fowler's insights, this professor's complete ease in communicating and embracing the world of Jewish belief and ritual were pivotal in my starting to become more and more comfortable in my Mormon skin. But, again, it would be misleading to portray this in any way as a steady ride or to say that I've even begun to be finish with Act Two. What follows, then, may be an “Act Three”-like musing, but it is definitely more like a letter written from the midst of the battlefield.

SO WHERE IS my faith centered? What do I trust to give meaning to my life? What does my heart call me to? The short answer is: I want to be *big*.

Those who have seen me in person or in photos would most likely say, “Mission accomplished, Dan! You definitely are a big boy.” So let me clarify. My deepest desire is to be large in a way that a steady diet of peanut M&Ms and Moose Tracks ice cream can't contribute to.

I gained the first sixty of these extra pounds I've been carrying around in about six months, just as my faith was falling apart. I think the panic and depression that led to my compulsive eating during this period was tied largely to the realization that whatever it is that God has to say to humanity, it's not available through easy channels. Prior to

these struggles, I had known who I was. I knew that because of my faithfulness in the life before this one, I was in the covenant, in the river that would take me to

the highest glory if I could “endure to the end.” In other words, I believed that I didn't need to make the journey to *find* the truths and receive the ordinances that the rest of the world had to; I'd made it that far already.

It was depressing to have all this fall away. In wistful moments, it is *still* depressing. But key shifts in my life over the past ten years have been (1) learning to embrace the fact that the struggle to find and embody the universe's deepest truths is *the* human journey, and (2) becoming convinced that this journey can be successfully and joyfully managed. This is what I have faith in.

Now what does “successfully and joyfully” managed mean? This leads me back to the idea of becoming *big*.

Before launching an analysis of “size,” however, it's important to offer the disclaimer that this metaphor, like all metaphors, only points toward a way of being. Its strength lies in its resonance. Whatever “size” is, understanding it comes through non-thinking processes. With that disclaimer in place, let's dive in.

The idea of “size” as a metaphor for the sort of person I want to become first came into my consciousness while at BYU through an encounter with C.S. Lewis's book, *The Great Divorce*. In this small book, Lewis describes the journey of souls from hell to heaven. The souls begin with small, anemic, insubstantial bodies; in order to make their way to heaven, they have to grow enormously in both size and solidity. However, during the past fifteen years, my most extended engagement with this notion of size has come through immersion in the writings of theologian Bernard Loomer, with whose words I began this essay.

Loomer describes size this way:

By size I mean the stature of [your] soul, the range and depth of [your] love, [your] capacity for relationships. I mean the volume of life you can take into your being and still maintain your integrity and individuality, the intensity and variety of outlook you can entertain in the unity of your being without feeling defensive or insecure. I mean the strength of your spirit to encourage others to become freer in the development of their diversity and uniqueness. I mean the power to sustain more complex and enriching tensions. I mean the magnanimity of concern to provide conditions that enable others to increase in stature.⁴

When I reflect on the description above, I'm tempted to paraphrase Joseph Smith and offer my own version of a “never did any passage of scripture come with more power to the heart of man than this did at this time to mine.” When I first came upon it, I staggered. I immediately realized that

this was a description of the same qualities of soul that drew me to Randy and Gene and other teachers who have served as spiritual mentors to me.

In his other writings, Loomer notes that size has two main qualities, one of which we don't often consider in depth. The obvious aspect of size is its general ability to create a direct, and usually coercive, effect. A couple of examples of this type of power are reflected in phrases such as "Walk softly, but carry a *big* stick" and in the so-called golden rule of business: "Whoever has the *biggest* pot of gold gets to make the rules."

The less obvious but far more powerful quality of size is the ability of persons of size to "receive"—to absorb—an influence, to take a blow, to be vulnerable. Christ's coming into this world was the act of a large, large God saying that he loves us enough to receive all the humiliations, both physical and spiritual, that we can heap on him—and still keep on loving us. It is a huge God who is willing to descend below all things and take on our infirmities "that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities" (Alma 7:12). In a passage from one of my favorite books, Krista Tippett's *Speaking of Faith*, Margaret Spufford, a theologian who endured many personal tragedies, says she can't imagine being able to worship or respect "any God who had himself not cried, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?'"⁵

Loomer applies his analysis of size to institutions as well as people. Commenting on these organizational insights, William Dean writes that Loomer believes the "goal of social institutions should be to promote size in the individual participant in society," and that "size-producing capacities [are] more important than the justice-producing capacities."⁶ None of this is abstract for Loomer. He writes that because "relations [lead] to something emergent . . . we need great communal, great societal institutions. We need great communities in order to have great individuals, in order to have great relationships out of which concrete individuals can emerge with their power and with their strength."⁷ Institutions should "provide those conditions of the giving and receiving of influences such that there is the enlargement of the freedom of all the members to both give and receive."⁸

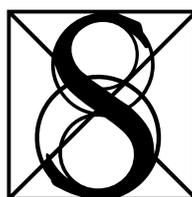
Of course, all institutions ultimately fail in being able to offer this kind of freedom, this full embracing of all individuals and their specific temperaments and life experiences. As Jim Sawyer pointed out in a very insightful SUNSTONE article, institutions such as a church may have honorable goals such as "saving souls," but in order to measure progress toward the goal, the institution must come up with quantifiable indicators, so they develop programs with specific objectives, and they then create tools to measure planned versus actual performance, and on and on. Soon, in all of this, the real goals tend to get lost in the demands of the institution's actual, day-to-day ministry.⁹

Loomer also speaks about how institutions hold "precon-

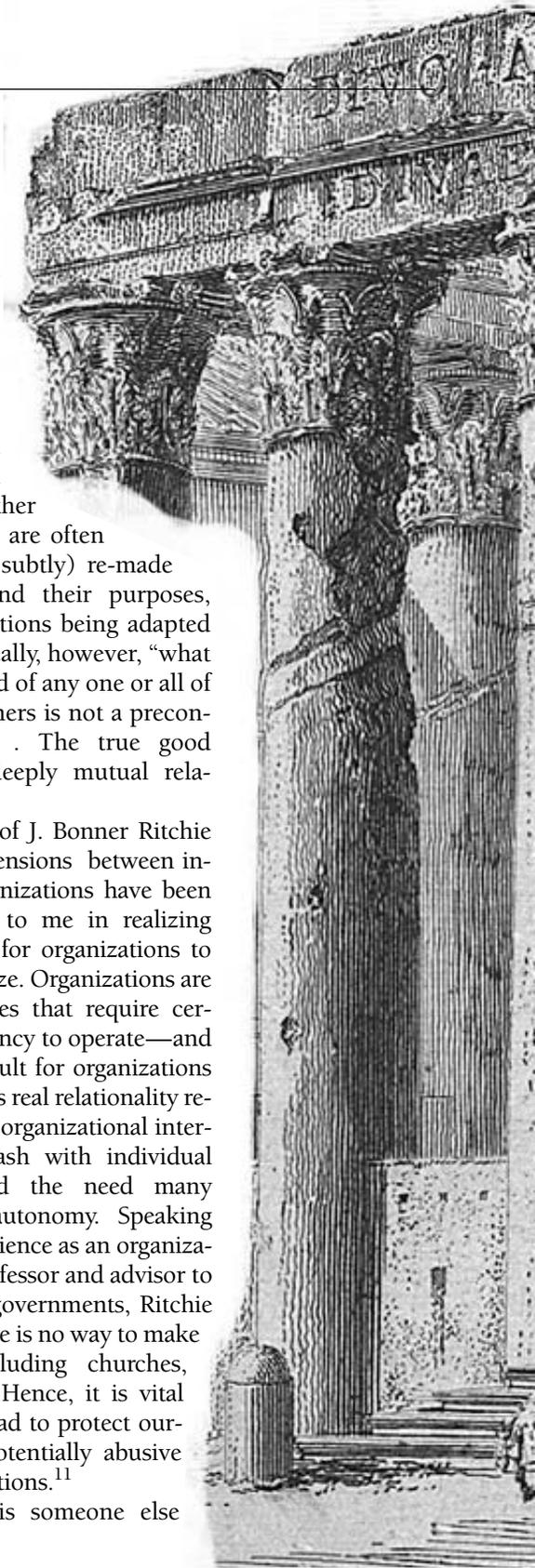
ceived goods" about what the end result of their work in the world will look like. As a result, they frequently have a conscious or unconscious desire to transform people to match this image. In other words, individuals are often subtly (or not so subtly) re-made for institutions and their purposes, rather than institutions being adapted for individuals. Ideally, however, "what is truly for the good of any one or all of the relational partners is not a preconceived good. . . . The true good [emerges] from deeply mutual relationships."¹⁰

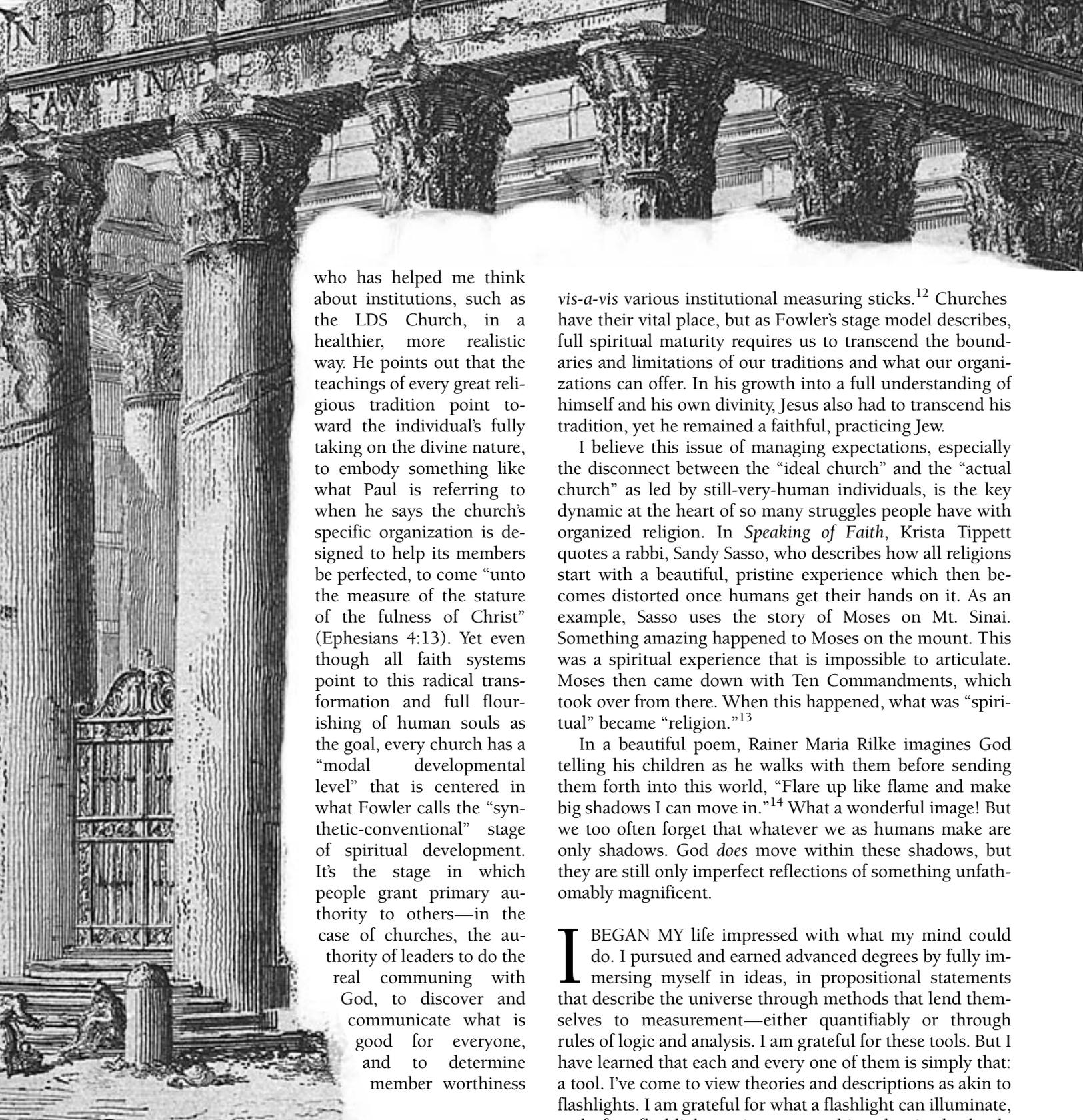
The reflections of J. Bonner Ritchie on the inevitable tensions between individuals and organizations have been extremely helpful to me in realizing how difficult it is for organizations to embody genuine size. Organizations are conservative entities that require certain levels of efficiency to operate—and this makes it difficult for organizations to adapt in the ways real relationality requires. As a result, organizational interests will often clash with individual temperaments and the need many people feel for autonomy. Speaking from his vast experience as an organizational behavior professor and advisor to corporations and governments, Ritchie concludes that there is no way to make organizations, including churches, "safe" for people. Hence, it is vital that we learn instead to protect ourselves from the potentially abusive aspects of organizations.¹¹

James Fowler is someone else



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who has helped me think about institutions, such as the LDS Church, in a healthier, more realistic way. He points out that the teachings of every great religious tradition point toward the individual's fully taking on the divine nature, to embody something like what Paul is referring to when he says the church's specific organization is designed to help its members be perfected, to come "unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13). Yet even though all faith systems point to this radical transformation and full flourishing of human souls as the goal, every church has a "modal developmental level" that is centered in what Fowler calls the "synthetic-conventional" stage of spiritual development. It's the stage in which people grant primary authority to others—in the case of churches, the authority of leaders to do the real communing with God, to discover and communicate what is good for everyone, and to determine member worthiness

vis-a-vis various institutional measuring sticks.¹² Churches have their vital place, but as Fowler's stage model describes, full spiritual maturity requires us to transcend the boundaries and limitations of our traditions and what our organizations can offer. In his growth into a full understanding of himself and his own divinity, Jesus also had to transcend his tradition, yet he remained a faithful, practicing Jew.

I believe this issue of managing expectations, especially the disconnect between the "ideal church" and the "actual church" as led by still-very-human individuals, is the key dynamic at the heart of so many struggles people have with organized religion. In *Speaking of Faith*, Krista Tippett quotes a rabbi, Sandy Sasso, who describes how all religions start with a beautiful, pristine experience which then becomes distorted once humans get their hands on it. As an example, Sasso uses the story of Moses on Mt. Sinai. Something amazing happened to Moses on the mount. This was a spiritual experience that is impossible to articulate. Moses then came down with Ten Commandments, which took over from there. When this happened, what was "spiritual" became "religion."¹³

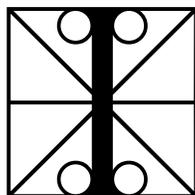
In a beautiful poem, Rainer Maria Rilke imagines God telling his children as he walks with them before sending them forth into this world, "Flare up like flame and make big shadows I can move in."¹⁴ What a wonderful image! But we too often forget that whatever we as humans make are only shadows. God *does* move within these shadows, but they are still only imperfect reflections of something unfathomably magnificent.

I BEGAN MY life impressed with what my mind could do. I pursued and earned advanced degrees by fully immersing myself in ideas, in propositional statements that describe the universe through methods that lend themselves to measurement—either quantifiably or through rules of logic and analysis. I am grateful for these tools. But I have learned that each and every one of them is simply that: a tool. I've come to view theories and descriptions as akin to flashlights. I am grateful for what a flashlight can illuminate, and often flashlights point at something that is absolutely worthy of our attention—perhaps even worthy of someone's devoting years to its study and then building a career teaching his or her discoveries to others. But, like every other tool, a flashlight has a limited function; it casts only a certain amount of light.

Thus, my second key shift has been from a faith centered in my left, linear, verbal brain to one most informed by my right, holistic, intuitive brain. My appreciation of religion

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ew weeks, soon showing its limits—

has become more like the way I appreciate art. During one of her radio shows, Krista Tippett described the type of religious life that I am finding myself called into: one big enough to honor “both poetry and physics, scripture and science, allelujah and analysis.”



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Paul Ricouer speaks of symbols as gifts in that they give us occasion for thought.¹⁵ He also argues, however, that symbols can't really be appreciated or approached helpfully through detached, rational thinking but only through the roundabout, piecemeal method of communal give and take. But how do we honor this gift of religion and symbol, this call to engaged giving and taking? How do we both stay within our communities and, like Christ did in relation to his Judaism, stretch beyond and grow fully into our divinity?

I've been helped by reflecting on what is sometimes called the “scandal of the particular”—the fact that whatever universally true and ennobling spiritual insight has ever emerged, or whatever world-lifting act that has ever been performed, was conveyed by a person living, breathing, and working in a very particular context: Jesus in Galilean Judaism, Gandhi in the Hinduism of colonial India, Martin Luther King in the black church, Mother Teresa in Catholic monasticism. Given this fact, I have come to embrace that whatever else Mormonism may be—and I'm open to it being much more than this—it is my home, my particular place to live, breathe, think, and serve with whatever gifts I have been given and have been called to continue developing.

During a visit to Salt Lake City in October 2007, author and youth organizer Eboo Patel was challenged by a caller on Doug Fabrizio's *RadioWest* show who suggested that it does more harm than good to raise a child within a faith tradition, that we should allow children to find their own faith when they are ready to do so. I love Patel's unrehearsed reply:

I'm a devoted Muslim, and I consider it one of my highest responsibilities on earth to pass down my tradition to my child, to pass down the tradition of my ancestors and a tradition that I think provides enormous solace, vision, and energy. That doesn't mean my child won't choose what type of Muslim he or she is, but I think it is important for me to play my parental role—and I think somewhat pastoral role also, which is what I think all parents have—and say to my child, “*This is what you inherit. And there are certain rules to this, and certain rituals. But more than anything, there is a story—and it is a story of how God believed so much in human beings that he made us his servant and representative on earth. And may you carry that responsibility with great care, and may God guide you on the right path, on the straight path.*” . . . Just as people teach language to their children—and cul-

ture and patriotism—I think it's entirely appropriate, in fact their responsibility, to teach what they think is the highest form of truth, which, of course, is truth connected to the divine.¹⁶

Just as Patel feels toward his Muslim faith, I believe Mormonism is a wonderful tradition, a true-even-if-partial-and-messy revelation in both its origins and its extensions down to today. I believe this tradition is very much worth passing along to my children as an expression of God's love and trust in human beings. I also believe it is up to us to make Mormonism even more powerful than it already is through our service to it and to each other. Rabbi Sharon Brous, another insightful person I first encountered through Tippett's radio show, talks powerfully about how the pages of the Torah are made even more sacred by her many tears that have fallen on them. We *all* make our tradition sacred through our tears and through the way we break ourselves open in engagement—sometimes oh-so-frustrating engagement—with its texts, its rituals, its people, and its failures at times to see the forest for the trees. Rabbi Brous talks of the many mistakes her tradition and its members have made, but she quickly acknowledges her own errors as well. Not everything in Judaism resonates for her, and she freely admits that some likely never will but, she adds, “We're in a marriage.” She speaks of her commitment to learn and test herself and remain open in her relationship with her tradition in the same way that partners in a successful marriage do.¹⁷

Though Tippett doesn't use the metaphor of size, she distills for me how religious persons of genuine size approach their tradition: “They insist on an honest appraisal of the destructive energies alive in their faiths. But they also long for a nuanced appraisal—one intelligent enough to take the time and care to unravel extremism from devotion, to distinguish what is ideological and what is human.¹⁸ Later she adds that even after fully facing the world's darkness, including the pain and harm their own religious traditions have caused, large-souled persons “don't let despair have the last word. Nor do they close their eyes to its pictures, or deny the enormity of its facts. They say, ‘Yes, and . . .’ And they wake up the next day, and the day after that, to act and live accordingly.”¹⁹ This is kind of person I hope to become.

MATHEMATICIAN BLAISE PASCAL is most famous in religious circles for outlining in a very logical way how one is better off wagering that God exists and living the commandments than gambling

that there is no God or afterlife. Following his death, a piece of parchment was found sewn into the lining of Pascal's winter coat that revealed a shift from head to heart, from analysis to allelujah. The parchment read:

Year of grace 1654, Monday 23 November, feast of St. Clement . . . from about half past ten at night to about half an hour after midnight, FIRE. God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, not of philosophers and scholars. Certitude, heartfelt joy, peace. God of Jesus Christ. God of Jesus Christ. "My God and your God." . . . Joy, Joy, Joy, tears of joy . . . Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ. May I never be separated from him.

In my life, I've experienced several dramatic moments with God and the Spirit that serve me in the way I imagine this experience did for Pascal. I'll share just one.

During the time I was living with the Wrights and struggling for the courage to change the path I was on, I was struck by the description in Mosiah 28:3 of the feelings that led the sons of Mosiah to serve a mission to the Lamanites: "Now they were desirous that salvation should be declared to every creature, for they could not bear that any human soul should perish; yea, even the very thoughts that any should endure endless torment did cause them to quake and tremble." Up until that point in my reading of the Book of Mormon, I'd felt a deep connection with these golden-boys-turned-hellions-turned-repentants. They represented an archetype for one of the options I had at that crossroads in my life. But here, with this passage, I remember thinking how they and I were still very far apart. I had such a long way to go even to imagine caring that deeply for the souls of others.

The scripture stuck with me through the months of transformation that followed and into the mission field. But, sometime into my mission, it faded. I found other cool things to think about and share with others, and my mission moved ahead without my thinking much about this scripture and all it had meant to me and the ways it served to help to bring me to that point in my life.

Then, about ten days before the end of my mission, I stepped onto the sidewalk after being turned away from a stranger's door and understood the meaning of that scripture. If I were to write in the style of Pascal's parchment, I might say:

Quaking! Trembling! Love, love, love for this woman! Oh help her see, help her see! . . . Expansion! Edges dissolving into Pure Love! Love for all! God's love! Oh, may I never feel anything but this Love!

That feeling of love for everyone, even those who chanced to treat me rudely, stayed with me for days, fading incrementally as packing and practical, end-of-mission kinds of concerns crept in. As I had a chance to reflect on this experience later, I realized that although I may have forgotten what that scripture had meant to me, God hadn't, and he sent me a love note—a simple, beautiful acknowledgment that he had noticed that I had, through my mission

service, become a new kind of man, one who knew what it was like to quake and tremble because he loved even strangers.

Twenty-four years later, almost to the day, as I close my term at Sunstone, I again feel as if I'm floating in a sea of love. Thank you, all of you, for sharing your lives with me. Thank you to everyone who comes to these symposiums, which make the Salt Lake City Sheraton sacred for a few days each year. Thank you for your active minds, but mostly for your goodness—which is far more important. Thank you for embracing me in this unique role I've been able to play for these past seven-and-a-half years, for giving me the courage to share my life and fears and struggles and to come to understand that vulnerability is indeed strength.

May we fully embrace this journey and all its joys and terrors. May we love and stumble and take everything in and still hear God's voice in the midst of all the confusion. In Rilke's words, may we all flare up like flames and make big, big shadows for God to move in. I trust that we can.

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Bernard M. Loomer, "The Size of God," in *The Size of God: The Theology of Bernard Loomer in Context*, edited by William Dean and Larry E. Axel. (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1987), 47.
2. Stephen Carter, "Wherein I Justify My Existence," *SUNSTONE*, October 2008, 6.
3. Some of these insights with developmental theory and encounters with individuals are described in Dan Wotherspoon, "Without the But," *SUNSTONE*, November 2001, 8–9; Wotherspoon, "When I Needed It Most," *SUNSTONE*, April 2002, 9–11; Wotherspoon, "All We Have," *SUNSTONE*, May 2005, 7–9.
4. Bernard M. Loomer, "S-I-Z-E," *Criterion* 13, no. 3 (Spring 1974): 6.
5. Krista Tippett, *Speaking of Faith* (New York: Viking, 2007), 85.
6. William Dean, "Introduction: From Integrity to Size," in Dean and Axel, eds., *The Size of God*, 9.
7. Bernard Loomer, "Two Conceptions of Power," *Process Studies* 6, no. 1 (Spring 1976), 26.
8. *Ibid.*, 27.
9. Jim Sawyer, "Enduring to the End . . . in Joy," *SUNSTONE*, October 2002, 60–62.
10. Loomer, "Two Conceptions of Power," 19.
11. J. Bonner Ritchie, "The Institutional Church and the Individual," *SUNSTONE*, June 1999, 98–112.
12. See Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 292–95. Fowler explains a modal developmental level as follows: "The modal developmental level is the *average expectable level of development for adults* in a given community. In faith terms, it refers to the conscious or unconscious image of adult faith toward which the educational practices, religious celebrations, and patterns of governance in a community all aim. The modal level operates as a kind of magnet in religious communities. Patterns of nurture prepare children and youth to grow up to the modal level—but not beyond it. . . . The operation of the modal level in a community sets an effective limit on the ongoing process of growth in faith" (page 294, emphases in the original).
13. See Tippett, *Speaking of Faith*, 180.
14. Rainer Maria Rilke, *Rilke's Book of Hours I*, 59, translated by Anita Barrows and Joanna Macy (New York: Riverhead Books, 1996), 119.
15. Paul Ricouer, *The Symbolism of Evil*, translated by Emerson Buchanan (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), 348.
16. Eboo Patel, interview by Doug Fabrizio, *RadioWest*, KUER, 22 October 2007.
17. Rabbi Sharon Brous, interview by Krista Tippett, *Speaking of Faith*, American Public Media, 6 September 2007.
18. Tippett, *Speaking of Faith*, 3.
19. *Ibid.*, 185–86.