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March 2007—$5.95

UPDATING: MORMONISM AND TRANS_HUMANISM
PARALLELS AND COMPLEMENTS BETWEEN
BY THE MEMBERS OF THE MORMON
TRANS_HUMANIST ASSOCIATION

There is no end to being above,
There is no death.
SUNSTONE SYMPOSIUM WEST

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Sunstone welcomes presentations on any theological or contemporary moral/ethical issue and its intersection with Mormonism, as well as studies of historical and contemporary events, movements, and figures. This year we also especially encourage proposals focusing on this year’s special theme: THE PUBLIC FACES OF MORMONISM. Please submit a proposal!

Please visit WWW.SUNSTONEONLINE.COM for more information
M Y COPY OF THE NOVEMBER 2006
SUNSTONE was read and passed along
to other church members within a few days
of receipt. “For Better, For Worse, For
Apostasy?” really spoke to the experience
of many of my LDS friends over the years.

For me, one of the greatest values of
SUNSTONE is that it provides a place
where committed Mormons can learn about
other LDS with the same concerns, experiences,
and struggles in life. It is so important to
have someone to talk and listen to. Feeling
you are the only one with these reactions and
experiences but not having people to talk
to and listen to would, I think, be the surest
way to leave the Mormon community.

Mormonism is a big, a big
world which includes a lot of different kinds of
people who experience religious faith in different
ways. We are much stronger when most of us
find space in that tent. For me, the magazine,
the symposiums, and the Sunstone commu-
nity are a way to affirm that we belong. SUNSTONE,
both the magazine and the sym-
posiums, strengthens my testimony. Thinking,
struggling, need not undermine faith.

KEN DRIGGS
Atlanta, Georgia
through my faith. So I have no complaints. My prayers are with all couples and families who struggle with the loss—or the renewal—of faith.

JOHN GUSTAV-WRATHALL
Minneapolis, Minnesota

TIMELESS SENTIMENTS

THE "UPDATE" SECTION OF THE November 2006 SUNSTONE mentions two instances of post-publication censorship in the Ensign. Luckily, my mother has kept a copy of every Ensign issue since 1971, so she was able to send me a copy of one of the articles mentioned in the story: "A Different Kind of Tithe," by Helen Candland Stark published in the month of my birth.

I enjoyed the article very much. How wonderful to read a mix of quotations from the Bible, Zuni Indian literature, Henry David Thoreau, and Brigham Young regarding stewardship of the earth. Why not tithe our urges to subdue, conquer, and tame the earth by protecting at least a tenth of it, for its own sake and ours? In places, the article seems dated, but overall its arguments are timeless. I'd love to see SUNSTONE pursue it for possible printing in a future issue. Or perhaps you could run an analysis of it and a fuller history of its publication and subsequent deletion from the Church's official online and CD-ROM editions?

Thank you to whoever gathers the interesting tidbits in "Update."

JOANNE CASE
Iowa City, Iowa

EDITOR’S NOTE: Hugo Olaiz has been SUNSTONE’S news editor and primary tidbit gatherer for the past five-plus years. We’re very grateful for him, too!

LEARNING FROM ALL

I REALLY APPRECIATED PHILIP G. McLemore’s "Mormon Mantras: A Journey of Spiritual Transformation," the feature article of the April 2006 SUNSTONE. The last few years especially, I have struggled with the “equation theory” of spirituality—that doing this + this + that = feeling God’s love and acceptance. Brother McLemore’s article rang true with me more than anything has in a long time. I really appreciated his gentle and articulate layout of some very practical ways to incorporate meditation into our own spiritual practice. I was glad to read his description of how to seek and to feel God’s love without necessarily feeling that we have earned the right to do so.

I was saddened, therefore, to read in the letters section of the September issue the negative response of one reader who, it seems to me, missed the whole point of the article. The response asserted that leaving our minds empty in meditation was essentially useless. I was surprised by this attitude, having had many experiences with meditation where “emptying” the mind has been very fruitful. In fact, coming to our God with a desire to simply be open to what we will receive might be more effective at times than coming with a mind full of wants and needs and things to pray about.

I am writing to thank Brother McLemore for a stellar article that was much needed. I hope that we can realize that there are many methods of learning to commune with God, and we need not deny that one way is good for someone else because the way(s) we approach God are different. Thank God for all our sisters and brothers in the world to learn from.

ANNA-KARIN SMITH
Portland, Oregon

For my talk on Joseph Smith, I’d like to express my appreciation for Rough Stone Rolling as well as that one episode of South Park.
S

LIVING IN THIS PARTICULAR TIME

SOMETIMES I MAKE jokes about being a “bionic woman” or “cyborg.” Having a prosthetic leg with a computer-controlled knee joint lends itself to such comparisons. Truth be told, the first thing I’d reach for if there was a house fire and we needed to exit quickly wouldn’t be the family photo albums. I’d reach for my robotic leg. It would make sense, given that the leg cost as much as a luxury car. And, of course, because it is essential for my mobility. I’ve been robotic for about three years. When I first learned that my insurance would pay for a computerized knee joint, I was thrilled to adopt the technology. I knew that would pay for a computerized knee joint, I was thrilled to adopt the technology. My patriarchal blessing says that I will not be limited in my mobility because of my amputation. I carry on with typical tourist activities: scaling the Great Wall, strolling through the markets, touring gardens. There were beggars nearly every place we visited, many of them amputees. I knew I needed to avoid giving handouts or I would be besieged by dozens of people asking for the same. So I kept my hands in my pockets and looked into their eyes and felt heartsick and smug. Contemplating the price that had brought my mobility. Feeling my own betrayal.

JANA BOUCK REMY
Irvine, California

THE LEXUS EPHEMANY

LIKE MOST COLLEGE freshman, I went to school for one reason: to make money. However, I didn’t just want to make money. I wanted to make as much money as possible. My plan was to complete an MBA in finance, head off to Wall Street, and spend the next thirty years reading stock ticker symbols.

I started off pretty well, acing my accounting classes, landing an internship with a major bank, and trying my hand at some discriminate stock picking. One event changed all that.

I was living in New Jersey at the time and stumbled upon Thoreau. Walden Pond was a mere five hours away, so one night, I packed, drove to Concord, bought the book, and camped near Walden Pond. The next morning, I started reading at 7 a.m. What followed was the most profound experience I have ever had. Ever.

Within the first few pages, I felt penetrated by the book. My dialogue with the text became instantly conversational. I felt as if Thoreau were standing there, searing my soul with his powerfully incisive gaze. And then, without asking permission, sitting me before his desk and subjecting me to a thorough evaluation of my life’s work so far. Were my life’s goals a waste of my time and energy? What was the point of it all? That is, what would I do if I died right now?

His ideas were so pithy that they came to me dripping with substance, his meanings so thick that they could be taken in only by swallowing them whole. His judgment both condemned and redeemed me all at once. I learned that day that the seven deadly sins are paltry compared to the sacrilege of neglecting real depth of life. There is no savior who can grant clemency for throwing away life’s narrow. It was on that day that I decided to become a philosopher and spend my life seeking wisdom.

Since then, I have had many flashbacks to my former dreams. These experiences are often triggered by seeing a new car or vacation commercial or flipping past CNBC. These tempting images make me wonder if the grass really might be greener on the other side.

TOUCHSTONES is a SUNSTONE section that debuted in the December 2005 issue. It was inspired by “Readers Write” in The SUN magazine. TOUCHSTONES topics are intentionally broad in order to give room for personal expression. Writing style is not as important as the contributor’s thoughtfulness, humor, and sincerity. SUNSTONE reserves the right to edit pieces, but contributors will have the opportunity to approve or disapprove of editorial changes prior to publication.

To submit a reflection, please send it typed and double-spaced to SUNSTONE, 343 North Third West, Salt Lake City, Utah, 84103. Electronic submissions can be sent via email to TOUCHSTONES editor Allen Hill at: allen@sunstoneonline.com. Due to space limitations, submissions should be kept somewhere around 400 words, but we are willing to make exceptions for exceptional pieces. Please submit right away for upcoming topics.

Upcoming Topics:

THE WARD FAMILY DINNER

JANA BOUCK REMY
Irvine, California

PAGE 4 MARCH 2007
However, recently I had the opposite experience. While walking out to catch my bus, I saw a brand-new Lexus. This time, rather than being struck with self doubt, I felt for the first time in my life that my understanding was worth far, far, more than that person’s Lexus. I smiled to myself and realized I just might become a philosopher after all.

Alden Stout
West Lafayette, Indiana

Tracking Your Life—One Tchotchke At A Time

After traipsing through Moscow a few summers back, I decided that I wanted to live my life as one big vacation. I would be freer and clearer-headed if my life were unbound by clutter— if, instead of baggage, I simply had a bag. Author Annie Dillard, who dutifully folds herself away into a writing shed in the woods, inspires me. All one really needs in order to subsist are some jeans, a book, and contact lens solution.

I returned to Utah with three backpacks full of tchotchkes. It took enormous strength to unpeel each clump of toys, CDs, shapkas, and chocolate from those packs. It would take eight writing sheds to house all of these things. While abroad, I kept a journal about the cathedrals and parks I’d visited, but I haven’t read it since I got back. Touching the furry hats and painted dolls is much more fun. What better way to possess a journey?

Possessions are an amiable way to mark experiences and track successes. By replacing actual memories with the simple story an item tells, you can give your amygdala a refreshing break. For example, I keep all of my schoolbooks from college, yet to read them again would be repellent. I just like to look at them all lined up on the bookshelf. The display is a rewarding sight whereas the real memory of the achievement is one of sleep deprivation, debt, and a cadaverous social life.

In another attempt to nobly evict my worldly things, I went to California for five months, my only cargo, a suitcase. I came back with . . . it’s too embarrassing to quantify. Well, okay: twenty pairs of shoes. But why not open my wallet and unleash a little enthusiasm onto objects? I’m ardently committed to each pair. There’s a story in each sole (to which my fourteen-year-old brother, who recently got the closet tour, will testify). I might start looking at trips not as an escape from possessions but a chance to become impassioned by exotic items. Never mind encountering new faces and testing out my Russian. The best part of traveling might be stockpiling souvenirs.

Chelsea Bush
Salt Lake City, Utah

Value

Two possessions in my life stand in contrast—my MP3 player and my personal journal.

My MP3 player is a little contraption that not only plays tons of music but also displays pictures, plays video, broadcasts FM radio,
has a voice recorder, and many more cool functions. When I first got it, I spent several days fiddling with its various features and uploading music, video, and pictures. However, the novelty quickly ran out, and now I have a completely full, seldom-used, ultra-tiny digital device sitting on my shelf.

My journal has taken different forms through the years. When I was younger, it was a book with pages that I filled more or less diligently as the weeks and months screamed by. Over time, the book has been succeeded by a file on my computer, which is very convenient as I never run out of space and benefit from the spelling and grammar check! I enjoy writing every week, making an account of my personal endeavors and the developments and progress of my family. For better or for worse, my journal contains my life story—often not very interesting, but personally valuable nonetheless. I often refer to it as I try to recall details from events in my past, and my wife and kids love to look through it and learn new tidbits about their husband and father.

Though my MP3 player has a much higher market value than my journal, there is no question in my mind which is more valuable.

JONATHAN H. WESTOVER
Tooele, Utah

HOW DID WE GET HERE?

FIVE YEARS AGO, I called insurance companies to find one to write a policy for our new home purchase and was repeatedly told, "I'm sorry, ma'am, but we are not presently writing policies on executive homes." Executive homes. How did we get here?

A line in my husband's patriarchal blessing tells him that he "won't waste time and effort on the trinkets of life." He let me read his blessing before we married, and the line caused me consternation. I'd always been rather fond of life's trinkets—particularly those which are multi-faceted and glimmering. But I wanted to marry him, so I congratulated myself for winning someone who'd knuckle right down to the business of obtaining trinkets for me instead of wasting his time and effort before getting them.

But dental school was expensive. Diapers were expensive. Food and clothing were expensive. College and missions loomed, and my husband had committed himself to a full career in the Public Health Service, which meant he was paid on the military's scale. I soon came to appreciate his no-nonsense approach to finances: We paid cash, avoided debt, and put every "extra" cent either into paying down the mortgage or into an investment.

My girlfriends felt sorry for me. My ancient Chevy Corsica vibrated noticeably (and audibly) at stoplights, and the ceiling fabric sagged until it rested on the top of my head. When the carpet in our family room became unbearably dog-damaged, my husband ripped it out. We lived with cold, concrete floors for more than two years before a girlfriend, who was employed at a tile outlet, offered us her employee discount if we would use it to buy tile to cover the floor.

Then 9-11 hit. Our house was nearly paid off. We were about to have many more extra cents than ever before, but the stock market was looking unstable and less appealing to us. One day, our family was driving through an upscale neighborhood and, on a whim, my husband picked up a flyer about a house. He showed it to me and, laughing, asked if I'd like to live there. I looked at the asking price, and my mind automatically did the math. "Honey," I said, "we could."

"Yeah, right." He stared at the flyer. Then he looked at me, stunned, as he realized that, quite by accident, we really could "move up."

Several months later, we moved into our own "executive home" in a prestigious golf course community. I drove up in a used, late model Mercury Voyager that I thought was fancy because it had a cup holder, and Bret drove up in a 1980-something Volkswagen Cabriolet convertible, the tears in the soft top flapping in the breeze like the American flag on the antennae. The illegals cleaning the homes next door drove away in newer, better vehicles than we had arrived in. But we lived here.

Of course, we are still us. Both homes have been replaced, but the great room in our new home has been empty for the five years we've lived here. If I wanted furniture in it, all I'd have to do is go choose it. But every time I consider doing that, habit kicks in and I think "I can't afford it." Nearly every weekend, Bret and I shop garage sales because we like to and because we like being together. It's what we do. Someday I'll probably furnish my great room with the discards from someone else's executive home. And no one will know the difference.

LISA TORCASSO DOWNING
Heath, Texas
OF GOOD REPORT

MOTHERING SUNDAY

By Kristine Haglund

IN THE ANGLICAN calendar, the fourth Sunday of Lent is often called "Refreshment Sunday." This nomenclature derives not from treats in the cultural hall after church, but from a tradition of relaxing the rules of the Lenten fast on this day to provide refreshment from the austerity of the Lenten season. It is also called "Mothering Sunday" because it was the traditional time for people to travel to their hometowns or villages to visit their "mother church." Children and youth who were servants in the cities were allowed to go home on this Sunday, and so it gradually became a day to honor mothers.

I choose this occasion to celebrate the mothering of my mother church. It may be a bit difficult to think of the Mormon church this way. Our day-to-day experience can condition us to more readily see the stern, patriarchal face of our church. And yet, and yet...

THIS IS THE CHURCH (Chapell Hill Branch, ca. 1974) where I first played "Go Tell Aunt Rhody" in Primary, while the teachers sang "Lord, Dismiss Us with Thy Blessing." It is where bishops and ward music chairs made space for me in the worship program throughout my growing up, maybe not because my scratchy violin-playing was so uplifting, but because they loved me and saw that I needed to worship with my little fiddle.

THIS IS THE CHURCH (Los Alamos Ward, ca. 1977) where my Sunday School teacher let me climb out the window and hide under the lilac bushes for most of Sunday School time once a month so because he saw that I was a sad little girl who needed time and space where no one expected me to answer questions and be the teacher’s pet.

THIS IS THE CHURCH (Chapel Hill Branch, ca. 1977) where I learned German from the Singer Sewing Machine Company. Way of a Harvard Business School case about the virtues of eating and sleeping regularly, by Sunbeam manual and the hymnal. It is the church where the psalms came alive for me in Luther’s translation, and my understanding of God was utterly transformed by a single phrase: "denn der Herr ist freundlich." In the King James Version, this is translated, "for the Lord is good." But "freundlich" was also simply "friendly" in the everyday parlance of an eighth-grader trying to approach God.

THIS IS THE CHURCH (University Ward, ca. 1988) where a kind bishop lectured me about the value of eating and sleeping regularly. For the gospel’s joyful sound. Thanks we give and adoration. Trav'ling through this wilderness. Oh, refresh us, oh, refresh us. We need to understand the flaws because we are shaped by them too, but we should not, in our minute examination of them, miss the grace. As Laurel Ulrich writes in her essay, "Lusterware," "If you find any earthly institution that is ten percent divine, embrace it with all your heart." And so I do. It is a complicated embrace, sometimes as awkward as at a junior high school dance, with too much be-crunching. I stumble and keep trying.

LIKE most mothers, the Church is a flawed instrument of love and grace. We need to understand the flaws because we are shaped by them too, but we should not, in our minute examination of them, miss the grace. As Laurel Ulrich writes in her essay, "Lusterware," "If you find any earthly institution that is ten percent divine, embrace it with all your heart." And so I do. It is a complicated embrace, sometimes as awkward as at a junior high school dance, with too much be-crunching. I stumble and keep trying.

1. In practice, this means she is very busy to her three children, and she blogs at bycommonconsent.com. You can share your opinions with her (if you dare) at kristinehaglund@yahoo.com. This essay is drawn from a guestblogger post she wrote for Feminist Mormon Housewives (http://www.feministmormonhousewives.org).

NOTES

1. Emma Lou Thayne and Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, All God’s Critters Got a Place in the Choir (Salt Lake City: Aspen Books, 1995), 166.
2. John Fawcett, “Lord, Dismiss Us with Thy Blessing,” Hymns of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985), no. 163.
FIRST MET Bob about 1992 when I attended some now-forgotten lecture on Mormonism in Salt Lake City. Bob was at the front of the auditorium, this white-haired fellow with glasses in a floppy suit and tie, hovering over a tape recorder. Afterward, I, along with several others, asked him about getting copies of the tape he had just made. This caused him some befuddlement as he had no way to duplicate the tapes. I, however, had a high-speed tape duplicator, so I offered my services if Bob would trust me with his master tape. Thus began a fifteen-year association with a person who would become much more than a friend.

Bob quickly became my “bud,” someone with whom I would spend long hours on the telephone discussing various news items and events, mostly involving the LDS Church. Actually I first “met” Bob, or rather learned of him, in 1982 through a series of articles in the Denver Post called “Utah—The Church State.” In one of the articles, the reporter detailed how he had followed Bob and his family as they attended church and carried on their daily activities as members of the LDS Church in Salt Lake City.

Bob was constantly on the go. He was always fashionably late but always willing to discuss and debate topics of religion, music, and life experiences. He was a lawyer by profession but found his greatest joy in things “Mormon.” And like me, he wanted to collect any book, article, magazine, tape, video, CD (you name it) about Mormonism—good, bad, or ugly. We taped every lecture, news report, television show, or radio interview that we learned about. If Bob couldn’t tape it, I would. We’d joke that if neither one of us could record something, well, it just wasn’t worth taping. Bob and I had an unofficial business we called “B&S Taping.”

As a result of this quest, there was no space in Bob’s home or office not filled with boxes, papers, tapes, and books. Each bedroom was a separate library, and we used to laugh that he needed a jungle guide to get through his house. It could be messy, but it was his mess, and he loved it. And Bob’s collection is very valuable in the preservation of things Mormon, for back in the days of reel-to-reel tape recording, and long before groups such as Sunstone began taping things themselves, it was Bob who captured many LDS-related events for posterity.

But Bob was not one-dimensional. He loved to go to plays and operas, and occasionally (even if you didn’t ask) he’d sing for you. Bob had a beautiful voice and frequently sang in ward choirs and musical presentations. He would also tape-record musical programs from the TV and radio and has a very impressive collection, which will soon be in the University of Utah Archives for all to use and hear.

Bob also loved his family and took care of his mother until she died a few years ago. He spent many hours of his own time working on family wills and estates. He loved and was very close to his stepfather, Stanley McAllister, who was a prominent businessman and church leader in New York in the 40s, 50s, and 60s. A few years ago at the Mormon History Association conference in Cedar City.
Bob was supremely happy giving me a paper about McAllister. (Even though I messed up the visuals, it was a great presentation!)

Bob always liked talking about his Vernon, Nielson, and McAllister family history and his own family. When a grandchild was born, he'd proudly wear a button with the child's picture on it and the notation, "Ask me about my grandbaby!" He loved his siblings, other relatives, and children very much and talked about them all the time. He also enjoyed discussing his life adventures, from his mission to Germany, to his experience as a seasonal worker at the Grand Canyon while attending the University of Utah, to law school in New York City. And Bob always maintained long-lasting friendships with companions, coworkers, or friends from each place he went.

It was always fun to run into Bob around town or in some bookstore. One time while I was photographing a traffic accident (I am a crime scene photographer for the Salt Lake City Police Department), I noticed Bob in his car waiting to get around the accident. He didn't see me, so I walked up to his car, banged on the roof, and yelled that he couldn't stop there. First seeing just a uniform, he was shocked and befuddled. Then he saw me smiling, realized the joke, and (after his heart slowed down a bit) couldn't stop laughing. Bob drove what can only be described as a "tank." How he loved that car!

A FEW THOUGHTS of my own about Bob Vernon. Several things were certain in any encounter with Bob:

1. He'd be smiling.
2. He'd be excited to share something he'd been reading or doing.
3. You were in for a long conversation!

All these things were very endearing.

I can't help but smile when I think about Bob. The combination of slight dishevelment, a mind that raced two hundred miles an hour, and an open, helping heart who put good intentions into action—even if those actions didn't always seem particularly well organized—made Bob one of those unique and memorable characters whom I will never forget and will always recall with fondness.

Though not a scholar in the sense of publishing or breaking new ground in areas of inquiry, Bob was nevertheless a fine student of Mormonism—of its origins and development as well as contemporary issues. Once his material has been pulled together and cataloged, researchers using the University of Utah library archives will benefit from Bob's energetic saving of everything—especially the audio and video recordings he made of LDS presentations. As Steve Mayfield mentions in his reflection, many of these discussions are preserved only because Bob had the foresight to capture them—was bold enough to bring his equipment, monitor the recording processes, and manage the many tasks required to create and preserve such things.

I will personally miss Bob very much. Sunstone and other Mormon groups will miss his ever-present self, huge heart, and excellent mind and insights.

FOR EACH SUNSTONE issue, there are always many people to thank for behind-the-scenes kindnesses and efforts that have helped things come to fruition. For this issue, I want to especially single out Brad Woodworth's wonderful help in soliciting and editing the reflection by Harold Bloom (page 18). Brad's assistance involved consistent follow-through for the past eighteen months as Professor Bloom was forced to postpone writing for us because of health setbacks and other projects that screamed for his attention. New Haven neighbors of Bloom's, Brad and his wife Cherie have done a great deal to keep Bloom's attention tuned into Joseph Smith and contemporary Mormonism, of which he wrote so insightfully in his The American Religion (Simon and Schuster, 1992). We're very excited that Professor Bloom has chosen to publish a few more thoughts now, fifteen years after that landmark book. Thank you, Professor! Thank you, Brad, for all you have done in making this happen!

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1. Early nineteenth-century group of English textile artisans who, protesting the effects of the Industrial Revolution on their way of life, set about destroying wool and cotton mills and textile machines. Most neo-Luddites voices eschew similar tactics of destruction, but like the original Luddites, they are united by a strong interest in preserving and maintaining a high quality of life in the midst of great and rapid technological advancement. Kirkpatrick Sale describes one of the primary tasks of the neo-Luddite movement as laying out as clearly and fully as possible the costs and consequences of our technologies, in the
near term and the long, so that even those overwhelmed by the ease/comfort/speed/power of high-tech gadgetry... are forced to understand at what price it all comes and who is paying for it. What purpose does this machine serve?

What problem has become so great that it needs this solution? Is this invention nothing but, as Thoreau put it, an improved end to an unimproved end?... Will this invention concentrate or disperse power, encourage or discourage self-worth? Can society at large afford it? Can the biosphere?

At the time I was introduced to the movement, much of my interest in neo-Luddite critiques grew out of my strong affinity for environmentalism and also for the vision and promise of Zion. (I was in the middle of writing my doctoral dissertation on resources in Mormon thought for ecological sustainability.) I recognized that any future to which one might apply the label "Zion" would require a healthy integration of environmental wisdom—including an economy geared to toward sustainability instead of simply toward growth—and strong religious sensibilities. Because neo-Luddite writings focus on the connections between technology, economic forces, and environmental impact, and on the shift in spiritual values that are embedded in the ideals of modernism and furthered by the unchecked march of technological advance, these writings gave me some of the most penetrating analyses of many dynamics I was then interested in.

Several factors ultimately led to my waning interest in neo-Luddism per se (though I've still found myself revisiting that section of my bookshelves many times in the intervening years). But the chief factor was the tendency of most of the movement's leading voices to look backwards more often than forwards—to advocate withdrawal from, rather than finding a way through, the industrial complex and our society's technological adolescence. While I very much value the wisdom of native traditions and find myself drawn at times toward the gospel of simplicity, ultimately I've come to realize that, baseline, I'm a pragmatist and an optimist. I have a strong trust in our ability as humans to rise to the challenges inherent in the technologies now emerging and the clear trend they show toward even greater interdependence between human beings and the machines we create.

There are several claims at the forefront of Transhumanist conversations, to which the article in this issue was my first introduction, that I'm not quite ready to embrace. I am absolutely for human intellectual and biological flourishing. I am even willing to consider as a good the ideal of dramatically increased human longevity. But even though I accept that we are following an arc that leads to even greater interdependence between humans and machines, I'm a bit discomforted by the seeming enthusiasm many Transhumanists have for flourishing primarily through human and technological melding—non-organic enhancements to our brains, skin, skeletal structure, sense organs, and so forth. The article envisions that humans are to one day have "the ability to communicate complex thoughts and emotions instantaneously without visual aids or speech," enjoy "higher awareness of even distant environs," be able to perfectly control "individual desires, moods, or mental states," and have "increased capacity to experience joy, love, pleasure, and other emotions" (page 32). I want to stand firmly with the camp that recognizes these as capabilities we can and should work toward developing through spiritual disciplines regardless of whether we also pursue technologies that can aid us in acquiring such capacities.

I don't rule out the possibility that Transhumanists may be right about the inevitability of a period in human and technological evolution when advances come so rapidly and are of such magnitude that we will not be able to predict or direct them (what Transhumanists call the "Singularity"). But I would much rather throw my efforts behind creating a future resembling that articulated by Bill Joy, chief scientist of Sun Microsystems. Using Star Trek as an example,
Joy shares his hope that the centuries to come will be filled “with strong moral values, embodied in codes like the Prime Directive: to not interfere in the development of less technologically advanced civilizations,” a vision dominated by “ethical humans, not robots.”

I’m likewise cautious when I meet enthusiasm for colonizing other planets—in the same way I want to reject attitudes about an imminent Second Coming that are fed, at least in part, by a pessimism about our ability to work together to solve current societal problems. I like the idea of exploring the galaxy, but not if the enthusiasm for extraterrestrial exploration is driven by a sense of our having botched things up on planet Earth so badly that our extinction here is inevitable and sending a remnant to new worlds is the only way the human species can survive. Transhumanists are, of course, not united in this view. While the Mormon Transhumanist Association exists—that bright, well-grounded Latter-day Saints have staked a claim in the Transhumanist table. I find their readings of many familiar but understudied scriptural passages and prophetic utterances fascinating. But mostly I share with them a strong sense that science and technology should advance “according to moral principles are vital in preparing for the ‘risks and responsibilities associated with future advances,’ and that it is imperative to strive to persuade others of this wisdom (page 27).

"Buzz" Capener Memorial Writing Contest in Comparative Religious Studies

The contest originates in the conviction that the study of Mormon theology and doctrine can greatly benefit from examination in a comparative context with other Christian and non-Christian traditions. The contest encourages entries that bring LDS concepts and practices into discussion with the worldviews, doctrines, and rituals of other faiths, trusting that the comparative act will enrich the understanding of each. Papers should exhibit sound scholarship but also be accessible to a broad, non-specialist readership.

The papers, without author identification, will be judged by qualified scholars of Mormonism and religious studies. The winners will be invited to give their papers at the 2007 Salt Lake Sunstone Symposium to be held 8–11 August, and the winning articles will be published in a future issue of Sunstone magazine. Only the winners will be notified personally of the results. After the judging is complete, all non-winning entrants will be free to submit their essays elsewhere. The contest is sponsored by the family of R. L. “Buzz” Capener to honor the memory of his life of faith, acceptance of diversity, and the pursuit of truth.

PRIZES: A total of $1,000.00 will be awarded:
• $750 for the best submission
• $250 for the runner-up

RULES: 1. Only one entry may be submitted by any author or team of authors. Four copies must be postmarked or reach Sunstone offices before or on 30 April 2007. Entries will not be returned.
2. Each entry must be 8,000 words or fewer (exclusive of footnotes). Entries must be typed, double-spaced, on one side of white paper, paginated, and stapled in the upper left corner. Author names should not appear on any page of the entry.
3. Each entry must be accompanied by a cover letter that states the essay’s thesis and the author’s (or authors’) name, address, telephone number, and email address. Each cover letter must be signed and attest that the entry is the personal or team’s work; that it has not been previously published; that it is not currently being considered for publication elsewhere, will not be submitted to other forums until after the contest, and that, if the entry wins, Sunstone magazine has one-time, first-publication rights.
4. Winners will be selected by anonymous evaluations supplied by judges appointed by the Sunstone Education Foundation and the R. L. “Buzz” Capener Memorial Writing Contest organizing committee. Sunstone will announce the winners in Sunstone magazine at WW.SUNSTONEONLINE.COM.

Failure to comply with these rules will result in disqualification.

The 2006 Capener Contest winners were:
• First Place—“Saving the Dead: A Comparative Study of Post-Funerary Rites in Japanese and Mormon Culture,” by John Delvey Remy (Sunstone, November 2006)
• Second Place—The Sacramental Worldview: A Philosophical Companion of Joseph Smith’s Magical View of Ordinances with a Liberation View of Sacraments,” by Dennis Remy (Sunstone, December 2006)
Having Eyes to See

MY HUSBAND AND I RECENTLY VISITED THE Monterey Bay Aquarium in California. To our delight, the giant octopus was especially active during our visit. It was big and reddish pink and had spread out all over the glass of its display tank. We were struck with the beauty of its sinuous movements, its suckers attaching and re-attaching in a graceful underwater ballet. We counted its arms (yes, eight!), inspected its nearly hidden mouth, and admired the vigor and energy of its movements.

We had forgotten to bring a camera with which we could record this wonderful sight, so we returned the next day to try to catch the octopus in its dance again. When we arrived, however, the tank appeared completely empty. No octopus anywhere! We knew they were hard to spot, so we looked carefully, high and low, but in vain. Finally, another visitor had us look in one corner of the exhibit—a place we thought we had thoroughly scanned already. Our octopus was right in front of us, its arms tucked into a rocky crevice and only its head exposed. Its color and shape now matched exactly the rocks of its habitat, blending in to the point of near invisibility.

We had difficulty reconciling what looked like a brown rocky bump with the magnificent, powerful, reddish creature we had admired the day before. It was in plain sight, but we had to change the way we were looking in order to see it.

I couldn't help but think of the Heavenly Mother, who, I believe, is hiding in plain sight. Like many LDS women, I quietly believe she is the Holy Ghost, the third member of the Godhead, with a job description that exactly suits her: the provider of light, knowledge, and comfort—a powerful and ever-present force in the lives of her children on earth. Completing the celestial family along with the Father and the Son, she performs the labor of salvation for the human family. If this idea were to become accepted doctrine, what a strong spiritual role model she would be for women—the Queen of Heaven, known at last! Perhaps all it takes is a shift in our thinking and the way we look for her, and we will see her right before our eyes.

VICKIE EASTMAN
Salt Lake City, Utah
try to appease the gossiping, disapproving factions in my ward. I simply shut my eyes to them and ventured out in faith.

While I was strengthening this resolve, I happened to meet a former minister's son who had abandoned organized religion for many of the same reasons that were troubling me. The human foibles of imperfect believers had blocked his view of God, and ultimately he left his religious practice because he couldn't see Christ reflected in the members of his faith. In his search for life beyond organized religion, my friend found a sense of humor and tolerance for a vast array of quirks and quacks. I took this lesson in forebearance from him, learned to light my path with patience and laughter, and progressed with my plan to turn a blind eye to the too-obvious human failings among those beside me in the pews and look for the godliness beyond. Over time, magically, mysteriously, I came to see Christ reflected in them.

From my Primary lessons growing up, I had thought that Christ's apostles were near-perfect, enlightened demi-gods who basically got to sit around on the beach within arm's reach of Jesus. I could almost hear the sound of the surf in the background and the hushed whispers of the multitudes who inhaled every syllable of the Savior's teachings as they fell from his lips. I inserted myself into airbrushed art and wished to be as intimate with Christ as were Peter, James, and John.

But when my family moved to Guam halfway through my ninth-grade year, I began studying New Testament theology at a Catholic school. There I learned about how much the apostles didn't know (and thus weren't held accountable for) before they received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. It took me awhile to adjust to this portrayal of the apostles as frequently floundering fellows who found themselves caught up in the chaotic, hyper-political mess of the final three years of Christ's life. I still remember the tolerance and compassion Sister Kathleen conveyed as she taught us about the Road to Emmaus, describing how Christ's disciples had been basically "flying blind" in their pre-Pentecostal state.

Ultimately, I came to feel a bit of that same compassion toward the apostles. Learning about their human side endeared them to me. The fact that my faith was imperfect didn't seem as big a deal once I came to understand that it hadn't been easy to fully recognize the divinity of Christ even when walking at his elbow and sharing every meal with him. I began to see the virtue in blindness and unknowing in a religious context.

In my "Damascus and Emmaus" year, I came to understand how much I needed to reflect that same kind of tolerance and compassion toward my fellow churchgoers and toward myself in order to see Christ in them and in me. As I learned to do so, our impulse to change each other vanished, the ward leadership came to no longer see me as someone in spiritual jeopardy, and, like Paul as he received Ananias's healing touch, I no longer feared for my own soul.

### All-seeing eye

**WE'LL ALWAYS HAVE . . . NAUVOO?**

Some readers of the Deseret Book 2007 Winter catalog may have been a little startled when they saw Paris's Arc de Triomphe and Nauvoo's LDS temple juxtaposed in an ad for Deseret Book's Time Out tours. “Spring is near,” the ad reads, “Nauvoo or Paris wait you.”

Nauvoo or Paris? Isn't that an odd pairing? Not at all! The City of Light and the City of Joseph share so many similarities that only the most hardened skeptic could fail to recognize the parallels. Consider: One was built on the horseshoe bend of the Seine; the other, on the horseshoe bend of the Mississippi. Both are well known for their places to visit (Paris: The Eiffel Tower, the Louvre, the Notre Dame Cathedral; Nauvoo: The Joseph Smith Homestead, the Red Brick Store, the Mansion House). Both have renowned people buried there (Paris: Napoleon Bonaparte, Oscar Wilde, Jim Morrison; Nauvoo: Joseph, Emma, and Hyrum Smith). And both have seen their fair share of historical crises (Paris: the French Revolution of 1789; Nauvoo: the Mormon War of 1844).

You may not be able to stay in the Ritz if you visit Nauvoo, but you can probably find room at the Nauvoo Family Inn & Suites. And both cities have seen, alas, their fair share of recent economic struggles—Paris: a steady decline of its manufacturing industries; Nauvoo: the 2003 closure of the Nauvoo Blue Cheese Factory.
longer felt condemned by the Divine. At times, my five years of wandering in the wilderness has felt like forty, but the rocky road feels justified now. Without this season of blindness, my off-road journey might never have yielded moments of illumination that felt like gazing into the face of God.

ALISON TAKENAKA
Essex Junction, Vermont

NOTE: The purpose of Margin Notes is to invite brief commentaries on passages from scripture or some other religious text. As the title indicates, authors could use their literal margin notes as a springboard toward a discussion of their experience or views on the passage. Margin Notes submissions should be no more than 500 words long. Please submit reflections to editor Alison Takenaka at: ALISONTAKENAKA@HOTMAIL.COM.

Righteous Dominion

A SOFT ANSWER

IN MAY 2006, I LEARNED IN ADVANCE THAT A FIRST Presidency letter would be read in every U.S. ward the next Sunday urging members to call their senators in support of an upcoming vote for a “Marriage Amendment” to the U.S. Constitution. I mentioned this to a friend of mine, and we decided that the best way for us to register our protest would be to walk out while the letter was being read. So that is what we did.

Following the meeting, I wrote a letter to my bishop detailing my objection to the Church’s involvement in what I considered to be a partisan, anti-gay exercise primarily intended to stir up the conservative voter base. I considered the vote to be political grandstanding, since those sponsoring the amendment knew that it did not have a chance of winning approval. I half expected to be called into the bishop’s office to discuss the matter.

Three days passed, and a knock came at my door. It was my bishop, holding a beautiful bouquet of flowers in a vase. He had come, he said, because he had seen my public gesture and read my letter and wanted me to know that I am appreciated and loved in the ward. He had taken a similar gift to my friend. I invited him in, and we had a friendly chat. I know that he supports the Church in these affairs, and he knows that flowers will not buy me off. I told him that that I appreciated his kind and loving response but that he needn’t bring flowers every time I disagree with Church policies!

In the sense of either of us persuading the other to our point of view, nothing changed because of his visit except that tension relaxed and good feelings prevailed. Although I may be at odds with the corporate church from time to time, I’m very grateful to know that this bishop also cares for the black sheep

THE END OF THE MORMONS

THE MORMONS HAD A GOOD RUN, BUT NOW IT’S ALL COME TO AN END. Since 1998, the members of this band, none of whom is LDS, have been playing punk music in Mormon missionary garb, including helmets, backpacks, dark pants, white shirts, and ties. And how well did these Mormons rock? According to Los Angeles Alternative’s Ryan Kluthe, “Most Mormon followers convert after witnessing a live show.”

Vince O’Campo, the band’s guitarist, says the name for the band came to him serendipitously. “One day, coming home from work, I saw some Mormon missionaries riding along the side of the road. And then it hit me. How cool and surreal would it look for Mormons to be on stage at some dive bar playing rock music? Genius!”

Since their inception, the Mormons have released one album, taped a show for channel LATV, and played at Muse Music in downtown Provo. They were featured in the Salt Lake Tribune, Los Angeles Alternative, and even BYU’s NewsNet.

This past January, however, O’Campo posted a message announcing the band’s imminent end. “The sad fact of the matter is that The Mormons have... suffered a hard blow,” he wrote. “Johnny (drums) & Louie (guitar) have decided that being in The Mormons is too hard for them... This is very likely to be the final blow in our long history.”

SUNSTONE wishes The Mormons all the best. And—who knows? Perhaps Johnny and Louie, who decided it was “too hard” being Mormons, can now start their own band. We suggest they name it “The Jack Mormons.”
in his flock. “A soft answer turneth away wrath” (Proverbs 15:1).

Anonymous

NOTE: Righteous Dominion presents stories of leaders and others who are true exemplars of the love of Christ, who have touched lives through their flexibility or their understanding that people are more important than programs. Please email your stories to column editors Alan and Vickie Eastman at: STEWARTSLC@AOL.COM

A Place for Every Truth

“OUR HOUSEHOLD IS BLESSED INDEED”

This regular column features incidents from and glimpses into the life and ministry of Elder James E. Talmage as compiled by James P. Harris, who is currently working on a full-length biography of this fascinating Mormon apostle. The column title is adopted from the statement inscribed on the apostle's tombstone: “Within the Gospel of Jesus Christ there is room and place for every truth thus far learned by man or yet to be made known.”

A PRACTICE PECULIAR TO MEMBERS OF THE Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is that of dedicating their homes. Typically, the father of the home, being the presiding priesthood holder, dedicates the dwelling. In homes lacking a priesthood holder, a home teacher or other Church representative can offer a dedicatory prayer. In one case, at least, the presiding authority who dedicated a home was the President of the Church.

Elder James E. Talmage was ordained a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles on 8 December 1911. Soon after Elder Talmage’s call, the Talmages purchased a home at 304 First Avenue in Salt Lake City. The family officially moved into the house on 1 April 1912.

In his journal entry of 17 October 1912, Elder Talmage notes two important events. The first sentence is typical of his Thursday journal entries: “Attended Council meeting of the First Presidency and the Twelve in the Temple.”

The second paragraph, somewhat lengthy (and shortened here), demonstrates Talmage’s excitement over a special occasion for his family:

This is a day long to be remembered by our family. This evening we were honored in having as our guests the First Presidency, the Twelve Apostles, the Presiding Patriarch, and the Presidency of the Ensign Stake. Except for absences due to illness or equally unavoidable causes, all the brethren of the councils named above were present and with them their wives. . . . The proceedings of the evening were pleasant and impressive. The special feature was the dedication of our new home which took place immediately after dinner. Impressive remarks were made by Presidents Joseph F. Smith, Anthon H. Lund [Second Counselor in the First Presidency] and Francis M. Lyman [President of the Quorum of the Twelve], and the prayer of dedication was offered by President [Joseph F.] Smith. We feel that our household is blessed indeed under such ministry.

John R. Talmage, the youngest of the Talmage children (born 1 February 1911) was a few months shy of his second birthday at the time of the dedication. In his brief biography of his father, The Talmage Story (Bookcraft, 1972), he writes of this occasion:

Shortly after moving into their new home, James and May [his wife] entertained the General Authorities of the Church in October, 1912 at a housewarming made forever memorable by the dedicatory prayer pronounced by President Joseph F. Smith. This made the already-precious home more impressive still, and set a solemnly joyous tone for the future years. (189)

In his journals, Elder Talmage documents some of his interactions with other General Authorities and the kindnesses extended to him. Few entries compare to his enthusiasm for this dedicatory occasion. Then-President Bishop Charles W. Nibley hosted an annual dinner for the General Authorities around the time of October General Conference. The dinner included entertainment and was always noted in Elder Talmage’s journal. He also notes some private dinner engagements with other Church officials. However, a private home dedication like his appears to be a unique event.

At the time of the dedication, Elder Talmage had been an apostle for less than a year and was the quorum’s junior apostle. He may have been “star struck” to have persons he had long honored come to his home for this special event. Among the members of the Quorum of the Twelve who were present at the Talmage home dedication were future LDS Church presidents Heber J. Grant, David O. McKay, and Joseph Fielding Smith. George Albert Smith was out of town at the time.

The Rest of the Story

THE TRANSFIGURATION

The story of the Transfiguration of Jesus is recounted in all three Synoptic Gospels (Matthew 17:1–13; Mark 9:2–13, Luke 9:28–36). In all three recounts, Moses and Elijah appear to Jesus. Moses, the lawgiver, was present to symbolize the fulfillment of the Law. Elijah, the greatest of the lesser prophets, symbolized the Prophets.

Mormon commentaries on this event generally emphasize its significance as the moment when Jesus, Moses, and Elijah gave priesthood keys to Peter, James, and John. “In consequence of the same Priesthood,” John Taylor taught, “Elia was translated, and got associated with Moses behind the veil, and became his companion in bringing a message of comfort to Jesus and his companions on the Mount” (Journal of Discourses
7:370). "This Priesthood is everlasting," Joseph Smith instructed in 1839. "The Saviour, Moses and Elias gave the keys to Peter, James and John, on the mount, when they were transfigured before him" (Journal of Discourses 6:238). Thus, for most Mormons, the appearance of Moses and Elijah to Jesus and his disciples primarily represented a dispensational transfer of priesthood authority, an ancient precursor to a similar event that took place in the Kirtland Temple in 1836, when Moses, Elias, and Elijah appeared and restored keys to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery.

For this reason, less often recognized among Latter-day Saints is the connection of this event with the Jewish "Feast of the Tabernacles." Leviticus 23:41–42 states that the Feast of the Tabernacles was to be held on the 15th through 21st days of the seventh month, which in the time of Christ was around October. It was to be a feast of thanksgiving following the yearly harvest and a time of rejoicing for the light ("Shekinah") that had guided the children of Israel through the wilderness. The Jews were to build tabernacles ("sukot") in which they lived for seven days. These booths were intentionally temporary, constructed of tree branches on three sides, with the front open. The roof was covered with palm branches, allowing rain to enter and the stars to be seen. The booths were designed to remind Israel of their travels in the wilderness and the provisions of God on their behalf. The Jews held this feast to be the most important of all their feasts, since it represented God’s saving providences to His children, and it was tied closely to the future coming of the Messiah and his reign.

Many of these elements are present in the New Testament transfiguration episode. Following Christ’s transfiguration, in which his body became as a bright light ("Shekinah"), Peter suggested that he and James and John, who were witnesses of the event, should build three tabernacles ("sukot")—one for Christ and the others for Moses and Elijah. Putting aside the question of whether the transfiguration episode involved the bestowal of priesthood (an idea not suggested in any non-LDS biblical commentaries), in Peter’s mind, then, this event fore-shadowed the beginning of the messianic age, when the Law and the Prophets were fulfilled in Jesus, the light of the world. For the event’s witnesses, the kingdom of God was being restored in all its legal (the Law) and spiritual (the Prophets) ramifications. To commemorate the event, Peter desired to build the tabernacles as a testimony of his conviction that he now realized that Christ was the Messiah and that his reign had begun. All three transfiguration accounts come after Jesus promises his disciples that “there be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:27; c.f. Mark 9:1; Matthew 16:28).

That LDS commentators miss the connection with the Feast of Tabernacles and focus instead on priesthood bestowal may be because the Joseph Smith Translation for Mark 9:3 indicates that the Elias present at the transfiguration was not Elijah but John the Baptist, who appeared to Joseph and Oliver in 1829 to restore the Aaronic Priesthood. ("Elias" is the Greek form of "Elijah." I will treat the subject of Elias in a forthcoming "Rest of the Story" article.) The LDS Bible Dictionary does agree with the standard interpretations of the dating of the transfiguration event—that it occurred in October—though the Bible Dictionary does not note that this is when the Jews celebrated the Feast of the Tabernacles.

BRIAN H. STUY
Lehi, Utah
NEW GYM HELPS PATRONS EXERCISE THEIR AGENCY

by Christopher Bigelow

ALPINE, UT—Latter-day Saints are continually advised to keep their agency in tip-top shape by exercising it on a regular basis. However, there has been no convenient, effective way to fit regular agency exercise into a busy schedule—until now.

Opening this week is the new Choose the Right Gym, where members can exercise their agency until they are spiritually buff and then maintain their fitness. Set up like an obstacle course, the gym features a progressively harder pathway of tempting choices. It starts out with chocolate, progresses through Coke, poker, and R-rated movies, and culminates with pornography, prescription painkillers, and Book of Mormon DNA evidence.

Patrons who make a wrong choice are given an electric shock through a wireless device. “Just a half-hour three times a week at our gym will keep your agency at peak performance,” said proprietor Carl Johansen. “When you need the strength in real situations, you’ll be ready.”

HMO BANS PREEXISTENT CONDITIONS

SANDY, UT—In an effort to brake ever-increasing health insurance expenses, Utah-based Altius Healthcare Corporation is no longer honoring claims for conditions contracted in premortality. Altius has developed a new rubric that helps determine when a mental or physical condition stems from tests the person agreed to undergo during mortality.

“We mourn when we think that we may have been working counter to the plan of salvation,” said Altius CEO Jeffrey Bangerter. “All those prescriptions, all those operations, all those hospital stays to alleviate a condition that heaven itself had ordained for the spiritual benefit of those struggling souls. Not only did we help them cheat on the test, but we also paid for it!”

Bangerter paused for a moment to regain his composure. “When someone contracts a disease that is a predetermined part of their mortal program,” he continued, “they need to either get healed by their bishop or endure to the end. It doesn’t do any good to incur needless medical expenses along the way.”

To enforce the new policy, it is rumored that Altius will be sending out testimony meeting spies. If they catch anyone talking about the spiritual benefits of a particular medical condition, Altius will allegedly cut off any further benefits treating that condition.

Bangerter did add, however, that the premortally afflicted should continue to pay their health insurance premiums just in case they encounter health problems with no spiritual precursors.

WHAT ARE WE SNACKING ON DURING SUNDAY SCHOOL?

• Peep Stone Pebbles
• Flakes of Brass
• Oats and Covenants of the Priesthood
• Chocolate Sugar BoMs
• Cream O’ Helaman
• Alphas and Omegas
• Wheaties and Taries
• Priesthood Pops
• Smiths-a-Plenty
• Lucky Charms Signs & Tokens
• Sacrament-O’s
• Cinnamon Clusters O’ Polygamists
• Mountain Meadows Munchies
• Golden Fruity Bits O’ Vicarious Sufferin’
RECALL A LUNCH DECADES AGO WITH THREE friends whom I continue to miss: the Southern historian C. Vann Woodward, the poet-novelist Robert Penn Warren, and the historian of American religion Sydney Ahlstrom. Woodward and Warren, fierce anti-Emersonians, teased me (as usual) about the Sage of Concord, and Ahlstrom silently enjoyed their banter and my counter-banter, such as it may have been. I remember saying on that occasion that Emerson allowed you no option: you could be an Emersonian or an enemy of Emerson, but not neutral. There hardly seemed to be a dispassionate stance available.

A literary critic necessarily is more at home with Emerson than with Joseph Smith, though I would name them both (with Walt Whitman) as our authentic American prophets. Yet my appreciation of the prophet, seer, and revelator Joseph has limitations, because my perspectives, varied as they can be, have their own difficulties. The more I brood on Joseph Smith, I become uncertain whether either Mormon or “Gentile” perspectives can encompass him. Something is always missing, as he himself prophesied. We don’t know him.

“Sincerity” seems to me an inappropriate category in considering Smith. Ezekiel and Jeremiah were scarcely sane, on the evidence of their utterances. All bad poetry is sincere, Oscar Wilde advised us. Poetry and prophecy are near-allied, and I would blink if asked: “Is Yahweh sincere?” Judaic religious tradition teaches me to trust and love Yahweh, whom in fact I dislike and certainly do not trust at all. I keep urging him to go away, but he won’t, to my chagrin. The United States fiercely persecuted the original Mormons: no one ought to forget that Joseph and his brother Hyrum were murdered by the Illinois state militia. As an outsider, I am puzzled by the current Salt Lake City hierarchy. The most relevant term for the prophet Joseph is Max Weber’s charisma, and part of what remains in this perspectivizing essay will be a note upon the phenomenon of charisma and Joseph Smith’s astonishing exemplification of it. There are a few observations I find necessary before I embark upon consideration of the charismatic Joseph.

The most relevant term for the prophet Joseph is Max Weber’s charisma, and part of what remains in this perspectivizing essay will be a note upon the phenomenon of charisma and Joseph Smith’s astonishing exemplification of it. There are a few observations I find necessary before I embark upon consideration of the charismatic Joseph.

One of the world’s most celebrated literary and cultural critics asks: “How much of Joseph abides in contemporary Salt Lake City?”

PERSPECTIVISM AND JOSEPH SMITH

By Harold Bloom
forms of worship from poetic tales and men thus forgot that all deities reside in the human breast. I am certain—as prophets, seers, and revelators go—Smith was closer to Blake than Hinckley is.

I have a fair number of Mormon intellectual friends, and some of them surprise me by insisting that they are Christians. Perhaps, but with rather a distance, tends to be my silent response. I have never understood why the magnificent Sigmund Freud, who did not trust in the Covenant, though he belonged to the Vienna Chapter of B’nai B’rith (“The Sons of the Covenant”), nevertheless insisted that monotheism was an intellectual advance over polytheism. Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, and John Taylor—three authentic American heroes, faults and all—were not even monotheists, but henotheists: they believed in a plurality of Gods, as presumably the prophet Hinckley does not. Milton, Blake, and Emily Dickinson were all Christian sects of one each. Mormonism is not a Christian sect, because it is (or should be) henotheist, and if you can be a Christian, Muslim, or Jew without even being a monotheist, then may all the angels bless you!

I remember several long and learned conversations I enjoyed with Sterling McMurrin during my Salt Lake City sojourn in the late 1980s. He was generous enough to say we shared much the same vision of the Prophet Joseph, except that he felt (rightly) I neglected Freemasonry. With so distinguished a chider, I since have mended on this matter. The Rosicrucians always were a fiction, but they seem to have transferred to the Masons the whole complex of Hermetist and Gnostic speculation, ancient and Renaissance. Researchers doubtless will continue to find occult, Hermetist, and Kabbalist sources for Joseph Smith, yet I suspect he made or remade all arcane speculations for himself. He was a Sufi who doubtless knew nothing of Sufism. What he most distinctly was not was another American Protestant revivalist. Mitt Romney would not like my saying this, but if he truly followed Smith, Young, and Taylor, then he could not honestly present himself to the electorate as a Christian. If Joseph Smith was a Protestant, then Muhammad was a Catholic. Perspective again is the crucial element: how much of Joseph abides in contemporary Salt Lake City?

The hierarchy or Tower of Power can be viewed either as the apotheosis of Joseph or as his obliteration: is any middle position possible on this? We are caught here in Max Weber’s dialectic of charisma and bureaucracy, for which Weber employed Friedrich Schiller’s formulation: the “disenchantment of the world.” Perhaps this essay should be retitled: “The disenchantment of Joseph Smith.” All enchantment—erotic, spiritual, literary—depends upon partial or incomplete knowledge. I believe Joseph when he says we don’t know him; to me, it is the most important statement of his life. You can’t routinize Smith: the Mountain of Names, when it was shown to me, transcended any reaction I could summon.

I believe Joseph when he says we don’t know him; to me, it is the most important statement of his life. You can’t routinize Smith.

The BEST WRITINGS on Joseph Smith avoid reductiveness. “What was he or she really like?” too often turns out to mean: “What is the very worst thing you can say about him or her that is essentially accurate?” Pragmatically, that is reductiveness, and takes us nowhere with Smith. Evidently he manifested the gift of grace: he was a charismatic. So was Brigham Young. Joseph could be unscrupulous, and Young could be brutal. What they accomplished was to turn a religion into a people, which was a repetition of the ancient Hebrew procedure.

I conclude by dismissing the routinization of Joseph’s charisma. We are left with three entities: the Mormon people, the Gentile cosmos, and Smith. I suspect that the Mormon and the Gentile perspectives alike always will leave Joseph in darkness. Something will go on being an absence. We will not know him. Did he know himself?
When asked to present this reflection, I agonized over how many pillars of faith one should have and did some research. I discovered one of the first mentions of pillars in the Book of Genesis. It was in conjunction with Lot, who had only one: his wife. Thereafter I discovered the Two Pillars of Hercules and the Five Pillars of Islam. Eventually I came upon T. E. Lawrence’s *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*. I thought: if he can come up with seven pillars, I can do... at least half that. So, I came up with four.

In this very personal essay, I briefly examine my own pillars and explain how they were built and judge how well they’re standing up after a half century of construction, repairs, and rebuilding. As I contemplated this daunting task, I wondered how much faith I really have and worried that it isn’t enough to qualify for Sunstone’s venerable “Pillars of My Faith” series. But at least one friend reassured me by saying, “I’d bet you have more faith than you think.” I wondered if that were true since I have more than my share of skepticism and sometimes even cynicism.

But such debating is not really my fault: I have a genetic disorder. I was born with a “why” chromosome which causes me to question everything. I understand that this condition, while rare, is nevertheless quite prevalent among Sunstone readers, and other known cases are scattered throughout the world. This condition is known to cause severe agitation and even hypertension when a sufferer hears an authority figure say or ask things such as: “Because I told you so!”; “Why do you have to ask so many questions?”, or “The thinking has been done; the debate is over.”

For those of us who sometimes have questions or doubts and who worry that those who say that faith and doubt cannot exist at the same time might be right, there is great comfort in the exchange between Jesus and the man who brought to him his son to be healed:

> Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth. And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief. (Mark 9:23–24)

Hermann Hesse affirms the coexistence of these two elements: “Faith and doubt go hand in hand; they are complementary. One who never doubts will never truly believe.” In an Easter sermon, the Rev. Jay Sidebotham points out that “the gospels make sure we realize that many disciples responded to the Easter news with doubt and skepticism.” Sidebotham quotes author Frederick Buechner, who said “If there’s no room for doubt, there is no room for me.” Tennyson’s words resonate with me: “There lives more faith in honest doubt, believe me, than in half the creeds.”

For many years now, I have identified more with Richard Poll’s “Liahona Saints” than with “Iron Rod Saints.” According to Poll, an Iron Rod Saint does not look for questions but for answers and in the gospel—as he or she understands it—finds or is confident that the answer to every important question can be found. The Liahona Saint, on the other hand, is preoccupied with questions and skeptical of answers, finding in the gospel—as he or she understands it—answers to enough important questions so as to function purposefully without answers to the rest.

Joan Chittister, a well-known Benedictine sister and author, writes that in her spiritual journey, she eventually “found the answers to be worse than the questions could ever be.”

Many great scriptures and treatises attempt to explain faith and what it is. Alma 32:21 explains what faith is not: “And

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now as I said concerning faith—faith is not to have a perfect knowledge of things; therefore if ye have faith ye hope for things which are not seen, which are true.” For some reason in the Church today, it seems unacceptable to say “I believe” or “I feel” something is true. Unless we “know” whatever it is “without a doubt” or “beyond a shadow of a doubt,” it is implied that we are spiritually or morally lacking.

This state of affairs is confusing to those of us who give credence to the scores of references in scripture and other writings that faith is a belief or confidence, not a definite knowledge, that a principle or idea is true. It is noteworthy that all but one of our own “Articles of Faith” begin simply with, “We believe.” For me and others, there can be shadows of doubt. A shadow does not cause total darkness—it brings only a cast of gray. Through my years of experience with life, religion, and the world in general, I have come to believe that far more is gray than black or white. Things that once seemed clear and sure are more obscure and tentative. I can relate better to Paul, who said, “For now we see through a glass darkly,” seeing only “in part” (I Corinthians 13:12). The trials and realities of life can sometimes dampen or even threaten to destroy one’s faith, but the fact that they do not extinguish it makes faith all the more real for me and gives me hope.

HOPE
Holding the place until faith develops . . .

THIS PREAMBLE LEADS me to my first pillar—the Pillar of Hope. Without doubt (oh, sorry, I mean clearly), I often have more hope than faith. Sometimes, hope is a substitute for faith, taking its place until belief or faith develops. I like many of the synonyms for hope: desire, expectation, dream, yearning, or longing. I find myself yearning for truth or longing to commune with God, to feel that he is there and that he knows me and loves me. Sometimes I feel he is there, and at other times I wonder why, if he loves us, he seems so distant and seemingly uncaring.

There have been times when I was mad at God, such as when my youngest son, Landon, developed epilepsy as a toddler and we watched him have dozens of grand mal seizures, writhing on the floor, unconscious. The day we took him to the hospital, he had a seizure as I held him in my arms and turned him over to the E.R. staff. Months of seizures became years. Various medications were tried and discarded. Blessings were given and prayers offered, and it seemed that they, too, were discarded. I poured out my anger and grief to the heavens, but they seemed sealed. But then the seizures became less frequent and eventually stopped altogether. Landon is now twenty and has not had a seizure since he was five years old.

Late one night about six years ago, I felt severe chest pain which turned out to be a dissecting aortic aneurysm. I was rushed to the hospital, and just before going into the O.R. for emergency surgery, I received a priesthood blessing. Some ten hours later, I emerged, alive, but with a “zipper” and some hardware in my chest. Later I was told that I had been very close to death and that more than half the patients with this type of aneurysm die.

Fortunately, an excellent medical team performed well while loved ones prayed for me and exercised faith. Under the circumstances, I did not have much time to exercise my own faith before my operation, but I did not believe I would die. I certainly had hope—a yearning and a desire to live, for I had so much to live for.

There is no doubt in some minds that a miracle occurred that night. Others may think the doctors did what they do
best, and the patient survived. The same reasoning might apply to Landon's seizures. Regardless, I am happy to give the doctors and medicine and God the credit for preserving my life and taking away my son's affliction. I can't explain what happened, but I am extremely grateful for the way everything turned out.

BOOKS
Just as with thinking, let there be too much reading rather than too little.

THOUGH IT MAY seem a bit unusual, maybe even a bit wobbly, my next pillar is formed of books. Since childhood, I have loved books and reading. I grew up in a Los Angeles suburb and frequently went to the beach with friends. When we were going to be there for several hours, I would take a book to read, earning the not-affectionately-meant nickname “bookworm” from my friends. I would later become a bibliophile, develop into a bibliomaniac, and finally further degenerate into a bibloholic. At the monthly B.A. meetings, I stand and say, “My name is Curt, and I am a bibliholic.” Desiderius Erasmus must have been talking about me when he said, “When I get a little money, I buy books; and if any is left, I buy food and clothes.”6 So was James Logan, who said, “Books are my disease.”7 Thomas Jefferson could have been speaking for me when he wrote, “I cannot live without books.”9 I also love films, but after Richard Dutcher told some of us a few years ago about his forthcoming film on Joseph Smith, I said to him, “I think I'll wait for the book.”

And as all have not faith, seek ye diligently and teach one another words of wisdom; yea, seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom; seek learning, even by study and also by faith. I figure that when God commands us to read books, we’d better do it.

For most of my life, I have read and studied a variety of books and subjects: fiction, history, biography, scripture, and many others. Reading, especially history, can be very pleasurable but is sometimes disturbing. In the search for religious truth, both author and reader bump up against some unpleasant facts and come out bruised—or worse. Those who are not well-grounded or open to the idea that even human beings called by God to do important things are still human may even have their faith damaged. Some who develop doubts or have questions about Church history or doctrine, for example, may find few who will sympathize or understand their dilemma or crisis of faith. They may be treated with pity, or worse, suspicion and condemnation.

Someone recently told me that his brother read and studied Church-related subjects extensively and became so disturbed that he quit studying. I often see this sort of thing in my business of selling LDS books to people all along the Mormon spectrum. Many individuals have called or come to our store who are hurt, confused, or angry that as they have read widely and then asked questions of friends, family, or leaders, they have been rebuffed, warned, or even punished. This is tragic and unnecessary. If we possess the truth, then what do we have to hide or be ashamed of? As Saints, should we not at least “be willing to bear one another’s burdens, that they may be light” and “mourn with those that mourn” and “comfort those that stand in need of comfort” (Mosiah 18:8–9)? Have we not been told to leave the ninety and nine to search out and bring back the one?
Just as with thinking, I say, let there be too much reading rather than too little. Books should be our friends—and even pillars—not our enemies, and we can draw great strength and comfort from them. Although we can’t take the books with us when we leave this life (though if there is a way, I’ll find it), we can take the knowledge we glean from them. I have a faithful LDS friend who told me that after having read as much Church history as I have, I must have a lot of faith to remain an active member. I simply reply that for good or ill, books and reading have helped make me who I am today.

ACTIVE MEMBER
I belong to a small group that calls itself the Latter-day Saints, inspired by the 17th-century Anglicans who downplayed dogma and allowed wide latitude and tolerance in religious beliefs. We frequently have lunch together and talk about many things, including the gospel, the Church, and the challenges and questions that sometimes arise in our journeys with them. We have probably never been accused of being pillars of faith standing firm; more likely, we’re probably more like drunken sailors trying to hold each other up. But we can talk about anything without fear of censure or judgment; no topic is taboo. We may tease each other, but we’re safe from criticism or disparagement. I feel very fortunate to have a safe place to be—with friends who care and give support—because I know many who do not have such a source of strength.

MARRIED LIFE
AND KIDS
I have been married for twenty-two years. Pat and I have a family of sorts. Both are occasionally dysfunctional and unforgiving but also harmonious and loving. For Latter-day Saints, these two “families” are sometimes so intertwined that separating them is difficult. Both have their share of skeletons in the closet, black sheep, crazy aunts and uncles, and elephants in the living room that everyone sees but won’t talk about. We always love members of our family even though we may not always like them or what they do. It is the same with the Church. I sometimes do not like something it does or certain individuals in it, but I still love it and them. Just as I occasionally become annoyed or angry with a member of my family, I may feel the same way toward the Church. But let an outsider attack my family or Church, and I will jump to their defense. I am at least a fourth-generation Mormon on more than one side of the family.

GROWING UP
Growing up Mormon in southern California, I was one of about twenty Latter-day Saints in my high school. Much to the embarrassment of my friends, an LDS buddy and I used to take our scriptures to school and would bash with the Jehovah’s Witnesses during lunch period or argue with RLDS friends after class. I went to early morning seminary for four years, served several youth missions and later a full-time mission, played Church sports, was active in the ward Boy Scout troop (in which I proudly achieved the exalted rank of “First Class”), participated in annual road shows—just about everything Latter-day Saint youths can do.

PILLAR
My parents were devout members who gave years of service in various callings. They did the best they could, loved us, raised us in the Church and taught us the principles of the gospel. Even so, two of their four children left the faith as teenagers, and one brother who had severe problems with substance abuse, took his own life at age thirty-three. At an early age, I saw free agency in action and learned that as dear as a person is to you, sometimes the consequences of wrong choices can be devastating. My oldest brother and I stayed in the Church and made it an integral part of our lives. My second brother does not attend church, but he is as good a person as you’d want to meet and a great one to have in your corner.

FAMILY
My wife Pat and I have always been active and committed Church members, held numerous leadership and teaching positions, and have tried to live the gospel principles we always espoused. All four of our children participated actively in the Church during their formative years, and although not all of them are fully participating today, they have each grown into loving, caring, moral adults. Almost as important, they love books, reading, and learning. Each has had a powerful impact on my life in more ways than I can count. They are now as much my friends as they are my children.

NOT LONG AGO, Pat was released as our ward Relief Society president. She is loved and appreciated by ward members, especially by the Relief Society sisters, many of whom were the recipients of her love and concern—as well as her delicious hot meals. A natural caregiver, Pat (and my kids, too, of course) cared for (and put up with) me daily during the long, difficult recovery from my operation, helping me get through a very trying time of my life, mentally and physically. She is one of the most giving and unselfish persons I know—a genuine follower of Jesus Christ. Because of those qualities, she puts up with my occasional heterodoxy and loves me anyway. My families are pillars of strength and love who constantly prop me up. After many years, I have at last learned to separate the Church and Mormon culture from the gospel. In 1984, I was
greatly heartened by Elder Ronald Poelman’s conference talk, “The Gospel and the Church” but dismayed when I found out he was told to make substantial changes in content and videotape the talk again. In the original talk, he said:

Both the gospel of Jesus Christ and the Church of Jesus Christ are true. However, there is a distinction between them which is significant and it is very important that this distinction be understood. Of equal importance is understanding the essential relationship between the gospel and the Church. Failure to distinguish between the two and to comprehend their proper relationship may lead to confusion and misplaced priorities with unrealistic and therefore failed expectations. This in turn may result in diminished benefits and blessings and, in extreme instances, even disaffections. . . .

The gospel is the substance of the divine plan for personal, individual salvation and exaltation. The Church is the delivery system that provides the means and resources to implement this plan in each individual’s life.  

In his classic essay, “Why the Church is as True as the Gospel,” Eugene England writes:

In the life of the true Church, as in a good marriage, there are constant opportunities for all to serve, especially to learn to serve people we would not normally choose to serve—or possibly even associate with—and thus there are opportunities to learn to love unconditionally (which, after all, is the most important thing to learn in the gospel).  

Seven years ago, I had an amazing spiritual experience. As these are rare for me, I call them “Random Acts of Inspiration.” Though rare and mysterious, they are powerful and fortify my faith because I can’t explain them in any other way than spiritually. My wife and I were on a BYU Travel Study tour in the Holy Land, and in our group was a middle-aged couple who were very loud and obnoxious. The husband constantly cracked jokes or told us all about what we were seeing because they had been there ahead of the group and had previewed many of the sites. He loved being the center of attention, and his wife said or did bothered me; in fact, we talked and laughed together often and got along very well. I found out they were actually very nice and generous people. I had badly misjudged them, and I believe God helped me see that and healed me spiritually.

I N MAY 2005, my family and I attended the Mormon History Association meeting in Kirtland, Ohio, the scene of much crucial LDS history. One day, more than three hundred of us, members of both the LDS Church and the Community of Christ (formerly the Reorganized Church), met in the Kirtland Temple and listened to talks and sang some of the original hymns of the Restoration. A select choir, divided into four groups and standing in the corners of the temple’s main floor, sang and then was joined by the congregation. It was one of the most powerful and moving experiences of my life. The sound was so fervent and heavenly that I almost expected a repetition of the Pentecostal event the original Saints experienced during the 1836 dedication of the temple. By the time it was over, few eyes were dry. I even saw one veteran and somewhat hardened historian emerge with tear-filled eyes. One friend in the choir, who calls himself a “Mormon agnostic,” was somewhat hardened historian emerge with tear-filled eyes. One friend in the choir, who calls himself a “Mormon agnostic,” was so filled with emotion, he could not finish one of the songs. I’m sure many felt as strongly as I did that these are my people, my brothers and sisters, this is my Church, and my religion, and I love them all. Perhaps there is a logical, natural explanation for all these experiences and feelings; but if so, I don’t know what they are and feel I must attribute them to God.

In spite of my fears, uncertainties, questions, doubts, and grumbling, perhaps my friend was right. Maybe I do have more faith than I originally thought after all.

NOTES

10. SUNSTONE, October 1990, 50.
11. Eugene England, Why the Church is as True as the Gospel (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1986), 4-5.
How can one work toward a future that is understood only vaguely, if at all? What is the effect of faith that is not active? Might active faith in Mormon visions of the future be essential to realizing them?

TRANSFIGURATION
PARALELSS AND COMPLEMENTS BETWEEN MORMONISM AND TRANSHUMANISM

By Members of the Mormon Transhumanist Association

We must assume our existence as broadly as we in any way can; everything, even the unheard-of, must be possible in it. This is at bottom the only courage that is demanded of us: to have courage for the most strange, the most singular and the most inexplicable that we may encounter.

— RAINER MARIA RILKE

MORMON TRADITION TEACHES THAT, THROUGHOUT time, God has inspired and endowed humanity with knowledge and power in various dispensations, or epochal transitions in the relationship between divinity and humanity. In ours, the “dispensation of the fulness of times,” God is restoring all the knowledge and power of past dispensations while continuing to inspire and endow us more rapidly than in the past, to prepare for a greater future.

Joseph Smith proclaimed that knowledge restored and gained in our dispensation would be broad, encompassing matters related to history, astronomy, geology, theology, and more: God shall give unto you knowledge by his Holy Spirit, yea, by the unspeakable gift of the Holy Ghost, that has not been revealed since the world was until now; Which our forefathers have awaited with anxious expectation to be revealed in the last times, which their minds were pointed to by the angels, as held in reserve for the fulness of their glory;

A time to come in which nothing shall be withheld, whether there be one God or many gods, they shall be manifest. All thrones and dominions, principalities and powers, shall be revealed and set forth upon all who have endured valiantly for the gospel of Jesus Christ. And also, if there be bounds set to the heavens or to the seas, or to the dry land, or to the sun, moon, or stars—

All the times of their revolutions, all the appointed days, months, and years, and all their glories, laws, and set times, shall be revealed in the days of the dispensation of the fulness of times—

According to that which was ordained in the midst of the Council of the Eternal God of all other gods before this world was, that should be reserved unto the finishing and the end thereof, when every man shall enter into his eternal presence and into his immortal rest. (D&C 121:26–32)

Smith taught further that the inspiration and endowments gained in our dispensation would provide a foundation for greater knowledge and power in future dispensations:

We are the favored people that God has made choice of to bring about the Latter-day glory; it is left for us

You can learn more about the Mormon Transhumanist Association at WWW.TRANSFIGURISM.ORG or by contacting ADMIN@TRANSFIGURISM.ORG.
MORMON THEOLOGY TEACHES THAT THOUGH SOME RIDICULE AND FEW HAVE RECOGNIZED ITS SIGNS, THE MILLENNIUM APPROACHES, AND WE SHOULD PREPARE OURSELVES FOR THE DAY OF TRANSFIGURATION AND ITS ATTENDING CHANGES.

Mormon theology teaches that though some ridicule and few have recognized its signs, the Millennium approaches, and we should prepare ourselves for the day of transfiguration and its attending changes.

The work of God is being carried on far beyond that which we can see with our natural eyes. The work of the preparation of the earth, and of its inhabitants, is pressing forward with a rapidity that we who are taking part in it do not realize. ... He is operating among the nations of the earth. His spirit has gone forth; and it is accomplishing that which He said should be accomplished. And this great work of the last days will be cut short in righteousness.

In addition to these broad teachings regarding our dispensation and the continuing advancement of God's work, Mormon tradition includes diverse specific teachings and prophecies concerning conditions, events, and possibilities for his children during this pivotal time. The scriptures and prophetic commentary are replete with references to a day of transfiguration, humans becoming physically immortal, the resurrection of the dead, renewal of this world, and the discovery and creation of worlds without end. However, the prophecies do not describe in detail the causes of their fulfillment and only hint about the human acts that need to occur before such things come to be.

Given this vagueness, many Mormons find it difficult to exercise faith in ideas and teachings like these except in abstract ways. Hence, some respond to these teachings by concluding that certain ideas are simply beyond our mortal capacity to understand. This response leads in turn to the question: What is the practical value of a belief in something one cannot understand? How can one possibly have faith in an idea if one does not understand it? This criticism is especially challenging to Mormonism, which emphasizes the importance of faith manifest in works. How can one work toward a future that is understood only vaguely, if at all?

We, the contributors to this article, felt much this same way. During conversations across several years, we have observed that, although our faith was active in relation to many tenets of Mormonism, it was mostly passive in relation to the more concrete aspects of future salvation: transfiguration and resurrection to physical immortality, the paradisical glory of millennial Earth, the organization of new worlds, and so forth. We found our passivity toward these ideas troubling. What is the effect of faith that is not active? Is it even faith? If not, how can we change so that our faith is active in these ideas that we value? Beyond that, we wondered: Might active faith in these ideas be essential to realizing them?

As we discussed ways to promote active faith in a Mormon view of the future, we observed that, in the broadest sense, science and technology are among the most obvious manifestations of active faith in the future: fighting disease and illness, improving communications, cleaning and beautifying environments, and extending life spans. This realization led us to ask how we could promote the application of science and technology to a Mormon view of the future, to bring these into dialogue with the plan of salvation, and specifically Mormon ideas about the exaltation of humanity to godhood. Questions like this eventually led us to become acquainted with Transhumanism. In hindsight, this discovery seems to have been inevitable. The parallels and complements between Mormon and Transhumanist views of the future are remarkable.
WHAT IS TRANSHUMANISM?

TRANSHUMANISM IS A young and dynamic ideology that is drawing persons of widely varying perspectives into careful consideration of the future, and, in particular, the future evolution of humanity. Their common expectation is that technological advancement will enable humans to transform themselves gradually into persons whose capacities so radically exceed contemporary capacities that the term “human” may no longer adequately describe them. Transhumanists call these future persons “neohumans” or “posthumans” and refer to those in process of becoming them, as “transhumans.”

Transhumanists generally trace their origins to humanism. Pre-Socratic Greek philosophers looked beyond traditional gods for scientific explanations of the world. Seventeenth-century astronomer Galileo Galilei deferred to human observation when conflicting with ecclesiastical authority. Eighteenth-century scientist Marquis de Condorcet claimed that medical science could be used to extend human life.

Although contemporary self-identifying Transhumanists are predominantly secular, religious humanism has made substantial contributions to the emergence of Transhumanism in the broadest sense. Early Christians taught of identifying with Christ and becoming gods. Thirteenth-century Scholastic theologians continued the recurring synthesis of Christianity with popular science. Nineteenth-century theologian Nikolai Fyodorov proclaimed that the common task of humanity should be the resuscitative resurrection of our ancestors. Likewise, as we will present more fully, the prophet Joseph Smith and subsequent Mormon leaders could be counted among religious humanists whose ideas have informed the emergence of Transhumanism.

An identifiable Transhumanist movement began in the last few decades of the twentieth century. In the 1960s, futurist Fereidoun M. Esfandiary, who later changed his name to “FM-2030” (in reference to his hope that he would live to celebrate his 100th birthday which would have come in 2030), began identifying as “transhumans” persons who behave in a manner conducive to a posthuman future.4 In the late 1980s, philosopher Max More formalized a Transhumanist doctrine, advocating the “Principles of Extropy” for continuously improving the human condition.5 In the late 1990s, a group of influential Transhumanists authored the “Transhumanist Declaration,” stating various ethical positions related to the use of and planning for technological advances (see Figure 1).

Of the Transhumanist organizations that have formed, the leading organization is the World Transhumanist Association (WTA), founded in 1998 by philosophers Nick Bostrom and David Pearce.6 The WTA has worldwide membership that currently exceeds 4000 persons in several geographically divided chapters and special-interest affiliates. Other contemporary organizations with significant influence among Transhumanists include the Extropy Institute,7 the Foresight Institute,8 the Immortality Institute,9 the Institute for Ethics and Emerging

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TRANSHUMANIST DECLARATION

1. Humanity will be radically changed by technology in the future. We foresee the feasibility of redesigning the human condition, including such parameters as the inevitability of aging, limitations on human and artificial intellects, unchosen psychology, suffering, and our confinement to the planet earth.

2. Systematic research should be put into understanding these coming developments and their long-term consequences.

3. Transhumanists think that by being generally open and embracing of new technology, we have a better chance of turning it to our advantage than if we try to ban or prohibit it.

4. Transhumanists advocate the moral right for those who so wish to use technology to extend their mental and physical (including reproductive) capacities and to improve their control over their own lives. We seek personal growth beyond our current biological limitations.

5. In planning for the future, it is mandatory to take into account the prospect of dramatic progress in technological capabilities. It would be tragic if the potential benefits failed to materialize because of technophobia and unnecessary prohibitions. On the other hand, it would also be tragic if intelligent life went extinct because of some disaster or war involving advanced technologies.

6. We need to create forums where people can rationally debate what needs to be done, and a social order where responsible decisions can be implemented.

7. Transhumanism advocates the well-being of all sentience (whether in artificial intellects, humans, posthumans, or non-human animals) and encompasses many principles of modern humanism. Transhumanism does not support any particular party, politician, or political platform.

Available at: http://transhumanism.org/index.php/WTA/declaration

FIGURE 1
For Mormons willing to engage

For Mormons willing to engage Transhumanism, the future events toward which they look are based not only in esoteric teachings and prophecies but also in the predictions of rational and scientifically committed persons looking at the future.

Technologies,10 and the Singularity Institute for Artificial Intelligence.11 In 2006, the WTA voted to recognize the Mormon Transhumanist Association as its first religious special-interest affiliate.12

A TRANSHUMANIST VIEW OF THE FUTURE

Transhumanists view human nature as a work-in-progress, a half-baked beginning that we can learn to remold in desirable ways. Current humanity need not be the endpoint of evolution. Transhumanists hope that by responsible use of science, technology, and other rational means, we shall eventually manage to become posthuman, beings with vastly greater capacities than present human beings have.

—NICK BOSTROM13

The following is a common Transhumanist view of the future, with a focus on accurately portraying the view rather than defending it. Although not all Transhumanists will agree with every aspect of this view, it reflects the ideas of persons who are generally recognized to have significantly influenced Transhumanism. Though we attempt to give an overall sense of major Transhumanist themes, in this brief introduction, we highlight the aspects that we in the Mormon Transhumanist Association believe closely parallel Mormon teaching and prophecy. In a later section, we will explicitly identify the parallels and complements.

The Fourth Epoch

Throughout history, technology has advanced through epochal paradigms, each building on the technologies of previous paradigms to progress at an accelerating rate. The word “technology” is typically used to describe practical applications of human knowledge. Here the word is used more broadly to mean that which extends abilities, whether it be of humans or otherwise. In this sense, technology includes the laws of physics and chemistry, which Transhumanists understand as foundational technologies characteristic of the first epochal paradigm. The Second Epoch began with the emergence of biological technologies such as DNA. The Third Epoch began with the evolution of brains and intelligence.

Today, we are leveraging past technologies of physics, chemistry, biology, and brains to create a new technology: human technology, or that which we more commonly refer to when we use the word “technology.” Human technology has accelerated the rate of technological advance to such an extent that we can now observe the acceleration trend, as illustrated by advances in computing. Consequently, Transhumanists anticipate that we will experience, sooner than commonly expected, increasingly dramatic advances that reflect the current technological paradigm, the Fourth Epoch. As futurist Ray Kurzweil states:

Combining the endowment of rational and abstract thought with our opposable thumb, our species ushered in the fourth epoch and the next level of indirect: the evolution of human-created technology. . . . Most advanced mammals have added about one cubic inch of brain matter every hundred thousand years, whereas we are roughly doubling the computational capacity of computers every year.14

Gordon Moore, one of the founders of Intel Corporation, observed in the 1960s that the ratio of complexity to cost for computer components doubled approximately every two years. Today this observation is known among computer scientists as “Moore’s Law.” In its original formulation, Moore’s Law reflected the rate of advance of the transistor-based computer architecture of the time. More recently, Kurzweil recognized that Moore’s Law also accounts for the rate of advance of previous computer architectures (electromechanical, relay, and vacuum tube computing) and subsequent computer architectures (integrated circuit computing), and that the rate of advance has been increasing. Furthermore, Kurzweil observed that Moore’s Law could be generalized to describe accurately the rate of technological advance broadly, well beyond the field of computing. This generalization of Moore’s Law is known among futurists as the “Law of Accelerating Returns,” which holds that technology as a whole is advancing, and will continue to advance, at an exponential rate.

An exponential view of technological change contrasts with the intuitive linear view. We commonly expect future advances to occur at a rate similar to that of the past. Such an expectation may approximate actual experience over short periods of exponential advance. However, over long periods, such an expectation results in surprises.

The story of the king and the mathematician illustrates the contrast between an exponential view and the intuitive linear view.16 As the story goes, a king wanted to reward a mathemati-
For service to the kingdom. The mathematician asked only for rice, the number of grains to be determined by placing a single grain on the first square of a chess board and doubling the number of grains on each subsequent square. The king quickly decreed that the mathematician should receive the requested reward. As servants began to place grains on the chess board, it appeared to the king that the mathematician had requested a small reward. After filling the first row, there were a mere 255 grains— not even enough to fill a bowl. However, the king’s perspective changed dramatically when, before his servants had placed grains on even half the squares, the board could no longer contain the accumulated grains (16,777,215 grains on the first three rows). Soon, the king realized he would be unable to fulfill his decree (18,446,744,073,709,551,615 grains on the whole board), even if he were to give his entire kingdom to the mathematician. Like the king, most of us have difficulty anticipating the full implications of exponential growth.

The Technological Singularity

Based on an exponential view, Transhumanists anticipate that increasingly frequent technological advances will culminate in dramatic advances so rapid and astounding that, given current limitations, we cannot predict or direct them. However, the exponential view also suggests we as humans may also adapt, enhancing our minds and bodies, and even our world, to such a degree that we transcend these limitations and maintain an ability to predict and direct technological advances. Transhumanists call this future period, the “Singularity.” Kurzweil writes:

“What, then, is the Singularity? It’s a future period during which the pace of technological change will be so rapid, its impact so deep, that human life will be irreversibly transformed. Although neither utopian nor dystopian, this epoch will transform the concepts that we rely on to give meaning to our lives, from our business models to the cycle of human life, including death itself.”

Mathematician Vernor Vinge associates the Singularity with the advent of superhuman intelligence: computers capable of recursively producing yet more intelligent computers at yet faster rates. Writing in 1993, Vinge predicted the Singularity will occur between 2005 and 2030. In slight contrast to Vinge, Kurzweil associates the Singularity with a prevalence of superhuman intelligence, and predicts this will occur around 2045, when $1,000 will buy computing power equivalent to that of all human brains and when overall computing power will far surpass that of all human intelligence combined today.

Transhumanists recognize that the advent of the Singularity is associated with serious— even existential— risks that should be earnestly reviewed and mitigated. Indeed, the need to increase awareness of and open a dialogue about these risks has been among the primary motivators for the formation of Transhumanist organizations. In particular, our interest in adding a spiritual dimension to this dialogue was in large part what prompted us to form the Mormon Transhumanist Association, which affirms: “We feel a duty to use science and technology according to wisdom and inspiration, to identify and prepare for risks and responsibilities associated with future advances, and to persuade others to do likewise.” (See Figure 2.)

Transhumans

“TRANSHUMANS” is the name Transhumanists give to persons who are evolving from a human to a neohuman state through the application of technology to the human condition. Although the dramatic advances of the Singularity will enable most of this evolution, it has already begun. We are all transhumans to the extent that we have applied human technology to our being—orthodontics and vaccinations, for example. The extent to which the average human applies technology to her being has been increasing at an exponential and accelerating (meta-exponential) rate. However, as in the story of the king and the mathematician, most of us simply have not yet realized how profoundly, and eventually rapidly, technology will change...
Following closely on the heels of the genetics revolution, the nanotech revolution is likely to begin in the 2020s. Nanotech will extend human abilities through miniaturization, enabling us to manipulate materials at an atomic scale. In his book, Engines of Creation, scientist Eric Drexler outlined in some detail a universal molecular assembler that may be realized during this time. Drexler envisions an atomic-scale builder directed by a computer that can create molecular structures, including copies of itself to assist in constructing complex structures in short periods of time. Although still theoretical, the essential physical properties of a molecular assembler, such as being able to manipulate individual atoms, have been demonstrated in the laboratory, and contemporary engineers are working, with increasing success, on implementing various components of the assembler as proofs-of-concept. Such advances in miniaturization may shift genetic defect and enhancement treatments from drug to nanotech solutions.

The third revolution, in robotics, is likely to occur in the 2030s. By this time, non-biological computing power should readily exceed the computing power of non-enhanced human brains. As understanding of and control over biology increases, humans would also learn to integrate biological and information technology. Robotics would take on increasingly sophisticated forms that may be visually and tactilely indistinguishable from biological bodies. Robotic interfaces would make it possible for humans to transfer their experiences and knowledge to one another, or to non-biological substrates to enable indefinite extension of life. The emergence of strong artificial intelligence, in non-biological or enhanced biological form, would lead to the advent of the Singularity.

Even today, in advance of the revolutions outlined above, humans are beginning to enhance their bodies in ways that were previously impossible. For example, LASIK eye surgery is now commonplace and can improve patients’ eyesight beyond native abilities. Pacemakers are widely used to extend human lives in ways that biology alone cannot. Prosthetics and cosmetic surgery are other examples of enhancements and reconstructions that, although formerly beyond our capabilities, have become conventional.

Although, by definition, the Singularity will change our nature and that of our world in currently unpredictable ways, we can speculate regarding possible post-Singularity futures, assisted to some extent by the application of logic to extrapolations from current trends.

For example, a common task to which computers are applied today is that of simulation. Flight and automobile simulators have been available both to the military
and for entertainment for many years. Financial simulators have become important for investors, as medical simulators have improved our ability to train surgeons. Many persons enjoy playing games such as SimCity that simulate urban planning. Entire worlds are simulated, for both scientific and entertainment purposes, such as the popular virtual world named “Second Life,” in which persons buy and sell real estate, hold meetings, even dance, and generally engage in a virtual life through the proxy of their avatars—virtual representations of themselves.

Over time, the quality of simulations has greatly improved. Users of early flight simulators saw only bumpy black and white outlines of abstract geometric features representing terrain above an equally coarse rendition of a cockpit. Today, full-color, three-dimensional geographies and other aircraft can be wrapped around a user inside a machine that moves to provide for realistic physical sensations.

As the computing power available to us continues to advance exponentially, it seems reasonable to suppose that one of the things we might do is to run increasingly detailed simulations of our world or worlds like it. As the level of detail increases and the user interface improves, it would become ever more difficult to discern any difference between our world and the simulated worlds, to the point that, for all practical purposes, “simulation” or “virtual” would no longer accurately describe those worlds or the apparently conscious persons in them.

In his paper entitled “Are You Living in a Computer Simulation?” philosopher Nick Bostrom identifies and explores some interesting logical ramifications associated with the possibility of running simulations detailed enough to include persons like us. To paraphrase, he argues that at least one of the following is true:

1. our civilization will never achieve the computing power required to run detailed world simulations;
2. civilizations that achieve such computing power never run a significant number of detailed world simulations; or
3. we almost certainly live in a detailed world simulation ourselves.

In other words, if ever we manage to run a world simulation that is detailed enough to be indistinguishable from our own, we should assume it is extremely unlikely that ours is the only or the first civilization to do so. It follows that there is a high probability that both (a) we are living in such a world ourselves, and (b) the world running our world is itself run by another, and so forth in possibly infinite regression. This argument is known among futurists as the Simulation Argument.

For some, the first thing that comes to mind when they read of the Simulation Argument is The Matrix, a popular film that portrays a world in which humans are imprisoned in a simulation and used as an energy source for the machines running the simulation. However, this dystopian portrayal is not necessary. To the contrary, it seems a more balanced portrayal would better account for the ramifications of worlds within worlds, as described by Bostrom:

**IS A SIMULATED WORLD “REAL”?

Are you living in a world computed by neo-human gods? Snickering and rolling of eyes may ensue, yet the question is only the latest of an ancient and prestigious kind. Plato taught that the world of experience is but a silhouette of a world of eternal Forms, which in turn is a silhouette of the Good. Descartes required divine benevolence to achieve confidence in experience, and Berkeley positioned God as the immediate cause of experience. These and others remind us of the uncertainty of matters beyond our physical and spiritual experience.

This metaphysical uncertainty also presents itself to us in less sophisticated ways. From the time we are children, we joke that we might now be dreaming or hallucinating—“what have you been smoking?” After watching a psycho-thriller film, we catch ourselves questioning our own mental stability. During a long road trip through the desert, we see the distant mirage and wonder whether we always recognize other illusions in our experience.

Common sense leads most of us, most of the time, to ignore or laugh away metaphysical uncertainty, and proceed with confidence in experience. As William James put it: “The greatest empiricists are only so upon reflection and when left to their instincts they dogmatize like infallible popes.” This may not be such a bad thing.

Whether we are dreaming, hallucinating, or psychopathic, and whether we are living in a world computed by neo-human gods, our experience now remains the most real we know. We continue in pain and pleasure, misery and joy. Our memories neither decrease nor increase in poignancy. Our power to help or hinder is unchanged. The smile on the face of the beaming child and the tear in the eye of the remaining centenarian remain as meaningful. Nick Bostrom writes:

> No clarity is gained by asserting that the world isn’t “really real” if we are in a simulation. The simulated world that we experience would, however, be only a part of reality. Reality would also contain the computer that runs the simulation, the civilization that built the computer, and perhaps many other simulations and much else besides.²

(For notes on this sidebar, see page 39)
In addition to wondering about the means by which God will bring about the resurrection, Mormons can work faithfully toward the promotion of related scientific research. In addition to speculating about scriptural mysteries, Mormons can apply the scriptures to their lives in more pragmatic ways by investing some of their time and resources in the ethical advancement of technology.

For example, if nobody can be sure that they are at the basement-level, then everybody would have to consider the possibility that their actions will be rewarded or punished, based perhaps on moral criteria, by their simulators. An afterlife would be a real possibility. Because of this fundamental uncertainty, even the basement civilization may have a reason to behave ethically. The fact that it has such a reason for moral behavior would of course add to everybody else’s reason for behaving morally, and so on, in truly virtuous circle.

One might get a kind of universal ethical imperative, which it would be in everybody’s self-interest to obey, as it were “from nowhere.”

Neohumans

TRANSHUMANISTS use the terms “neohumans” or “posthumans” to refer to persons who have advanced to the point that, according to present standards, one may no longer consider or recognize them to be human. Although descriptions of this state differ and accommodate a wide variety of perspectives, most Transhumanists see some form of radically enhanced personhood as their ultimate objective.

This should not imply that becoming neohuman is a final destination. Neohumans would continue to advance and progress. The term is used simply to distinguish between humanity’s current state and its future possibilities, as well as these can be envisioned at present. It is also inevitable that visions of a neohuman future will evolve as time goes on. As imagined now, possible neohuman traits, all involving technological enhancements to current human capacities, include:

- highly advanced intellectual capabilities, greater than ours in magnitude as ours are greater than those of other animals
- physical bodies that are immune to disease and aging
- the ability to communicate complex thoughts and emotions instantaneously without visual aids or speech
- expanded sensory inputs that enable higher awareness of even distant environs
- superhuman strength and agility
- perfect control of individual desires, moods, or mental states
- increased capacity to experience joy, love, pleasure, and other emotions.

Not all concepts of posthumans are associated with bodies—biological or otherwise. Some Transhumanists desire to abandon bodies entirely and “upload” their identities into some type of network or computer system where they would be free from the perceived demands and constraints of bodily form.

Neohumans, in whatever form they evolve into, may interact, directly or indirectly, with humans as neohuman “gods.” Their interactions with humans may include restoring dead humans to life, as speculated by mathematician Frank Tipler, or simulating human worlds. Nick Bostrom writes:

Although all the elements of such a system can be naturalistic, even physical, it is possible to draw some loose analogies with religious conceptions of the world. In some ways, the posthumans running a simulation are like gods in relation to the people inhabiting the simulation: the posthumans created the world we see; they are of superior intelligence; they are “omnipotent” in the sense that they can interfere in the workings of our world even in ways that violate its physical laws; and they are “omniscient” in the sense that they can monitor everything that happens.

A MORMON VIEW OF THE FUTURE

As stated earlier, we, the members of the Mormon Transhumanist Association, feel that the many significant changes on the horizon make it important for Latter-day Saints to become actively involved in shaping the future by mining pertinent gospel insights for injection into the wider Transhumanist discussion. While Mormon teachings about the future are vague in many respects, so, too, are the various Transhumanist scenarios. That vagueness makes sense within the context of Mormon teachings that present the unfolding creation as following a particular tra-
jectory, with perhaps a basic framing and thrust, that has been followed "worlds without end," allowing for genuine prophetic insight without predetermining the future. The Mormon understanding is that the power of God is used to work with, not control, creation.

In this section, we provide a brief overview of some significant Mormon notions about future events, especially those that touch on human flourishing and our potential godhood. As with the previous section, our goal is to describe rather than defend these teachings, and we will focus primarily on those for which we sense there are strong Transhumanist parallels. In the final section, we'll explicitly address the parallels and complements, and share more about our own interests and hopes for helping to shape the future through applying Mormon understandings.

The Dispensation of the Fulness of Times

WE opened this article with a brief discussion of the "dispensation of the fulness of times." It is in this dispensation that God is bringing together "a whole and complete and perfect union" in which "a welding together of dispensations, and keys, and powers, and glories should take place," and in which "those things which never have been revealed from the foundation of the world ... shall be revealed unto babes and sucklings" (D&C 128:18). According to Joseph Smith, this dispensation will see "a work that is destined to bring about the destruction of the powers of darkness, the renovation of the earth, the glory of God, and the salvation of the human family."28 The dispensation of the fulness of times is also characterized by the speed at which God's work progresses. As George Q. Cannon stated, "The work of the preparation of the earth, and of its inhabitants, is pressing forward with a rapidity that we who are taking part in it do not realize. . . . This great work of the last days will be cut short in righteousness."29

Transfiguration, the Millennium, Immortality

MORMON tradition teaches of an imminent "day of transfiguration," expanding across a millennial period of time, when mortals are transfigured and resurrected to immortality (see D&C 63:20–21). The Millennium is an imminent and widely unexpected future period, during which a progressive transfiguration and resurrection to immortality will occur as our knowledge and power continue to increase. The advent of the Millennium is associated with disruptive changes in world conditions, culminating in the return of Christ. Despite its imminence, many will not expect the Millennium to occur when it does, but a few will recognize the signs of its coming.

The Doctrine and Covenants describes conditions during the Millennium, including some aspects of transfiguration, as follows:

And in that day the enmity of man, and the enmity of beasts, yea, the enmity of all flesh, shall cease from before my face.

And in that day whatsoever any man shall ask, it shall be given unto him.

And in that day Satan shall not have power to tempt any man.

And there shall be no sorrow because there is no death.

In that day an infant shall not die until he is old; and his life shall be as the age of a tree;

And when he dies he shall not sleep, that is to say in the earth, but shall be changed in the twinkling of an eye, and shall be caught up, and his rest shall be glorious.

Yea, verily I say unto you, in that day when the Lord shall come, he shall reveal all things—

Things which have passed, and hidden things which no man knew, things of the earth, by which it was made, and the purpose and the end thereof—

Things most precious, things that are above, and things that are beneath, things that are in the earth, and upon the earth, and in heaven. (D&C 101:26–34)

Joseph Smith frequently expressed the imminence of the Millennium and encouraged us to prepare for it:

When I contemplate the rapidity with which the great and glorious day of the coming of the Son of Man advances, when He shall come to receive His Saints unto Himself, where they shall dwell in His presence, and be crowned with glory and immortality . . . I cry out in my heart, What manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness!30

Brigham Young suggested that many of us may not even know when the Millennium has already begun:

Will the Saints arise from the dead? Yes. Who will know it? But a few. When the resurrection commences, I say but few will know it . . . Will the Saints rise from the dead before the world is converted? Yes. . . . When the Millennium is ushered in, no man or woman will know anything about it, only by the power of God. He will rule and reign, and His glory shall be in Zion, and the wicked will not know it is the hand of our God.31

Prophets have envisioned that, during the Millennium, we and other forms of life will be immortal. While immortality might be defined as achieving a perfect physical state, it is an ideal with diverse manifestations. Joseph Smith taught that being raised to an immortal state may involve moving from lesser to greater manifestations of immortality and that such progressions may involve ceremonial ordinances:

Now the doctrine of translation is a power which belongs to this Priesthood. There are many things which belong to the powers of the Priesthood and the keys thereof, that have been kept hid from before the foundation of the world; they are hid from the wise and prudent to be revealed in the last times.32

Michael the archangel (Adam) holds the keys of the resurrection and after a man is raised from the dead,
has an immortal body and receives an ordination to hold the keys of the resurrection from under the hands of Michael or those having authority, he then has the power to raise the dead, and not before.33

Brigham Young speculated:
I have friends on the earth, for God would raise them up for me to do my work. That is not all; by and by the Lord will say to the sleeping dust, awake and come forth out of your graves. I am on hand; the Lord wakes me up or sends somebody to do it that possesses the keys of the resurrection. My dust is waked up; my spirit is re-united to it, and it is made a celestial body filled with immortality and eternal life.34

Worlds without End

MORMON tradition teaches that the eternities consist of innumerable heavens of types and degrees toward which our world may advance. These heavens are inhabited by a plurality of gods whom we may join as we emulate and become as God. Prophets proclaim that innumerable worlds of diverse types and varying degrees have been and will be created. Further, they envision that these worlds advance through processes such as transfiguration and resurrection, becoming heavens according to the desire and work of their inhabitants and preparing their inhabitants for yet greater heavens. Brigham Young taught:
You may now be inclined to say, “We wish to hear the mysteries of the kingdoms of the Gods who have existed from eternity, and of all the kingdoms in which they will dwell; we desire to have these things portrayed to our understandings.” Allow me to inform you that you are in the midst of it all now, that you are in just as good a kingdom as you will ever attain to, from now to all eternity, unless you make it yourselves by the grace of God, by the will of God, which is a code of laws perfectly calculated to govern and control eternal matter.35

The work of creating innumerable worlds and heavens may have neither beginning nor end. This idea is expressed in a Mormon hymn by William Phelps entitled “If You Could Hie to Kolob.” (See Figure 3.) Moreover, there may be no end to the advance of heavens, as one heavenly degree prepares its inhabitants for yet another that is greater. Joseph Smith used our world as an example, indicating that, even as it serves as a celestial heaven, its inhabitants would continue to learn of yet greater heavens:
This earth, in its sanctified and immortal state, will be made like unto crystal and will be a Urim and Thummim to the inhabitants who dwell thereon, whereby all things pertaining to an inferior kingdom, or all kingdoms of a lower order, will be manifest to those who dwell on it; and this earth will be Christ’s. Then the white stone mentioned in Revelation 2:17, will become a Urim and Thummim to each individual who receives one, whereby things pertaining to a higher order of kingdoms will be made known; And a white stone is given to each of those who come into the celestial kingdom . . . .(D&C 130:9–11)

LATTER-DAY prophets have proclaimed that there is a plurality of gods, each of which became so by emulating God, and that becoming gods ourselves is the ultimate destiny of humanity as children of God. These prophets envision that humans will join in the creation of worlds and heavens and the development of other gods, expanding our influence throughout eternity and engaging in yet greater works. Joseph Smith stated:
Here, then, is eternal life— to know the only wise and true God; and you have got to learn how to be Gods yourselves, and to be kings and priests to God, the same as all Gods have done before you— namely, by going from one small degree to another, and from a small capacity to a great one— from grace to grace, from exaltation to exaltation, until you attain to the resurrection of the dead, and are able to dwell in everlasting burnings and to sit in glory, as do those who sit enthroned in everlasting power.36

As Gods, we would join in the creation of worlds and heavens:
We believe there are many, very many, who have entered into power, glory, might, and dominion, and are gathering around them thrones, and have power to organize elements, and make worlds, and bring into existence intelligent beings in all their variety, who, if they are faithful and obedient to their calling and creation, will in their turn be exalted in [the] eternal kingdoms of the Gods.37

These children . . . through their faithfulness to the
The present is a time of rapid progress in knowledge;
A fundamental change in our nature and that of
our world is imminent;
Both we as humans and our world can and will
dramatically transcend our current limitations.

More specific parallels can be seen in the following areas:
• The LDS notion of the "dispensation of the fulness
  of times" parallels the Transhumanist view of our
  having entered the "Fourth Epoch";
• LDS teachings about transfiguration, the
  Millennium, and immortality parallel Transhumanist
  notions of the Singularity and transhumans;
• LDS teachings about worlds and heavens without
  end and the human potential for godhood parallel
  Transhumanist understandings of simulations and
  posthumans.

The Dispensation of the Fulness of Times
and the Fourth Epoch

Mormon teachings about the dispensation of the fulness of
times parallel Transhumanist ideas regarding the Fourth
Epoch in at least the following ways:

1. Present knowledge is the culmination of multiple past periods.
   In the dispensation of the fulness of times, we benefit from the
   restoration of the knowledge and power of previous dispensations.
   Likewise, in the Fourth Epoch, the technologies of previous
   epochs enable present human technologies.

2. Acquisition of knowledge and power is accelerating. In the
   Dispensation of the Fulness of Times, God is shortening the
days and increasing the rapidity of the work. Similarly, in the
   Fourth Epoch, technological advances are recursively lever-
gaging previous advances to progress exponentially.

3. Future progress depends on knowledge and power acquired
today. In the dispensation of the fulness of times, we are estab-
lishing the foundation for yet greater dispensations to come.
Analogously, in the Fourth Epoch, we are introducing tech-
ologies that will enable future epochs to combine biological
and information technologies.

Transfiguration, the Millennium, Immortality,
and the Singularity and Transhumans

Mormon teachings about transfiguration, the Millennium,
and immortality parallel Transhumanist ideas regarding the
Singularity and transhumans in at least the following ways:
1. A period of dramatic and unexpected change is imminent. Mormon theology teaches that though some ridicule and few have recognized its signs, the Millennium approaches, and we should prepare ourselves for the day of transfiguration and its attending changes. Likewise, although critics scoff and despite the intuitive linear view of change, Transhumanists believe the Singularity is nearer than we anticipate, and that we should review and mitigate the associated risks.

2. Minds and bodies may be changed in diverse ways. Mormon doctrine speaks of how in the twinkling of an eye, we may be transfigured or resurrected to bodies of varying types and degrees of glory. Similarly, Transhumanists recognize that continued advancement in information technologies may enable genetics, nanotechnology, and robotics to enhance our minds and bodies.

3. Anatomical changes may extend lives indefinitely. Mormons teach that from one transfiguration to another, exchanging blood for spirit, we may attain immortality. Analogously, as transhumans, we may extend or exchange our biological substrate with a different substrate to ensure the persistence of our identity.

4. Our work may contribute to these changes. Mormons teach that transfiguration and resurrection may be ordinances for us to perform for each other. Comparatively, Transhumanists believe our science may provide technology that enables us to enhance ourselves and attain indefinite longevity.

Worlds without End and Worlds within Worlds

Mormon teachings related to worlds and heavens without end and the human potential for Godhood parallel Transhumanist ideas related to simulations and posthumans who act as Gods in at least the following ways:

1. Our world may be among infinite and diverse worlds. According to LDS teaching, there may be telestial, terrestrial, and celestial worlds without end, and heavens of yet higher orders, each reflecting the work and desire of its inhabitants. Likewise, there exists a Transhumanist notion that in addition to the worlds of our space and time, there may be an infinite regression of simulations, each with inhabitants adapted to varying physical laws.

2. We may one day utterly transcend our current knowledge and power. According to Joseph Smith and other prophets, as the children of God, we may learn to become like God as we emulate and join in the plurality of gods. Similarly, Transhumanists believe we may one day be able to merge with our technology to become neohuman, with minds and bodies enhanced in ways far beyond what is currently imaginable.

3. Others may have produced us, and we may yet produce others. Mormon theology understands that God created our world and its inhabitants and that we may one day join in the creation of yet other worlds. Analogously, in Transhumanist speculation, neohumans in another world may very well be simulating our world, and we may eventually simulate yet other worlds.

4. There may be no end to progress. The Mormon doctrine of eternal progression declares that God may progress forever, creating worlds without end, exalting others to immortality and eternal life, and expanding throughout eternity. Comparatively, Transhumanists posit that neohumans may advance forever, sending their intelligence through time and space.

Transhumanist Complements to the Mormon View

The Transhumanist view may complement Mormon faith in three areas:

- It provides a rational basis for certain LDS beliefs;
- It promotes Latter-day Saints' exercising a more active faith in Mormon notions of the future;
- It encourages Latter-day Saints to have more optimistic expectations for the near future.

Superstitious versus Reasonable Hope

One of the criticisms of religion in today's postmodern world is that religious belief is superstitious. Critics often claim that faith in ideas such as immortality and theosis (human potential for godhood) have no basis in reality. Transhumanist ideology has the potential to answer these criticisms by providing believing Mormons with a relatively reasoned and detailed vision of possible future events. For Mormons willing to engage Transhumanism, the future events toward which they look are based not only in esoteric teachings and prophecies but also in the predictions of rational and scientifically committed persons looking at the future. The Transhumanist view complements the Mormon view by providing a basis of belief, not only in mystical teachings, but also in rational predictions.

Idle versus Working Faith

As discussed in the introduction, Mormonism contains many teachings about the future that are so vague that they are difficult to exercise faith in, except in very abstract ways. Critics rightly ask about the value of believing in something we cannot begin to understand. And given Mormonism's pragmatic view of the world and emphasis on the manifestation of faith through works, this criticism is especially challenging for Latter-day Saints.

Mormons who take Transhumanist notions seriously can appeal to more than unexplainable or incomprehensible mysteries. They may appeal to rationality and science. Their arguments then become more understandable, meaningful, and practically applicable. Transhumanism provides Mormons with something tangible toward which to work. In addition to wondering about the means by which God will bring about the resurrection, Mormons can work faithfully toward the promotion of related scientific research. In addition to speculating about scriptural mysteries, Mormons can apply the scriptures to their lives in more pragmatic ways by investing some of their time and resources in the ethical advancement of technology. In addition to wondering how God will provide a way for us to overcome physical ailments and limitations,
Mormons can promote the rights of individuals to cure and enhance themselves as the technology becomes available.

A More Optimistic View of the Immediate Future

SOME Latter-day Saints believe that additional war and disaster must occur before the return of Christ and the advent of the Millennium. Critics argue that faith in such interpretations of biblical prophecy could be self-fulfilling and result in needless suffering and death. Influenced by a Transhumanist perspective, Mormons may open themselves to more optimistic views of the near future. Given cause to believe that the prophetic promises of the Millennium could be realized without further war and destruction, Mormons are more likely to seek to bring about such prophecies through constructive efforts and are more likely to choose to view prophecies of destruction as warnings rather than inevitabilities. Hence the Transhumanist view complements the Mormon view by encouraging an optimistic expectation for the near future of humanity.

MORMON COMPLEMENTS TO THE TRANSHUMANIST VIEW

MORMONISM may complement Transhumanism in several important areas:

- Mormon teachings about the human potential for godhood provide resources for adding love and a moral coloring to Transhumanist views of what it means to be neohuman;
- Mormonism, along with other religious traditions, can encourage Transhumanists to adopt a more respectful and accurate view of certain traditional values and the important role they play in human lives;
- Mormon emphasis on universal salvation can provide an important reminder in the work and thinking done in Transhumanist circles that technologies and opportunities must be available to all.

Brazen versus Sanctified Desire

SOME religious critics charge that Transhumanists are “playing
CRITICS of Transhumanism argue that emerging technologies will be disproportionately available to those with greater financial resources. An elite class of neohumans may arise to the will be disproportionately available to those with greater financial resources. The desire to work together toward godhood is the highest and most righteous desire and the fullest manifestation of love. Hence, the Mormon view complements the Transhumanist view by providing a spiritual justification for the desire to better the human condition.

Disdainful versus Respectful Attitude

THERE are detrimental consequences to acting with a negative or dismissive attitude towards established cultures, religions, and values. When the advocates of social or philosophical movements do not respect the traditions of persons they are trying to persuade, those advocates decrease their success.

In common with advocates of other nascent movements, some Transhumanists are negative or dismissive toward tradition. This was demonstrated early in the Transhumanist movement when FM-2030 advocated Transhumanist rejection of religious belief and traditional family values. More recently, the World Transhumanist Association has acknowledged that it would like to find better ways to communicate with and understand religious persons. To that end, Transhumanists should not ignore the religious lives of others and should take a closer look at core values at the heart of the various world religions. Many of these religious values can benefit Transhumanists as they work on the cutting edges of technological innovation, just as Transhumanists might be able to teach others how to complement their religious lives in fulfilling and practically beneficial ways.

Mormonism, with its Judeo-Christian roots, has much in common with established cultures, despite differences in various beliefs. Mormonism emphasizes the traditional values of charity and unity, avoidance of unnecessary contention, and the building up of all persons, regardless of their beliefs. These and many other gospel teachings belong at the Transhumanist discussion table to impact the way future technological advancement unfolds.

Elitist versus Universal Access

CRITICS of Transhumanism argue that emerging technologies will be disproportionately available to those with greater financial resources. An elite class of neohumans may arise to the exclusion of poorer individuals. Central to Mormon ideology is the assertion that all persons are invited to partake in salvation. Mormonism even goes so far as to advocate faith that all persons will find happiness in immortality and in heavens that vary according to their individual desires. Hence, the Mormon view complements the Transhumanist view by positing a moral imperative to advocate for universal access to whatever understanding of salvation and human flourishing emerges in the future.

CONCLUSION

WE RECOGNIZE THAT the Transhumanist ideas sketched briefly in this article may sound far-fetched to persons who do not closely monitor what is occurring in technological and scientific circles. Still, we believe that many recognize that we as a species have reached a critical moment in human history. Through technological advancement in recent centuries, humans now navigate depths of the sea that sunlight does not reach and rocket through the sky at speeds greater than that of sound. For more than a half century now, humans have had the technological power to destroy themselves and a significant portion of the planet. Within just the past quarter century, we’ve seen the emergence of the personal computer, which now provides more power in a handheld device than what once filled entire rooms. Humans have visited the moon, space tourists are currently orbiting the Earth, and robots are scouting Mars. The human genome has been entirely sequenced. Worldwide data, text, audio, and video communications via the Internet are inexpensive and commonplace. We regularly read in the news of advances toward cures for cancer. This is today!

Whether tomorrow is wonderful or horrible may depend on the extent to which persons with good minds and loving hearts become actively involved in shaping the future. We cannot prove that God will prevent us from misusing the power with which we have been endowed, nor can we prove that God will ensure human immortality despite our efforts or lack thereof. It may be that we can avoid the prophesied horrors of the last days just as Nineveh avoided its prophesied destruction (Jonah 3). It may be that the transfiguration and resurrection to immortality will happen no faster than we do the work, as with the preaching of the gospel to all persons. More generally, it may be that charitable and working faith, leveraging all the inspiration and endowments we have received, is essential to the realization of prophetic visions of the future. With such risks and opportunities at hand, what shall we do? Where do wisdom and inspiration guide us? As Captain Moroni asked in the Book of Mormon: “Do ye suppose that the Lord will still deliver us, while we sit upon our thrones and do not make use of the means which the Lord has provided for us?” (Alma 60:21).

In response to these questions, we repeat the words of Brigham Young:

You are in just as good a kingdom as you will ever attain to, from now to all eternity, unless you make it yourselves by the grace of God, by the will of God, which is a code of laws perfectly calculated to govern and control eternal matter.

The Mormon Transhumanist Association was formed on 3 March 2006 and became the first religious special-interest affiliate of the World Transhumanist Association on 6 July 2006. We invite you to explore our website at www.Transfigurism.org or contact us at admin@Transfigurism.org...
NOTES

4. Of his name change, Esfandiary wrote: “2030 reflects my conviction that the years around 2030 will be a magical time. In 2030 we will be ageless and everyone will have an excellent chance to live forever. 2030 is a dream and a goal.” See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/FM-2030 (accessed 15 January 2007).
5. These principles can be viewed at http://www.extropy.org/principles.htm (accessed 2 February 2007).
16. The many variations of this story may have originated in Hindu mythology. For more information, see “Ambalappuzha Sri Krishna Temple” at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ambalappuzha_Sri_Krishna_Temple (accessed 2 February 2007).
17. Kurzweil, Singularity is Near, 7.
22. Kurzweil, Singularity is Near, 239.
27. Bostrom, “Are You Living in a Computer Simulation?”
30. Smith, Teachings, 29.
32. Smith, Teachings, 170.
34. Young, Brigham Young Addresses, 2:100.
36. Smith, Teachings, 346–47.

NOTES FOR “IS A SIMULATED WORLD ‘REAL?’” SIDEBAR


NOTES FOR “MIRACLES” SIDEBAR

5. Smith, Teachings, 217.

ESCHATOLOGY

They said Jesus said he'd come back, which means that, till then, now is never, will never be, can never be enough: the merest between, time sliced sliver-thin, an empty car speeding from vague nostalgia toward final fire. Or the secular version: incessant Progress hurrying past the contorted faces outside the window, talking the Kingdom of genetic engineering and artificial intelligence over muffled wails.

Or maybe Jesus spoke like the sun like river, thunder and leaf saying now now forever now.

— JAY UDALL
2004 Brookie & D. K. Brown Fiction Contest Moonstone Winner

ROSEVIEW THE FOURTH

By Carol B. Quist

LONNIE GOLDBERG SILVERMAN WAITED UNTIL everyone else, including Aunt Edie in her casket, had filed into the giant recreation hall Edith Goldberg had called "Roseview's Folly" to enjoy the catered dinner and stage show. Then she slipped into the chapel where many people, not realizing Edie's would not be the standard funeral, had turned the lights on and almost filled the place before being redirected. For after the viewing Lonnie's husband Ron had conducted in a jam-packed Relief Society room—nothing was to be the usual bishop-guided service—Ron had explained the program to come and, nodding as Lonnie turned aside, led the way.

For a moment, she stood just inside the double doors. The newly lowered ceiling made it look squat, not hallowed like the vaulted heavens of her childhood church. She sat nine rows back on the west where, despite heavy, hooded purple drapes, the sun glazed some pews.

"Where God's sun anoints us, we need no mortal hand," Aunt Edie had always said. And Edie had complied with the block schedule she disliked by going variably to Relief Society in Roseview First Ward, Sunday School in Roseview Second, and sacrament meeting in Roseview Third, as schedules for the use of the building rotated and outside light changed with the season and time of day—and sometimes, of course, to hear a certain speaker. Lonnie had to follow and, as a result, attracted different teams of tormenters. Never friends.

Aunt Edie told secretaries and clerks, "God will mark my roll," and from then on never accepted callings. She advised each bishop, "The scriptures say men should do many things of their own free will. You now claim the word 'men' includes women. That includes me. So call me only if I fail to make the meal, tend the children, or drive someone to the doctor." They never called. Aunt Edie always seemed to know first where the needs were. Lonnie never knew how.

S Lonnie's shoulder warmed in the sun, laughter filtered through the doors behind the chapel. Ron must have finished reading Aunt Edie's playful, pointed foreword to the printed program and gotten the repose Edie had intended. Lonnie hoped the stiffly disapproving Memorial Mortuary men and bishopric counselor would ultimately relax and enjoy the food and fun.

As she heard the band begin to play in the rec hall, she really noticed the walls behind the choir rows. She stared. Felt sick. Clamped her mouth shut. When had the two large frescoes been scraped off or plastered over? She strained to recall their details. The one on her left had shown Christ being baptized, light glazing both the water and descending dove. The right-hand panel had shown Christ on Galilee's shores, hand toward a fisherman but always seeming to beckon, to welcome, Lonnie, too. Squinting, trying to discern through shadows where at least a white wing might have been, she tip-toed down the aisle, up the steps, and around the organ.

Sitting on the back of the curved choir bench that had survived the latest remodeling, she fingered the possible wing area—bigger, more like a seagull's. Of course gulls had flown over Galilee, too. Then she touched what she knew were a plasterer's strokes. Frantically fingering, she stroked a wide area before breaking into sobs.

As a child, when she'd been able to get in alone, the art and chapel had sheltered her from meanness, from kids taunting, chasing, hitting, tearing her clothes, yelling, "Lonnie Goldberg doesn't have a dad. She doesn't have a mother either—how too bad!"

JUMPING up, she bolted out the door beside the bishop's office. Trumpets, trombones, and cymbals blared as she squeezed through bushes to the old coal chute door in the foundation. The chute had been a construction goof—furnaces had always been oil or gas. But until welded shut, that chute had let Lonnie's father and her aunt—young orphaned Lemuel and Edith Goldberg—into the refuge of their foster parents' church.

"Make no mistake," Aunt Edie had often said, showing Lonnie the certificates. "You were born to my brother Lemuel and his wife Sarah a year after they had married. Then when..."
you were two months old, a drunk driver hit their car—"

Oddly, despite her free, feisty talk about almost everything else, Aunt Edie had never been able to add more about the deaths than “guardianship,” “insurance,” and “inheriting the house.”

But Lonnie’s repeatedly shouting those facts hadn’t silenced neighborhood kids. They all had real, not adopted, parents. And no one else’s mother earned a living by running a hair salon in the basement. Widowed Nancy Silverman had taught school, which had somehow been more respectable. Athletic, dark-haired Ron Silverman, her son, had been a good-sized teenager when the two had moved in, so nobody picked on him.

Lonnie laid her cheek against the door she’d often wished had accepted her, too. She looked for the form she’d etched in the adjacent stucco. Aunt Edie had said, “Christ lived and died for every soul. What people do, regardless of rank—Well, we can only learn from our own lives. We can’t travel anyone else’s path to faith.”

Ultimately easing out and brushing off her clothes, Lonnie heard the crowd cheering inside—cheering, she knew, for the performers, but also for Edith Goldberg’s strength, compassion, outspokenness, endurance, and undaunted spirit. Often since the remodeling Edie had said was a mistake and a waste, she’d stressed, “Remember, ‘new’ doesn’t always mean ‘improved.’ But even though only two wards meet here now, leaders insisted on adding that barn, so when my time comes—and I am getting tired, I may want to move on soon—throw my funeral festival in it!” Aunt Edie’s wink should probably have alerted Lonnie that if anyone could choose her time to die, Edith Goldberg could.

Exploring the rest of that new wing, Lonnie found the nursery door open. Good—not only blonde, blue-eyed children surrounded Christ. And pictures of prophets and temples, Leh’s family on the ocean, handcart pioneers, and even some women from the Bible ringed the room.

In the restroom, she washed and dried her face and deburred and combed her long, thick black hair. She reached into a stall for tissue to blot her lipstick. Then, seeing lint on the seat, she yanked a square to brush it off. Apparently pressure-sensitive, the toilet flushed. And flushed again and again. Lonnie panicked, studied the piping, fingered a square projection stamped Zurn. Zurn?

From down the hall, laughter soared again—great timing—and despite the rushing water, Lonnie laughed, too. Easily she imagined Aunt Edie saying, “I try to be discerning and always..."
concerned for others." Giggling, Lonnie finally pushed something like a navel at the end of the zurn; the flushing stopped. Seriously, though, Aunt Edie had often said, "Can't let the Church do everything for you." And Edie would have somehow used the Zurn incident in a talk about agency.

In the mirror, Lonnie saw in herself Aunt Edie's definite chin and upturned nose But her mouth was questioning, not

A S she crossed the foyer, Lonnie saw the bare wall above the mantel. Was art being banished from the church? Had she been away too long to know some edict? For gone was the painting of Christ telling the fishermen to cast their nets on the other side. Yes, try casting on the other side, the painted Christ had suggested. Well, she and Ron had done just that—moved to the East Coast for several years, enjoying work, church friends, before recently, amazingly, being transferred back where they could be nearer her aunt and Ron's mother. Years earlier, under that painting, at the reception following their temple wedding, they'd shaken people's hands for five hours. She'd wondered at the time if members were relieved to be rid of her, genuinely glad for Ron and her, or were honoring her Aunt Edie.

Looking into the arena, she caught Ron's eye. He winked, indicating the boxes piled at a table beyond the buffet lines.

"No Relief Society lunch makers!" Aunt Edie had insisted. "Sisters are to enjoy the show, too. And no leftovers go to the caterers! They're paid to serve food, not squirrel it away. Friends and neighbors can take," she had giggled, "a care package in remembrance of me. You, too!" she'd ordered Ron. "Take every remaining bite immediately to your freezer or fridge. I can wait at the cemetery a bit longer."

Aunt Edie had also decreed, "And no head table at lunch. Souls should sit with soul mates—on laps, even."

Lonnie blew Ron a kiss—a promise to come eat with him. She closed the door as cloggers moved onto the floor. Judging from the rehearsal she'd watched, twenty minutes remained.

The custodian had moved inside; the Memorial men and bishop-ops had finally settled in, too.

A LONE again in the chapel that had nurtured her, Lonnie cried as she knew Aunt Edie had cried—late, many nights, maybe seeking light to sustain her through the dark days. Maybe she longed for friends besides her patrons, for a different career, for a husband-companion and children of her own, for relief from the burden of guardianship. Whatever, Edith Goldberg had somehow found solace and strength—and faith—in light.

Moving forward to a sunlit row, Lonnie knew that whatever the builders had intended, this place had become a tomb. Whether the frescoes that had once given her hope had been irreversibly damaged during renovation and the foyer art was all being cleaned or replaced, the Christ of her youthful understanding had gone with them. She sighed. At the Garden Tomb, Mary Magdalene had said, "Tell me where thou hast laid him." Christ himself had answered Mary. And despite Aunt Edie's unconventional speech and behavior, she had done as Mary had. So what if the adult Lonnie tried again to search. And ask?

Finally, standing, she heard applause and, resolving to think later, hurried out to join Ron.
“I know exactly how far I can go and exactly when I need to stop, and this time we were nowhere close.”

PECULIARITIES
NCMO

By Eric Samuelsen

CHARACTERS
KIM . . . BYU co-ed, early-twenties, single
TRENT . . . BYU student, returned missionary, early twenties, single

CAST
Peculiarities was first presented at the Villa Theatre, Springville, Utah, mid-October 2002.
It was directed by Tony Gunn. The original cast for the “NCMO” portion was:

KIM . . . Susanna Florence
TRENT . . . Jesse Harward

EDITOR’S NOTE: “NCMO” is the fourth segment from Eric Samuelsen’s play, Peculiarities, which SUNSTONE has been running serially. The other installments, “Tahoe,” “Temps,” and “Pizza and TV,” were published in the December 2005, April 2006, and November 2006 SUNSTONE issues. Samuelsen wrote Peculiarities as an exploration of LDS attitudes toward sexuality, in particular situations in which moral rigidity and sexuality collide in Mormon culture.

An early cut of the film version of Peculiarities was screened at the 2006 Salt Lake Sunstone Symposium and is scheduled to be shown at the 2007 Sunstone West Symposium in San Francisco on 21 April. The film is also currently being submitted to film festivals. Watch for announcements about the film at WWW.SUN-STONEONLINE.COM and in magazine issues.

NOTE ON SCRIPT
A mention about notation. In this play, a dash (—) indicates an interrupted line. An ellipsis (…) should suggest a pause, a line trailing off.

NOTE ON LOCATION
The play takes place inside a BYU-approved housing apartment in Provo, Utah.

ERIC SAMUELSSEN is head of playwriting and screenwriting at BYU, where he has been on the faculty since 1992. This is his fourth play published in SUNSTONE (Accommodations, June 1994; Gadianton, July 2001; Family, March 2005). Sixteen of his plays have been produced professionally.
SCENE ONE

(Lights up on KIM and TREN T, who are on a sofa making out.
TRE NT moves away.)

TRE NT: Okay. Okay. (KIM tries to nuzzle his neck.)
I think we'd better—. (KIM kisses him again, hand on his
thigh.) Kim, I mean it.
KIM: Don't quit on me.
TRE NT: Not a good idea.
KIM: I mean it.
TRE NT: I'm serious. (He stands. She's clinging to him, hits the
floor.)
KIM: (On the floor. Furious, but controlled.) All right.
TRE NT: I'm sorry.
KIM: Fine.
TRE NT: It was starting to get too—. Not for me.
KIM: I was fine.
TRE NT: Dangerous. It was getting dangerous.
KIM: Not for me.
TRE NT: Well, it was for me.
KIM: (A pause. Venomously.) Coward.
TRE NT: There's no need for—.
TRE NT: Just a second here—.
KIM: Fag.
TRE NT: I think I proved that I'm not a—.
KIM: I know exactly how far I can go and exactly when I need
to stop, and this time we were nowhere close.
TRE NT: Yeah, well, I guess I don't have your fine-tuned sense
of—.
KIM: I draw the boundaries in this relationship.
TRE NT: Do you?
KIM: Yes. I do.
TRE NT: Well, maybe it's time to redraw some boundaries.
(Heads for the door.)
KIM: You go out that door, and you will never see me again.
TRE NT: Break my heart. (But he doesn't exit, stands by the door.)
KIM: You know me well enough to know that I am stating
nothing less than the exact truth. You know me well
enough, Trent.
TRE NT: So what?
KIM: I really don't kid around. Leave, and you're history.
TRE NT: Fine. (But he doesn't leave.)
KIM: Trent? (He does not answer, still stands by the door, torn.)
TRE NT: I was gonna start pushing things, see? I mean, that's
why I... I was really gonna start pushing things.
KIM: I understand. See, but maybe that's what I wanted.
TRE NT: What do you mean?
KIM: Maybe I wanted you to start pushing things.
TRE NT: I didn't know if I could stop.
KIM: Of course you could stop.

I get these... feelings, and I want you to come over,
and I want you. And then I don't. For weeks.
TRENT: I don't know.
KIM: I mean, I know you. I trust you.
TRENT: I was getting pretty—.
KIM: You could stop.
TRENT: Whatever.
KIM: You could have.
TRENT: Okay. But see—.
KIM: No, see, that's not the issue. Whether you could stop. I trust you, but you kinda need to trust me too. One of us has to say no, and I kinda think that's my job.
TRENT: Both of us.
KIM: Well, sure.
TRENT: Both of us need to, you know, have that responsibility.
KIM: Okay, sure. Okay. But—.
TRENT: That's so bogus, "It's the girl's responsibility to say—." I No, I'm not disagreeing—.
TRENT: I mean, I stopped it tonight. Right? Earlier than you wanted, okay, but seriously, I was not up to pushing things any further.
KIM: Look, can I get you a Coke? Cool us both down. (Gets up and moves toward kitchen)
TRENT: Sure.
KIM: Ice?
TRENT: Yeah.
KIM: (Pouring both a Coke from a two-liter bottle.) I hope it's not too flat. Katie always buys these two-liter things and then leaves the cap off.
TRENT: Gary does the same at my place.
KIM: It's undrinkable, flat pop.
TRENT: Totally.
KIM: Oh, it's got a nice head though.
TRENT: Good.
KIM: (Reaches over the back of the sofa to hand Trent a glass. Spills a little.) Oops. I'm still a little shaky, you know.
TRENT: Yeah.
KIM: You get going on the back of my neck like that.
TRENT: You like that?
KIM: You couldn't tell? (Sits.) I'm still shaky.

SCENE TWO

(KIM and TRENT on the sofa. TRENT finishes off the soda.)

TRENT: That hit the spot.
KIM: Okay, Truth or Dare.
TRENT: Do we have to do this?
KIM: Yes.
TRENT: It's a party game, right? For like ten people.
KIM: You can play it with two.
TRENT: I don't know.
KIM: Truth or Dare?
TRENT: Truth. I guess.
KIM: Okay, are you and Lisa engaged?
TRENT: Okay, I thought Lisa and Brad were off-limits.
KIM: Well, as in, "Do we tell 'em?"—of course we don't. But I'm curious.
TRENT: What if I don't want to say?
KIM: Truth or Dare—you gotta.
TRENT: I don't want to.
KIM: Trent, honey, you really wanna try one of my dares?
TRENT: (Pause) Lisa and I are talking about getting married.
KIM: Okay.
TRENT: We are. We're not, you know, engaged.
KIM: I understand—.
TRENT: But close. We're talking.
KIM: Sure.
TRENT: If she knew I was over here—.
KIM: She's not going to find out that you were over here. Not from me.
TRENT: I'm gonna have to tell her.
KIM: Your call.
TRENT: I just don't think I can go into . . . you know, a—.
SUNSTONE

I will marry in the temple and be a virgin on my wedding night.

KIM: Okay, sure, fine—.
TRENT: A committed . . . an engagement—.
KIM: Brad and I too.
TRENT: What?
KIM: I anticipated. Truth or Dare— I anticipated you’d ask me about Brad.
TRENT: Yeah, okay.
KIM: We’re talking. Brad and I.
TRENT: About . . . about getting m—.
KIM: Yes. We are.
TRENT: Okay . . .
KIM: Or . . . maybe we’re not.
TRENT: Truth or Dare— you can’t do that, change your mind.
KIM: Maybe we are, maybe we’re not. Maybe Brad and I are like you and Lisa. That’s possible. Or maybe I just lied to you.
TRENT: What are you—?
KIM: Point is, you and Lisa, me and Brad . . . . What does any of that have to do with anything at all?
TRENT: It . . . it seems—.
KIM: We may never do this again. We may never see each other again. Or we might be back here tomorrow night, on this sofa, doing just what we were doing. We . . . we don’t have a “relationship.”
TRENT: Okay, there’s a sense in which—.
KIM: NCMO. That’s all this is about.
TRENT: You can’t . . . just—.
KIM: Non-committal. Non-comm—.
TRENT: I think we’ve got more going than—.
KIM: I don’t.
TRENT: You can’t just . . . play games about this kinda stuff, Kim. (Gets up and heads for the door again.)
KIM: Can’t I? We have. For nearly a year now.
TRENT: I like you. I’ve thought of . . . even, like, dumping Lisa—.
KIM: Why would you do that?
TRENT: Because, you and me, we—.
KIM: You don’t know anything about me.

TRENT: I . . . I—.
KIM: What’s my major?
TRENT: Your major?
KIM: Yeah. What am I majoring in?
TRENT: Is this more Truth or Dare?
KIM: It seems like the kind of basic thing you should know about someon—.
TRENT: Okay. Communications.
KIM: No.
TRENT: Well, I thought it was.
KIM: No, you don’t know, because I’ve never told you.
TRENT: So what are you major—?
KIM: I’m not going to tell you.
TRENT: You’re . . . why n—?
KIM: Because I don’t want you to know. Where am I from?
TRENT: Okay.
KIM: I’m not going to tell you. What does my dad do for a living?
TRENT: I get your poi—.
KIM: I’m not going to tell you.
TRENT: So we could do that. Share those sorts of—.
KIM: I don’t want to. That’s the point. That’s where we are. I get these . . . feelings, and I want you to come over, and I want you . . . and then I don’t. For weeks.
TRENT: Okay, I get it, I get your—.
KIM: Do you?
TRENT: Yeah. (Pause) Me, too.
KIM: Right.
TRENT: No one makes me come over here. I could just . . . not.
KIM: Exactly.
TRENT: But I do. Every time.
KIM: But Brad . . . . Brad is a sociology major from San Diego; his father’s a dentist, Lisa?
TRENT: And Lisa’s majoring in Elementary Ed; she’s from Lethbridge, Alberta, and her father died five years ago of cancer. He was a junior high school principal.
KIM: See?
TRENT: It just seems so—.
KIM: Seems. Sure.
TRENT: Empty. And—.
KIM: No, see that's just . . .
TRENT: Wrong.
KIM: So? So what?
TRENT: And I just feel like I need to—.
KIM: Go on. Go ahead.
TRENT: I might just—.
KIM: Tell the bishop, tell Lisa, I don't care. If you do, I'll find someone to replace you. If I decide that's what I need. Either way, I will marry in the temple and be a virgin on my wedding night. This isn't about—.
TRENT: What is it about?
KIM: It's about. . . . (Pause.) It's . . . about . . . you know what it's about, Trent, don't pretend you don't. (Pause.)
TRENT: I think I'd better just leave.
KIM: If you do, that's it. The end.
TRENT: Maybe that would be best.
KIM: Or maybe not. Your call. (He stares at her. Blackout.)

SCENE THREE
(KIM and TRENT on the sofa.)

TRENT: I just get so sick of these games.
KIM: It's all games, Trent-o.
TRENT: I also hate it when you call me that.
KIM: No kidding.
TRENT: I'm serious. The whole thing.
KIM: Okay, Truth or Dare.
TRENT: I don't want to play anymore.
KIM: Truth or Dare.
TRENT: Okay, Truth.
KIM: Have you lied to the bishop?
TRENT: What an absolutely . . . that's just the crappiest thing to ask someone.
KIM: Have you?
TRENT: You better not choose truth when it's your turn, that's all I can say.
KIM: Have you? Lied to him.
TRENT: Yes.
KIM: Okay.
TRENT: It was just after he'd interviewed Lisa—about some stuff she and I had done, and I just thought I'd sound like a real jerk if I told him about you, too.
KIM: Are you ever going to tell him the truth?
TRENT: No, you don't get two questions, no way. My turn, Truth or Dare?
KIM: Truth.
TRENT: Have you—?
KIM: No.
TRENT: I didn't even ask the question.
KIM: I have never lied to the bishop. Not once.
TRENT: So he, like, knows about me?
KIM: If I didn't get a follow-up question, then neither do you. Truth or Dare.
TRENT: Truth.
KIM: Do you check out porn on the internet?
TRENT: Not anymore.
KIM: That's not an answer.
TRENT: It's all you're getting. Truth or Dare.
KIM: Truth.
TRENT: Have you ever kissed a girl?
KIM: For real? Yes, but I didn't like it. Truth or Dare?
TRENT: Truth.
KIM: You were a lousy missionary, right?
TRENT: (Long pause.) I was a district leader.
KIM: But you were bad. You didn't get the job done. You did stuff, and it got in the way. You sucked as a missionary. Am I right? (He stares at her. Cannot answer. She nods.) I knew it.
(Blackout.)

SCENE FOUR
(KIM and TRENT sitting on the sofa, slightly apart from each other.)

KIM: (Softly.) Come here.
TRENT: No.
KIM: Come here.
TRENT: I don't want to.
KIM: Yes, you do. (She kisses him. He resists. She kisses him again. Blackout.)

SCENE FIVE
(TRENT lies back on the sofa. KIM'S buttoning her shirt.)

KIM: You want another Coke?
TRENT: Sure.
KIM: Ice?
TRENT: I think I need it.
KIM: (She gets him another glass of pop. Brings it to him. Leans over the sofa. Kisses him.) That was more like it.

SCENE SIX
(He's rubbing her feet.)

KIM: Sometimes, your hands . . .
TRENT: Quiet.
KIM: Oh, that feels great.
TRENT: Just relax.
KIM: But I want to say this. Sometimes your hands . . .
TRENT: We don't need to talk about it.
KIM: But if there are things you do that I like—
TRENT: I already know.
KIM: Okay. (Relaxes a bit.) You found the spot.
TRENT: Good.
KIM: It's such a fine line. Between tickling and heaven.
TRENT: Be sure and tell me if I cross it.
KIM: Don't worry. (Blackout.)

SCENE SEVEN
(On the sofa. He's holding her.)

KIM: Tell me about her.
TRENT: Lisa?
KIM: Yeah.
TRENT: What's to tell?
KIM: I've never met her. What's she like?
TRENT: Geez, I dunno. She's . . . I'm lousy at this.
KIM: Guys, I swear.
TRENT: She's cute. She . . . drives a Jetta. She likes dogs.
KIM: Is she tall?
TRENT: Medium height, maybe five six. She's an Ed major; I said that . . .
KIM: Come on, you haven't said anything . . .
TRENT: What can I say? (Pause.) She's always changing her hair.
KIM: What do you mean?
TRENT: When I met her, she was blonde, had that sort of Mariah Carey big hair thing goin' on.
KIM: Right, I know the look.
TRENT: Anyway, since I've known her, she's had three other hairstyles. Red. Real black once. Now she wears it short and straight, dark blonde.
KIM: Like Tea Leoni?
TRENT: I don't know even know who that is.
KIM: Actor? She was in that end-of-the-world one . . . meteorite. Never mind.
TRENT: Anyway, Lisa. Always messing with her hair.
KIM: Okay.
TRENT: And she's always losing weight. She's always on a diet. Right now she's doing the whole Atkins thing.
KIM: So two years ago.
TRENT: Well, she's trying it. She'll go to McDonalds and order a quarter pounder and throw away the bread and just eat the meat. And somehow, all that fat, she loses weight.
KIM: I've heard it works; it's counterintuitive, but for some people . . . Is she heavy?
TRENT: Of course not. But she thinks she is. She's always "I'm so fat."
KIM: What else?
TRENT: And she's really into backpacking, hiking. She does the Timp hike every year, and she wants to hike the Appalachian trail for our honeymoon.
KIM: Are you into that?
TRENT: Getting there. Anyway, what else? She's . . . she'll express an opinion, and then she'll, like, back down. "That's
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We don’t need to talk about it.

what I think, anyway. For what it’s worth.” Like that. Or she’ll say something, just joking around, friendly insult kind of thing, and then she has to say “just kidding,” even though you know she’s just kidding.
KIM: I’m starting to get her.
TRENT: And, like, roommates. She’s always reading things into roommate relations. “I think she’s mad at me ‘cause I ate her broccoli by accident.” Stuff like that. She’s always so concerned that people are mad at her.
KIM: Absolutely.
TRENT: And they’re having to have these apartment meetings to straighten things out.
KIM: Sure.
TRENT: Anyway. She loves really terrible puns. She’s really close to her family; she calls her sister maybe three or four times a week. And she cries in testimony meeting and hardly any other time at all. And . . . that’s Lisa.
KIM: I know her. At least getting a sense.
TRENT: And I am just . . . not worth someone like that. No way.
KIM: Trent. Take it from me. Self-pity is not attractive.
TRENT: So tell me about Brad.
KIM: No.
TRENT: I told.
KIM: What, you want equity? Not—.
TRENT: Fair’s fair.
KIM: No. (Pause.) Suffice it to say that I don’t deserve Brad any more than you deserve Lisa.
TRENT: Yeah. . . . Trent? (He waits. She gets up, puts her arms around his neck.) Not yet. (She kisses him again. With increasing desperation. He responds. They fall together on the couch. She breaks the kiss. As he kisses her neck, breathlessly.) Why do we have to . . . ?
TRENT: Hush.
KIM: (She’s crying.) Why do we . . . why do we have to . . . ?
TRENT: I don’t know.
KIM: Why do we have to . . . ? (They continue kissing. Slow Blackout.)

WEEDING

This is how my father did it when I was young, fighting the weeds one by one, hours on his knees. I press my fingers in the soil beneath each weed and yank it from the dirt. In the house across the lawn I hear my three-year-old yelling at his mother “Don’t you tell me” and “I’m the boss” from his room where she’s sent him for time-out. Between his shouts I hear my teenage daughter slamming cupboard doors, banging pans, and wailing how unfair we are to make her work so hard. I pound weed roots against my knee, make them drop the soil they hold, and fling them away from me. I smile to see the ground I gain, the weedless dirt expanding inch by inch. I understand why my father stayed outside so long, sweat glistening on his smooth brown back, how sometimes distance is release.

— CECIL MORRIS
THE ANCIENT GREEKS were fascinated with mathematics, and the Pythagoreans in particular were enthralled with number. The mystical Pythagoras said, “All is number.” By number, he meant the positive integers and the rational numbers that could be formed from them. A legend exists regarding the discovery of irrational numbers—numbers such as \( \pi \) or the square root of two, which cannot be expressed as the ratio of two integers. It is said that this discovery was made by a young sailor during a voyage. His fellow sailors were so disturbed by the philosophical implications that they killed him by throwing him overboard to suppress his knowledge.1

While this story hardly seems credible, we are all at risk of constructing personal philosophies that are not quite built upon truth. When the errors of our foundations are exposed, we may respond with frightful violence, as the Greek sailors did. We can easily build up a personal “testimony” based on false premises about what the restored Church is or how God interacts with us. Just as many Pythagoreans lived and died content in their belief that all was integers, so we may live lives where our false expectations of the Church are never challenged. But this is not likely. When error is exposed, it is testimony-shattering for many—because we have the habit, as Elder John Widtsoe warned, to reject the whole when only a part is found to be false.2

Elder B. H. Roberts wrote of the need for the Saints to be a people who expected adult answers to adult questions.3 Becoming Saints who are comfortable with hearing adult questions is very challenging. Becoming Saints who can answer adult questions is even more challenging. I won’t pretend that I have arrived at such adult sainthood. But I believe that I have been journeying toward it for a while and along my journey have found some principles that have been invaluable. My objective today is to share with you some of these principles in the hope that they might make your journey smoother than it might otherwise be.

In Doctrine and Covenants Section 1, we read the Lord’s declaration that this church is “the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth.” I will address three important topics related to this declaration:

1. **We Are Not God’s Sole Agents.**

2. **We Are Not Always Inspiring or Inspired.**

3. **We Are Collectively Responsible for Making the Church True and Living.**

The first two topics address conclusions that are not supported by the declaration. The third addresses our responsibility in regards to the declaration.

**We Are Not God’s Sole Agents**

RECENTLY, while I was driving a sister whom I home-teach to church, we passed the East Liberty Presbyterian Church. She commented that there was a very nice food bank and daily free lunch service run through that church. “With such great need here in Pittsburgh, it’s great that there are so many good people willing to be helpful,” I replied. She concurred.

When I related this story to my bishop, the man theoretically responsible for the welfare of everyone living within the Pittsburgh First Ward boundaries, his response was something like, “You can’t believe how grateful I am that there are lots of helpful people in Pittsburgh.”

According to statistics published in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, Western Pennsylvania
has the lowest proportion of Mormons among its population of any place in the United States. Coupled with the level of poverty here—Fayette County, which comprises the Uniontown Branch of our stake, is one of the poorest counties in the country—living in Pittsburgh is certainly an opportunity to recognize what a small part the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints can do in addressing the world’s problems.

This fact reminds me of a favorite quote from Elder Orson F. Whitney, a former member of the Quorum of the Twelve:

[God] is using not only his covenant people, but other peoples as well, to consummate a work, stupendous, magnificent, and altogether too arduous for this little handful of Saints to accomplish by and of themselves.

Who are these other people contributing to God’s work? What are some of the great works Elder Whitney had in mind? Elder Whitney was born in 1855. If we limit ourselves to events that have occurred since his birth, my (idiosyncratic) list might include:

- Abolition of slavery
- Women in the U.S. receiving the vote
- Development of the germ theory of disease
- Discovery of penicillin
- Quantum mechanics
- Picasso’s The Old Guitarist
- The philosophy of William James
- The civil rights movement
- The information age
- Invention of the electric guitar

Mormons have been able to play only a small part in these artistic, scientific, and cultural works because we have been a small population who for much of our existence had been trying to survive in an inhospitable environment. But are these works the work of God? For the most part, yes. Hugh B. Brown, former member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and counselor in the First Presidency to David O. McKay, said:

Revelation does not come only through the prophet of God nor only directly from heaven in visions or dreams. Revelation may come in the laboratory, out of the test tube, out of the thinking mind and the inquiring soul, out of search and research and prayer and inspiration.

In all this good God is achieving with other people, is he using other churches? Of course. But didn’t the Lord say in the First Vision that all the professors of other religions were corrupt? Elder William Grant Bangerter tells of President Hinckley’s response to that question when it was raised by a group of ministers as they toured the Jordan River Temple prior to its dedication. President Hinckley asserted that the Lord did not say that. But it is a common belief.

Early in my mission, I challenged a zone conference talk given by a Church leader that implied ministers were primarily motivated by money. The foundation for my disagreement came from that talk by Elder Bangerter, which had been published in the Ensign. Elder Bangerter began with the story of President Hinckley and the ministers at the temple and went on to make the following claims:

It is clearly apparent that there have been and now are many honorable and devoted men and women in other churches who are moving in the direction of their eternal salvation and who give righteous and conscientious service to their congregations.

Are ministers of other churches inspired of God? Of course they are, if they are righteous and sincere. Do they accomplish good? Certainly....

Can ministers of other churches call forth blessings from God upon their people? Most assuredly they can and do.

Elder Bangerter’s comments are based on a deeply rooted universalist strain within Mormonism. In the Book of Mormon, we read:

Know ye not that there are more nations than one? Know ye not that I, the Lord your God, have created all men, and that I remember those who are upon the isles of the sea; and that I rule in the heavens above and in the earth beneath; and I bring forth my word unto the children of men, yea, even upon all the nations of the earth....

For I command all men, both in the east and in the west, and in the north, and in the south, and in the islands of the sea, that they shall write the words which I speak unto them.... I shall also speak unto all nations of the earth and they shall write it. (2 Nephi 29:7, 11–12)

Early in the twentieth century, Elder B. H. Roberts taught:

Now, while the Church is one of God’s instrumentalities for making known the truth, we do not maintain that he is limited to this Church for such purposes, neither in time nor place. We hold that all great teachers are servants of God, inspired men appointed to instruct the children of God according to the condition in which they are found.

More recently, President Howard W. Hunter taught:

All human beings share an inheritance of divine light. God operates among his children in all nations, and those who seek God are entitled to further light and knowledge, regardless of their race, nationality, or cultural traditions. . . .

As members of the Lord’s church, we need to lift our vision beyond personal prejudices. We need to discover the supreme truth that indeed our Father is no respecter of persons. Sometimes we unduly offend brothers and sisters of other nations by assigning exclusiveness to one nationality of people over another.

We Are Not Always Inspired; We Are Not Always Inspiring

OD uses us as instruments despite our imperfections. Some church leaders are arrogant; others lack tact. Some members are thin-skinned; others reprehensible. It has always been this way and will always be this way. Joseph Smith had deep character flaws that were difficult even for his contemporaries to accept.

David O. McKay commented that when God makes the prophet, he doesn’t unmake the man. So it is also with stake presidents, bishops, Relief Society presidents, Young Women presidents, Sunday School teachers, and high councilors. In every one of us are human elements that are unlikeable. For some, finding these flaws in high church leaders can be fatal to their testimony. Joseph Smith is a minutely documented historical figure, his flaws and failures well known. In contrast, what do we know about Peter, James, or John? Isaiah, Abraham, Mary Magdalene, Adam, or Eve? For the most part, their flaws are long since lost to history.

George Bernard Shaw’s warning, “Beware of the pursuit of the Superhuman. It leads to an indiscriminate contempt for the human,” could be rephrased for us as, “Beware of the pursuit of the Super Latter-day Saint. It leads to an indiscriminate contempt for the Latter-day Saint.” Ours is the opportunity and responsibility to have a more realistic under-
God uses us as instruments despite our imperfections. Some church leaders are arrogant; others lack tact. Some members are thin skinned; others, reprehensible. It has always been this way and will always be this way.

There is nothing in the doctrines of the Church which makes it necessary to believe that men are constantly under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, even men who are high officials of the Church. When we consider the imperfections of men, their passions and prejudices, that mar the Spirit of God in them, happy is the man who can occasionally ascend to the spiritual heights of inspiration and commune with God! . . .

We should recognize the fact that we do many things by our own uninspired intelligence for the issues of which we are ourselves responsible. . . . He will help men at need, but I think it improper to assign every word and every act of a man to an inspiration from the Lord. . . . Hence, I think it a reasonable conclusion to say that constant, never-varying inspiration is not a factor in the administration of the affairs of the Church; not even good men, no, not even though they be prophets or other high officials of the Church, are at all times and in all things inspired of God. It is only occasionally, and at need, that God comes to their aid.

That there have been unwise things done in the Church by good men, men susceptible at time to the inspiration of the Spirit of God, we may not question. Many instances in the history of the Church, through three quarters of a century, prove it, and it would be a solemnity to say that God was the author of those unwise, not to say positively foolish, things that have been done. For these things men must stand responsible, not God.

It is well nigh as dangerous to claim too much for the inspiration of God, in the affairs of men, as it is to claim too little. By the first, men are led into superstition, and into blasphemously accrediting their own imperfect actions, their blunders, and possibly even their sins, to God; and by the second, they are apt to altogether eliminate the influence of God from human affairs; I pause in doubt as to which conclusion would be the worse.11

These mistakes Elder Roberts refers to range from the trivial to the painful. As a simple example, consider the building program. In the 1960s, we spent excessive amounts of money constructing large buildings for very small congregations throughout the world. This drove us nearly to bankruptcy. In a perhaps overcorrection, in the 1990s, we built buildings that were too small, such as our meetinghouse, a problem to which I'm sure many of you here would be glad to attest.

More serious mistakes exist, and there is no way to hide from them, nor should we. An upcoming PBS documentary will outline many of them in unflattering and perhaps biased detail. It is imperative that our understanding of Church leadership be mature and sound.

Often mistakes are rooted in the cultural baggage our leaders inherit. As an example, consider the topic of waltzes. Brigham Young banned waltzing; however, John Taylor and Wilford Woodruff allowed it on a limited scale. The general question of whether to waltz or not to waltz, the preferred form of dancing at the time being square dancing, continued to bubble around in meetings of the Quorum of the Twelve and the First Presidency until well into the twentieth century. By 1912, waltzing had been accepted as the social norm, and Church leaders were not debating the propriety of jazz and Latin dancing. Eventually they realized that sexual chastity of youth was the gospel principle they were concerned with, not the manner of their dancing.12

Was God directing these discussions regarding dancing? Or were the leaders struggling to differentiate their merely cultural preferences from gospel principles? A scriptural illustration of this struggle is found in the New Testament character of Peter. Peter had to overcome his cultural sense of what was unclean in order to learn “what God hath cleansed, that call not thou common” (Acts 10:15). Despite Christ's charge at his Ascension to preach the gospel to every crea-
I need humility to recognize that I might be wrong. I need tolerance to allow others to make different mistakes than those I make; I need tolerance to allow others to make a different choice among equally plausible options than I would have made.

...
information about the Church has become available in libraries and on the Internet. We need to develop a Church curriculum that creates robust testimonies in the presence of this information. Another challenge is to better incorporate the knowledge and insights of women into Church government. Along these lines, Elder Ballard has counseled that we should replace one of the monthly ward PEC meetings with an additional ward council meeting where the women leaders attend and contribute. This counsel is not yet canonized, yet it illustrates the realization that we are underutilizing an important resource in the Church and that a discussion is underway about how to do better.

Conclusion

BEGAN this talk with a mathematical legend related to a false premise. I will end by quoting from Shakespeare's Sonnet 130:

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun... 

I love the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I know that this institution is the seed of the kingdom of God on earth. I am grateful for the restoration of the priesthood and the blessings I have received through it. I am grateful for the opportunities I have had to attend the temple and receive personal revelation for my life. I am grateful for the privilege I have to work within this institution to bring about the salvation of mankind. I am grateful that there are millions of good men and women outside of the Church who are working with us, knowingly or unknowingly, to achieve this salvation. I am grateful that I am part of a living church that seeks change, seeks greater insight. I am grateful that God has invited each one of us to be his partner in accomplishing these changes. I am grateful that I have come to accept and love the Church despite its imperfections.

Though Shakespeare recognized his lover's eyes were less bright than the sun, her lips less red than coral, and that her beauty fails in several other ways, he concludes:

And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare As any she belied with false compare. 

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. This story is told in Keith Devlin, Mathematics and the Science of Patterns (New York: Scientific American Library, 1994), 17.

2. John A. Widtsoe, "Is It Wrong to Doubt?" in Evidences and Reconciliations (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1960), 31–33.


4. Quoted in Howard W. Hunter, That We Might Have Joy (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994), 60.


8. Hunter, That We Might Have Joy, 60, 74.


10. George Bernard Shaw, Man and Superman, Act III.

11. Roberts, "Relation of Inspiration," 365–66. In an interview published with Joseph Smith in the Pittsburgh Gazette on 15 September 1843, the reporter writes, "Speaking of revelations, he [Joseph Smith] stated that when he was in a ‘quandary,’ he asked the Lord for a revelation, and when he could not get it, he followed the dictates of his own judgment.” See Dean C. Jessee, ed., The Papers of Joseph Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 1:443.


BRAVING THE BORDERLANDS . . .

TEMPTATION AND THE KNOWLEDGE CLASH

By D. Jeff Burton

N THIS COLUMN, I touch on the impact on Borderlanders of two issues: temptation and what some call the “knowledge clash.” I have garnered many of the ideas and thoughts I share here from several sources.¹

TEMPTATION

SEVERAL puzzled people have asked me about the two “Wormwood” columns (SUNSTONE, November 2006 and December 2005). Apparently some Borderlanders have not had the delicious experience of reading C.S. Lewis’s The Screwtape Letters. The book is based on the very clever premise of an “advanced” devil of Satan’s underworld (Screwtape) instructing his novice devil nephew (Wormwood) how to tempt mortals into sinful behavior. My two “Wormwood” columns are an attempt to show how Satan’s minions might tailor traditional Christian temptations to Mormons, enticing us into less-than-wholesome thinking, attitudes and behaviors.

Coincidentally, President Faust wrote a piece about Satan and temptation in the January 2007 Ensign. Among other things, he suggests that Mormons do not always recognize temptation. Certainly Latter-day Saints recognize oft-mentioned and uniquely Mormon temptations such as skipping church, having a latte, not doing their home or visiting teaching, or ignoring the counsel of Church leaders. But some Saints are less inclined, perhaps, to recognize the more subtle kinds of temptations described in the Wormwood columns that relate to Jesus’ teachings about moral living.

Borderlanders also recognize the typical Mormon temptations, and most of us have no special advantage over core members—e.g., immunity from temptation or unique insights into temptation. Indeed, we may sometimes excuse ourselves and our behaviors as having “moved beyond organized religion and its silly rituals and rules.” Some of us rationalize our way into behaviors, attitudes, and thinking that may actually put us on the “road to below.” Recognizing these attitudes in ourselves is another theme I was trying to wrestle with in the Wormwood columns. Even Borderlanders who have progressed into more deeply felt and peaceful spiritual stages need to be ever vigilant to avoid the subtle but advanced temptations of modern life.²

Now my challenge: Think deeply and critically about Jesus’ basic teachings, and then make a serious commitment to identify times and places when you feel tempted to diverge from one of his principles. (Be sure to start with just one principle.) For example, try adhering faithfully to the most basic of all, the principle of honesty. In every discussion, transaction, communication, and issue that faces you in the next month, try to make yourself become aware of when you are being tempted to be less than totally honest. It will be an exhilarating (and very often troubling) experience with temptation.³

THE KNOWLEDGE CLASH.

I CAN touch on only one or two aspects of this broad (and maybe overworked) subject. I’ll start by summarizing a recent review by Trent D. Stephens of Duwayne R. Anderson’s new book, Farewell to Eden: Coming to Terms with Mormonism and Science.⁴

Stephens begins his review by observing that at some time in their lives “almost all thinking persons”⁵ experience a “clash” between their religious faith and beliefs and what they perceive as “the facts.” Most Borderlanders will recognize this “clash” experience. To an unsuspecting, young, naive, or inexperienced intellectual, it can be devastating.

During his early twenties, Anderson’s clash was precipitated by his reading of the Old Testament and his discovery there of what he calls the “most unimaginable inhumanity and violent crime.” Anderson found his subsequent experiences with his family, bishop, and stake president very troubling.

Stephens describes how shortly thereafter, Anderson, unable to resolve his concerns, drifted away from the Church, explored anti-Mormon websites and anti-Mormon literature, and so forth. Stephens avers that Anderson is one who now believes that the only people who remain active in the Church are either “liars or idiots.”

Like most of us when we hear of these sad tales, Stephens had his heart broken as he read Anderson’s story—a young intellectual trying to know the truth and then futilely trying to get help as the clash escalated into an explosion. Stephens closes his review with the lament that “there goes another fine young intellectual from the Church.”

Stephens notes that the Church Handbook of Instruction provides information on how to handle marriage, abuse, and financial and legal problems but is mighty skimpy on how to handle intellectual “clashes.” He suggests that something be done—namely, that bishops and stake presidents be given a list of scientists who are strong, active members. That way, when these leaders encounter a science student who is experiencing a “clash,” they can direct the student to someone who could acknowledge and honor their journey while also assuring them that they are not alone, that others have had similar experiences, and that reconciliation with Mormon theology is possible. In short, these scientists might be able to model for or point out to the struggling person alternatives to jumping ship.⁶

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HE FACTS” are rarely rock-solid. There is no final point when we “understand everything,” especially pertaining to nature, religion, and God.

(3) Reason and logic—e.g., deductive and inductive reasoning used to discover facts independently of direct observation of all instances: things that fly have wings; birds fly; therefore, birds have wings.

(4) Innate ideas—e.g., truths that seem to be inborn, simply in our genetic makeup or, in LDS parlance, from “the pre-existence.”

(5) Inspiration or indirect revelation—e.g., insights that occur as we read scripture or that arise in conversation with friends or some other chance interaction or coincidence.

(6) Direct revelation—e.g., a stronger form of inspiration; knowledge or insights that come through direct answers to prayer or through visions or dreams.

I think if we were to discuss this matter on the Sunstone blog, we’d find that most of us believe, in varying degrees, that all six sources have in some way contributed to our personal beliefs and knowledge. Certainly sources 1-3 are common and well-recognized, 4 (genetics) is probable for most, and 5 and 6 (inspiration or indirect and direct revelation) are possible. We also would recognize, however, that none of the first five are fully reliable or accurate—i.e., was that comment on Oprah a message from God sent in answer to prayer or just good common sense? Even source 6 (direct revelation) might be questionable (when received by a schizophrenic, for example).

To a great extent, we are all scientists employing knowledge source 1. We constantly make inferences from our experiences and draw conclusions which govern our actions. When the alarm clock rings, I “know” morning has arrived. (Yet, as a natural skeptic, I confess to still looking closely at the alarm clock, then at my watch.) Inserting my key into the front door, I believe the door will open. In fact, my experience with the house keys is so successful that I “know” the door will open. I know that stepping on the brake will stop the car. I put a lot of trust in my beliefs about those brakes. The point is, we run our lives by the beliefs and knowledge developed through our sensory experiences and the subsequent faith that experience and knowledge engender in us.

Another common knowledge source we all rely on is the “voice of authority,” especially when we are young. Our teachers, our parents, or books we read may have told us that God would answer our prayers. The authority of those sources was strong enough for us to believe that it would happen. Our Primary teachers told us that the Book of Mormon is an authentic history of early America. And so forth.

Socrates made great contributions to our understanding of how we acquire beliefs and knowledge through logical reasoning (source 3). Logic is either deductive (starting with a general principle and applying it to particulars) or inductive (starting with facts and generalizing). Socrates’ major contribution was his suggestion that sense perception is not an infallible approach to obtaining genuine, true knowledge. Our experiences can deceive us. But if we’re not careful, logic can also fail us. (Rockets don’t have wings.)

Other Greek philosophers suggested that although beliefs and knowledge originate in sense perceptions and are refined and put to use through reason, that knowledge also depends upon the individual knower. Somehow, seemingly identical sense perceptions and subsequent reasoning can lead to different individual beliefs and “knowledge.” For example, when a Church leader speaks about the need for unquestioning obedience, it sounds very reasonable to some, suspect to a few, and quite curious or even downright baffling to others.

Plato may have been the first to suggest that the soul came to the world already equipped with certain knowledge, a suggestion many Latter-day Saints find harmonious with the gospel’s teachings about a premortal existence and eternal progression. The role of genetic factors and inherited knowledge is not clear, but they also seem likely to be sources of some types of knowledge.

During the early Christian era, Augustine taught that humans received knowledge through revelation. Revealed knowledge was necessary for “higher forms of living,” granted as a gift through faith. This led him to delineate two levels of truth: that which originates in and is upheld by experience and objective reasoning, and that which is gained by inspiration and revelation (and substantiated by faith and the authority of the church).
Iven this brief background on how we acquire our beliefs and knowledge, what might have happened in the development of Duwayne Anderson's Mormon religious beliefs and knowledge? Rather than speculate on Anderson's exact path, I propose the following as a fairly typical sequence for this type of struggle:

A person learns about Mormonism from source 2 (voices of authority). These authorities tell him or her that the Church is the "only true church"; that the God of the Israelites was a benevolent, loving God; that Joseph was a prophet; that the Book of Mormon was compiled by an ancient American prophet in the fifth century A.D.; and so forth.

As they grow into and through their teens, they pick up additional beliefs and knowledge about the gospel and Church history through other sources—e.g., experience of the "Spirit" at a youth trek meeting; reasoning that of course the "red skin" of Indians came upon them as a curse as described in the Book of Mormon; the testimony that our warm feelings when praying are God communicating with us; and so forth.

Then comes college and adulthood. Source 1 (experience) becomes primary, and different authorities (source 2) also appear. Reason and logic (source 3) are re-explored and re-examined. New knowledge is accumulated that conflicts with existing understandings. The clash occurs.

We who want to assist young members in dealing with such knowledge clashes can intervene at any stage of development. I will explore this in future columns, but in a recent column ("Coping with a Deadly Pandemic," SUNSTONE, September 2006), I described an "inoculation" approach that might work for some, especially if it occurs early on. Many write me to say that they have found the first chapter of my book For Those Who Wonder, titled, "Helping Those with Religious Questions and Doubts," helpful.

It is important to point out to our troubled friends that "the facts" are rarely rock-solid. We approach knowledge or understanding asymptotically, i.e., we never reach a perfect knowledge or understanding of anything. Science and statistics have developed elaborate methods for testing, verifying, and strengthening the evidence on which beliefs and knowledge are based, but no test produces perfect knowledge. There is no final point when we "understand everything," especially pertaining to nature, religion, and God.

Jesus' teachings were primarily personal—how to act, how to behave, how to think, what kinds of attitudes to cultivate, etc. As part of our religious lives, we are developing personal understandings of life, personal relationships with our Father in Heaven, and personal religions based on Jesus' (and the Church's) teachings. When I die and stand at the judgment bar, I'll be answering for myself. I will be there (ideally with my spouse and family) telling the what's and why's of my actions and about my motives. Church officials won't be there to make excuses for me.

So another good early step is to help our friends define, develop, and cultivate satisfying personal religions, based on the teachings of Jesus and other worthy spiritual, moral, and ethical precepts. Joseph Smith, for example, gave us some pretty good concepts for living a good life. The Church suggests excellent principles of living. Since most of us have magnetic and sticky ties to the Church, we ought to try to make our personal religion compatible with the LDS model of a personal religion. We can be good followers of Jesus as Latter-day Saints.

This column has been mostly "talk." Intellectualizing. Preaching to the choir, perhaps. But let's bring this to a close at the personal level: If you are at this time experiencing a "clash," I suggest that you slow down, consider all the ramifications, and stay with us in the Borderlands at least until you can sort out the issues and make decisions which will be most beneficial for you and for those around you.

NOTES


2. James W. Fowler describes a calm "Stage Five" faith as "alive to [accepting] the paradox and truth of contradictions," as unifying "opposites in mind and experience," as having a "commitment to justice [and being] freed from the confines of class, nation, religion, and community." He describes "Stage Six" as characterized by serenity: "[Having] perfect love; lack of division, universalizing faith, being headless of threats to self," and other idealizations. His Stages of Faith is one of the most insightful books ever written about personal religious development.

3. About four-and-a-half years ago, I decided to try to concentrate on a few basic Jesus-taught principles and become more aware of my behaviors. Among these were the principles of honesty and generosity. Needless to say, I was shocked when I realized the difficulty in consistently applying these "simple" principles and recognized the temptations that so often occur to break down the most basic principles of living. I'm still struggling.


5. I think most readers will understand who Stephens is referring to with the term "thinking persons," but everyone believes they are "thinkers." So we might want to substitute the words "Intellectuals," "skeptics," "scholars," "those who follow the scientific approach," "the science-educated" and other similar terms.

6. Trent Stephens, in an exchange of emails with me, wrote that he has the idea to start a grassroots group of people experienced in "science/religion" clashes who would provide support for people such as Anderson. If you would like to volunteer or have ideas on how to proceed with this idea, you can contact Stephens at his email address: STEPTREN@ISU.EDU. The big problem, of course, is reaching those struggling with these issues before their clashes become catastrophes.


Please send me any of your experiences or tales from life in the Borderlands.

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Falling

David was innocent when he hurled the first stone. Strange the forms that Eden takes, how knowledge comes, how sorrow rises from us and we from it until the circle rolls, the snake with its tail in its mouth, the hula-hoop of time laying down legends as it loops by.

— Mikal Lofgren
HISTORY DEMONSTRATES THAT any attempts to synthesize scripture and science will soon be outdated. Nonetheless, the attempt can be enlightening. Our expanding scientific knowledge brings new vistas on the organization of the universe, and I find echoes of that universe in the scriptures—leaving me with many questions and some speculations.

In this essay, I share one such excursion in natural theology. My text: “Kolob is set nigh unto the throne of God, to govern all those planets which belong to the same order as that upon which thou standest” (Abraham 3:9). In the last decade and a half, a number of published astronomical observations and numerical simulations have made me wonder if the planet Jupiter might be a governor, a type of Kolob, set at the creation of the solar system to govern and protect the earth and the heavens can illuminate back.

Please send me your reflections on Mormonism and issues of science or health at BOUNDSANDCONDITIONS@HOTMAIL.COM. —RICK JEPSON

In 2003, Dialogue ran adjacent essays by two scientists, David Tolman and David Allred. The two Davids had been students together at Princeton, attending the same student ward. Decades after Princeton, Tolman had left Mormonism and Allred had stayed. Their essays are a fascinating juxtaposition.

In the course of his piece, David Allred ventured for a few paragraphs into a discussion of the planet Jupiter and its role as a governor and protector in our solar system—a type of Kolob. Although the author dismissed the topic as “fanciful physics,” my own interest was piqued. I asked Dr. Allred, who is now a professor of physics and astronomy at BYU, how he’d feel about fleshing out those paragraphs into a full column. He accepted the invitation and produced the following essay. It’s a fascinating piece that demonstrates how the gospel can illuminate the heavens and the heavens can illuminate back.

A BRIEF history of astronomy may be helpful. Modern science emerged three centuries ago as observers came to recognize the physics behind the clockwork regularity of the heavens. With this realization came the ability to predict where planets, comets, and moons would be in the future. This sense of an ordered universe, along with the realization that its laws were discoverable and comprehensible by people, helped fuel that eighteenth-century wheels: the sun and Jupiter. Maybe a third in Saturn. The earth might not show up at all.

Jupiter is colossal. It carries more than twice the mass of the other seven planets in our solar system combined. It has 320 times the mass of the earth and three times that of the next biggest planet, Saturn. If we were to imagine our solar system not just by running the clock forward and backward, but even by simulating how the solar system might have taken its current form or how changes in its organization would affect our planet. One set of such simulations examines the influence of our system’s largest planet, Jupiter.

Jupiter’s gravitational effects are massive. Although the sun is more than a thousand times the size of Jupiter, the planets motion carries an angular momentum larger than the sun’s. This means that it has enough force to perturb the orbits of the planets of the inner solar system—Mercury, Venus, Earth, and Mars. In essence, Jupiter is able to push these planets around. Of course force is reciprocal, so the inner planets do some pushing back. But it’s like four children jumping on a trampoline with an adult: Jupiter is so massive that it alters the orbits of its neighbors much more than they alter its orbit in return. Calculations show that all this pushing around has kept the earth’s orbit nearly circular, neither expanding nor contracting over the eons.

DAVID ALLRED received his Ph.D. in physics and physical chemistry from Princeton University in 1977. He has worked in industry, U.S. National labs, and several universities, including Brigham Young University where he is a professor of physics and astronomy. He and his wife Janice are the parents of nine children. This essay is adapted from “What the Universe Means to People like Me,” Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought 36, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 109–25.
I see the Earth and its cosmic environment as an expression of God’s constant love for us. As we learn more about the heavens and the Earth, I expect we will see more evidences of that love and find more resonances with the scriptures.
Reflecting on this influence, one can see massive Jupiter acting as a “ruler” or a “governor” of the inner planets—which are often termed the “terrestrial planets” because of their similarity to Earth. This brings to my mind Abraham’s description of a sphere set “to govern all those planets which belong to the same order as that upon which thou standest.” Jupiter governs the orbits of the four terrestrial planets, the order of planets to which our own belongs.

Jupiter’s role in our solar system may be exceptional in the universe. Although we’d expect most long-lived planetary systems to function much like our own, in fact there is evidence that our system is uncommon in the galaxy. Just over two decades ago, we knew of no extrasolar planets or planetary systems. We reasoned about how our system had come into existence to produce what we saw and then extrapolated that other planetary systems ought to resemble our own. Then, just about a decade ago, the first planet revolving around another star was confirmed. Now we know of more than 210 such planets and nearly as many systems around other stars.5 Only a few of these closely resemble our own solar system.

Because they make solar systems easier for us to find, all the systems discovered so far have a Jovian planet. These planets are gas giants similar to four of the planets in our solar system: Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, and Neptune. But none of these systems matches our own, with a Jovian planet moving in a nearly circular orbit sufficiently distant from its star. Instead, their gas giants fall mostly into two unexpected classes: “hot Jupiters” and “eccentric Jupiters.” Both types make their systems inhospitable for a planet like our earth.

Hot Jupiters lie at very small orbital distances from their parent stars—so close that their “years” may be as short as three Earth days long. Because their motion necessarily affects the motion of the stars they orbit, hot Jupiters are relatively easy to detect, so they may seem more common to us than they actually are. But even with that in mind, they are surprisingly common. Our current hypothesis is that these giants form at a great distance from their parent stars and then slowly draw closer. In the process, a hot Jupiter would destroy any terrestrial planets inside of its tightening orbit by pushing them into the star.

Almost all known Jovian planets that are not hot Jupiters are instead eccentric Jupiters. These planets, even when set distantly from their parent stars, have astonishingly elliptical orbits. In our own solar system, the earth can tolerate the eccentricity of smaller planets like Mars and Mercury because their gravitational effects are small. But if Jupiter had an elliptical orbit, life might not be possible on our planet.7

Having a nearly circular orbit has helped stabilize the earth’s climate, allowing complex life to develop and diversify. We’ve known for some time that Jupiter moves in a rather circular orbit around the sun every twelve Earth years and that, via gravitational interaction, it keeps the earth and other terrestrial planets in nearly circular orbits as well. Until data from other systems came in, we assumed this arrangement was the norm.

Eccentric Jupiters tend to clear out large chunks of space. Over the course of eons, they destabilize the orbits of smaller objects—making their orbits more elliptical. They might also absorb smaller planets, smash them into the star or other planets, or even throw them out of the system into the deep freeze of interstellar space. Instead of being governors for terrestrial planets, most Jovians in the universe seem like destroyers.

JUPITER is also a protector. It shields us from collisions with killer comets. This shielding became apparent when astronomers began computing where comets end up after completing thousands of orbits, influenced all the while by the gravity of the objects they pass by. They found that these long orbits often cut across the paths of several planets in our solar system, a fact which destabilizes the comet’s direction. A planet’s gravitational field can absorb a comet or sling it either into the Sun or into deep space.

With computer simulation, we can examine Jupiter’s role in clearing our solar system of comets. By replacing Jupiter with a Jovian the size of Saturn and running through millions of years, we see that the rate of KT class, or “dinosaur killer,” comets bombarding the earth increases between ten- and one hundredfold. If there were no planet at all in Jupiter’s place, the rate would increase another hundredfold. The frequency of a 10-kilometer body hitting the earth would increase from once every hundred million years to once every hundred thousand years. This kind of event would be devastating for complex life on Earth.

We live in a dangerous neighborhood, but we have powerful, helpful neighbors. Jupiter soaks up most comets or hurls them into the sun or out of the solar system before they can reach the earth. This point was brought home in 1994 when Jupiter disrupted the recently discovered comet, Shoemaker-Levi-9. Pulled from its course, the comet broke apart and slammed into Jupiter. Many wondered if we’d be able to see the impact. Jupiter is huge and has no solid surface. Its atmosphere is tens of thousands of miles thick. So many thought Jupiter would just swallow up the fragments without any trace. But it didn’t, and the effect was sobering.

The collisions occurred on the side of the planet turned slightly away from the earth, but the flash and expelled gases could be seen by telescopes. Several hours later,
when the planet's rotation brought the impact area into view, there was a dark spot almost 8,000 miles in diameter where the large fragment hit. If the comet had hit the earth instead, our entire planet would have been devastated pole to pole within a few days.

Jupiter may also have been instrumental in the initial organization of the earth. Jupiter's gravity blocked the formation of a planet between itself and Mars, instead leaving the small chunks of leftover matter that form the asteroid belt. Some theorize that Jupiter also brought water to the earth more than four billion years ago by flinging chunks of cold, ice-bearing rocks and hydrated minerals from the outer reaches of the asteroid belt towards the inner planets. This conjecture is based on the ratio of the common isotope of hydrogen in water to the earth's orbit out of near circularity.8 Jupiter's gravity blocked the formation of a planet between itself and Mars, instead leaving the small chunks of leftover matter that form the asteroid belt. Some theorize that Jupiter also brought water to the earth more than four billion years ago by flinging chunks of cold, ice-bearing rocks and hydrated minerals from the outer regions of the asteroid belt furthest from the sun, nearest the orbit of Jupiter. An eccentric Jupiter, by contrast, would be expected to deliver less water to terrestrial planets.

We live in an interesting time. The more we learn about the universe, the more appreciation I have for the earth we have been given to live on and for the factors that went into creating it, that protect and stabilize it, and that help to keep it the beautiful and nurturing garden it is. One of those factors is Jupiter. It was probably instrumental in the creation of the earth by providing our planet with the right amount of water. It protects us from most destructive comets, and it does not perturb Earth's orbit out of near circularity.

The Lord's words teach me that this state of affairs is not accidental. Perhaps Jupiter can be seen as a type of Kolob. It is a governor of the earth and its neighboring terrestrial planets. In this light, I see the earth and its cosmic environment as an expression of God's constant love for us. As we learn more about the heavens and the earth, I expect we will see more evidences of that love and find more resonances with the scriptures. Advances in science help us to understand and appreciate the scriptures in new and interesting ways.

NOTES

1. Jupiter facts can be found at Wikipedia, which offers the interesting note that the planet's name in English is a reduction of "Deus Pater," meaning "Father God." ("Father God" would be a looser but more illuminating translation.) Also NASA has a fact sheet available at: http://nssdc.gsfc.nasa.gov/planetary/factsheet/

2. NASA's Terrestrial Planet Finder (TPF) mission may get postponed. But a "starshade" has been proposed as a relatively cheap mission which could give the James Webb Telescope the capacity to see small objects near a bright star. In addition, Darwin may fly. Sooner or later someone will try a project which may make it easier to see planets. See for example: http://www.usatoday.com/tech/science/columnists/vergano/2007-02-04-starshade_x.htm.

3. Saturn lies about ten times farther from the sun than does the earth, so its average effect on the inner planets would be more than a factor of ten smaller than Jupiter's. Therefore, Saturn's effect on the earth's orbit can be disregarded for this discussion.

4. The best book on this theme that I know is the one that first made the case: Peter Ward and Donald Brownlee, Rare Earth: Why Complex Life Is Uncommon in the Universe (New York: Copernicus, 2000). Both Ward and Brownlee are professors at the University of Washington. The first is a geologist and paleontologist, the second, an astronomer and astrobiologist. Pages 235–42 contain an excellent analysis of the potential role of Jupiter in keeping the earth habitable for animal life.

The book is written to be accessible to educated amateurs and makes a case for the "Rare Earth" hypothesis, an alternative to what is sometimes termed the "Copernican" hypothesis. The Copernican hypothesis is the idea that just as the earth is not the center of the universe, so too the earth is nothing special in the universe and that complex life will therefore be common in the universe. Both hypotheses have stimulated active thought and investigation. It may take considerable time and investigation to provide definitive evidence for one model over the other.

5. An up-to-date, extensive, and easy-to-search catalogue is at http://exoplanets.org/planets.shtml.

6. The Jovian planets orbiting the star 47 Ursae maj. have nearly circular orbits, but these planets are more massive and closer to 47 Uma than Jupiter and Saturn are to our sun.


LUNAR ECLIPSE

The night sky nibbles the biscuit of moon. Bite by bite, the moon melts in the mouth of the night.

— Kristin Berkey-Abbott
BOOK REVIEW

FAITHFUL SCHOLARSHIP GOES TO WASHINGTON

The Worlds of Joseph Smith: A Bicentennial Conference at the Library of Congress
Edited by John W. Welch
Brigham Young University Press, 2006
325 pages, $24.95

Reviewed by John-Charles Duffy

The Worlds of Joseph Smith is less important as a contribution to Mormon studies than as a window into the agendas and aspirations that leading institutions of LDS scholarship bring to Mormon studies.

In May 2005, the Library of Congress hosted a two-day conference to celebrate the Joseph Smith bicentennial (see SUNSTONE, May 2005, p. 74). The Worlds of Joseph Smith, produced by BYU Press, contains the published proceedings of that event, with photos of Smith-related paintings, documents, and artifacts that the Library placed on display for the occasion. Because the book’s organization reproduces that of the conference, and because the papers have received only light editing, an assessment of the book cannot help but become an assessment of the conference itself. In the book’s introduction, John Welch and other conference organizers suggest that the conference was a landmark in the scholarly study of Joseph Smith; the book’s classic-looking binding and dust jacket reinforce the impression that this is a volume of special significance. However, The Worlds of Joseph Smith is less important as a contribution to Mormon studies than as a window into the agendas and aspirations that leading institutions of LDS scholarship bring to Mormon studies. At a time when Mormon studies is being welcomed into the broader academy, The Worlds of Joseph Smith should inspire caution among non-LDS academics about working with Latter-day Saints committed to “faithful scholarship.”

The conference was conceived, organized, and largely funded by Latter-day Saints. Although not credited as a cosponsor (that title went to BYU), LDS Public Affairs provided half of the thirty to forty thousand dollars required to fund the conference, in addition to controlling media access to the event. Four LDS scholars, all connected to Church institutions, joined James Hutson, director of the Library’s Manuscripts Division, to form the planning committee: Richard Bushman, formerly affiliated with BYU’s Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for LDS History; Robert Millet of BYU Religious Education (who conceived the idea of the conference); Richard Turley of the Family and Church History Department; and John Welch, founder of FARMS and editor of BYU Studies. The conference was organized as a showcase of faithful LDS scholars in dialogue with friendly non-LDS colleagues. Sixteen hand-picked presenters—eight Mormon, eight non-Mormon—spoke on four panels, each of which was “presided” over by an individual representing an institution committed to faithful scholarship: the Family and Church History Department, FARMS, BYU Religious Education, and the Smith Institute. A fifth session of the conference featured a devotional address by Dallin H. Oaks.

Non-Mormon presenters included familiar Mormon-watchers Jan Shipps and Douglas Davies, in addition to Robert Remini, author of a recent Penguin biography of Joseph Smith; Richard Mouw, president of Fuller Theological Seminary, who a few months earlier had publicly apologized for the poor treatment of Latter-day Saints by evangelical countercultists (see SUNSTONE, December 2004, p. 73); and Margaret Barker, a biblical scholar whose idiosyncratic interpretations of ancient Israelite religion had attracted the interest of FARMS. Of the eight LDS panelists, only two were not from BYU: Richard Bushman and Terryl Givens. No one from the Community of Christ was invited to speak, a slight that Douglas Davies noted during his remarks. The presence of two British participants (Davies and Barker) allowed organizers to bill the conference as “international.” Considering, however, that a session of the conference was titled “The Making of a Global Religion,” it is striking that participants were mostly American, all Anglophone, and all white. They were also overwhelmingly male: only two of the sixteen panelists were women (Shipps and Barker), both non-LDS.

Because faithful scholars dominated the organizing committee, issues important to these scholars dominated the conference. As one non-Mormon scholar in attendance pointed out to me, the conferences focus slid quickly from Joseph Smith to LDS religious claims more generally. During the first session, panelists responded to a paper by Richard Bushman (pages 3–20 in the published proceedings), who argued that Joseph Smith is diminished by histories which confine him to a nineteenth-century American context and that he ought instead to be compared to figures such as Augustine and Luther. The second session focused on Smith’s claims to have reproduced ancient...
The speaker was Douglas Davies, who steered the conversation. This was the one session that opened with a paper by a non-Mormon, making it the only session on Mormonism as a world religion. The Worlds of Joseph Smith demonstrates LDS scholars' understandings of what is appropriate discourse for an academic forum, then administrators at Claremont and elsewhere would be wise not to assume that faithful scholars and their supporters "know how to operate in the professional world."4 Rejecting Davies's analysis, Keller asserted that Mormonism would grow to "become a world religion ... like none before it" because of its divine authority and revealed directives. Keller's remarks prompted a protest from Davies (again, not included in the published proceedings) that Keller had pushed the conversation down the road of apologetics. What kind of conference was this, Davies asked—academic or evangelistic? Earlier in the conference, BYU anthropologist John Clark had also taken an apologetic tack, citing mounting archaeological evidence to conclude that the Book of Mormon can only be accounted for as "an ancient text" conveyed to Joseph Smith "through supernatural means." No one challenged Clark publicly, but I am told that even some faithful scholars felt he had crossed a line.

How should Davies's question be answered? Was this an academic conference or an evangelistic one? Conference organizers clearly thought it was academic: they conspicuously labeled the conference "faithful" without mention of the word "scholar" and changed "scholar" to "leader," or between a scholarly forum and Church public relations.

The Worlds of Joseph Smith shows that some faithful scholars are more subtle than others about infusing an orthodoxy perspective into their work. Still, whether subtle or reckless, scholars who pursue faithful scholarship are pointedly resisting secular ground rules for the academic study of religion. Their project is to rewrite the rules, a project they share with conservative religious scholars from other traditions—evangelicals, Catholics, Muslims. Some organizations may be willing to provide a space where faithful scholars can pursue that agenda, especially if Mormons are willing to pay. The Library of Congress was willing, and The Worlds of Joseph Smith was the result: a showcase of LDS scholarship funded and orchestrated by Church public relations; a carefully staged display of conversation between Mormon and non-Mormon scholars that does little to address broader disciplinary questions; an occasion for Latter-day Saints to reassure themselves that they are winning the esteem of outsiders in academia and government. Do faithful scholars harbor hopes that the establishment will never see a LDS-organized public symposium, between academic discourse and a devotional talk by a Church leader, or between a scholarly forum and Church public relations?
tablishment of a Mormon studies chair at Claremont will afford similar opportunities? How about the Latter-day Saints section at the Society of Biblical Literature recently created under the leadership of John Welch, conference organizer and publisher for The Worlds of Joseph Smith? The questions may sound suspicious, but The Worlds of Joseph Smith makes suspicion reasonable.

The book's introduction offers a quotation from an anonymous scholar to the effect that the conference was “something very important. . . . We will arrive at some point in the future when we will look back and say, 'This development began at the Library of Congress’” (x). If we're going to traffic in anonymous judgments, I can toss in some that I encountered of a different nature: the non-Mormon scholar who came to see what was happening and decided it wasn't worth-while to sit through even one session; the journalist who predicted that the Library of Congress would never let itself be used like this again. Like all of us, the faithful scholars who organized The Worlds of Joseph Smith prefer to hear praise. But the future credibility of Mormon studies requires taking more seriously the concerns that found voice in Douglas Davies's question: What kind of conference is this?

NOTES

1. “Faithful scholarship” is a preferred self-identifier for what I have elsewhere called “orthodox scholarship.” See John-Charles Duffy, “Defending the Kingdom, Rethinking the Faith: How Apologetics Is Reshaping Mormon Orthodoxy,” SUNSTONE, May 2004, 22–35. Faithful scholarship seeks to bring distinctively LDS perspectives (which in practice means orthodox LDS perspectives) to the study of Mormonism. Institutions that incorporate a commitment to faithful scholarship into their missions are FARMS, BYU Studies, and (before its demise) the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Latter-day Saint History. BYU Religious Education is dedicated to “gospel scholarship,” while the Family and Church History Department pursues faithful scholarship by default. I define faithful scholarship at greater length in “Faithful Scholarship” and the Mainstreaming of Mormon Studies,” Sunstone Symposium, Salt Lake City, Utah, 11 August 2006 (tape/CD/download #SL06223).

2. My information about the funding of the conference comes from a conversation with Helen Dalyrple, senior public affairs specialist at the Library of Congress, 9 May 2005, while I was reporting on the conference for SUNSTONE; and from a panel discussion with the conference organizers held at Brigham Young University, 23 March 2006.

3. Jill Derr, then head of the Smith Institute, presided over the final session, making her the only LDS woman whose name appeared in the conference program.

REVIEW ESSAY

“HE WAS SOLITARY, REBELLIOUS, AND HARD TO BE GOVERNED”

WHAT JESUS MEANT
by Garry Wills
Viking, 2006
143 pages, $24.95

Reviewed by Brett Alan Sanders

Wills’s book is a believer’s unpretentious yet intellectually rigorous attempt to ferret out the real essence of Jesus’s teachings from the sanitized, simplified versions of others’ agendas. The Jesus Wills emerges with is of the uncomfortable, indomitable, “rebellious” sort.

JUNE 1996 FOUND me with a small group consisting of five of my high school students, my wife Anita, and my parents in Cuernavaca, Mexico, where my students were experiencing a combination of homestay, language training, and excursions. On a free afternoon in town, Anita and I wandered into a bookstore where I bought a Spanish-language edition of Lebanese poet Kahlil Gibran’s Jesus, the Son of Man.

This event is significant to me for several reasons. First, while I had read Gibran’s most famous work, The Prophet, in English, it had been a gift from an MTC companion before our departure in December 1978 for Argentina; so it seemed fitting, somehow, that my next encounter with Gibran should be in the language of my mission.

Another coincidence occurred in June 2005 in Buenos Aires, where I would pick up Gibran’s little volume of poems and parables called in Spanish El loco, when only a week earlier, in Concordia, a city on the border with Uruguay, I had been discussing Gibran with my kind and philosophical hostess.

I detail all this here because of a classroom encounter in spring 2006 between Gibran’s Spanish-language Jesus and my sole fourth-year Spanish student at the time, a faithful and earnest Mormon girl. The passage reads roughly: “And the child grew in body and spirit and was different from His companions; he was solitary, rebellious, and hard to be governed. I never managed to tame His impulses.” Gibran puts these words into the mouth of Anna, Mary’s mother, as she describes the childhood of Jesus.

I was hardly surprised at my student’s reaction to the phrase, “solitary rebellious, and hard to be governed,” a description more apt, in correlated Mormon teaching, for Lemuel. Her pursed lips and raised brow suggested confusion and objection. I acknowledged the oddness of the image from a Mormon perspective and wondered aloud whether the poet—who had naturally chosen his words carefully—might intend to provoke some insight that might redeem the words to our understanding? Given the Savior’s peculiar mission, could there be some sense in which to be rebellious and hard to govern might be a virtue?

For her, of course, this idea was new and unsettling; I did not try to impose my own reading on her. She wore her most pensive expression and wrinkled forehead, then shrugged her shoulders and allowed that this was, indeed, something to think about. Over subsequent weeks, while I spent most of my time with the third-year students who met with me at the same hour, she continued her mostly independent labor of reading and translating a selection of different voices from that volume. Eventually she moved on to other texts: a pair of revolutionary writings by Subcomander Marcos, a leader of Mexico’s new Zapatista rebels—from volumes I had also picked up at that Cuernavacan bookstore a decade earlier.

“Faith out on quest to know”


Renowned historian and American Catholic intellectual Garry Wills, author of Papal Sin (Doubleday, 2000), and its “unintended sequel” Why I Am a Catholic (Houghton Mifflin, 2002), makes a valuable contribution to this conversation with his new book What Jesus Meant, in which he even makes so bold as to discern from among so many variants the authentic, historical Jesus. Even so, Wills’s book is not so much an exercise in intellectual hubris as it is a believer’s unpretentious yet intellectually rigorous attempt to ferret out the real essence of Jesus’s teachings from the sanitized, simplified versions of others’ agendas. In Why I Am a Catholic, responding to those who question
WILL'S JESUS DOES NOT CARE WHETHER WE VOTE OR OTHERWISE FULLFILL OUR DUTY TO CAESAR, ONLY WHETHER WE PASS THE SUPREME TEST, WHICH IS THAT OF LOVE.

Saint Anselm called 'faith out on quest to know' (xxx). And the Jesus Wills emerges with is of the uncomfortable, indomitable, "rebellious" sort described by Gibran's Anna.

First of all, in his intriguing note on translation, Wills establishes that, far from the elegance of Latter-day Saints' preferred King James Version, the "marketplace Greek" of the New Testament—which both Jesus and his disciples would have spoken—was a rough pidgin dialect whose "sentences sometimes fumble at meaning." Wills adds that lack of clarity in the text has more often to do with "mere linguistic clumsiness" than with any sublimity of ideas; and he paraphrases Nietzsche's barb that "If God wrote the New Testament, he knew surprisingly little Greek" (xii).

Challenging, thus, the reasons that Mormon leaders often cite for preferring the King James Bible over more modern versions, Wills acknowledges that such versions are always thought undignified when they first come out but that, in fact, "new translations have to be undignified if they are to reproduce the effect of the original"—which effect he calls "a rough, hewn majesty, an almost brutal linguistic earliness" (xiii).

Beyond that, Wills might well be addressing my sweetly naive Mormon Spanish student when, in his foreword, he demolishes the Sunday School orthodoxy of "gentle Jesus meek and mild" that lies behind the presently ubiquitous letters WWJD embazoned on bracelets and T-shirts (signifying "What Would Jesus Do?"). "But can we really aspire to do what Jesus did?" Wills asks (xv).

A consideration of his actual words and deeds reveals, rather, a deep chasm between what Jesus said and did and what any of us could ordinarily justify saying or doing. Could we countenance a precocious twelve-year-old's going off on his own, unannounced, in a big city? Or driving demons from a lunatic into the pigs of a neighboring farmer? The redemptive nature of Jesus's role, Wills elaborates, places an unbridgeable chasm between him and us because what he experiences to atone for our sins is so far beyond what any one of us could ever endure in the flesh. Jesus, in fact, was ever "a man of the margins, never quite fitting in, always 'out of context'" (xxi). In Mormon terms, he is that "poor, wayfaring man of grief" that we might shelter but whom we can never ourselves completely fathom. He is the perfection after which Don Quixote aspires in his mad tilting at windmills, whose assault on an innocent flock of sheep might be compared to Jesus's disorderly—event subversive—assault on those pigs.

Yet Latter-day Saints will still object that we are elsewhere commanded, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). I don't know how Wills would respond to that verse, but perhaps he might consider it hyperbolic as far as our actual mortal state is concerned. Perhaps he would say that greater perfection is intended as the more distant result of eternal progression.

Social barriers and taboos like so many cobwebs

THE BODY OF Wills answer to the question of what Jesus actually "meant by his strange deeds and words" (xviii)—in contrast to what he merely did or said—is taken up in eight concise and cogently argued chapters. In the first of these, "The Hidden Years," Wills reveals a figure whose life began "as a mysterious rumor, one child hidden among the many, who are put at risk by his radical presence among them"—and who yet, as the first-century Jewish historian Josephus relates it, is given one of his day's most common names: "It is as if." Wills adds, "he were called Everyman—or simply the Son of Man."

But this impression of Jesus as "the exemplary, or a summary, of all mankind" will not stand up in Wills's analysis (3). The meaning that Wills attaches to this period lies in the wilderness testing of Jesus's adult years, from which he emerges at "about thirty"—which, Wills suggests, was "just the conventional way of saying that he was fully adult" (5).

"Though we are not explicitly told anything about the hidden years" beyond Luke's description of his running away from his parents when he was twelve," Wills writes, "the stance of the rebel who would not be contained in the expectations of his hometown comes out again and again when family ties are mentioned" (7). Wills contends, in fact, that this rebellious stance led him to a period
Thus, according to Wills's analysis, in the trial of the stone for a loaf of bread, Jesus symbolically rejects the Christian socialism or liberation theology that would limit his radicalism to that of a mere socio-political movement; while in the temptation of worldly power, he rejects "what will become the medieval papacy, with its all-encompassing authority over the 'two swords' of temporal rule and spiritual rule"—the most insidious of which, Wills asserts, was and is the latter (15). Finally, in resisting the temptation to hurl himself from the temple heights and summon angels to rescue and minister to him, he refuses to glory in himself above the Father: Satan's desire being, in this case, to defeat God by "making Jesus repeat his mystical members, he stood in these episodes—where, in his mystical members, he was standing then? He was with the gay man, not with his haters. This is made all the clearer by the fact that gays are called unclean for the same reason as were other outcasts of Jesus's time—because they violate the Holiness Code of the Book of Leviticus. The anthropologist Mary Douglas has demonstrated that this concept of the unclean comes from the 'unnatural' mixing of different kinds of things—of milk and meat, for instance. Examples are planting two different kinds of seed in the same field, or mingling two kinds of yarn in the same garment (Leviticus 19:19), or ploughing with a donkey and an ox (Deuteronomy 22:10), or eating meat with the blood in it (Leviticus 19:26).

"In the case of homosexuality, the passive partner mixes with his male body the female role," Wills continues:

In the Holiness Code, women are unclean anyway, because of their menstrual function. But this fictional "woman" who cannot menstruate is even more unclean. Those who have been anxious to teach lessons about the heavenly reign he brings with him, and one of the main lessons is that people should not be separated into classes of the clean and unclean, the worthy and the unworthy, the respectable and the unrespectable. He has told his followers that they are privileged, since they enter into a new intimacy with the Father through his own identification with the Father. But if they try to make that privilege to be used against others or each other, they are betraying the point of their union with the Father, whose love is undiscriminating and inclusive, not gradated and exclusive. (29)

In this sense, my previous allusion to Don Quixote, "the knight of the woeful countenance," and to Joseph Smith's "wayfaring Quixote, "the knight of the woeful countenance," to Joseph Smith's "wayfaring Quixote, "the knight of the woeful countenance," to Joseph Smith's "wayfaring Quixote, "the knight of the woeful countenance," to Joseph Smith's "wayfaring Quixote, "the knight of the woeful countenance," and to Joseph Smith's "wayfaring Quixote, "the knight of the woeful countenance," Wills, for his part, concludes that Jesus was likely such a figure himself. "Hurt people," he writes, are not drawn to the aggressively healthy but to the "holy person who is often slight and frail, with spiritual powers fretting their physical envelope . . . People instinctively feel the companionship of such men with the afflicted. The energy radiating from them has partly consumed them. (22–23)

In the present LDS context of anguished wrestlings over the problematic existence of same-sex attraction among the marginalized faithful, Wills treatment of Jesus's challenge to the very "holiness codes" that his religion and ours still uphold is itself of great importance. "No outcasts were cast out far enough in Jesus's world to make him shut them out," Wills writes, but not so for the Christianity that arose in his name to cast out the Jews: "If one of Christianity's greatest sins—'did not cause the Holocaust, it certainly facilitated it.' Who then, Wills asks, are the Jews—or the Samaritans—of our day? "Some Christians tell us who," he answers.

At the funeral of a well-known gay man who died of AIDS, a 'Christian' group showed up with placards saying 'God hates fags.' In the San Diego diocese, a Catholic bishop forbade Christian burial to an openly gay man. Is there any doubt where Jesus would have stood in these episodes—where, in his mystical members, he was standing then? He was with the gay man, not with his haters. This is made all the clearer by the fact that gays are called unclean for the same reason as were other outcasts of Jesus's time—because they violate the Holiness Code of the Book of Leviticus. The anthropologist Mary Douglas has demonstrated that this concept of the unclean comes from the 'unnatural' mixing of different kinds of things—of milk and meat, for instance. Examples are planting two different kinds of seed in the same field, or mingling two kinds of yarn in the same garment (Leviticus 19:19), or ploughing with a donkey and an ox (Deuteronomy 22:10), or eating meat with the blood in it (Leviticus 19:26).

"In the case of homosexuality, the passive partner mixes with his male body the female role," Wills continues:

In the Holiness Code, women are unclean anyway, because of their menstrual function. But this fictional "woman" who cannot menstruate is even more unclean. Those who have been anxious to keep this taboo alive in our times are selective in what parts of the Holiness Code they continue to observe from the Book of Leviticus. That is the point of a letter I was shown that came from the Internet...
. . . addressed to a Protestant evangelical who believes in literal reading of the Bible. (32–33)

Among the sarcastic queries that follow in this "letter" is one regarding the possession of slaves ("A friend of mine claims that this applies to Mexicans but not Canadians. Can you clarify? Why can't I own Canadians?") and the problem of avoiding contact with women who are menstruating ("The problem is: how do I tell? I have tried asking, but most women take offense") (34).

As for the "natural law" theology that arose later in Christian history, whereby homosexual activity is wrong because the partners cannot produce children, Wills takes the moral philosopher's position that "the primary function of human acts is not normally said to be the only non-sinful use. Eating, for instance, is primarily an act of self-preservation," but it is also a social act—and Jesus's "image of heaven's reign is that of a feast, where no need for subsistence will be at stake." Why then, Wills asks, "is sex as human communion different from feasting and drinking as human communion? In one way only," he answers—"because sex is considered unclean" (36).

Radical Messiah, reactionary churches

IN THE NEXT two chapters, Wills addresses Jesus's opposition to the interests of wealth; to power, especially that of the spiritual leaders of every faith; to the barriers put up between men and women; to violence for any reason and the menace of theocracy which "involves religion in state violence" (54). For that matter, Wills's Jesus does not care whether we vote or otherwise fulfill our duty to Caesar, only whether we pass the supreme test, which is that of love: "Did you treat everyone, high and low, as if dealing with Jesus himself, with his own inclusive and gratuitous love . . .?" which, for Wills is "not a dreamy, sentimental, gushy thing" but "radical love, exigent, searing, terrifying" (56–57). Similarly, Wills addresses Jesus's preference for Albert Schweitzer's inward reign of heaven, or "kingdom of God in the heart," to the "whited sepulchers" of the established religious orders. (As I recall from my reading of so many years past, the gentle agnosticism of Schweitzer's view of Jesus as a desert-trained ascetic who firmly believed he was living out the end times accords rather well—for that agnosticism—with Wills's interpretation of the wilderness trial.)

Mormons readers, familiar with Joseph Smith's history of radical departure from the accepted creeds of the Christendom of his day, might sympathize to some extent with Wills's take on Jesus's rejection of formalized religion. Ironically, though, this forces a confrontation—disorienting for many faithful—with our own Church's corporate structure at over a century-and-a-half's remove from the Prophet Joseph's ragged frontier church. In the first of the "official declarations" that close out the Doctrine and Covenants, Wilford Woodruff promises that neither he nor any prophet-president of the Church will be permitted by God to lead His people astray—a puzzling promise in the light of so many well-established prophetic misstatements. One solution to that dilemma is to differentiate between when the prophet in question was speaking "as a man" versus the prophet, but how does that idea help to clarify anything? What exactly constitutes being led astray? Does God tolerate His prophets' errors on science or politics, just so long as they don't fail to teach faith, repentance, and the importance of sacred ordinances? And if so, is that idea of any comfort to the gay Mormon who has committed suicide because he can't bear his enforced separation from those ordinances? Regardless, Mormon readers are bound to feel challenged by Wills's assertion that all churches "resist radicalism—which means that they reject Jesus" (44).

Equally challenging is Wills's contention that the early Christians had no priests among them, no notable hierarchy of any kind, that women broke and passed the bread and wine as well as (in at least one instance) led their husbands on proselytizing missions. If the Jesus Christ who spoke to Joseph Smith organized this Church, how can the faithful Latter-day Saint accept Wills's assertion that a heavenly reign quite separate from any organized ecclesiastical body—including our own? Undoubtedly, then, this will be a sticking point for Mormon readers. Still, there are those equally challenging stances of Mormonism's great apologist-scholar Hugh Nibley, who famously declared that he would rather be a doorkeeper at the Lord's Temple than an officer in the Church's hierarchy. And might there not be some element of truth in Wills's barb that Jesus "would have the same reaction he had to the profanation of the Temple if he walked into Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome—or, for that matter, into the Mormon Tabernacle or Robert Schuller's Crystal Cathedral" (75–76)?

In arguing that Christ did not organize a church, Wills writes that "the Greek word usually translated as 'church' is ekklésia, a 'gathering'—a word that occurs in only one verse. The final three chapters of Wills's intriguing and provocative book deal with the related matters of Jesus's raising of Lazarus from the dead (which Wills views as a prefiguring of his own resurrection), a declaration of "his authority over life and death"; his death and descent to hell; and his resurrection (93). Of particular interest to Mormons might be Wills's treatment of the figure of Judas, which differs starkly from the familiar position of James E. Talmage in Jesus the Christ that he was a son of perdition and a denier of the Holy Ghost. All of the interpreters of Judas's actions agree, Wills asserts, that Judas "did not believe that [Jesus] would be sentenced to death" (102). Whatever his motivations, Wills writes, "[t]hey imagine that Judas followed with increasing horror the process of Jesus's trial and torture" (103). This view is what makes Elder Talmage's pronouncement seem so harsh; in this respect, Wills's view seems at once fairer to Judas and more consoling to the rest of us. "Judas could not bear the knowledge of what he had done," Wills writes. "He killed himself for having killed God. It was an act of contrition that redeems him, makes him a kind of comrade for all of us who have betrayed Jesus. He is our patron. Saint Judas" (203–04).

And this redeeming notion concords well with Wills's take on the suffering at Gethsemane and at Calvary. "Jesus did not wear merely the outer shell or facial mask of a man (as the ancient Docetists taught)," Wills writes.

He had to enter the full tragedy of humanity, its bewildered helplessness, its shame, its sense of inadequacy and despair. That is the meaning of the dark cry from the cross saying that even the Father had abandoned him. To experience
all the aspects of human contingency, to plumb those depths, is a way of descending into hell.

The repetition of his prayer three times is a scriptural device for showing a prolonged experience, just as Luke did in the desert struggle with Satan. The triple prayer at Gethsemane, at the end of his public ministry, is a companion piece to the triple trial in the desert. . . . Both episodes are emblematic of the stakes being played for in the whole public ministry. . . . [But] in the last showdown. . . . he has no one to speak with, not even the Father. He must conquer himself, all alone, with no human or divine help. All that is non-divine in him must leap into oblivion. . . . Only by being completely crushed as a human can he accomplish the utmost in human heroism. (106-07)

Finally, Wills explores the possible reasons for Jesus’s Incarnation and his ultimate sacrifice. “Perhaps,” he writes, “the Incarnation is just God’s way of saying that, no matter what horrors we face or hells we descend to, he is coming with us” (118). Implicit in these words is that he is coming with all of us: with Judas, the outcasts of all ages, all who would submit, finally, to his offering of divine grace. And then, having dispensed with grief and sorrow, Wills addresses three interlocking things [which] can give us confidence that Jesus is risen—the empty tomb, the multiple apparitions, and the seismic change in the followers of Jesus” (124). Wills’s earlier description of this book as not scholarly but devotional is most evident in this conclusion, and reading it put me much in mind of Wills’s poignant confession of faith (in the final brief segment of Why I Am a Catholic) in the Roman Catholic Creed. He elaborates on the particular meaning he attaches to each point in that creed in a succession of succinct little chapters headed with the phrases themselves:

- “I believe in God . . .” (Ch. 23)
- “the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth . . .” (Ch. 24)
- “and in Jesus Christ our Lord, the only son of God . . .” (Ch. 25)
- “conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary . . .” (Ch. 26)
- “shall come to judge the living and the dead . . .” (Ch. 27).

In the voice of one who truly believes, this confession is surely no less touching than that of the faithful Mormon child reciting her Articles of Faith or later maintaining that faith—steadfastly—in the face of the slightest heterodoxy.

In the final analysis, though, as an agnostic Mormon whose struggle to reestablish a fruitful union with the communal body of Latter-day Saints is severely compromised since his youngest child’s coming out two years ago in an openly gay and still vibrant relationship, I am less interested in Wills’s proofs of the resurrection and the specific matter of his creed than in the conclusion expressed in his brief afterword to the full argument of What Jesus Meant. “The meaning is clear,” he writes:

All earthly societies have currently unidentifiable elements of heaven’s reign in them, but none of them . . . can be equated with heaven’s reign. Claims to a “faith-based politics” or to a perfect church substitute a false religion for heaven’s reign—which is a form of idolatry.

Strong words, indeed, and a great deal to think about for any faithful Mormon reader in this day of “Proclamations on the Family” and much-denied efforts to insert matters of theological law into the United States Constitution.

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## Cowboys and Prophets

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## Statements of the LDS First Presidency: A Topical Compendium

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VANGELICAL CHRISTIANS OFTEN employ the term and converse about the significance and process of being "born again," whereas members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints seldom do. Despite many Book of Mormon references to being born again,1 the LDS Church neglects to get us as far as possible before our death.

The New Testament is replete with many other exhortations to Christians about "being born again," about "putting on Christ," "Christ being in you," and "having the mind of Christ" (John 3:7; Romans 8:10; 13:14; 1 Corinthians 2:16). In fact, this is the central message of the New Testament. Let us examine what Jesus, Peter, Paul, and John have to say specifically about this fundamental theme.

W

HILE obeying the Mosaic Law "could not make . . . [one] perfect, " Jesus said that a person becomes whole or "perfect" when exemplifying the Sermon on the Mount in his or her life (Matthew 5:48). Jesus is saying: If you will let me, I will make you perfect. The job will not be accomplished in this life; but He intends to come and live in It Himself. The command Be ye perfect is not idealistic gas. Nor is it a command to do the impossible. He is going to make us into creatures that can obey that command. . . . If we let Him. . . . The process will be long and in parts very painful; but that is what we are in for. Nothing less. He meant what he said.2

To each generation, Jesus Christ answers the ancient query of the rich young ruler: "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" with the timeless response: "Come, follow me" (Luke 18:18, 22). The Sermon on the Mount reveals the essential character of Jesus. He defines the Christian as one who, like himself, practices the beatitudes. Such are promised eternal life in the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted: in the kingdom of heaven where there is no mourning, pain, or death).

Blessed are the meek [humble, gentle, long-suffering, not easily offended, exhibiting strength under control]: for they shall inherit the [new] earth [the kingdom of heaven].

Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled [with the Spirit, the love of God, and wisdom and knowledge in the kingdom of heaven].

Blessed are the merciful [who are more forgiving than justice requires]: for they shall obtain mercy [in the kingdom of heaven].

Blessed are the pure [honest] in heart: for they shall see God [daily in the kingdom of heaven].

Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children [sons and daughters] of God [and inherit all things in the kingdom of heaven].

Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake [return good for evil when reviled, persecuted, or spoken against falsely]: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake . . . for great is your reward in heaven. (Matthew 5:1–12; for an elaboration of these promises, see Revelation chapters 2, 3, 21–22)

Jesus is the Sermon on the Mount—the first morally perfect Christian. Each of these Christian attitude-ideals is exemplified many times throughout his ministry. In short, Jesus is asking us to:

• Be diligent in the ministry.
• Exercise self-discipline.
• Do what is right.
• Forgive others beyond what justice requires.
• Be pure in heart and honest.
• Be a peacemaker.
• Return good for evil.

In his old age, the Apostle Peter reemphasized these Christian ideals. He had carefully observed Jesus and knew him well. In one of his two surviving epistles, Peter lists nine personal characteristics for which the Saints ought to strive. He repeatedly referred to these collectively as "the way of truth," "the right way," and "the way of righteousness," and he undoubtedly observed them in Jesus during the Master's three-year ministry (2 Peter 2:2;
optimism? They are around us, but we have exhibited life, joy, enthusiasm, happiness, and Galatians 2:20). But who are these saints who have “life.” The Apostles Peter and Paul refer to such disciples as “lively stones,” and say to such disciples as “lively stones,” and say ‘Christ liveth in [them]” (1 Peter 2:5; 2:5–23). Taking upon us the name of Christ and his character is to “know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” and thus receive “life eternal” (John 17:3; cf. 10:27–28). Being like Jesus is far more ambitious than saying that we know he lives.3

The Apostle Paul also taught the Saints to strive for these characteristics “until Christ be formed in you.” His list of the fruits by which a Christian is known is almost identical to Peter’s. He also lists nine qualities: “love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance” (Galatians 5:21–23). Taking upon us the name of Christ and his character is to “know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” and thus receive “life eternal” (John 17:3; cf. 10:27–28). Being like Jesus is far more ambitious than saying that we know he lives.3

The Apostle John explained what being born again means. He taught that those who are born again “walk, even as he [Jesus] walked,” then explicitly described them as: Every one that doeth righteousness is born of him. . . . Whosoever is born of God doth not [continue to] commit sin. . . . Every one that loveth [others] is born of God, and knoweth God. . . . Whosoever believeth [i.e., has a trusting relationship in his heart] that Jesus is the Christ is born of God. . . . Whosoever is born of God overcometh the world. . . . He that hath the Son [in him] hath life. . . . Whosoever is born of God . . . that wicked one toucheth him not [meaning temptation has lost its power over him].4 Perhaps the most observable of these characteristics is that a “born again” person has “life.” The Apostles Peter and Paul refer to such disciples as “lively stones,” and say that “Christ liveth in [them]” (1 Peter 2:5; Galatians 2:20). But who are these saints who exhibit life, joy, enthusiasm, happiness, and optimism? They are around us, but we have to look for them. C. S. Lewis observes: Every new and then one meets them. Their very voices and faces are different from ours; stronger, quieter, happier, more radiant. They begin where most of us leave off. They are, I say, recognizable; but you must know what to look for. They will not be very like the idea of “religious people” which you have formed from your general reading. They do not draw attention to themselves. You tend to think that you are being kind to them when they are really being kind to you. They love you more than other men do, but need you less. . . . They will usually seem to have a lot of time; you will wonder where it comes from. When you have recognized one of them, you will recognize the next one much more easily. . . . [They are found] across every barrier of color, sex, class, age, and even of creeds.5

WHAT is the role of churches in bringing about the “born-again” saint? The high aspiration of “Christ being formed in us,” of becoming “a son of God,” a “real son,” is not just one among many jobs a Christian has to do, but as C. S. Lewis declares: It is the whole [purpose] of Christianity. Christianity offers nothing else at all. . . . It is so easy to get muddied about that. It is easy to think that the Church has a lot of different objects—education, building, missions, holding services. . . . The Church exists for nothing else but to draw men into Christ, to make them little Christs. If they are not doing that, all the cathedrals, clergy, missions, sermons, even the Bible itself, are simply a waste of time. God became Man for no other purpose.6

In other words, a church may receive high marks in a dozen different areas of its concern, but if its leaders are not notably talking about Christ—his life, example, and ministry—and accentuating on a regular basis the importance and process of “putting on Christ,” they have largely failed in their stewardship. Jesus invites us to make him the central focal point in our meetings and lessons. Teaching principles to others is much more meaningful when viewed in the context of a life, and Jesus has asked repeatedly that we focus our attention directly on him: “Come unto me,” “follow me,” “hear me,” “confess me,” “gather with me,” “remember me,” “seek me,” “believe on me,” “find me,” “live by me,” “know me,” “serve me,” “see me,” “receive me,” “love me,” “dwell in me,” “honour me,” “abide in me,” “ask me,” “testify of me,” and “be witnesses of me.”7 Jesus uses the phrase “follow me” more than fifteen times when speaking to different individuals and groups in the Four Gospels.

A church fulfilling its stewardship encourages and facilitates the process of ones becoming “born again.” But ultimately that process is more about our own personal relationship with Christ than with an institution. Jesus has assured disciples who seriously covenant to take his “divine nature” upon them: “I am with you alway[s],” “My peace I give unto you.” “[My Spirit] shall teach you all things . . . whatsoever I have said.” “And I will love [you], and will manifest myself to [you]” (Matthew 28:20; John 14:26–27; John 14:21). In short, Jesus is affirming that true followers will be “born again.” It is our diligence but especially God’s “gift” of enabling grace that empowers us to fully employ the characteristics of Christ—that increases desire beyond our natural abilities—that makes it possible for us to “overcome the world” (Ephesians 2:8; John 16:33).

THROUGH the centuries, many Christian church founders have come and gone. They have enticed us to embrace the beauty of their theological systems. But for Jesus, the gospel was not about theology or philosophy but about emulating the divine nature, about being born again, about doing and becoming like him. It was more about right actions than “right beliefs” (Matthew 7:21, 24; John 7:17). “The way” and the power of “overcoming the world” are clearly taught in Jesus’ life, example, ministry, promises, spiritual grace, and atonement—and that is enough.

NOTES
1. See, for example, Mosiah 27:25, 28; Alma 5:14; 49; 22:15; 36:5, 23.
3. The above four paragraphs on Jesus, Peter, and Paul are also found in Grant H. Palmer, The Incomparable Jesus (Salt Lake City: Kofford Books, 2005), 2–4, 9–10, 27–28.
4. 1 John 2:6, 29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 12, 18.
6. Ibid., 166, 169–70.
CAROL LYNN PEARSON is an author, poet, and playwright whose works include Goodbye, I Love You, Consider the Butterfly, Mother Wove the Morning, and My Turn on Earth. Pearson's discovery of the struggles of gay Mormons is a very personal one: she married a gay Mormon man. In a compelling autobiography, Goodbye, I Love You (Random House, 1986), she describes her experiences meeting Gerald at BYU, starting a family with him, and caring for him when he became sick with HIV/AIDS. Now Pearson revisits the struggles of Mormon families with gay and lesbian members through a new book, No More Goodbyes: Circling the Wagons around Our Gay Loved Ones, and a new play, Facing East.

In No More Goodbyes, Pearson lists suicide, divorce, and family rejection as three gay-related tragedies which, although preventable, continue to devastate the Mormon community. The book includes the voices of many Mormon families and individuals who “circled the wagons” by showing support and acceptance for their gay loved ones. In her play, Facing East, Pearson explores how the suicide of a gay man affects his Mormon family.

The following interview was conducted via email by SUNSTONE news director Hugo Olaiz in January 2007, shortly after the announcement that Facing East will go on tour to both the west and east coasts. To purchase Pearson's new books, visit www.nomoregoodbyes.com. A calendar for upcoming performances of Facing East in New York and San Francisco is available at www.planbtheatrecompany.org. An excerpt from No More Goodbyes was published in SUNSTONE, September 2006, 66-67.

In the foreword to your book, No More Goodbyes: Circling the Wagons around Our Gay Loved Ones, Robert Rees, a former bishop of a singles ward who often counseled with gay Mormons, calls the book a “clarion call to action.” Do you think the Mormon community is ready to accept the book’s message?

I think that many individuals within the Church are. This is so, clearly, for so many individuals and families, a hugely important and painful part of their experience that it is up on the table for examination, and it is not going to go away. Any significant change within any organization is always preceded by this person, that person, this other one making a shift in their own consciousness. Concepts of the “tipping point” or “critical mass” give me hope that on this subject, as well as others, when enough members of the Church are willing to talk about their gay loved ones and insist that we are not yet where we need to be in dealing with this, there will be some general movement forward.

There is a perception that in gay Mormon forums women’s voices are often absent; yet No More Goodbyes include several stories by or about lesbian Mormons. Was this a conscious decision?

Of course. My entire history of writing has been informed by my personal need to bring femaleness into the discussion. Many of my works demonstrate that. Luckily, several of the stories I included in the book just fell into my lap, such as the great story titled “Is She Still My Daughter?” which came to me through my brother in Sandy, Utah, whose home teaching companion is the father of a lesbian daughter. I had to put some effort into finding some of the others. And I still wish I had more. My experience has brought many more gay men than lesbian women into my life, and in terms of suicide and ill-fated marriages (which I emphasize in the book), there is a lot more pressure on men than on women in the Church, so naturally many of the most dramatic stories come from men. But I am glad I was able to find a number of good stories from women.

In a recent interview posted by LDS Public Affairs, Apostle Dallin H. Oaks and Seventy Lance B. Wickman refer to the “trap” parents fall into when they “become defensive” of gay children who “engage in sinful behavior.” How would you respond to that statement?

I feel sad when I see wedges developing between family members. I am choosing not to address “sinful behavior.” That is not my personal business to judge. But there are sins that I feel called upon to address. I feel that for families to turn their backs on their children is a sin. I feel that for voices of authority to encourage marriages that are clearly destined to fail is a sin. I feel that for a religious community to make gay people feel that they are the “other,” and to drive so many young men to suicide because they see no way out, is a sin.

Gay and lesbian Mormons who have seen family bonds severed are often suspicious when their parents make a phone call or offer other friendly gestures—they tend to think it’s a ruse to get them back into the Church. Do you think gays and lesbians can play a more positive role when parents and other relatives make friendly gestures?

Absolutely! This takes some self-confidence, of course. But to be big enough to “turn the other cheek,” to accept an extended olive leaf is a sign of strong character. The gay person certainly has the right to make clear what their expectations are for a possible relationship. Many of the most dramatic stories come from women. A gay friend once told me, “It’s not that I haven’t forgiven my parents for rejecting my partner—it’s just that I no longer have any interest in associating with them. Call me stubborn, but I am not going to create a fictitious life for their benefit. I will not prepare for that, every year, an alternative version of our Christmas card with my partner cropped out of the picture!” How would you respond to that?
Well, send them every year the same Christmas card with the same picture you send everyone else. Make sure you’re both smiling and make sure the message to them personally is one of sincere affection and good will. If it’s sent with confidence, some of that spirit will affect them, I think.

Your new play Facing East shows how the suicide of a gay young man affects his LDS family. Why did you decide to write about such a “hot button” issue?

The theatre is the perfect place to explore “hot button” issues. I didn’t go out looking for a “hot button” issue. I’ve lived with this issue for decades now. I’ve been outraged by the knowledge of the pain that being gay and religious brings. I’ve been haunted by the suicide attempt of my friend Brad Adams, whose story I tell in No More Goodbyes. When I found myself drawn to playwriting again, this issue emerged as an unavoidable one.

How was Facing East received in Salt Lake City?

There is no way the production and reception of Facing East in Salt Lake City could have gone any better. We had huge and positive publicity before the play opened, in the press, on radio and television, and we had excellent reviews. The Deseret Morning News theatre critic, Ivan Lincoln, made the play his number one pick in the category of drama for all the plays he saw in 2006 (tied with Hamlet at the Utah Shakespearean Festival). But the most thrilling thing was to watch the sold-out theatre fill up every night with people for whom this was not just a night out for entertainment. There were young kids in leather and with spiked hair and nose rings. There were middle-aged couples in their sacrament meeting clothing. There were a few elderly people in wheelchairs. I knew that every person who bought a ticket to Facing East was someone who had a story of their own, that somehow this subject had touched them, either intellectually or at a very, very deep level of experience and emotion. I’ve never been at a play—mine or anyone else’s—at which there was more riveted attention. And the responses that I received personally after every performance — the tearful gratitude from so many people for whom this was a red-letter event, an evening they would never forget and that for some was life-changing—made this one of the most rewarding experiences of my life.

Do you know if the relatives or partner of any gay Mormon who committed suicide saw the play?

I was approached by a couple of relatives of Stuart Matis who attended the play. They asked if it was based on his story. I told them no, that I certainly was aware of Stuarts story and that it proves again how huge the problem is. The events in Facing East are compiled from many experiences that have come to me.

The play is now going on tour. When and where is it going to be staged?

In Salt Lake again, the last two weeks of April. New York for an off-Broadway run at the end of May through June. San Francisco the month of August. (For specific dates and for tickets check WWW.PLANBTHEATRECOMPANY.ORG.)

In Facing East, Alex, the father, says, “Everyone deserves a shot at being in love.” Do you think that includes gay and lesbian people?

Of course. As my friend Bruce Bastian once said to me, “Heterosexuals need to realize that they don’t have the patent on falling in love.” This is one of life’s most remarkable experiences and needs to be honored.

One of the things that I liked the most about Facing East was the theme of being a pioneer. What does it mean for you to be a pioneer? How can a gay or lesbian Mormon be one?

Like it or not, we are pioneers on this frontier. Our choices are to sit down and refuse to move or to gratefully step out and make the journey. Where we are now is not an acceptable place: there is too much misunderstanding and unnecessary anguish. I think a gay or lesbian Mormon can be a powerful pioneer in terms of mapping your own journey and following your personal wisdom, while learning from the experiences of others. Don’t do the “gay thing” just because someone else says this is how gay people are. Develop a spiritual vision that is independent. Be brave enough even to carry in your handcart all of the good things you received from the Mormon community and teachings. Take only from religion and from society (even gay society) those things that resonate with the highest of who you really are. Make sure your pioneering directs you to places that are higher and clearer and kinder and more loving—of self and of all—than the places you are leaving behind.
HUNDREDS OF STORIES HAVE APPEARED IN NEWSPAPERS, TV shows, and blogs since LDS governor Mitt Romney announced his intention to run for president of the United States. But as media attention intensifies, it continues to focus more on the peculiarities of LDS history and belief than on Romney’s political views.

A recent Associated Press story gives a historical overview of Mormon polygamy, clarifying that the church abandoned the practice, but at the same time, the story spotlights Romney’s great-grandfather Miles Park Romney, who married his fifth wife six years after the 1890 Manifesto. According to the story, Romney’s wife Ann recently took a jab at Republican competitors John McCain and Rudy Giuliani as she introduced her husband at a Missouri GOP dinner. She said that the biggest difference between her husband and other candidates is that “he’s only had one wife.” McCain has been married twice and Giuliani three times.

Another potentially embarrassing LDS subject was explored by ABC reporter George Stephanopoulos, who asked Romney how Muslims might “perceive the Mormon belief that Jesus will return to the United States and reign personally here for a thousand years.” In a misleading response, Romney said: “Our belief is just like it says in the Bible: that the Messiah will come to Jerusalem, stand on the Mount of Olives, and that the Mount of Olives will be a place where there is the great gathering, and so forth. It’s the same as the other Christian traditions.” After the interview, Stephanopoulos appeared on ABC’s Good Morning America to set the record straight: “Actually, we checked in with a Mormon spokesman who said that’s not exactly true,” Stephanopoulos reported. “They believe the New Jerusalem is here in the United States, in Missouri, and that’s where Jesus is going to come.”

Because of doctrinal peculiarities such as this, evangelicals are divided on Romney. Many evangelicals are impressed by Romney’s pro-life, anti-gay marriage stance; supporters have even created a blog, EvangelicalsForRomney.ORG. Others dismiss Romney because they believe, with Pat Robertson and the Southern Baptist Convention, that Mormonism is a cult. “You, sir, you’re a pretender. You do not know the Lord. You’re a Mormon,” an unidentified man hollered at Romney during a recent Florida rally. When the audience began to boo the heckler, Romney replied, “Let me—let me offer just a thought, and that is, one of the great things about this great land is we have people of different faiths and different persuasions. And I’m convinced that the nation . . . does need to have people of different faiths, but we need to have a person of faith lead the country.”

Not surprisingly, Romney is counting on a Mormon base to support his campaign. Powerful industrialist Jon Huntsman, Sr., currently serving as a member of the Fifth Quorum of the Seventy, is one of nine heavy-hitters nationwide who will raise funds for Romney. In the solicitation letters he sends, Huntsman includes a disclaimer that he is not acting because of his church affiliation. “I don’t want to get involved in situations that would bring the LDS Church into play,” Huntsman told the Deseret Morning News.

However, Mormon support for Romney is not universal. Jason Roberts, a returned missionary from Lake Mills, Wisconsin, doesn’t think Romney would make a good president. Roberts created a website, MormonsAgainstRomney.ORG, which has received some 4,800 hits since January. “There are two reasons why we started this blog,” Roberts told Sunstone. “One is that we wanted to inform our LDS friends who might vote for Romney without looking at his background, to educate them and get them thinking a little differently. The other reason and audience we’re aiming for are non-LDS people who might be operating under the assumption that all LDS people vote and think the same way.”

In the midst of the media attention, the LDS Church has moved to dispel the notion that it officially backs Romney. In the Church’s online newsroom, officials posted a 380-word
SUNSTONE

statement affirming that the Church does not (1) endorse, promote, or oppose political parties, candidates, or platforms, (2) allow its church buildings, membership lists, or other resources to be used for partisan political purposes, (3) attempt to direct its members as to which candidate or party they should give their votes to, or (4) attempt to direct or dictate to a government leader. According to the document, the policy of not directing members to vote for certain candidates “applies whether or not a candidate for office is a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.”

ROMNEY'S MORMONISM HAS become a favorite theme for late-night comedians and cartoonists—especially in reference to polygamy. Comedian Conan O'Brien joked, “Apparently Romney is planning on winning the soccer mom vote by marrying all of them.” David Letterman showed a clip of Romney giving a speech with the word “MORMON” in big letters superimposed on the image. The shot then faded to a clip of President George W. Bush giving a speech while the second “M” disappeared and the remaining letters closed in to spell, “MORON.”

Cartoonist Dave Granlund of the Metro West Daily News published an illustration of a “Mormons for Romney” fundraiser in which an Amish-looking man, sitting at the phones with his seven wives, explains to a potential donor that “spouses can donate $2100. For example, in my case, it’s $14,700.”

GAY-RIGHTS GROUP PROTESTS AT BYU

A BUS LOADED WITH TWENTY-FIVE ACTIVISTS STOPPED in Utah on 20-22 March to protest Brigham Young University’s policies and its treatment of gay, lesbian, and transgendered students. Events included presentations along the Wasatch Front, a “Walls of Jericho” walk around the BYU campus, and a rally in Provo’s Kiwanis Park.

The event was organized by Soulforce, a group that fights gay discrimination through acts of civil disobedience and non-violent resistance. With stops scheduled at thirty-two Christian colleges and universities across the U.S., Soulforce’s Equality Ride includes four young men who come from an LDS background.

On 22 March, the protesters, together with relatives and supporters, walked for six consecutive hours around BYU's perimeter in a “Walls of Jericho” demonstration. In the most dramatic moment of the protest, Kourt Osborn, a transgendered young man who has been excommunicated from the Church, walked onto campus with his mother Karel Allen in defiance of police orders. Osborn and his mother were carrying a 55-page document listing concerns and grievances that current and former gay students have about BYU’s policies. BYU police officers dressed in plainclothes stopped them, escorted them into a white van, and cited them for trespassing.

“After months of attempted dialogue, it is clear that the administration at BYU does not respect this conversation and wishes to silence the issue and their students,” said Matthew Kulisch, a former BYU student and one of the Equality Riders. “We return because at this very moment, there are many lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered students suffering alone on campus, many of whom have reached out to us.”

In a panel discussion held at the Provo City Library, the activists were joined by Melissa Pomeroy and Lauren Jackson, two BYU students who identify as lesbians. “I feel like I’m all alone at BYU,” said Pomeroy. “There is no way for me to meet others like me, even just to talk, because everyone is so afraid of coming out.”

“If BYU wants celibate students, it has every right to demand that and to limit behavior,” said Jackson. “But the issue with the Honor Code is not about lifestyle, it’s about identity. Not being allowed to express an identity is very damaging.”

This year’s Equality Ride will include for the first time a stop at BYU-Idaho. Last year, a total of twenty-nine people were arrested by BYU police in similar demonstrations (SUNSTONE, April 2006, 76).
Media watch

DOCUMENTARY ON MORMONS TO AIR AT END OF APRIL

A FOUR-HOUR DOCUMENTARY IN TWO PARTS WILL AIR April 30 and May 1 on PBS. Filmmaker Helen Whitney spent three years making the film The Mormons, which will be the first co-production of two acclaimed PBS series, “American Experience” and “Frontline.” The first night’s segment will provide a historical account from the beginning of Mormonism to the Manifesto. The second half will address the contemporary church—its worldwide expansion, theology and ritual, and LDS involvement in political and social issues.

“Through this film, I hope to take the viewer inside one of the most compelling and misunderstood religions of our time,” says Whitney. She interviewed hundreds of subjects from President Gordon B. Hinckley to people who have become disillusioned with Mormonism. She traveled across the country and even sent a film crew to Ghana. “Mormons are everywhere, and I wanted to make that point,” Whitney told the Deseret Morning News. “There are more Mormons outside of America than in this country. And even within America, there are many Mormons outside of Utah. So only a small part of it was shot in Utah.”

An Emmy and Peabody Award winner, Whitney says the LDS Church has been “absolutely cooperative” with her project. For more information, visit HTTP://WWW.PBS.ORG/PREVIEWS/THEMORMONS. Whitney will be speaking about the film and her larger body of work at the 2007 Sunstone West Symposium in San Francisco, California, on 21 April.

MOUNTAIN MEADOWS MOVIE BOUND TO STIR CONTROVERSY

SEPTEMBER DAWN, A NEW FILM BASED ON EVENTS surrounding the Mountain Meadows Massacre, will soon be released to a theater near you—and the film’s trailer promises a treatment as controversial as the massacre itself. “I am the voice of God,” says a stern Brigham Young at the opening of the trailer, “and anyone who doesn’t like it will be hewn down.” If Brigham Young, played by Terence Stamp, comes across as cruel, Jon Voight’s portrayal of fictional local Mormon leader Jacob Samuelson is plain demonic. “Jehovah created me to be your God on earth!” he proclaims from a pulpit.

In a collage of images that combines sanctimonious sermons, secret temple ceremonies, ritual nudity, and a high dose of violence, the preview suggests that the massacre was concocted and concealed by Brigham Young and other Mormon leaders. “Who ordered the massacre and why has it been hidden in a cloak of secrecy and conspiracy” the trailer dramatically asks, “and the reputation of one of this nation’s mightiest religious figures has been preserved and protected . . . until now.”

“This is a horrific act—they murdered 140 men, women, and children and they did it in a vicious, violent way,” filmmaker Christopher Cain told The New York Times. “If you’re going to show that, I think you have to show what caused it. It’s not like somebody got excited one day and shot somebody. They bashed their heads with rocks.”

September Dawn will be released 4 May. The trailer can be viewed at WWW.SEPTEMBERDAWN.NET.

LDS WEBSITE REVAMPED

FEATURING AN IMAGE OF THE CHRISTUS ALMOST doubled in size, on 30 January 2007, the LDS Church unveiled a redesigned website at WWW.LDS.ORG. The site’s contents, which had previously been accessed via an ever-growing list on the left side of the home page, are now categorized into six channels that display “fly-out” menus.

The site’s Newsroom has also been completely redesigned. It now offers statistical information about the Church by country and identifies local media contacts.

According to an official statement, “Information is presented in a more easily digestible format to suit not only journalists but also other researchers and members of the public who are looking to find factual material on the Church quickly and easily. Materials are written in non-Church language that can be readily understood, and the site addresses topics that are commonly raised by these audiences.”

Additional improvements are in the works. LDS.ORG has just announced that the website will soon be available in nine languages: Chinese, French, German, Italian, Japanese,
Korean, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish. Materials in those languages are currently available only via regional or national sites. Materials will be added to the Gospel Library, containing manuals, magazines, and other official publications, in thirty-two additional languages.

The LDS Church unveiled its first website in December 1996. By March 1997, that site was receiving nearly 1.5 million “hits” (visits to individual pages) per month. According to Chief Information Officer Joel Dehlin, the Church’s websites today “service almost five million users per month with over forty million unique page views per month.”

NEW BOOK SAYS JOSEPH SMITH DESCENDS FROM JESUS

In an just-released illustrated book, Vern G. Swanson, a museum director in Springville, Utah, asserts that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene and that Joseph Smith is a direct descendant of that couple. Swanson says he wrote Dynasty of the Holy Grail: Mormonism’s Sacred Bloodline partly as a rebuttal to The Da Vinci Code, which Swanson claims is riddled with errors. “My book is the first one that really examines the Mormon position thoroughly . . . and is willing to raise new questions,” Swanson told The Salt Lake Tribune.

In a fashion similar to The Da Vinci Code, the new book includes references to paintings which provide clues to support the book’s overarching theory. One of the illustrations Swanson includes is a reproduction of Gustave Moreau’s La Licorne (The Unicorn), which depicts the mythological animal and a naked woman. Swanson interprets the woman in the painting as Mary Magdalene and the unicorn as a symbol of the tribe of Ephraim, which Swanson believes was Mary Magdalene’s bloodline. A Deseret Morning News story about the book hints that some LDS booksellers “have already found the art in the book controversial” and specifically mentions the Moreau nude as an item that has drawn complaints.

Swanson revisits statements by nineteenth-century Mormon leaders to the effect that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene and that early LDS leaders are direct descendants of that couple. Swanson also quotes from Harold D. Ethington’s diary, who as a missionary in 1963 visited with then-apostle Joseph Fielding Smith in an upper room of the Salt Lake Temple. During the visit, another missionary asked Elder Smith if Jesus was married. According to Ethington’s report: “Yes,” Smith replied, “to Mary Magdalene. But we don’t teach it.”

Church spokesperson Dale Bills told The Salt Lake Tribune that the idea that Jesus was married is not official LDS doctrine but declined to comment on the notion that Joseph Smith is Christ’s direct descendant.

Does this painting suggest Mary Magdalene’s connection to the tribe of Ephraim? Is the nudity it depicts too “controversial” for LDS book buyers?
People

Deceased. DONNA HILL, 85, on 29 January. Hill is best known for her acclaimed 1977 biography Joseph Smith, the First Mormon. Born in Salt Lake City, Hill received a MLS from Columbia and became a librarian at the Hunter College Library in New York City. In addition to her Joseph Smith biography, Hill wrote several fictional works, including Shipwreck Season, for which she received the Christopher Award in 1999.

Deceased. Activist in the ex-Mormon movement, KATHY WORTHINGTON, 56. During the 1999–2000 LDS drive against same-sex marriage in California, Worthington wrote articles criticizing the fundraising and volunteer recruiting efforts by Church leaders and began a campaign to help disillusioned Mormons resign their memberships. Worthington eventually created the instructional website MORMONNO MORE.COM, which guided hundreds through the process of having their names removed from Church rolls.

Appointed. PHILIP BARLOW, to the Leonard J. Arrington Chair of Mormon History and Culture at Utah State University. After obtaining a Ph.D. from Harvard in American religion, Barlow joined Hanover College in Indiana, where he taught courses in American religion, Christian history, and theology. A frequent contributor to Dialogue, SUNSTONE, and LDS conferences, Barlow is the author of Mormons and the Bible: The Place of the Latter-day Saints in American Religion (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991). The appointment makes Barlow the country’s first full-time professor of Mormon studies at a non-Mormon institution.

Nominated. BECKY L. SAVAGE, to serve in the First Presidency of the Community of Christ. If confirmed during the church’s 24–31 March World Conference, she will be the first woman to occupy such a high position. Formerly known as the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, the Community of Christ began to ordain women to the priesthood in 1984.

Freed. Former BYU student WILL VAN WAGENEN, nine days after being kidnapped in Iraq. Van Wagenen was volunteering with Christian Peacemaker Teams, a faith-based, violence-reduction group that sends trained peacekeepers into conflict areas. A Harvard Divinity School graduate, Will is the son of The Work and the Glory director Sterling Van Wagenen.

Released. From captivity, Elders AKANDE ADEBAYO EGUNJOBI, EMeka HENRY EKUFU, UCHENNA ANTHONY EZE, and HOPE AIBONI ISAIAH, after spending four days as hostages near Port Harcourt in Nigeria. In a press conference, Apostle Russell M. Ballard and Elder Quentin L. Cook told the media that local tribal leaders had been involved in helping secure the missionaries’ release. The sum of $810 was paid not as a ransom, Ballard said, but “to reimburse the expenses that those who were holding them hostage had incurred.” According to Ballard, the missionaries, all Nigerian nationals, had been treated well during their captivity and spent their time teaching the missionary discussions to their captors.

Resigned. D. KYLE SAMPSON, BYU alumnus and chief of staff to Attorney General Alberto Gonzales, in the midst of a scandal involving eight U.S. attorneys who had been fired by the Bush administration. Sampson’s emails, which suggest that the attorneys were hired and fired for political reasons, have triggered a constitutional showdown between the White House and Congress.

Cleared. For proxy temple work, the name of SIMON WIESENTHAL, renowned Nazi hunter and Holocaust survivor, who died last year in Vienna. This is the latest in a series of incidents in which Church members have prepared Jewish names for posthumous ordinances in violation of a 1995 agreement with several Jewish organizations, including a center named for Wiesenthal himself. “We are astounded and dismayed,” said the Simon Wiesenthal Center’s dean and founder, Rabbi Marvin Hier. “It is sacrilegious for the Mormon faith to desecrate [Wiesenthal’s] memory by suggesting that Jews on their own are not worthy enough to receive God’s eternal blessing.”

Turned. 100 years old on 9 January 2007, the LDS Church’s emeritus Presiding Patriarch ELDRED G. SMITH. A direct
BYU PROFESSORS ENVISIONED IRAQI WAR FAILURES

IN 2003, SIX BYU POLITICAL SCIENCE PROFESSORS published an editorial that warned of the potential pitfalls of waging war against Iraq. Four years later, their predictions have proven true.

“Establishing democracy in Iraq is a worthy goal, but is war the best way to achieve it?” Donna Lee Bowen, Byron Daynes, Gary Bryner, Darren Hawkins, Eric Hyer, and Wade Jacoby asked in a 23 January 2003 Deseret News editorial. “A weak government replacing Saddam’s regime might invite civil war and widespread human suffering, while a strong government could replicate the current tyranny. In most cases, democracy must grow gradually from within. Outsiders can help, but they cannot impose democracy.”

Among other predictions, the professors correctly warned that American forces could become targets of terrorism and that many nations would deem the U.S. invasion unjustified.

According to a 26 January 2007 story in the Deseret Morning News, the professors remain frustrated because many dismissed their opinions as unpatriotic or politically motivated.

“People just said, ‘Well, professors are liberal. Even BYU has liberal professors. They’re just contrarians,’” Hyer told the News. “What strikes us was that Congress was uncritical; even the New York Times was uncritical.”

“So was the rest of the media and the populace,” Donna Lee Bowen added. “The anti voices were silenced.”

SUPPORT FOR IRAQ WAR DROPPING AMONG UTAH’S MORMONS

POLLING FROM THE PAST SEVERAL YEARS HAS SHOWN Latter-day Saints to be among President Bush’s strongest supporters regarding the war in Iraq. So it was surprising when a January 2007 Salt Lake Tribune survey revealed a 21 percent drop (from 63 to 44 percent) among Utah’s Mormons in support for Bush’s handling of the war in just the past five months.

The Tribune story on the poll results sought possible answers for this abrupt drop, something pollsters claim is “un-common . . . unless ‘spooked’ by something.” The story quotes Church spokesperson Mark Tuttle to the effect that there has been “no additional statement, clarification, changed policy or announcement” on the war, and that the Church has no official position on the war.

The story suggests several events might have caused the drop, ranging from President Hinckley’s 31 October BYU address that, without mentioning Iraq, lamented “the terrible cost of war” to negative reports on Iraq from prominent Mormon politicians such as Utah’s governor Jon Huntsman and Senators Harry Reid (D-Nevada) and Gordon Smith (R-Oregon). It also quotes Guy Murray of the Messenger and Advocate blog, who senses that it “has become less socially perilous for Mormons to express ‘alternative’ opinions about Iraq. Especially . . . as ‘the church has gone out of its way to stress political neutrality.”
MENTAL LAZINESS IS the vice of men, especially with reference to divine things. Men seem to think that because inspiration and revelation are factors in connection with the things of God, therefore the pain and stress of mental effort are not required; that by some means these elements act somewhat as Elijah’s ravens and feed us without effort on our part. To escape this effort, this mental stress to know the things that are, men raise all too readily the ancient bar—“Thus far shalt thou come, but no farther.”

Man cannot hope to understand the things of God, they plead, or penetrate those things which he has left shrouded in mystery. “Be thou content with the simple faith that accepts without question. To believe, and accept the ordinances, and then live the moral law will doubtless bring men unto salvation; why then should man strive and trouble himself to understand? Much study is still a weariness of the flesh.” So men reason; and just now it is much in fashion to laud “the simple faith;” which is content to believe without understanding, or even without much effort to understand. And doubtless many good people regard this course as indicative of reverence—this plea in bar of effort—“thus far and no farther”.

I MAINTAIN that “simple faith”—which is so often ignorant and simpering acquiescence and not faith at all—but simple faith taken at its highest value, which is faith without understanding of the thing believed, is not equal to intelligent faith, the faith that is the gift of God, supplemented by earnest endeavor to find through prayerful thought and research a rational ground for faith—for acceptance of truth; and hence the duty of striving for a rational faith in which the intellect as well as the heart—the feeling—has a place and is a factor.

But to resume: This plea in bar of effort to find out the things that are, is as convenient for the priest as it is for the people. The people of “simple faith,” who never question, are so much easier led, and so much more pleasant every way—they give their teachers so little trouble. People who question because they want to know, and who ask adult questions that call for adult answers, disturb the ease of the priests. The people who question are usually the people who think—barring chronic questioners and cranks, of course—and thinkers are troublesome, unless the instructors who lead them are thinkers also; and thought, eternal, restless thought, that keeps out upon the frontiers of discovery, is as much a weariness to the slothful, as it is a joy to the alert and active and noble minded. Therefore one must not be surprised if now and again he finds those among religious teachers who give encouragement to mental laziness under the pretense of “reverence,” praise “simple faith” because they themselves, forsooth, would avoid the stress of thought and investigation that would be necessary in order to hold their place as leaders of a thinking people.

SURELY in the presence of [the] array of incentives, instructions and commandments to seek for knowledge, taken from the revelations and other forms of instruction by the Prophet of the New Dispensation—taking into account also the scope of the field of knowledge we are both persuaded and commanded to enter—whatever position other churches and their religious teachers may take, the Church of Jesus Christ in the New Dispensation can do no other than to stand for mental activity and earnest effort to come to a knowledge of truth up to the very limit of man’s capacity to find it, and the goodness and wisdom of God to reveal it.
TIRED of the wait between SUNSTONE issues? Want to connect with friends between symposiums?

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FROM RECENT DISCUSSIONS:

Conforming Thoughts and Behaviors (Authentically)
ELISE EGGETT JOHNSON, 25 February

I’ve met several people who do a beautiful job of balancing their individuality with their religious community. Sunday School teachers who are able to deliver a heartfelt, personal lesson without propagating ideas that they disagree with. Women who participate in all salvation ordinances except for those that cause them to feel inferior to men. Couples who attend an LDS service one Sunday and another service the next Sunday so they can participate fully in both of their faith traditions. I’ve heard such individuals accused of picking and choosing from something that was meant to be consumed in its entirety. I disagree, and greatly admire their ability to authentically merge their individual beliefs and ideas with their community’s culture, teachings, and expectations. I want to do a little bit better at that myself.

Who Needs Truth?
STEPHEN CARTER, 8 March

Many Mormons I know are quite certain that their religion is a logical religion, that it has a preponderance of empirical evidence to prove its truth. So when Mormons run across convincing evidence that goes contrary to the Church’s claims, they find themselves in a difficult position. The loyalty to truth that Mormons taught them insists that they follow the evidence. . . . But here, two people decide that what they feel is much more important than what they thought was true in an empirical sense. As they put it, “Our decision is bigger than our ego and our reasoning. It feels ‘delicious’ and so, so right.” I admire these two people. They followed something that was delicious to them. How many people in our modern, duty-bound world can claim that?

The Limits of Language
JANA REMY, 17 March

When I was younger, the phrase “burning in the bosom” always made me giggle. I mean, it was hard to say the word ‘bosom’ without thinking of large-breasted great aunts with names like “Deloris.” As I got older and realized the difficulty of using language to describe my own spiritual experiences into words, I could see why Joseph Smith used this somewhat-stilted phrase. . . . Do you ever grapple with this desire to express your spiritual experiences? Do you ever find yourself yearning for a universal language of the Spirit? . . . What accounts of spiritual manifestations have you found where the authors are able to translate their experiences effectively into language?

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NEW FROM GREG KOFFORD BOOKS

Modern Polygamy and Mormon Fundamentalism: The Generations after the Manifesto
by Brian C. Hales
Survey history of Mormon Fundamentalists since polygamy’s official discontinuation in 1904. This book examines the previously unexplored period of the practice of plural marriage between 1904 and 1934, investigating the assertion that many plural marriages were solemnized under claims of a new priesthood line of authority asserted by a man named Lorin Woolley. It also focuses on modern-day polygamists many of whom accepted Woolley’s teachings and authority creating many of the fundamentalist organizations during those years after the Manifesto. The Allreds, the FLDS Church in Texas and on the Utah-Arizona border, the Kingstons, the LeBarons, the TLC Church in Manti, Utah, and other splinter groups are all scrutinized in this study. Regardless of ones beliefs regarding Joseph Smith and plural marriage, this historical and doctrinal volume will provide interesting reading and enlightenment.
ISBN 1-58958-035-0 Hardback 530 pages $32.95

A House for the Most High: The Story of the Original Nauvoo Temple
by Matthew McBride
Chronologically documents the behind-the-scenes stories of the common people involved in the sacrifice to erect the second Mormon temple. First-hand accounts are drawn from diaries, journals, and letters. The prologue of this book discusses briefly the early temple building efforts of the fledgling Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the development of temple-related doctrines during the decade prior to the Nauvoo era, and the arrival of the Saints in Illinois in 1839. The body of the history covers the years 1840, when the temple was first contemplated, to 1850, when its walls were toppled by a tornado. An epilogue completes the story by recounting the story of the repurchase of the temple lot by the Church in 1937, the lot’s excavation in 1962, and the announcement that the temple would be rebuilt. Also included is an appendix containing important eyewitness descriptions of the temple and a bibliography of major sources.
ISBN 1-58958-016-8 Hardback 448 pages $39.95

On the Road with Joseph Smith
by Richard Lyman Bushman
Bushman’s personal account of the events surrounding the publication of his great work, Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling.
HONEST JON  by Jonathan David Clark

“...and for those of you who did not bear their testimonies-you can now email them to us at IWussedout.com.”