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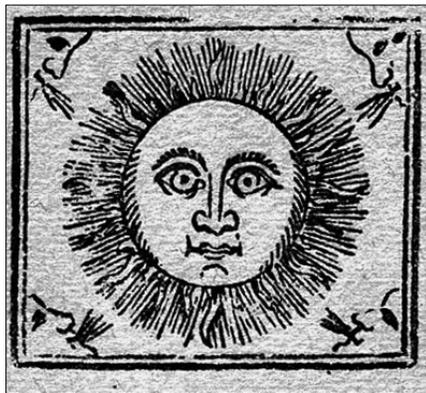
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APPRECIATING BLOOM

FOR MY WIFE MERRIAM AND ME, THE March 2007 SUNSTONE evoked more than the usual nostalgia: Curt Bench ("More Faith Than I'd Thought") was one of the precocious members of the BYU student branch we were associated with in the 1970s. Brad and Cherie Woodworth, both Russian majors, met in our language classes. I envy their now having such an illustrious neighbor, Harold Bloom, in New Haven. Bloom's thought—idiosyncratic yet most distinguished—comprises a school of criticism all its own. His insights about Shakespeare alone in *The Anxiety of Influence* and *Shakespeare: the Invention of the Human* would suffice to earn him such a deserved scholarly reputation.

Coincidentally, during our graduate years at Yale, Merriam and I frequently observed through the window of our second floor rental a rather corpulent young gentleman sprawled in a chaise lounge on an adjacent balcony, surrounded by both drinks and stacks of books. We may have exchanged greetings at least once during the three-year period we were neighbors, but of course I could not foresee that this Harold Bloom would soon emerge as one of the most original and renowned critics of literature and religious culture.

I well remember Bloom's hallmark lecture on Joseph Smith a decade or so later at the University of Utah's Kingsbury Hall. My former professors and colleagues seemed primed to enjoy Bloom's anticipated scoffing at Mormonism's founder, but Bloom didn't do that. That lecture and two laudatory chapters on Mormon theology in his *The American Religion* must have similarly dismayed a number of others. Bloom's adjective—"audacious"—and his bafflement at the correspondences between LDS scripture and what in Joseph Smith's day was not yet elucidated regarding Kabbala still ring in my ears.

Already in *The American Religion*, Bloom expresses his disdain for the LDS Church as an institution. Nor should we expect him to fully fathom what he considers lost since the days of our earlier modern prophets. Yet, upon encountering in his SUNSTONE essay a parallel between "the ancient Hebrew procedure" and Joseph Smith's accomplishment in turning "a religion into a people" (page 19), I could not help being reminded that this transformation is what our full-time mission-

aries still almost daily experience with convert members. I was reminded also of the affinities that arise in LDS temples. I'm grateful for Bloom's mention of this parallel and its reminder to me of the exceptional, at times even ecstatic, concord and sense of community that—largely according to our own spirit and attitude—we still encounter among fellow Saints on Sundays and at other times.

Too often we devalue the familiar Church "procedures" that give rise to such community. Yet the citation in the same SUNSTONE issue of William W. Phelps's inspired "If You Could Hie to Kolob" (in the cover article, "Transfiguration") and of Brian Chapman's fair comment (in his sermon, "A True and Living Church")—"The burden of making the Church true and living does not just fall on President Hinckley. It falls on all of us"—further substantiate what, for all his erudition, Bloom could not possibly appreciate or understand.

For all that, Bloom serves—though perhaps unwittingly, together with Jan Shippy, Rodney Stark, and a few others—as a latter-day Colonel Kane, appreciatively (though with critical tools fully functioning) translating Mormonism for a wider world. Witness his final words in the recent PBS documentary, *The Mormons*: "Of all religions that I know, the one that most vehemently and persistently defies and denies the reality of death is the original Mormonism of the prophet, seer and revelator, Joseph Smith." Or consider this surprising reference in Bloom's preface to *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*: "[Shakespeare] has become a Scripture, not to be read as many of us read the Bible or the Koran or Joseph Smith's Doctrine and Covenants, but also not to be read as we read Cervantes or Dickens or Walt Whitman."

TOM ROGERS
Bountiful, Utah

ENJOYING FROM AFAR

IT'S BEEN A MORE THAN A YEAR SINCE I first read a copy of SUNSTONE magazine (the December 2005 issue with the somewhat Cubist portrait of Joseph Smith on the cover) in the Community of Christ Library in Independence, Missouri. And it's been a little less than a year since I started my overseas, online subscription which has allowed me to read issues electronically and thus save postage and perhaps a tree or two. I very

much enjoy my subscription and how it helps me keep up with what my “Mormon cousins” are thinking about church history, theology, science, and the arts.

One article in the March 2007 issue which really struck a chord with me was Curt Bench’s “More Faith Than I’d Thought.” Bench describes to his readers what he feels are the most important aspects of his faith: hope, intelligent inquiry (aided by lots of good books), family, friends, and being open to the Spirit wherever and whenever he finds it. I am grateful for his article because it reminded me so much of my own experience as a teenage, bibliophile convert in the RLDS Kirtland Stake—debating with my LDS contemporaries in high school or at 6 a.m. seminary classes, talking with missionaries at the local Mormon ward, and taking friends to services at the Kirtland Temple. The older I get, the more I seem to return to the things that were important to me when I was young. Thank you for such a fine article and publication. I look forward to every issue.

BRYAN R. MONTE
Zeist, The Netherlands

NO SUBSTITUTE

THANK YOU FOR THE ARTICLES by Harold Bloom and Curt Bench in the March 2007 SUNSTONE. They more than made up for the nonsensical gabbliness of the anonymous authors who found parallels and complements between Mormonism and Transhumanism. At the invitation of the article, and thinking there had to be something to it for SUNSTONE to give it fifteen precious pages, I checked out what is available on the Internet, but without any satisfaction. The organization the anonyms claim to have created is as mysterious as the identity of the authors.

My conclusion as to the worth of the article came after considering each of the following three explanations: (a) someone or some small group is pulling our leg and is highly amused at the credulity of those who take them seriously; (b) they are trying to be a second L. Ron Hubbard and wish to exploit us; or (c) they are sincerely fascinated by both technology and eschatology but have such superficial knowledge of both that they think they have found a new wisdom.

The notion behind Transhumanism, if it be taken seriously, is not new. It is another proposal for the conquest of nature. Its impracticality as a solution to

the challenges of mortality, and its danger to the fundamental principle of freedom of conscience and the values of a society built upon that freedom, have been well explored by C.S. Lewis in *The Abolition of Man*. Lewis points out that the ultimate conquest of nature is the conquest of man, for it will be humans, not technology, who do the conquering. Those who direct the conquest gain control over others, the ultimate success being the destruction of freedom of conscience and free will (in Mormon terms, “free agency”) and the values that make life worthwhile—now and eternally—for those who attempt to live by them.

Some parallels and complements can be found between Mormonism and many other theologies, philosophies, and even self-help systems, for, as Ecclesiastes says, “There is nothing new under the sun.” But that does not make any of them either the same as the gospel or its equal or a substitute for it.

SAMUEL L. HOLMES
Lafayette, California

Lincoln Cannon, president of the Mormon Transhumanist Association, responds:

MY THANKS TO SAMUEL HOLMES for his response to the article written

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JEANNETTE ATWOOD

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article, Transhumanists generally trace their origins to secular humanism. But religious humanism (a description that suits some influential interpretations of Mormon theology) and other ideological influences should also be recognized. On the other hand, Transhumanism does provide some new extensions to ancient perspectives—or, Transhumanism was created through a reorganization of eternal element, so to speak.

Regarding #3: The authors agree that some interpretations of Transhumanism are oppressive. For example, a few Transhumanists think ethics can be enforced through technological means. However, that thought presents a serious problem: morality can be enforced, if at all, only within the context of the enforcer's moral understanding, which may itself be immoral. For this and other reasons, most Transhumanists value diversity and liberty, as expressed in the Transhumanist Declaration and Mormon Transhumanist Affirmation. Technology can and will be used for both good and evil.

With foresight, we can mitigate the evil.

Regarding #4: The authors heartily agree that Transhumanism is not a substitute for the gospel of Christ. As expressed in the article, Mormonism complements Transhumanism. The most important complement is Mormonism's high esteem for charity. Power (whether understood in technological terms or otherwise) without charity is dangerous, at best. Our desire to influence Transhumanists toward charitable positions is among the reasons we established the Mormon Transhumanist Association.

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By Levi S. Peterson
Illustrations by Micah Clegg

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FROM THE EDITOR

NAMASTE

By Dan Wotherspoon

*God speaks to each of us as he makes us,
Then walks with us silently out of the night.*

These are the words we dimly hear:

*You, sent out beyond your recall,
Go to the limits of your longing.
Embody me.*

*Flare up like flame
And make big shadows that I can move in.*

*Let everything happen to you: beauty and
terror.*

*Just keep going. No feeling is final.
Don't let yourself lose me.*

*Nearby is the country we call life.
You will know it by its seriousness.*

Give me your hand.

—RAINER MARIA RILKE¹

I HAVE BENEFITED FROM a wonderful cross-fertilization of ideas these past few months working with Phil McLemore to ready his “Yoga of Christ” article for publication (begins page 30) while at the same time preparing lessons for my Gospel Doctrine class and making my way through several books in my own reading pile. In Phil’s article and these books, I find reminders of our own innate divinity, a divinity that is obscured by life’s cares and by our attachments to things in a world which, though serious, is only a temporary home, a place for us to pass through long enough to regain the secret of who we really are. These ideas have begun to affect my vision in exciting ways.

In my Sunday School teaching, this understanding of who we truly are has helped me rediscover the power of the Gospel of John’s Gnostic-flavored storyline, in which the Light shines in the darkness with the intent of gathering the scattered pieces of Itself. Which of these sparks of divinity will see past the distractions of physical water, bread, history, and lineage, recognizing them simply as shadows of the brightness they once knew and were part of? Which of these wandering sheep will still recognize the voice of the shepherd? Which branches will abide in the vine, bearing the fruits of joy and manifesting God in the world? Which will be shadows in

which the Light can move and perform miracles? Also, Phil’s analysis of the prodigal son is the best I’ve ever encountered: a son takes his inheritance (his divine nature) into the world, is distracted by its enticements, but eventually “comes to himself,” realizes who and what he was when he lived in his father’s house, returns and is greeted as the royalty that he still is—now, even more so because of the understanding he has gained through his journey. The father offers this same reception to his other lost son, who is so distracted by duty and self-righteousness that he, like his brother before his adventure, doesn’t recognize his own divine nature, doesn’t realize that he must make a similar pilgrimage.

This growing sense of the holiness—wholeness—in myself and others has been fed further through my reading of Krista Tippett’s *Speaking of Faith*, a book of reflections about her experiences and the insights gained from the past six years as host of the wonderful NPR radio show of the same name.² Though I’ve been aware of Rilke’s poetry for some time, the poem above really only came to my attention as the epigraph to Tippett’s book. More than that, this book, in which Tippett discusses the memorable people and ideas she has been blessed to interact with in what she calls her “life of conversation,” shares many details of her life path. That path includes wandering from faith to doubt to cynicism and despair, then to faith regained, even while experiencing the trauma of divorce and battling chronic depression. Her book has reminded me of the strength that is vulnerability, the true courage that is the core of all of us and can be rediscovered only through struggle and temporary forgetfulness.

Another book I read in the past few months (and which came to my attention when the author was a guest on Tippett’s show), Rachel Naomi Remen’s *My Grandfather’s Blessings*, even more directly addresses the divinity that is all of us.³ Remen is a physician who gave up her pediatric practice to focus on the spiritual and psychological needs of those who, like her, are dealing with chronic illness. She shares with readers the legacy she received from her grandfather, an Orthodox rabbi who embraced Kabbalistic

teachings about the scattered spark of divinity in everything and chose to “bless” everything he encountered. In the book’s introduction, she reflects on the Hindu greeting, “Namaste,” and the strengthening that occurs in both parties when this spark is honored:

On meeting even a total stranger, one bows and says Namaste: I see the divine spark in you. Here we are too often fooled by someone’s appearance, their age or illness or anger or meanness or just too busy to recognize that there is in everyone a place of goodness and integrity, no matter how deeply buried. We are too hurried or distracted to stop and bear witness to it. When we recognize the spark of God in others, we blow on it with our attention and strengthen it, no matter how deeply it has been buried or for how long. When we bless someone, we touch the unborn goodness in them and wish it well. . . . A blessing is about our relationship to the spark of God in one another. (5)

I N my interactions with others these past months, I’ve begun to notice the fruits of trying to remember to see and acknowledge the holy in them. Tippett quotes Virginia Mollencott, from a conversation on the *Speaking of Faith* radio program, as saying that we should always seek to speak “from the holy in ourselves to the holy in the other” (192). This phrase has proven to be a powerful mantra for me, coming with greater regularity to the fore of my consciousness during times of frustration. It has helped me be more patient in interactions with my less-than-favorite people, and those people in turn have responded in ways that have led me to reconsider my own contributions to the strain between us.

Remen writes of the magic that flows when we bless rather than curse another:

A blessing is a moment of meeting, a certain kind of relationship in which both people involved remember and acknowledge their true nature and worth, and strengthen what is whole in one another. By making a place for wholeness within our relationships, we offer others the opportunity to be whole without shame and become a place of refuge from everything in them and around them that is not genuine. We enable people to remember who they are. (6)

While the effects of these blessing moments are empowering to the other, I've appreciated even more the blessing that has come to me as well in the form of greater patience with and acceptance of myself. Recently I've been meditating on why particular people and attitudes bother me more than others do. I can see that the people I feel edgy around have many friends, and they seem as generally lovable as any of us—so what is it about them that makes me a bit crazy at times? I have ultimately come to realize that in most cases, these persons drive me bananas because they are actually quite a bit like me. We are stubborn in many of the same ways, too often timid in moments where boldness would be a big help, more effective at talking and analyzing than actually putting our theories into practice. This realization smacked me especially hard as I analyzed my reactions to certain dogmatic types in my present and past wards. "Dan—he/she

by winning and losing matches. Mike was just born strong. Strong and wild. Dad loved his spunky son, the son who fought back—who, even as a toddler, threatened to "beat your brains to the moon."

Mike still says and does what he wants while I remain censured by the fear of disappointing our parents. And though I've adopted my father's two great loves—wrestling and writing—I've never caught his eye with either. But Dad swells with wet-eyed pride over his younger, feistier son who's out driving Hummers in Iraq while I sit here guzzling soda at the keyboard.⁴

This realization that those who frustrate me the most are often those in whom I see myself has allowed me to let go of the huge burden of expectation and judgment. Just like me, I have come to realize that they are

Her eyelids flickered for a second, she gave a long, tired breath, and she said very quietly, "History records, dear, that you will do quite well."

Chittister expounds on Sister Theophane's insight:

The fact is that history records that we all really do quite well, however we do. Transitions complete us. We ripen. We learn. We hurt. We survive one thing after another. And we go on, whatever the odds against us. Then in the end, we gain what we came to get—a kind of well-worn, hard-won wisdom. One way or another life batters us until we get the unavoidable. Sometimes we get it with glory; sometimes we get it in disgrace. Whatever the circumstances, the problem is that we all too seldom bother to stop and notice how much we have become in the process.⁵

THE EVENTS AND LESSONS THAT BRING us to the point where we "come to ourselves" and realize our divinity will differ, but life is designed to work its magic and turn us toward our true home.

is you! You were once that certain about things! You were once the one who had it all figured out and were more than ready to share your wisdom at every possible chance!"

In his SUNSTONE article about Jacob's wrestle with the angel and the many side dramas in the stories of Jacob, Esau, Isaac, and Rebekah, Rick Jepson shares an intensely personal connection with the story that he has given me permission to tell again here. In a footnote prompted by the comment that "we don't always like seeing our reflections," Rick writes that he only recently realized that his obsession with the story arises largely from an (up til then) unconscious recognition of his own kinship with Jacob—the son who, though much more like Isaac than his brother Esau was, "couldn't buy or steal [his father's esteem], despite his efforts."

My own mild father . . . seemed always frustrated with me, with my boyhood shyness and sensitivity. But not with my brother Michael, who came three years later. I've become a strong man. But, like my father, I had to develop that strength

on a journey. Our stories may be different in specifics but not in their arc. As Phil McLemore's article suggests, we are all prodigals and elder brothers—each of us is clothed in ego, the story and shield we unconsciously create and work hard to maintain as a buffer to our sense of vulnerability that comes with being human and living in a chaotic, ever-changing world. The events and lessons that bring us to the point where we "come to ourselves" and realize our divinity will differ, but life is designed to work its magic and turn us toward our true home.

In her book, *Called to Question*, Joan Chittister, a Benedictine nun whose thought and writing I also first encountered through Tippet's radio show, tells the story of how she first came to consider that this fact might be true.

Sister Theophane, one of Chittister's primary mentors, fell deathly ill. Following her collapse, Sister Theophane tells a desperate Chittister, "I'm going now, Joan."

"But Sister," Chittister pleads, "you can't go. . . . What about me!"

Chittister continues:

FOR me to imagine the people who frustrate me as forever stuck in the same place they are now requires that I imagine the same of myself—something I can't do. Life continually shows me otherwise. The question then becomes whether I will move past simply letting go of my judgment and irritation and seek also to bless them and receive their blessing in return? Remen writes:

Our blessings become even more powerful as we grow older. They have survived the buffeting of our experience. We may have traveled a long, hard road to the place where we can remember once again who we are. That we have traveled and remembered gives hope to those we bless. Perhaps in time they too can remember this place beyond competition and struggle, this place where we belong to one another. (6)

And speaking in the context of her own chronic illness and life's work as a wounded healer, Remen writes of the blessings she receives from an acceptance of her own vulnerability that has been enabled by her encounters with others:

I realized that many of the ways I had changed myself had made me smaller and in some ways weaker. Parts of myself that I had judged and hidden for years were welcomed and even needed by those who were dying. I felt the life in me

blessed by such people; felt it expand to become its real size and shape and power, unashamed. . . .

When people are blessed they discover that their lives matter, that there is something in them worthy of blessing. And when you bless others, you may discover this same thing is true about yourself. (6–7)

No, I've decided it isn't enough simply to make peace with aggravating others because they are me. Through this realization, my burdens feel lightened, yes, but only in a cut-and-run sort of way. One piece of prevailing wisdom says that once we've moved past a particularly difficult challenge, we should put it in our rearview mirror and drive away from it with all speed. As Remen writes of this path, "Life might be easier then but far less genuine" (27). No, we must go deeper *into* those things we struggle with, not away from them. We must learn to love even those parts of ourselves that frustrate us. They are the points of vulnerability through which we are able to truly come to ourselves; they are the ground as well as counterbalance to those places and ways in which we soar.

AMONG the many spiritual experiences I've had my life, two—coming more than twenty years apart—stand out. Each came in response to deep despair over opportunities wasted, progress stalled. In both, my father met me with arms wide open, with robe, ring, and shoes. I was perfect, he told me in no uncertain terms. My journey was perfect. Where I thought I was lost, I truly was found.

I find it interesting that even after experiences such as these, I must continually relearn this most basic truth. Thankfully, I want to keep at it, to keep learning "Namaste"—how to honor the holy in others and myself. I'm quite certain it's actually the only lesson we're here to learn. ☺

NOTES

1. Rainer Maria Rilke, *Rilke's Book of Hours: Love Poems to God*, Anita Barrow and Joanna Macy, trans. (New York: Riverhead Trade, 1997).

2. Krista Tippett, *Speaking of Faith* (New York: Viking, 2007). Tippett's radio show airs weekly on most NPR stations. A downloadable podcast of each week's show is available through the show's website: <http://speakingoffaith.publicradio.org>.

3. Rachel Naomi Remen, M.D., *My Grandfather's Blessings: Stories of Strength, Refuge, and Belonging* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2002).

4. Rick Jepson, "Godwrestling: Physicality, Conflict, and Redemption in Mormon Doctrine," *SUNSTONE*, November 2005, 30.

5. Joan Chittister, *Called to Question: A Spiritual Memoir* (Lanham, MD: Sheed & Ward, 2004), 57–58.

TOUCHSTONES: CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS



WE'VE BEEN PLEASED at reader response to the TOUCHSTONES section that we began running in December 2005. Unfortunately, we haven't yet received enough submissions for either of our next two topics to run a TOUCHSTONES in this issue. If you've been thinking about "THE WARD" or "FAMILY DINNER" but have been thinking it's too late to submit it,

please send it to us right away! We'd also very much like your suggestions for future topics!

TOUCHSTONES is inspired by "Readers Write," a very popular feature in *The SUN* magazine. TOUCHSTONES topics are intentionally broad in order to give room for personal expression and creative approaches. Writing style is not as important as is 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. Send electronic submissions via email to TOUCHSTONES editor Allen Hill at: ALLEN@SUNSTONEONLINE.COM. Submissions should be kept somewhere around 400 words, but we are willing to make exceptions for exceptional pieces.

SAMPLE TOUCHSTONES REFLECTIONS ON THE TOPIC: "GRACE"

When I was twelve, I was boy-crazy. Sometimes I even kissed boys in the halls at school. Enjoying the power that the promise of such kisses held. Imagining myself a winsome beauty. Relishing the whispers of girls who gossiped about such things. Knowing that I was the center of scandal.

When I was thirteen and was diagnosed with bone cancer, I started to feel guilty about my boy-craziness. When someone suggested that my cancer was God's way of punishing me for kissing boys during my lunch hour, I believed them. I knew I was supposed to wait for such things until I was sixteen or until I was engaged to a good Mormon boy. Maybe God knew that the only way for me to ever end up worthy for the temple was to make me so sick that I no longer thought about boys.

Now, with that temple marriage behind me and more than twenty years since my diagnosis, I still wonder why I got cancer. But I have given up believing that my cancer was God's doing. He and I have talked about that. And I now know that it was as hard on him as it was on me.

—JANA BOUCK REMY

My missionary companion and I had ordered some gyoza in what was a small, dark, considerably less-than-two-star cafe in Yamagata, Japan. He suggested we say grace, so we bowed our heads slightly and I said a quick but typical Mormon food thing: ". . . and bless this food to nourish and strengthen our bodies."

About a minute later, a cat slunk across the dirt floor with a rat weakly squirming in its jaws. Cats with rats are not entirely unusual in Japan, so we chuckled and turned back to our appointment book. A few minutes later, I went to use the restroom and happened to glance into the kitchen where I saw the cook filleting the rat into our gyoza.

We got the heck out of there. I wonder, if we'd stayed, whether God would have graced us with the nourishment and strengthening of our bodies.

—D. JEFF BURTON



CORNUCOPIA

SUNSTONE invites short musings: chatty reports, cultural trend sightings, theological meditations. All lovely things of good report, please share them. Send to: <editor@sunstoneonline.com>

Blogwatch

The following reflection was posted 5 April 2007 to the LDS-themed blog, "By Common Consent." It was written as a guest contribution by Joanna Benson and is reprinted here with the author's permission. Benson graduated from BYU with a degree in elementary education and taught school in the early grades for several years. She now resides with her husband Mike and five children in the south-eastern United States.

DNA MORMONS?

MAYBE, LIKE US, YOU ARE A PROUD DESCENDANT of Mormon pioneers, confident in your knowledge of your Western European heritage, a typical DNA Mormon-American. Are you ready for a big surprise? We weren't!

All my life I knew certain things to be true: the gospel for one, and that my Mormon pioneer ancestors are British and Danish with a little bit of French. The first of my family lines joined the Church in 1832, and all my ancestors were in Utah by the start of the American Civil War. My family stayed in Utah, and I am a proud Utah native.

I married a man whose family lines are also Mormon pioneer. Mike's people joined the Church in 1831 and were in Utah by 1873. His ancestors are British, Swiss, with a little bit of German. We met and married at BYU.

After graduating, we immediately moved to the South. Often people would ask us if we were from Louisiana or were Jewish, Arabic, or Mediterranean. We would say confidently that we weren't but instead are proud descendants of Mormon pioneers, who were British, Danish, Swiss, and a bit of German and French.

We kept up this mantra until we began to question the ancestral origins of Mike's coarse, curly hair and dark complexion he inherited from his father. Although it would never occur to us in Utah, decades of living in the South have alerted us to the issue of someone "passing" as white.

We decided to get DNA testing. The test would show where our ancestors had been living in the last five hundred years. We could compare what was on our genealogy charts to what was in our DNA. Mike took the test first. The process in a nut-

shell: fork out \$170, swab the inside of your mouth with a big Q-tip from a DNA kit, and overnight the kit back to the lab. Mike's results came back in a week via email. We were certain the results would show British, Swiss, a little bit of German, and possibly a little bit of Amerindian and African.

Shock and total disbelief. I did not believe it at first, and Mike still isn't convinced. I even called the company to complain that they had switched the test with someone else. After all, I argued, the man is from Idaho. No, they assured me, this is your husband in terms of the likelihood that he has ancestors who lived in the populations listed in the report.

Tanjore Kallar (Tamil Nadu, India) 26.6
 Oraon (Chotanagpur Plateau, India) 6.4
 Iran 3.8
 Flemish (Belgium) 3.6
 Venda (South Africa) 3.5
 Northern Portugal 3.0
 Piemonte, Italy 2.7
 Brahmin (Bihar, India) 2.6
 Bhumihar Brahmin (Bihar, India) 2.5
 Sudan 2.2
 Guinea-Bissau 2.2
 Kurdish (Northern Iraq) 2.1
 Uyghur (Xinjiang, Chinese Turkistan) 2.1
 Dundee, Scotland 2.1
 Pakistan 2.1
 Kirgiz (Xinjiang, Chinese Turkistan) 2.1
 Piedmont, Italy 2.0
 Turkey 2.0
 Nigeria 1.9
 Calabria, Italy 1.8
 Mongolian 0.8
 Mestizo (European Amerindian mix) 0.5
 Salish 0.4

Perplexed, I took a look at Mike's Swiss line on FamilySearch.org. Non-Swiss names like Kohli, Dubi, Mani, Zagli, and Wasseem were in abundance. So much for Mike being Swiss in the way we had thought. Other research led me to understand that thousands of East Indians had immigrated to Europe starting in the early 1600's.

Next it was my turn. My results came back in a week. Again, shock, but this time belief:

Podlasie, Northeast Poland 18.6
 El-Mina, Egypt 12.6
 Northern Ireland 6.4
 Iran 5.7

Sweden 5.5
 Eastern Mediterranean Region, Turkey 5.0
 Turkey 4.9
 Finland 4.3
 Lodz, Poland 4.0
 Flemish 3.9
 Poland 3.8
 Afghanistan 3.7
 Bavaria, Germany 3.6
 Northern Greece 3.3
 Toscana, Italy 3.2
 Afghanistan (different region) 3.2

Austria 3.1
 Piemonte, Italy 3.0
 Russia 2.9
 Finland (different region) 2.8
 Mestizo (European Amerindian mix) 1.3
 South African 0.9
 Mongolian .3
 West African .2

This was fun! I concluded I don't have to be buttoned down anymore as I'm not all that British. I get to be Slavic, Mediterranean, Middle Eastern, Protestant Irish, with a whole lot of Scandinavian. And heck, Mike is barely western European.

All-seeing eye

THE FUNNY SIDE OF BEING GOD



IT TAKES A VILLAGE TO RUN A UNIVERSE.

(Left to right) Jesse/Jesus, Lucy/Lucifer, Mr. Deity, and Larry

“Let me go over the lists,” replies Larry. “Holocausts, torture, Down Syndrome. . . . Those three alone make it kind of hard to believe in you.”

Other episodes, now numbering ten, contain reflections on everything from the logic of the crucifixion as opposed to Mr. Deity's simply forgiving everyone, to Mr. Deity's supposed involvement in the outcome of sporting events and confusion over what various commandments mean.

Only one *Mr. Deity* episode contains an explicit reference to Mormonism. In Episode 9, Mr. Deity complains that people have mischaracterized him because of things written in the Bible. And to make matters worse, Bible publishers don't even pay him royalties when copies are sold!

“At least you don't come across the way you do in the Mormon book,” Larry consoles him.

“Don't get me started with that, please!” Mr. Deity explodes. “Do I look like the kind of person who would punish people by darkening their skin? What kind of punishment is that? . . . I like a good tan!”

In various interviews linked to the *Mr. Deity* website, Dalton describes himself as “a formerly religious person (non-bitter),” who has “great sympathies for the beliefs and feelings of religious people.” Of the *Mr. Deity* series, he says the goal isn't “to mock religion, but to use it as a foundation for the humor.” He promises in future episodes “to turn the tables a bit and poke fun at what I call the ‘angry atheists’ (of whom I am not fond).”

At age nineteen, Dalton was in the Missionary Training Center in Provo, Utah, preparing for an LDS mission when he was given the chance to sign a recording contract. He dropped out of the mission to tour as part of the duo, “Brian and Paul,” promoting their album of religious music.

Get in tune with Mr. Deity at WWW.MRDEITY.COM.

HOLOCAUSTS? TORTURE? DOWN SYNDROME? The human tendency to blame misfortunes on an angry or vindictive God is skewered in *Mr. Deity*, a series of comedic clips created by filmmaker and self-described “Formon” (former Mormon) Brian Keith Dalton.

Containing occasional adult humor and situations, the clips, which are huge hits on video-sharing sites such as YouTube, portray a very down-to-earth but often overwhelmed Mr. Deity engaged in mundane activities such as answering his cell phone, doing business with his ex-girlfriend Lucy (Lucifer), and arguing with his personal assistant Larry or his friend Jesse (Jesus).

In Episode One, Larry suggests to an exhausted Mr. Deity, at the end of the sixth day of creation, that he could safely remove earthquakes, floods, and tsunamis from the list of tragedies set to come into the newly created world. But Mr. Deity insists, “If we take [them] out, it's going to be way too easy for people to believe in me.”

I gave myself a quick review of world history. It seems that the world is like a giant mixmaster with wars, slavery, and revolutions. But this time, I could see *my* people in the mixer. The British Empire moved other nationalities to England until it was a diverse society. I learned about the early Christian churches in the Middle East and Egypt and those who left to find refuge in Europe. I found that along with our western European American forefathers, Italians and others were in America much, much earlier than the Ellis Island period. The industrial revolution attracted many peoples (such as the Polish) to leave their impoverished countries to work in the giant, grimy industrial centers of England, which also contributed to the genetic puree we are a part of.

Then it hit me. When the Lord said, “every nation, kindred, tongue and people,” He really meant it. In all those vast, great world events, God put in His hand and plucked our ancestors out of their diverse homelands. Now we have found them hidden in ourselves. I am honored to be part of that promise. I am gratified that the pioneers who crossed the plains and came to Utah were not just western Europeans, but all peoples. It was God who hid our kindred dead from the natural-man prejudices of the average nineteenth-century American (Mormons included).

The time has come to reveal the great gathering within myself. I gladly step out of the small dark box of Eurocentrism and into the big tent of humanity where the real party is going on. I know that I have been led to find them. I can see their dear faces lightly imprinted not only on my face but also on the faces of my loved ones. The gift I have been given is one of love and a shared identity with all of God’s children. Now when I meet someone of another nationality, I can truly think, perhaps you are my cousin. And that, my friends, is a wonderful gift.

The Rest of the Story

ELIAS AND ELIJAH

ON 3 APRIL 1836, JOSEPH SMITH AND OLIVER Cowdery witnessed a series of visions in the newly dedicated Kirtland Temple. Following a vision in which Moses appears and transfers keys to the latter-day gathering, a new vision opens and a personage Joseph identifies as Elias appears, committing the keys of the dispensation of Abraham. This vision is followed by the appearance of the Old Testament prophet Elijah, who commits the “keys of this dispensation.” In this vision series, Elias and Elijah are clearly understood to be two distinct individuals.

Most New Testament readers recognize the name “Elias” as the Greek form of “Elijah” (LDS Bible Dictionary, “Elias,” definition 1). For example, Luke records this allusion to Elijah by Jesus: “[M]any widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land” (Luke 4:25; 1 Kings 17:9). Every time Elias is used in the New Testament, it refers to Elijah, the prophet of Israel taken up into heaven. In addition, many scholars also identify Elijah, along with Moses, another

prophet who was taken up to heaven without tasting death, as the two witnesses who will preach in the streets of Jerusalem before the return of Jesus Christ (Revelation 11:3-12; note especially verse 6 identifying the two witnesses as Elijah and Moses).

Given the clear identification of Elias in the New Testament as the Old Testament prophet Elijah, why is there so much confusion among Latter-day Saints about this personage?

I see three primary reasons. First, in D&C 27:7, in a verse absent from the original manuscript of the revelation but appearing beginning with the 1835 Book of Commandments, Elias is identified with the angel Gabriel, who appeared to the father of John the Baptist.

Additional confusion arises from Joseph Smith’s reworking of Mark 9:3, the appearance of Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration (see my discussion of this in the March 2007 SUNSTONE, 15). In this passage, Joseph identifies the two personages who appear to Jesus, Peter, James, and John not as Elias (Elijah) and Moses, but “John the Baptist and Moses” (JST Mark 9:3).

Finally, in March 1844, Joseph dedicated an entire discourse to expounding the differences between the calling of Elias and that of Elijah. “For while the spirit of Elias is a fore-runner,” according to Joseph, “the power of Elijah is sufficient to make our calling & election sure” (Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon Cook, *The Words of Joseph Smith*, 330). In this discourse, Joseph speaks of Elias not as an individual but rather as a role: anyone who prepares the way for greater priesthood restoration, much in the way John the Baptist functioned in this dispensation as an Elias in preparing the way for Peter, James, and John to confer the Melchizedek Priesthood on Joseph and Oliver.

So what do we make of the vision of Joseph and Oliver in the Kirtland Temple describing Elias and Elijah as two different individuals? Perhaps a previously unknown biblical prophet, whom Joseph Smith identifies as Elias, a representative from the dispensation of Abraham, did appear to them. Or perhaps, as is the case with the vision of the celestial kingdom given to Joseph Smith on 21 January 1836, there was some initial confusion about who each visitor was. As recorded in Joseph’s diary for that date, Joseph reports of that vision that “[t]he heavens were opened upon us and I beheld the celestial Kingdom of God . . . I saw father Adam and Abraham and Michael and my father and mother, my brother Alvin” (Journal entry for 21 January 1836, in Dean C. Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 175). The words “and Michael” were deleted when the vision was published by Brigham Young in the *Documentary History of the Church*, since Joseph Smith later taught that Michael and Adam are the same individual (D&C 27:11). The edited version was later canonized as section 137 of the Doctrine and Covenants.

In weighing the evidence, I think it is wisest to conclude that Latter-day Saints err when they understand Elias as a separate individual from Elijah. Instead, Elias should be understood in two ways: as the New Testament name for Elijah and as a theological construct describing someone whose “mission

Mormon Media Image

THE “MOPE”



*Stephen Colbert urges Mormons to install
Boyd K. Packer as “the Mope.”*

ONLY DAYS AFTER SUGGESTING THAT AMERICANS WOULD have to breed like “polygamist Mormon squirrels” in order to close the population gap between the U.S. and China, Comedy Central’s Stephen Colbert decided to have some more fun with the Mormons—two shows in a row.

In the 12 April *Colbert Report*, a satirical news show in which its host assumes an air of punditry as a primary vehicle for humor, Colbert chastises LDS Senator Harry Reid for quoting Pope Benedict XVI from the senate’s floor in a speech questioning the war in Iraq. “Senator Reid, stop using the Holy Father to bash our Holy War. . . . He isn’t even *your* Holy Father—he’s *mine*. I’m a Catholic; you’re a Mormon.”

“You have your own infallible leader,” Colbert continued, “Boyd K. Packer, President of the Mormon Church: The Mormon Pope—The Mope.”

On the next show, airing 16 April, Colbert sort of rectifies his misstatement that Packer is the President of the Church: “He is

the current Acting President of the Council of Twelve Apostles of the Mormon Church,” explains Colbert. “That would make him something like a Mormon Cardinal . . . or Mardinal.”

“Apparently the real Mope is Gordon B Hinckley. Got the job in 1995, but he can’t be doing all that great of a job if I don’t know who he is. So time for Hinckley to go! See, rather than retract my statement misidentifying Boyd K. Packer, I’m calling on the Mormon Church to issue a correction by making Boyd K. Packer the Mope. . . . And make Packer’s Mopeship effective as of last Thursday.”

“That shouldn’t be a problem for you Mormons,” Colbert concludes. “If you can retroactively baptize George Washington, you can retroactively make me look right!”

it was to commit keys and powers to men in this final dispensation” (see Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 221).

BRIAN H. STUY
Lehi, Utah

A Place for Every Truth“A VERY UNWELCOME
ASSIGNMENT”

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.”

ACCORDING TO THE 24 SEPTEMBER 1890 “Manifesto” issued by President Wilford Woodruff, the Church would no longer sanction the practice of plural marriage. However, instances of plural marriages being solemnized persisted, causing President Joseph F. Smith to

issue the “Second Manifesto” on 6 April 1904. The Reed Smoot Hearings of 1905–07 highlighted the difficulties for the Church if plural marriages continued to be solemnized or advocated. Two members of the Quorum of the Twelve, Matthias Cowley and John W. Taylor, were subsequently dropped from the Quorum for urging that the Saints continue living “the principle.”

By 1924, Church authorities unanimously discouraged the practice of plural marriage. And when individuals continued the practice, they were excommunicated by the Church.

In his journal entry for Thursday, 10 January 1924, Elder James E. Talmage of the Quorum of the Twelve recorded the following:

Attended council meeting in the Temple. . . . Today I was made the subject of a very unwelcome appointment, that of representing the Twelve in assisting stake presidencies and other officers in the Church in dealing with cases of alleged transgression, particularly with respect to claims persistently made that plural marriage is still sanctioned by the Church. As this appointment may lead to rather important developments I include in the journal a copy of the resolution, signed by Elder Joseph Fielding Smith, who is the secretary of the Council of the Twelve.

The resolution reads:

At a meeting of the Council of the Twelve Apostles held Thursday, January 10, 1924, in the Salt Lake Temple, the following action was taken:

Elder Stephen L. Richards offered the following motion:

That it be the sense of the Council that brother James E. Talmage be selected to act under the direction of President Rudger Clawson as the representative of the Council in giving aid to Stake Presidents and High Councils in the investigation and trial of alleged offenses and offenders against the marriage laws and the moral discipline of the Church and matters immediately relating thereto, it being understood that it is the desire of the Council that the stakes and local jurisdictions shall assume responsibility for bringing offenders in such matters to trial and justice.

The motion was seconded by Brother Joseph Fielding Smith, and after a brief discussion was unanimously adopted.

TALMAGE CONSIDERED THIS an odious assignment. Yet, as with all of his dealings as a member of the Twelve, he took the task seriously and acted quickly.

Two days after receiving the assignment, Talmage was involved in the case of Lorin C. Woolley, who was circulating literature advocating the practice of plural marriage. As a sign of protest, Woolley did not attend his disciplinary council. Talmage notes in his journal:

[A]ccording to the evidence presented, [Woolley] has persistently given out and declared that President Heber J. Grant and others of the General Authorities (including myself, according to one witness) have violated the rule of the Church against plural marriage and have taken wives during the recent past.

The notice of Woolley's excommunication was printed in the *Deseret News* of 16 January 1924. A notable figure in Utah at the time, Woolley was a relation of two future Church leaders, J. Reuben Clark and Spencer W. Kimball.

A second high-profile individual excommunicated for the practice of plural marriage was Alma Dayer LeBaron, more commonly known as A.D. LeBaron. Talmage wrote:

[A]ssociated with his name are those of his wife and of the other woman in the case. It is reported that A.D. LeBaron obtained a divorce through the District Court here in Salt Lake City by fraudulent representations, and that he and his wife treated the divorce as of no effect in separating them. The case is a grievous one.

A.D. LeBaron is the father of Joel and Ervil LeBaron, who started the Church of the Firstborn and radically advocated the practice of plural marriage.

In his 2 April 1924 journal entry, Talmage opines: "In the special work assigned to me I have many painful experiences. In spite of all that has been said and done, there is a clique still busily engaged in propagating the falsity that plural marriage is yet countenanced by the Church."

Talmage's appointment to this role lasted only until the end of 1924, when he was called to head the European Mission. During these few months, however, he was very thorough in this unwelcome assignment. To this day, seventy-four years since he died (in 1933), Talmage is still ill-regarded among those who continue to practice plural marriage.

MITT ROMNEY'S UNDERWEAR

a prose poem by JOANNA BROOKS

The world will clamor, gape, and stare to see Mitt Romney's underwear. Mark my words: they will find a way to mock our Edenic Missouri, our Mexican colonies, and our golden plates, too. Mormon millionaires in insulated skyscrapers do not know. They pledge that our industry is irresistible, our destiny sure. They smile while in Washington their lawyer sons-in-law devise broad permissions for torture.

Whoever mocked the underwear of George Romney, Vietnam War opponent, advocate of Civil Rights? Whoever mocked the underwear of Harry Reid, Nevada Democrat? When did Harry Reid ever pander patriarchy to Pat Robertson? When did George Romney ever mug for prime time cameras and call his wife "a hot babe"?

When our people sidle up to the Religious Right, I remember that good conservative Christians hold our sacred garments aloft in their stadium churches, that they picket our conferences, that Pat Robertson calls us a cult.

I remember the silken chrysalis my mother stepped into each morning, the way I learned to see the human form: the body a promise of becoming. I remember the holiness my grandmother hugged about her loins for the first time at age seventy-five, how strong she said it made her feel. I remember the sacred we slipped around her brittle bones before we lowered them into the waiting ground.

I remember all that we have stripped away—our poets, our scholars, our feminists, our gays and lesbians—for the prospect of passing as good conservative Christians. Mark my words: they will tear off our clothes just to adumbrate our weirdness. They will never love our garments—knowing, lovely, modest, queer.



The Sugar Beet

“All the Mormon News That’s Fit to Print”

Not many people know this, but just after the War in Heaven, a smaller scrimmage took place between those who would choose to buy *The Mormon Tabernacle Enquirer* (find it at ZARAHEMLABOOKS.COM or AMAZON.COM) during mortality, and those who wouldn't. According to some studies, those who chose to buy the book were smarter, more beautiful, and twenty-four times more likely to enjoy a fulfilling sex life than those who didn't.

A VOICE OF WARNING TO ALL CHILDREN'S BOOK READERS

by *The Sugar Beet* Editorial Staff

IN A RECENT ISSUE OF *THE FRIEND*, SOME OF THE book reviews contained this caveat: “Occasionally, characters who are not members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints will drink coffee or tea. Selections where this occurs are marked with an asterisk (*).”

After recovering from our shock, we at *The Sugar Beet* decided that it was only right that we provide further instances of Word of Wisdom breakage in children's literature in order to provide admonition to the families of Zion.

After exhaustive research, we have found that occasionally badgers who are not members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints will drink coffee or tea. And in the case of Russell Hoban's *Frances* series, these badgers will even let their innocent children save their coins in the empty coffee cans (see *A Baby Sister for Frances*). We warn our readers that exposing their children to such portrayals may confuse the children into connecting provident living with filthy habits.

Further, in each of the *Frances* books, the father is seen with a corn cob pipe in his mouth. As we all know, Doctrine and Covenants section 89 clearly states that corn is for the ox, not the *badger*. If parents choose to read *Frances* books to their children, they should be prepared to clear up any misconceptions the child may develop about who should be eating what.

Similar violations of the Word of Wisdom crop up in *Sylvester and the Magic Pebble* by William Steig. Again, the father in the book often has a tobacco pipe sticking out of his mouth. Though he seems to be an upstanding citizen and conscientious parent, we cannot overlook the fact that tobacco is for bruises and sick cattle only, not donkeys.

Sadly, we must also report that Dr. Seuss, who now runs a Book of Mormon study group in the Spirit World with C.S. Lewis (in whose books tea and brandy run rampant), must be handled carefully by the righteous parent.

In *The Sneetches*, the sneetches with stars upon thars are

shown participating in a summer evening's weenie roast. Parents should be prepared to insist either that the weenies are made of tofu, or else teach their children that meat is only to be eaten in times of winter and famine. Remind them that the elders' quorum never sponsors summer barbecues, and that those who are caught eating meat during the summer are immediately stripped of their temple recommend.

Views from the pews

WHAT DID YOU THINK OF THE PBS FILM ON THE CHURCH?

It really strengthened my testimony to learn that the Book of Mormon and the book of Exodus are supported by exactly the same amount of archeological evidence!

You could just see the prejudice: not a word about BYU football, and not a mention of how the refs are out to get us.

If I watched it, does that count as my October General Conference viewing requirement?

We have black members?

A couple of times I thought I was feeling the Spirit, but then I realized that was impossible.

It would have been SO much more faith-promoting if they'd just let the Church produce it.

You mean to tell me, after Katrina, that we helped non-Mormons in New Orleans?

Frankly, I think we dodged a bullet: hardly a mention of Godbeites!

I hope to see some of that bizarre artwork start showing up in the Ensign.

Just looking at his beard, you could tell there was something fishy about that Will Bagley guy.

Hey, my ancestor was at Mountain Meadows, and the immigrants shot first.

Technically, the word should be “polygyny.”



2007 Eugene England Personal Essay Contest Second Place Winner

LOVING A KILLER WHALE

By Joanie Ellis Tidwell

EVERY DAY IT IS THE SAME: THE morning of mourning. His arousal slow and aching. And again I am torn, like always, between love and this nagging sense of obligation. Some days I want to ignore the curse of responsibility and grab him up with the speed of seven years of love, worry, and heartache and climb back into bed, safe under the comfort of an old quilt. But I don't. Instead I tell him we still go to school even when our stomachs hurt. Even when our throats hurt, even when we don't have friends, the sound of the bell makes us jump, the chairs are too hard, the days too long, and the pencils too thin. This is what we do, I say.

We pile into the car, me regretting the hard line I feel forced to take, Alex regretting the moment he turned six and school became a full-day event. On the way, we pass all those parents walking their kids to school, pass all those rows of seamless houses with manicured yards, each rock perfectly in place. Not our house—our gravel has spilled onto the sidewalks, tiny pebbles to stick in the crevices of shoes and slow down roller skates. We drive with his list of ailments growing. I force myself to accelerate, gripping the steering wheel until my hands turn white. We lurch through the intersection just as the light turns yellow. We have arrived.

The side I picked to drop him off is wrong. We go to the front, where he jumps out hastily, dragging on his backpack as he goes. I pull away from him quickly, the way you pull off a band-aid fast because it doesn't hurt as much. But today, it still stings. I drive faster, willing my tears to stay in their ducts, to



never form and race down my face. I can hear my breath sprinting from my lungs, gasping; I hold it in, my cheeks bursting against the pressure. Then slowly, I let go. The air pushed out steadily, lips pursed like in Lamaze. All this emotion for this child, this first-born son, sometimes I think I will crumble from the sheer force of it. And driving home, with my two other boys happy and unaware in the backseat, I pray, "Please Heavenly Father, watch over Alex when I can't."

ALEX WAS BORN perfect. He was a beautiful baby with a mop of blond hair and huge blue eyes the color of exotic butterfly wings. He had a smile so brilliant you couldn't look at it directly. His laugh was infectious, and he was the greatest source of sunshine and joy in our lives. Alex was born after we had lost our first baby twenty weeks into my pregnancy. I think because of the searing ache I had felt when we lost our first child, I was reluctant to attach to Alex while I was pregnant with him. And throughout the long nine months of his gestation, I always expected something to go wrong. I didn't let myself believe I would be a mother; it was too soul-baring, too risky to bask in the luxury of envisioning him, wondering how he would feel held against my heart. Like a robot, I prepared for his arrival. I diligently read essential books, watched Discovery Health channel until I could quote the scripts verbatim, and tied a quilt with soft blue yarn. Yet still I kept my feelings locked inside, too scared to risk my heart again.

Even with all the facts I had filed in my brain, and all the onesies and sleepers I had packed in his drawers. Even with all the blessings I had received with hands resting heavily on my head. Even with prayers, and endless trips to the temple, our faith stretching like taffy, I wasn't prepared. I remember well the moment the carefully created wall I had constructed came crashing down. I was in labor. I was grouchy, hungry, and wor-

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ried, my faith seeping through me, my hope a rock. I lay in the hospital bed, somewhat detached from the whole process. At one point, a nurse came to check me and announce my progress. "You're a 9," she said, and with her hand still resting on my belly added, "Wow, your baby has a lot of hair." My breath caught, and I squeezed my eyes tight and turned my face into the pillow. My son had hair! I don't know why exactly, but her announcement somehow made Alex tangible to me. At once, this growing mass of cells became my child. He had hair. And if he had hair, he must have hands and toes, and eyes and a heartbeat. In that instant, all my fears melted into a sudden resolution: I needed to hold my son. And as the nurses busied themselves preparing me for the birth of my child, I kept my eyes closed, thinking of the picture hanging on the wall in the nursery. The picture my mom had given me after we lost our first child—Noah on the ark, stretching his arm towards the dove hovering just out of reach. And in the middle of the print the words, "God keeps his promises." Alex was born almost before the doctor could get there, and with his arrival, my dream of motherhood was fulfilled. God had given us a son. Russ cut the cord, and as I clutched Alex to my chest, I yelled for Russ to get the camera! I needed to document the moment, so later I could analyze every detail, memorize each grain of color making up the picture.

The nurse took him to weigh and monitor his breathing. I knew they were administering Apgars, and suddenly I was like some overachieving, soccer mom, agonizing over what his score would be. I hope he gets at least a seven, I thought. After announcing his weight, 7 pounds, 11 ounces, a kind nurse cleaned me up and put a fresh gown on me. This one had nursing slits and tiny pink flowers. Another nurse wrapped Alex in warm blankets, bound like a little burrito, and handed me my son. He was beautiful! He seemed so calm, with those big dark eyes peering at me, like a wise old man. After a few minutes of holding him, I gave Alex back to Russ. I knew we could keep him with us for a while longer before the nurses took him away, but I was so overwhelmed with exhaustion, I could hardly keep my eyes open. I think I hadn't slept well in nine months. Completely drained, I was asleep before Russ even shut the door.

IT IS FALL in the desert. Seven and a half years since Alex's birth. The temperature has dropped below 100 today. I think it's 99. The air holds no hint of change in seasons, no fall leaves to abandon their roots and float away on scented breezes. No bite in the air. But still it is October, and soon I will have to buy pumpkins and sort out who will be what for Halloween.

October. It's hard to believe it has been one year since Alex was diagnosed. One year since we sat in the sterile room, with Alex sprawled lazily on a gray beanbag chair, while Russ and I sat rigid and guilty, as if we'd been called to the principal's office. I remember praying fervently for answers, but really I wanted solutions. I wanted my son to be healed. Earlier that morning, I had knelt in faded pajama pants, leaning into the hotel bed like death, a sleeping child resting near my feet. I

took extra time to get ready, agonizing over what I would wear, making sure my hair was done and my makeup perfect. Unconsciously I thought that if the doctor saw we were nicely dressed, professional people, maybe he wouldn't blame us for Alex's condition. Both of us have backgrounds in behavioral science, so I understood "bad parenting" wasn't the cause of Alex's problems, but there had been too many years of avoiding eye contact with other mothers in sacrament meeting, too many hasty exits from play lands, and too many awkward, whispered conversations about discipline during Primary and what worked well for the mother of the little girl with pink ribbons in her hair. That, and I knew Autism Spectrum Disorders had a genetic component. So in the end, I guess, we were bad parents after all. Our good intentions obliterated, betrayed by our own genes.

After the doctor gave Alex a battery of tests, and I filled out paper work until my hand cramped and nervously answered questions in a detailed interview, the doctor confirmed our suspicions. Alex had Asperger Syndrome, a condition falling in the pervasive developmental disorders in the Autism Spectrum range. Pervasive, Russ said later, means it is part of his brain: he would not outgrow this; rather, it would grow with him.

"What does this mean?" I'd blurted to the doctor after he pronounced his diagnosis like a proud king. And he said something to the effect of Alex's brain being sort of like Swiss cheese. Some areas were dense and highly developed, such as his vocabulary, rote memory, and reading comprehension, while other areas were holes—his gross and fine motor skills, his social skills. Swiss cheese. I think I thought of a mouse sniffing at Alex while he slept.

We had waited for months for this appointment with a renowned specialist; I'd had weeks to think of questions to ask, but sitting there, numb, nodding and smiling in my perfect coral lipstick, I couldn't think of anything to say. We left with a list of books we should buy and a prescription for Alex to begin occupational therapy. As I was leaving, I paused in the door jamb of the waiting room and said, "It's just so hard to see him going through this. He's only six." The doctor answered with the sternness of a hardened war general who has seen too many casualties: "You think it's sad now? Kids are accepting at six; wait until he turns thirteen." And that's when the last shred of hope for healing and wish for normalcy, dangling like a strained bungee cord, snapped. And I found myself hurling towards the ground at warp speed.

On the ground is where I resided for some time. Oh, I think everyone thought I was taking the news in stride. After all, I was always putting a reassuring hand on other people's backs, promising that I was fine. Really, we were being blessed; after all, we had caught this very early, and could do a lot of behavior modification, and blah blah blah. Without an election, I became Alex's advocate. I photocopied articles, informed teachers, requested IEP meetings, and hired a therapist. We shielded, adjusted, and tailored our lives to fit his needs. As if he were an epileptic, we watched him like a hawk, waiting for the euphoric signs that something was going to set him off—off into a fit of irrational anxiety or rage.

The rigidity of his behavior didn't really change with diagnosis; our day-to-day activities weren't any different. By now, we were accustomed to dealing with Alex; we had been doing it for years. However, with diagnosis, I was left with a voracious appetite to know everything about Asperger syndrome—causes, treatments, and alternative treatments. And I think it was with the overload of information, and so many possibilities of sadness, that the reality of painful and lonely outcomes hit me. One night my despair reached a pinnacle point. I couldn't sleep, and as midnight approached, I found myself scanning a support website for adults with Asperger syndrome. I sat frozen, the single source of light from the computer screen illuminating the room and bouncing off the shadows. *Adults!* In that moment, I could physically feel the blow, the wind knocked out of me, the cold understanding of forever startling, the reality of "pervasive" sinking in. In the next instant, I found myself shattered, crumpled like Humpty Dumpty, my faith spilled like egg whites on the floor. Fragmented, I lay with no hope of being put back together again.

And unlike when I was pregnant with Alex and didn't allow myself to attach to him, now I was connected, in every sense. I loved this little boy! Needing some concrete evidence of my perceptions, I left the computer and sat alone on the living room floor, the eerie silence of night deafening, the dark minutes ticking by. Consumed with sudden grief, I sat surrounded by piles of pictures stacked in Rubbermaid boxes and lined up around me like little caskets. Intermittently sobbing and then lapsing into silence, I sat sorting through the pictures like some mad, deranged woman. Russ found me at four in the morning, clutching a pile of photos to my chest, mourning the little boy I'd always envisioned, the little boy who might never be, those beautiful blue eyes, that quick, easy, four-month-old smile. Sweet, sweet baby boy.

I think on that lonely night, the only thing I knew how to do was disconnect. *Distraught*, I found myself reaching into my soul, groping for all those tumbled-down bricks once belonging to a long-ago-obliterated wall I had built around my heart in the early days of pregnancy with Alex. Finding them, I sighed and began stirring my metaphorical mortar, stacking each brick, robotically assembling, comforted by the familiarity of that long-forgotten coping mechanism. Reinforced, as I thought I was, with a shield placed at my most vulnerable point, I knew I could face the morning. And blessedly, the light did come, wrapped in soft pinks with gauzy clouds stretched across the sky, masking the color of day. With time, I learned

that nights always turn into days. Our family continues to get up and get dressed. As the stars disappeared, I'd throw my wadded tissues away and start cracking eggs. My boys needed breakfast, striped shirts to wear, and lunch tickets to hold.

*Distraught,
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HOWEVER ABNORMAL OUR lives may have been, our daily schedules were predictable. Alex was a boy who craved routine like candy. As another condition of his condition, Alex possessed a narrow range of interests he tended to obsess about. Even as young as one, he was hooked on Elmo, on diggers at two, Bob the Builder at three, dinosaurs at four, Thomas the Tank Engine at five. His most recent and longest running obsession was sea creatures, starting at six. We lived only a few hours from the ocean, and Alex loved to go to Sea World or climb along the rocks near the water. Together we'd search the shallow tide pools for lingering animals, trapped and clawing at the sandstone like mad, searching for escape from their empty, lonely seas. Alex was never happier than when he got to indulge in his obsessions. His appetite for information was insatiable! And as he learned about this underwater world of coral, sea cucumbers, and wavy mysterious anemones, so did I. We'd lie together in bed at night, talking about crustaceans and sea stars that magically grew back arms if one broke off, Alex's eyes shining in the darkness.

Given Alex's current obsession, it was no surprise when he announced one morning in late October that he needed to be a killer whale for Halloween. With Alex, it is never a want but always a need. And there is no deviation from a "need." He would need to be a killer whale or nothing. And if we couldn't accommodate his perception of how the holiday ritual should go, then Halloween would be ruined for everyone. Luckily for me, my mom is a genius seamstress, and after yet another one of my panicked phone calls, she sewed and sent a spectacular costume. On Halloween morning, with our costumes packed safely in the trunk of our car, Russ and I drove through the steep rocky mountains of San Diego. While Russ drove, I watched the horizon change, the still lavenders and soft blues of morning pushing away the dark. Even the sterile white sky seemed to soften somehow when the first rays of light stretched over the tired mountains. All the stars fading, sucked into the sun, consumed by the strength of tomorrow, the power of morning. In that moment, through a simple expression of nature, I knew God was near, gifting me the sun.



THE TIDWELL BOYS AND SHAMU
Sea World, San Diego, 2004

We arrived at Sea World a tumbled-up mess. Even in happy possibilities lurks the danger that some routine might go askew, some whale might be sick, some dolphin might not jump over the rope, some popcorn machine might be broken. At times, the anxiety is more than Alex can handle. Then he, in turn, pushes his fears onto us, and in our advocacy, we become victims as well. We are anxious about the day, and Russ and I whisper to each other in low tones. We struggle through the flood of tourists, the push of people. The sun hot and penetrating, I can feel my skin turning red from its strength.

Then, suddenly, it's over. The park is closed, and we are left in an empty parking lot, stuffing our boys into their costumes. We pile into the van, a virtual zoo, one cheetah, one pteradon, one whale, and drive slowly away to find some place where we can trick or treat. In the van, with the heater on low pushing the sting of autumn back to its roots, we pause at neighborhoods, looking for children. Looking for Halloween the way I remember it, with great throngs of children spilling from houses, clutching pillowcases and tiaras, their happy parents letting go of their hands, only to urge them back to the sidewalk. But there are no children. Everywhere we turn, the houses seem sad and dark, and even the few shadowed jack-o-lanterns blinking shakily in the night appear isolated and misplaced.

We're driving faster now. "We'll miss it!" I keep telling Russ. "Turn here. No, go left. Oh, let me drive!" All at once I am angry. I must find some children! The two little boys in the back are asleep now, lured by the soft rocking of the van. But Alex is alert, sitting upright, holding his orange plastic pumpkin, peering through Shamu's head. Finally, frustrated and aching to give my boy some taste of what I had as a child, I yell, "Pull over here!" Russ sighs as the tires crunch against the curb. The neighborhood is lonely. Alex and I stagger from one empty house to another. At last one door opens, and then two. I poke Alex, "Say trick or treat," I prompt. Plop plop the candies fall into the bright pumpkin two at a time, reminding me of an Alka-Seltzer commercial. Then it is finished. Alex is hot and itchy, and he is complaining as he climbs back into the van to go home.

I am driving now. I made Russ move. "I need to," I'd said simply as he sighed and scooted over. Somehow, if I am behind the wheel, I feel that I am in control. I could drive all day. Then from the silence comes Alex's voice, "I thought you promised we would go to the ocean." I know better than to try to rationalize with Alex, and lacking the endurance to weather a drive home with thundering outbursts and sheets of tears, I exit the freeway, and turn back toward the ocean. We arrive in

the dark. A few scattered fires line the sandy shore. Alex is out of his costume. "I'm just a boy again," he says. And together we walk toward the water, Russ waiting with our other boys.

The tide is low, pulled back to the sea like some mother who can't let go. Alex loves the ocean, and I love the stillness of the sand under my feet, the soft languid tones of the dipping waves and crescendo crash as they collide with the ground, the water foaming and thrashing like some ill-tempered child. Crash! Boom! And then quiet. From the safety of the shore, we stand mesmerized, then suddenly the water is racing towards

wave roars into Alex with all the force of the laws of motion. He is bowled over, knocked clear off his feet, and carried some distance up the shore, a tangled mess of arms, legs, seaweed, and deflated foam.

I rush to where he is pulling himself up, soaking wet and making faces over the feel of salt on his tongue. "Are you okay, Alex?" I ask cautiously, bracing myself for the guttural cry of distress, but he answers as calmly as if I'd asked him if he wanted a peanut butter sandwich. "Yeah, Mom. I'm fine." Standing there in the dark, with a sea of jewel stars a twinkling



THE TIDWELLS, 2007

(Left to right): Logan, Russell, Alex, Joanie, and Spencer

us, threatening to cover our feet, until we sink into the soft, quiet sand, unheard. Just before reaching us, however, it is pulled back, and we are left to puzzle over patches of seaweed and disconnected kelp.

ALEX COULDN'T BE happier. He is jumping in the surf, "spy hopping like an Orca," he says. I watch as the waves chase after him. Laughing, he runs from the water, past the edge of a cliff, and beyond the empty caves. As the tide retreats, defeated, he chases it back to its source of strength, willing the game to continue. It was then, with the moon as round as a golf ball, a shaking reflection on the swaying waves, that I begin to understand something about God and something about Alex. I looked up from the sand to see Alex standing at the edge of the water. Then, glancing past him, I saw a dark, heavy wave bullying its way directly towards him. "Get out of the way!" I scream, breaking into a sprint, but he just looks up at me and smiles. "It's going to knock you over!" I warn again, my voice lost in the wind. With my feet still moving, I watch as the water reaches him before I can. The

heritage scattered lovingly over our heads, I watch him walk back to the edge of the angry waves, a steadfast appendage between land and sea. He surveys the great density of the ocean, and then dripping wet and satisfied, shouts into the dark abyss, "Bring it on!"

That's when I knew he'd be okay. We'd be okay. With the ocean's deafening roar sounding in my ungrateful ears and the sea spray heavy in the dark night, hovering like unshed tears. That's when I begin to understand something about mercy and justice and how love for a child can transcend any obstacle. How love for a Father can help a child learn to face the angry waves still wet. Heavenly Father blessed me to know a spectacular spirit can break free from its confinements and shine through the darkest masks. I smile as I watch my boy standing there, a seven-year-old beacon. In that moment, I can almost hear the moaning of the mortar as it separates and cracks. All those retired bricks I'd tried in vain to stack again, crumbled and resting in a broken, damp pile, sinking into the pooled faith of my soul. Exposed. My heart still beating, I take his small hand in mine, and together we walk up the shore to go home. ☺

If a church's primary duty is to promulgate the gospel of Jesus Christ, which asserts that each soul is equally precious in God's eyes, it is important to question any policies that contravene or offend this principle.

“ARE BOYS MORE IMPORTANT THAN GIRLS?”

THE CONTINUING CONFLICT OF GENDER DIFFERENCE AND EQUALITY IN MORMONISM

By Margaret Merrill Toscano



EDITOR'S NOTE: This article by Margaret Toscano kicks off a series of discussions on Mormon women's experience that Sunstone plans to host at its Salt Lake symposium this August and in upcoming issues of the magazine. In addition, Sunstone is combining energies and seeking to cross-fertilize its discussions with those taking place at Mormon Stories, an influential blog and podcast that is currently doing a cycle of interviews and hosting exchanges on this vital issue. Please check out these discussions at MORMONSTORIES.ORG.

“ARE BOYS MORE IMPORTANT THAN GIRLS?” THIS question was asked by an eight-year-old Mormon boy who had been left behind with his mother and sisters while his father and older brother attended the priesthood session of the October 2004 General Conference. When the boy's mother answered that boys and girls are equally important, this eight-year old contradicted her with bracing candor: “I think,” he said, “that boys are more important because Jesus



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and Heavenly Father are boys, and boys get the priesthood and girls don't.”

During his conference remarks the very next morning, President Hinckley addressed the value and importance of LDS women in a talk titled “The Women in Our Lives,” in which he stated that “women are such a necessary part of the plan of happiness which

our Heavenly Father has outlined for us.” The boy's mother felt that the prophet's remarks were an inspired answer to her son's question and supported her defense of the equality of women in the Church. Subsequently, she related this incident as a faith-promoting story in sacrament meeting in my sister's ward.¹

But is President Hinckley's statement that “women are such a necessary part” of God's plan really an assertion of gender equality? In this paper, I address the question, “Are boys more important than girls?” by examining five related questions:

1. Does God's justice demand gender equality, and, if so, is it possible to achieve gender equality and gender difference simultaneously?
2. Is gender equality in the Church to be measured objectively by outward criteria or subjectively by the feelings reported by LDS women?
3. Does the Church have the moral duty to promote gender equality within its organization?
4. If the Church is failing in such a duty, how can concerned members work for positive change when they also believe the Church is divinely guided by priesthood authority?



“WHEREFORE, SHE COMMANDETH NONE THAT THEY SHALL NOT PARTAKE OF HER SALVATION. . .”

IF THIS WERE THE LANGUAGE THAT WE READ OVER AND OVER IN ALL SCRIPTURE AND OTHER OFFICIAL TEXTS, WOULD MEN FEEL THAT THEY ARE FULL PARTICIPANTS IN THE CHURCH AND THE GOSPEL? WOULD *THEY* PERHAPS QUESTION THEIR WORTH, ETERNAL VALUE, AND POSITION?

5. Perhaps most important of all, what would need to happen to make an eight-year-old conclude that LDS girls are just as important as LDS boys?

JURISPRUDENTIALLY, EQUALITY IS defined either as equality of treatment, called commutative justice, or as equality of condition, called distributive justice. Commutative justice requires equal treatment of individuals under law. Distributive justice requires the equal distribution of wealth, privilege, and power. Each concept seeks to avoid invidious discrimination on the basis of race, religion, sex, or alien status. In either case, human differences complicate the picture because of genetic endowments or environmental conditions. If justice is blind to such differences, then the socially or naturally underprivileged will be disadvantaged unfairly, and minority groups will be forced to conform their identity with the majority. On the other hand, emphasizing differences can increase unequal treatment because it can turn a difference into a stereotyped role or forced identity. Think of the difficulty of giving “handicapped” people equal access to public facilities without labeling them as deficient human beings. Is it possible to honor difference and promote equality at the same time?

Much of the feminist debate about gender equality has centered on the implications of these definitions and problems. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the “first wave” of feminists emphasized women’s commonality with men, arguing that the human traits they shared with men should entitle them to common human dignity and equality under the law. This call for gender blindness and commutative justice dominated the suffrage movement.

A later feminist wave argued that this type of gender equality continued to privilege males and helped only assertive male-identified women who possessed inherent abilities to succeed in a patriarchal world—in particular, those women who had not assumed the duties of wife and mother. These “difference” feminists argued for a maternal or woman-centered equality that put nurturing and caring on an equal footing with autonomy and assertiveness. This position, how-

ever, was later criticized by postmodern feminists as essentializing women and reducing them to biological and psychological stereotypes that disqualify women from certain roles on the assumption that all women share common characteristics. So the feminist debate goes round and round. But what unites all feminist approaches is the goal of ending the domination and subordination of women and of all underprivileged persons worldwide, such as children, the elderly, and the disabled.²

HOW DO THESE controversies relate to gender questions in Mormonism? What does equality mean in LDS terms? In 2 Nephi 26, we find a scriptural requirement for the equal treatment of all God’s children. We are told the Lord

inviteth them all to come unto him and partake of his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female; and he remembereth the heathen; and all are alike unto God, both Jew and Gentile. (v. 33)

In contrast to the proud who lift themselves above others and work for their own gain alone, God works for the benefit of the world; for he loveth the world, even that he layeth down his own life that he may draw all men unto him. Wherefore, he commandeth none that they shall not partake of his salvation. (v. 24)

In context with the rest of the chapter, it is clear that the term “men” used here includes all races, genders, and ethnic groups. All are alike and equally privileged. None is forbidden in respect to receiving the goodness of God. The Book of Mormon asserts, then, that salvation is a gift available to men and women alike. But how alike do men and women need to be to fully receive it?

In the 1995 document, “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve assert that male and female sexes and role differences are part of eternal identity:

By divine design, fathers are to preside over their families in love and righteousness and are responsible to provide the necessities of life and protection for their

families. Mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children. In these sacred responsibilities, fathers and mothers are obligated to help one another as equal partners.

Inherent in this statement is a striking contradiction: Men and women are to be equal partners, and yet the male partner is always to preside and provide, while the female partner is primarily to nurture. Because the Proclamation states that “Gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose,” the stated role divisions would seem to make women eternally subordinate to men. (The prefix *sub* means “under” and *ordinate* means “order” or “rank.”) If one partner always presides, even in love and righteousness, the other is still subordinate, at least in rule, if not also in rank. Doesn’t the Proclamation, then, contradict the ideal of equality required in the Book of Mormon?

In talking to many active, believing Mormons over the years, both male and female, I have found that most feel men and women are equal in worth but have been assigned the different roles outlined in the Proclamation. One woman explained it to me this way: “They have the same capabilities but different responsibilities.” The view I most frequently encounter among Latter-day Saints is that, while the genders may not be equal in condition, they are equally valued and fairly treated.

But is this ideal being met in LDS Church practice? In an attempt to assess the current state of affairs, I examine three pieces of evidence: (1) President Hinckley’s 2004 conference talk that the woman in my sister’s ward saw as an answer to her son’s sense that boys were more important than girls; (2) visual representations of men and women in recent issues of the Church’s *Ensign* magazine; and (3) a thought experiment in which one reverses the references to men and women in LDS discourse.

PRESIDENT HINCKLEY’S OCTOBER 2004 general conference talk, “The Women in Our Lives,” focuses on the equal value and dignity of women and contradicts the view of men who think they are superior simply because of their sex. His talk is especially touching because it was given in part as a tribute to his wife Marjorie, who had passed away the previous April after their sixty-seven years of married life together. In his talk, President Hinckley makes several strong assertions about women’s equal worth. He mentions that “some few of the greatest characters of scripture have been women of integrity, accomplishment, and faith,” such as Esther, Naomi, Ruth, Sariah of the Book of Mormon, Mary the mother of Jesus, and the sisters Mary and Martha. He notes that Jesus gives Mary of Magdala “a position of preeminence” by appearing to her first after his resurrection. He emphasizes the “divine qualities” of women as daughters of God.³ And he ends with praise for his own daughters who are “so kind and good and thoughtful.” The overall tone and purpose of President Hinckley’s talk is a clear attempt to improve the treatment of women.

In spite of this, the presumption of male power underlying

his talk reinforces the very thing he is trying to remedy: the subordination of women. This is especially evident in President Hinckley’s telling of the creation story, in his description of male leadership in the home, and in his framing of these issues within the context of priesthood authority. I offer the following critiques with all due respect to President Hinckley’s position. He stands out as an inspired president of the Church with his moderate, kind, approach and his emphasis on humanitarian service. My reason for focusing on his talk as an example of gender inequity in the Church is, in fact, *because* of his position. The prophet sets the doctrine and practice for the Church as a whole, and the doctrine President Hinckley sets out in this talk clearly underscores male priesthood leadership over women that puts them in a secondary and supporting role within the structure of the Church.

He begins his description of women’s place by forefronting the creation of the world as a solely male enterprise: “The Almighty was the architect of that creation. Under his direction it was executed by his Beloved Son, the Great Jehovah, who was assisted by Michael, the Archangel.” After this all-male trinity created the cosmos, they decided the endeavor would not be complete without the introduction of a female as a helpmeet for the male. Of the multiple LDS versions of the creation of woman, President Hinckley emphasizes the account of her being taken from Adam’s rib, rather than the account that states that male and female were each created “in the image of God.” This is a curious choice in remarks designed to contradict the denigration of women. He says, “Notwithstanding this preeminence given the creation of woman, she has so frequently through the ages been relegated to a secondary position.” But in his account, isn’t woman relegated to a secondary position? Isn’t it secondary for an all-male godhead to create woman after the man as a helpmeet for him? To say that women are the culmination of creation rather than its source is to say that women are derivative, not primary; important, not essential; helpers, not partners; separate, not equal.

While it can be argued from the Hebrew that the term “helpmeet” is more about complementarity than subordination, because of its current connotations, most readers do not understand the term this way.⁴ Likewise, when President Hinckley asserts that the duality of male and female is God’s design and that their “complementary relationships and functions are fundamental to his purposes,” this translates into the well-worn priesthood/motherhood dichotomy that relegates women to the private sphere. President Hinckley, in fact, focuses on motherhood as a primary reason for honoring women. He asserts that those men who “think they are superior to women . . . do not seem to realize that they would not exist but for the mother who gave them birth. When they assert their superiority, they demean her.” Despite his intent to correct what he sees as arrogant male chauvinism that can lead to divorce, abuse, and family stress, President Hinckley still gives to men the central role of setting up the way the family system operates. He blames divorce “predominantly” on men, presuming that men have the power and authority to avoid di-



LDS CHURCH LEADERSHIP IS SO IDENTIFIED WITH MALENESS

THAT FOR A WOMAN TO BE DISSATISFIED WITH HER EXCLUSION FROM POWER IS TANTAMOUNT TO HER BEING DISSATISFIED WITH HER SEX AND HER MOTHERING FUNCTION—THE VERY ROLES SHE IS TOLD HER HEAVENLY FATHER HAS ASSIGNED HER.

voice by presiding over women in love. He says: “I plead with the men of this Church, to look for and nurture the divinity that lies within their companions. To the degree that happens, there will be harmony, peace, enrichment of family life, nurturing love.”

Indirectly, President Hinckley does admonish women, as well as men, to promote their partners’ happiness; and he praises women for their “kindness and love,” while blaming men for acting selfishly. Though this seems to privilege women on one level as spiritually superior creatures, on another level it deprives women of full moral agency by assuming their nature is mostly good. That President Hinckley addressed this talk to men when women were present in his audience further strengthens the impression that agency and leadership ability center on males. He does insist that men should not make all the decisions in the home, but again the presumption is that the decision not to make all the decisions lies with men.

On the positive side, President Hinckley is obviously trying to loosen men’s hold on power, encouraging them to share it more equally with their wives. Priesthood authority in the Church and home, however, gives the final say to men in a way that works against equality. Women have informal power in both arenas: that is, power that comes from personal gifts rather than the forms, (i.e., offices of the organizational structure). But the few formal positions women hold, like Relief Society president, are all under the direction of men, as is evident in President Hinckley’s talk, when he gives the example of the “presidency of the Relief Society” visiting a meeting of the “General Authorities” (notice the difference in capitalization between the female “presidency” and male “Authorities”). He says, “These able women stood in our council room and shared with us principles of welfare and of helping those who are in distress. Our stature as officers of this Church was not diminished by what they did. Our capacities to serve were increased.” The example seems an odd choice to illustrate gender equality in Church leadership because it is presented as an exception, a special time when women invaded men’s space, although invited. If women were valued as equal partners, wouldn’t it be normal for them to share their viewpoint

and experiences with male leaders? There is a clear emphasis in this example on men as the presiding “officers of this Church,” with women as advisors and supporters.

President Hinckley concludes his talk by reminding men of their duty to exercise their priesthood according to the principles of righteousness outlined in D&C 121. When he states here, to his male listeners, that “God has given us the priesthood,” he resoundingly highlights male leadership over “the women in our lives.”

Again, I applaud President Hinckley for addressing the gender issue; I think his purpose is to elevate women. Yet the contradictions in his remarks between equality and subordination reinforce the view of women not as active and empowered participants, but as receivers without equal power or authority to direct the family or influence the Church.

GENDER TENSIONS ARE evident not only in words but also in pictures.⁵ In early 2005, I examined several issues of the *Ensign* and was pleased to discover more articles than I expected by women and more images of women in actions other than their traditional service in the Church—that is, I found images of women as gospel students and teachers, not simply as providers of food and compassionate service. For example, in the January 2005 *Ensign*, one can find a woman thoughtfully studying the scriptures and Church magazines. On another page, the same woman is teaching a class of mixed men and women. On a third page, the woman is at a pulpit speaking in sacrament meeting. These visuals are encouraging for gender equity because they create a sense of women’s authority in regard to doctrine. When I was young, there were few such images of women investigating doctrine or being serious students of the scriptures. However, in the third visual, one sees the male leadership seated behind the woman, reinforcing the role of male priesthood holders as governors in the Church. The woman speaks at the behest of men. Of course, men also speak at the behest of men with higher authority. But no man in the Church ever speaks at the behest of a woman.

The importance of priesthood authority is the dominant message and pattern in all the issues of the *Ensign* I examined. The presence of male priesthood authority is felt on almost

every page in pictures, authoritative statements, and in the magazine's format itself. In this January 2005 issue, five of the twelve bylined articles are written by women; and of the seven written by men, five are by general authorities. In another issue, eight out of seventeen articles are by women, and again, five of the male authors are general authorities. Also, for each major article in every issue, quotations by prominent Church leaders, living and dead, all male, are displayed along with their pictures in highlighted boxes. While this functions as a teaching device to add material for further thought about the subject at hand, an unspoken implication is the importance of priesthood leadership in establishing truth by authoritative pronouncement. In one article, Elder Russell M. Nelson's statement about the blessings of the temple is forefronted in a touching article by a woman who describes how her faith in the ordinances of the gospel helped in her struggle following the death of her husband. More of the women's articles in the *Ensign* deal with relationships and practical problems; more of the men's articles deal with doctrine and history. Overall, the *Ensign* reinforces the same message as President Hinckley's address: that women are indeed a very important part of the Church and contribute to it in many ways, but men lead and define both the Church and women.

loveth the world, even that she layeth down her own life that she may draw all women unto her. Wherefore, she commandeth none that they shall not partake of her salvation.

If this were the language that we read over and over in all scripture and other official texts, would men feel that they are full participants in the Church and gospel? Would *they* perhaps question their worth, eternal value, and position?

As the eight-year-old boy in my sister's ward could see, Jesus and Heavenly Father are boys. If the Godhead is just boys, then boys are in charge. Mormon theology, reinforced as recently as October 2004 by President Hinckley, does not accord to women the power to create or save worlds because both are described as priesthood functions. The highest authority is vested in males. Women are not final decision-makers. The Relief Society, touted as the largest and possibly oldest women's organization in the world, is subordinate to men in every way, with no chain of command from the General Relief Society presidency to each stake and ward Relief Society presidency. Rather, at each level—general, stake, ward, and branch—women are called by, released by, and supervised by men, to whom they must report and from whom they must seek and obtain permission and money to act. Church re-

BECAUSE GENDER EQUITY IS A HIGHLY CHARGED ISSUE,

IT IS DIFFICULT FOR THOSE ON EITHER SIDE TO TELL THE
COMPLETE TRUTH ABOUT THEIR FEELINGS AND
EXPERIENCES, EVEN TO THEMSELVES, ESPECIALLY
UNDER UNSPOKEN PRESSURE FROM BOTH
SIDES OF THE QUESTION.



A THOUGHT EXPERIMENT may clarify whether the ideal of men and women's equality is being met in today's Church. In this, I follow in the footsteps of Elouise Bell, Carol Lynn Pearson, and others who have written "role reversal" essays as a way of highlighting unstated ways in which gender affects LDS discourse.⁶ What would LDS discourse look like if we reversed male and female references? What if, as we flipped through the pages of the *Ensign*, we saw female leaders highlighted and quoted authoritatively and men in supporting roles? What if, instead of pictures of Christ, we saw pictures of Mary his mother, or Mary Magdalene, or a female savior? What if our image of God were female? What if we merely substituted the female pronoun for the male in scripture? Such a rewrite of 2 Nephi 26:24 (which I quoted earlier more fully and with the original pronouns) provides a taste of how this kind of change might feel:

For behold, my beloved sisters, I say unto you that the Lord God worketh not in darkness. She doeth not anything save it be for the benefit of the world; for she

sources now rest entirely in men's hands. Although often used by women, Church funds are never to be used without male approval. Women cannot commonly schedule the use of a meetinghouse without male permission. They cannot create or present a curriculum that has not been approved by males. The current Relief Society lesson manual is taken entirely from the writings and utterances of male Church presidents.

Women confess their sins to males, never to other females; certainly men never officially confess their sins to women. Men hold all the judicial offices of the Church, whether in a disciplinary council conducted by a bishop on the ward level, by a president on the stake level, or on the general appellate level. Women are therefore never judged by their peers. On the other hand, Church leaders do not need the approval of women for any of their actions, nor are they required to receive doctrine or ordinances from women. Men define doctrine,



PRIESTHOOD, AS THE POWER TO ACT IN GOD'S NAME, PUTS THE SPIRITUAL MISSION OF GOSPEL SALVATION INTO

THE HANDS OF MEN, NOT WOMEN, WHICH INEVITABLY MAKES MEN'S WORK SEEM MORE FAR-REACHING. THIS IS WHY THE ISSUE OF GENDER EQUITY IN MORMONISM INEVITABLY REVERTS TO THE QUESTION OF WOMEN'S EXCLUSION FROM PRIESTHOOD.

policy, and practice. They define normative behaviors. They create the moral context for all departments of Mormon life. They hold the keys of the kingdom on earth and in heaven.

Current Church practice and rhetoric reinforce how deeply ingrained the gender problem is and how difficult it is to remedy, as seen by the following four observations. First, the problem is systemic and not merely a matter of individual behavior. This can be seen by the fact that women's roles and input in the Church are entirely dependent on the way male leaders allow them to participate. Many have assured me that women have a voice in the Church because the male leaders they know ask women for their input. The crucial point, however, is this: whether male leaders solicit women's input or not, either on a local or Church-wide level, is *entirely* in the discretionary power of men.

Second, women, as a group, must rely on male leaders, such as President Hinckley, to ensure their fair treatment in private and public settings, their inclusion in church activities, and their visibility in gospel lessons. This situation can affect women's self-esteem. When was the last conference talk assuring men that they "are such a necessary part of the plan of happiness which our Heavenly Father has outlined for us"? The fact that women need to be told of their worth, and that men need to be reminded of women's equal value, should make us question assertions of gender equity in the Church.

Third, what are we to make of theories of gender equality that tie the worth of women primarily to their functioning as wives and mothers (even when single or childless), while these same theories tie the worth of men to their priestly ordinations, which are not only independent of but often in competition with their functioning as husbands and fathers? (It is true that single men are also not likely to be called to important Church offices—a fact that demonstrates that men, too, are limited by gender roles.) These theories about different roles create different concepts of self-worth for men and women. While President Hinckley and other male Church leaders repeatedly assert that a woman's chief, indispensable, contribution is motherhood, this alleged indispensability is subverted by the absence of the Heavenly Mother in discussions of the

plan of salvation, including the cosmic creation story. If the Heavenly Mother is absent as an equal participant in the creation, what is the mothering principle really worth? If mothers are so vital, where is the council of mothers, either in heaven or in the earthly Church? Where are the female Church leaders with voices equal to men's—women with equal authority to assure that nurture, care, and right relationships are fostered in the Church?

Finally, no matter how much lip service is given to women's worth and equality, the patriarchal governing structure of the Church gives dominance and preference to men and their views, simply because they have the final say regarding how things are organized and defined.

I HAVE ARGUED for the existence of systemic gender inequity in the LDS Church based on a pattern of male domination and female subordination in all formal LDS Church power structures, using standard objective criteria for gender analysis. But is it right to look at gender equity only in this way?

Another approach that we might employ is referred to as "third world feminism." Third world feminism is a response to the hegemony of white, European-American women in the feminist movement. White feminists are often liberals who come to free native women from oppressive traditions, but without any awareness of the beliefs and desires of those they are supposedly trying to help. As a result, white feminists often end up inadvertently colonizing the native women instead. This white feminist hegemony is represented by academics so caught up in careers and theory that they dismiss everyday politics and lose sight of the real practices that affect women's identities and status. Third world feminism provides a model for critiquing power structures while honoring women's agency and self-descriptions. It suggests common concerns across racial, ethnic, and national borders without erasing important differences.⁷ The implication of this theory for the Mormon gender question is that gender equity cannot be defined without understanding how most LDS women feel about this issue.

I started this study with the question of an eight-year-old boy. His opinion, however, should not be given greater weight than that of his mother, who appears willing to accept not only President Hinckley's assertions but also her own role as evidence of the equality of genders in the LDS church. A recent study by an intern at the Smith Institute at BYU showed that 70 percent of LDS women surveyed were content with their role in the Church. While the results have been questioned because of the way the survey was set up to solicit certain kinds of answers, they accord in large part with my own assessment based on informal discussions with hundreds of Mormon women over the last twenty years.⁸ I am not a social scientist and do not pretend to know how to interpret statistics mathematically, but I am trained to read texts and to interpret cultural signifying practices.⁹ I would not be surprised if a broader survey revealed a statistic even higher than 70 percent approval in some contexts.

When I have asked LDS women if they are satisfied with their current status in the Church, most active women say "yes." When asked if they think it is fair for men alone to be in charge of the Church, most say they do not envy men this position and would not like to bear the responsibility of hearing confessions, holding disciplinary councils, and making hard decisions about Church policy, procedure, practice, and doctrine. Their answers are also usually couched in language which shows that LDS Church leadership is so identified with maleness that for a woman to be dissatisfied with her exclusion from power is tantamount to her being dissatisfied with her sex and her mothering function—the very roles she is told her Heavenly Father has assigned her. Most Mormon women would see such dissatisfaction as synonymous with ingratitude toward and even rebellion against God. One woman told me:

We [women] don't hold the priesthood and therefore cannot be in positions in the Church of great prominence, but that doesn't bother me. I don't care to hold the priesthood. . . . I feel its power in my home. I don't think it makes me a lesser person to my husband or to my sons; I just see my role as mother and nurturer as the role best suited for me.

In my view, the reason most Mormon women say they are satisfied with their role in the Church is that they have concluded, consciously or not, that the advantages of membership in what they deeply believe is Christ's true Church outweigh any disadvantages. Since these women believe that salvation can come only through the Church, it makes sense from their perspective to ignore ecclesiastical stresses and problems and cling to the gospel of Jesus Christ and its blessings, letting God sort out the power issues that might arise. One woman wrote:

I guess it's hard when, as a woman, you feel very strongly about something in the church, whether it is who to call in your organization, or how to proceed with an activity and the men always do have the final say. I don't know how that could change with the nature of Priesthood callings. . . . I believe in sustaining the prophets who are called of God. If I [err], I want it to be on the side of obedience, since, if a Priesthood

holder is leading us astray or making incorrect decisions, the Lord can deal with that in His way and in His time.

For such women, their subjective view or experience does justify the Church's treatment of women, despite "objective" evidence that the genders are treated differently and unequally. Any gender inequities are to them but the unintended consequences of benign Church doctrine and policies that require men to provide for families and to protect women, children, and weaker members in their charge from economic, physical, moral, and spiritual harm. Not surprisingly, I have found in talking to LDS women that their views on gender issues are closely tied to their individual experiences with the men in their lives. One woman explained:

I was raised in a home where my father thought very highly of my mother and her abilities. He always treated her well. I never sensed any feeling of men being better or more important than women in our family. My brothers had that kind of example and followed it . . . [Name omitted] has been that kind of a husband also. I know that some women are not as fortunate as I have been and may answer these questions differently.

SHOULD THE SUBJECTIVE feelings of faithful Mormon women resolve the gender question in the LDS Church? Or does the list of gender inequities offered earlier justify a challenge to the Church's construct of male privilege? These questions are complicated by other factors. First, the positive or negative pictures given by women in questionnaires may not reflect their complete experiences. Because gender equity is a highly charged issue, it is difficult for those on either side to tell the complete truth about their feelings and experiences, even to themselves, especially under unspoken pressure from both sides of the question. The very fact that the issue is perceived as two-sided and polemic instead of multiple and complex is telling. Though unfair, many perceive as unbelieving those who question—while others perceive as unthinking those who conform. One woman interviewed expressed serious concerns about women's roles but also many positive experiences as a Church member. But when asked to write her views, despite assurances of anonymity, she expressed only the positive. Many women expressed a desire to be more public with their concerns but feared the consequences. One woman said, "I have a wonderful husband who wants our two sons to be raised in the Church; I can't risk getting kicked out."

Few are willing to risk Church membership by stating their concerns publicly. However, in a letter to the editor in the December 2004 issue of SUNSTONE, Peter Bleakley from Kent, England, described the damage he sees happening to women in the LDS Church:

All my life I have been surrounded by [women] spiritual giants with exemplary faith, who should never for a moment have to question whether they have value in God's kingdom or a right to be heard. But be-

cause they are women, even when they hold senior callings, their ability to function and contribute depends entirely on the mindset and basic social skills of their priesthood line-managers. . . . When my own mother . . . who has devoted her life to raising children in the gospel . . . has started to seriously wonder whether women really are second-class citizens in the celestial kingdom, alarm bells ring with me. Something has gone seriously wrong. With the self-confidence our doctrines should give her, how could she become so demoralized?

Bleakley gets to the heart of the matter. In judging whether or not gender inequity is a problem in the LDS Church, the evidence and issues must be examined in terms of basic Christian ethics and not just women's reported experience. The primary moral question must be what the current practice does to individual self-worth. The scripture that states that the "worth of souls is great in the eyes of God" is central to an LDS theology of personhood.¹⁰ To block any soul from reaching her potential or from using his gift must be seen as an offense to the God who gives those gifts. In looking at gender structures in the Church, we must ask, returning to the concept found in 2 Nephi 26, how those structures affect each person's ability to "partake of the goodness of God." As I have tried to show by looking at women's own statements and feelings about gender roles, this is a difficult issue. Still, for the sake of fair treatment, there must be the freedom to question—something that is presently lacking in the Church.

I SEE TWO obstacles to an open examination of gender difference and equality: first, an ambiguity surrounding the desirability of power; and second, the belief that the present Church structure must, and therefore does, reflect the will of God. Most women who complain, or even express pain or doubt, about gender inequity in the Church are immediately accused of being power hungry and out of line with Church doctrine and authority. Lorie Winder Stromberg asks why we assume that wanting power is a bad thing:

I've spent too many years on the defensive . . . It's time I owned the term. Perhaps I am power hungry. And my question is: Why aren't we all? If by power hungry you mean I desire the ability not only to accept responsibilities in the institutional Church but also to be part of defining those responsibilities, then, yes, I'm power hungry If by power hungry you mean I believe women must have a voice in the Church, then, yes, I'm power hungry If by power hungry you mean I would welcome a heightened ability to bless the lives of others, then, yes, I'm power hungry. . . . If by power hungry you mean I want the ability to participate in a model of power based on partnership rather than patriarchy, based on empowerment rather than domination, then, yes, I'm power hungry.¹¹

In LDS discourse, the term "power" is not often connected with male leadership roles, even though priesthood is defined as "the power or authority to act in God's name." Rather,

priesthood is usually connected to "stewardship," "service," and "callings," terms that emphasize duty and downplay recognition. While men are allowed to view such callings as desirable, even central to male identity, many LDS priesthood holders do not have managerial positions and, like women, are deprived of involvement in the making of policy and interpreting doctrine. In talking to active LDS men over the years, I have found that they, too, feel a lack of self-worth if they have never been called to lead. Ecclesiastical hierarchy stratifies men as well as women. Because Church leaders are so highly revered and so important, it is difficult for male members not to see their personal worth and righteousness as dependent on the type of Church callings they receive. However, because of the strong, unspoken prohibition in the culture against "aspiring to Church office," Mormon men rarely complain about being pegged as only followers. Mormon men don't want to be thought of as ambitious for such callings. But, silently, many understandably are.

As a feminist disinclined toward corporate power and inclined toward an ethics of care and relationship, I am uneasy with the Church's modeling of priesthood authority on the secular model of corporate management. In the last twenty years, I have repeatedly asserted the necessity of reexamining and redefining in sacral terms the meaning and nature of priesthood.¹² On the other hand, over time I have come to see how complex, large institutions like the Church cannot avoid corporate models altogether, though I still believe we should not allow the need for order to overtake the Church's spiritual mission.¹³ Also, I agree with Lorie Stromberg that because power is the ability to act and produce an effect, power issues in a healthy community must be acknowledged openly as a fundamental part of both personal agency and institutional organization. When power issues are avoided, then power is more likely to be abused to gratify pride and ambition or to exercise compulsion, to paraphrase the important caution found in D&C 121:39.

I NOW RETURN TO the question of whether the equal dignity and worth of all Church members can be promoted under the rule that men preside and women primarily nurture. That is, in the LDS Church, can there be fair treatment of the sexes, including equal access to resources, privileges, protections, and avenues of participation, when the genders in the Church are necessarily divided into these roles? The answer must be "no" for several reasons.

First, these roles limit women's and men's ability to develop and express their talents. Though humans have different gifts that qualify some more than others for certain functions, those differences are not sufficient justification for excluding anyone from access to opportunity—at least not if we want evenhandedness in their treatment. Because of my severe lack of talent as a singer, I should not direct the ward choir; but I also should not be prohibited from taking lessons or joining the choir. By the same token, my sex or race should not disqualify me from pursuing my desires either. Moreover, gender and race surely differ from talents or abilities as markers for exclu-

sion or inclusion because of their historical and long-standing status as cultural categories that define both personhood and citizenship. Yet the LDS Church promotes the assumption that gender disqualifies women from most Church leadership and management roles.

As with race, acknowledging differences based on sex is not discriminatory unless used to exclude, treat unjustly, or subordinate. However, the current gender role distinctions asserted by Church leaders put women in a subordinate position solely because of their sex. Despite this subordination, strong women continue to wield power informally, especially in the home and sometimes in the Church organization as well. Patriarchal systems are usually supported by a strong matriarchal substructure. Interestingly, several women have told me that one reason they don't want priesthood is that they fear it would diminish their centrality and dominion in the home. This fear may be valid. Nevertheless, excluding women from formal power structures can encourage them to resort to manipulation to maintain a voice. Studies on larger populations of American women have shown that the social unacceptability of ambition and aggression for women drive them toward other means of obtaining power.¹⁴

I am not asserting leadership as the most important or valu-

scope, but it denies the Church community the blessing of women's full array of gifts and spiritual power.

In addition, if a woman, either because she is expected primarily to nurture or because she is excluded from priesthood, is given fewer opportunities within the Church to exercise her other abilities, they may be invisible to her and others, and in time may be lost as well. Christ told his followers not to hide their light under a basket (Matthew 5:15), but this may be the case for those not allowed to express certain talents because of gender or hierarchy.¹⁵ If women have the same capabilities as men but because of limited responsibilities do not use them, will those capabilities eventually disappear? And vice versa. It is true that women do much more than nurture in the Church, in spite of the Proclamation's gender definitions; and certainly they do not have a solely private role. In fact, it is obvious in the examples I've given above, ironically in the section on gender inequity, that women teach, write, organize, manage, and serve in diverse ways in the Church. But still their subordination to men's priesthood authority limits their scope, expression, and perhaps self-esteem. In a recent conference talk, Elder Dallin Oaks explained that the equal partnership of men and women described in the Proclamation applies only to the home, not to the Church organization, which is hierarchical.¹⁶

THE CHURCH'S CURRENT GENDER ROLES PROMOTE, AT BEST,

A GENDER-BASED POLICY OF "SEPARATE BUT EQUAL."
YET, THE HISTORY OF RACE RELATIONS
IN AMERICA HAS CLEARLY SHOWN THAT
SEPARATE IS NEVER EQUAL.



able aspect of Church service. As the apostle Paul admonished, "the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee" (I Corinthians 12:21). Rather, I am emphasizing the way priesthood, as the power to act in God's name, puts the spiritual mission of gospel salvation into the hands of men, not women, which inevitably makes men's work seem more far-reaching. This is why the issue of gender equity in Mormonism inevitably reverts to the question of women's exclusion from priesthood. Can women be seen as men's spiritual equals when they have no official permission or legitimate authority to act in God's name? Is there any woman in the Church who is revered as the spiritual peer of President Hinckley? Is there any woman who is considered as close to God, or who can legitimately speak in God's name? Even on a lower level in the Church, because many spiritual gifts are linked to priesthood and priesthood office, such as healing blessings and prophecy, women may feel these and other such gifts are beyond women's legitimate use. Not only does this belief limit women's

Perhaps the most common argument for gender role division in the Church is the belief that women's ability to bear children gives women a special gift that men will never possess and also makes it impossible for women to bear the responsibility of the priesthood if they are going to fulfill the demanding role of motherhood. Even if we acknowledge that gender differences connected to the body are eternal, we must also acknowledge that women can and do bear and rear children while serving as Relief Society presidents, even as men serve as bishops while functioning as fathers.¹⁷ Fathers nurture, and, as President Hinckley reminded his listeners, Relief Society presidents preside. Because some women may have the "natural" ability to preside and some men the "natural" ability to nurture, to limit either person's access to these roles simply on the basis of sex is unreasonable, discriminatory, and damaging.

Yet motherhood, even for women who do not have children nor will never have children in their care, is a main reason given for women's being disqualified for leadership roles connected to priesthood. By contrast, priesthood, which is available to all men, does not disqualify them from fatherhood.¹⁸ To say that the gender division of priesthood for men and motherhood for women is simply a matter of different responsibilities avoids the central issues of personal agency, growth, and development. This division is false and creates a damaging dichotomy that tends to put women in the private and bodily realm, while granting men the public, spiritual realm.¹⁹ Some have told me in response that it is because men are less spiritual than women that they need the priesthood to raise them to women's level. Like the motherhood argument that equates women with one function while reducing the importance of fatherhood, this argument also ultimately demeans both men and women because it says men are inferior while denying women full latitude to express their supposed superior spirituality in the Church. But what if it's just God's will that men alone have priesthood? Joseph Smith's explicit revelation about women receiving priesthood in the temple endowment gives me comfort that a just God would not give his daughters less than he gives his sons.²⁰ Perhaps women's and men's priesthood function differently, but, as 2 Nephi 26 implies, a loving Father and Mother would neither forbid any of their children access to their spiritual power nor privilege one group over another.

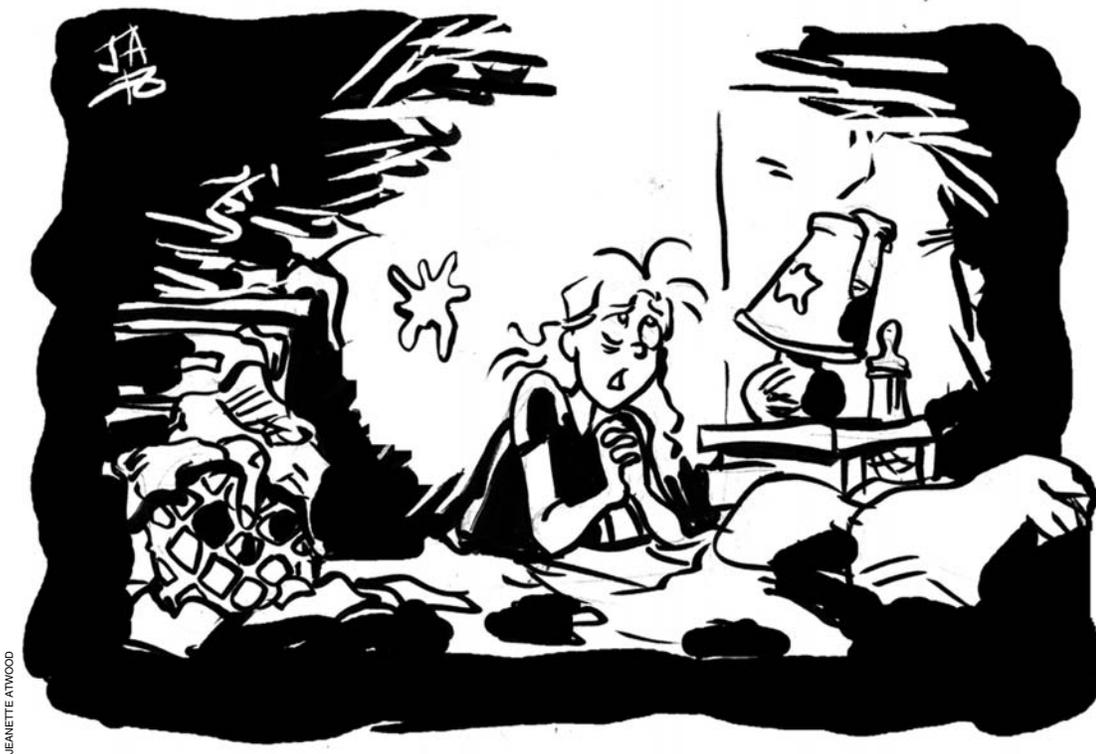
The final reason that current gender roles in the Church are

not equal is that they deny women full agency to participate in defining and authorizing doctrines and policies that shape cultural and personal identity and practice. Because most decisions about Church management and the direction of spiritual affairs are made by priesthood councils, women do not have a full voice or "vote" in the Church. Thus the Church's current gender roles promote, at best, a gender-based policy of "separate but equal." Yet, the history of race relations in America has clearly shown that separate is never equal.

I AM AWARE that no matter how persuasive my arguments may be about gender inequity in the Church, they will be perceived merely as feminist criticism, or worse as "anti-Mormon," as long as the current gender roles are seen as divinely mandated. This fact leads to my final questions.

Can't we assume in a Church run by revelation from God that the current structure is God's will and that any change must come from the current prophet? There are many problems with this line of reasoning, but the short answer must be "no." There are numerous historical precedents, starting with the Church's about-face on its policy of withholding priesthood from black men, that expose the fallacy and danger of this position. To assume that all current Church policies and teachings are correct is to assume that human mistakes and misjudgments cannot infect the Church, a view plentifully contradicted by the scriptural history of God's dealings with his people and his repeated calls for repentance. Some argue that though individual members can sin and are imperfect, the

Church is perfect, and its leaders acting unanimously represent the will of God. Such a view puts the Church as a whole in a position of self-righteous pride that keeps its membership from thoughtful self-examination—the foundation of ongoing repentance. Do we really think that we are the only generation that has not sinned collectively? Or that our Church leaders have become infallible? Could President Kimball have received the 1978 revelation if his heart had not been open to the wrongness of the Church's teachings and policies on this issue? Even in the years that have followed that change, had we willingly admitted that denying blacks the priesthood was a human prejudice



"Heavenly Father. . . I hope you don't mind. . .
can I PLEASE talk to Mom?"

instead of God's will, we would have avoided collateral prejudice and severe damage to our brothers and sisters.²¹

The Church's primary duty is to promulgate the gospel of Jesus Christ, to assert that each soul is equally precious in God's eyes. Any Church policy that contravenes or offends this principle must be questioned. Our scriptures admonish us to aid the oppressed, to notice and care for the poor, to bind up wounds, to nourish those who hunger and thirst. The Church bears the principal duty to promote equality of treatment, of dignity, of value, and, to the extent possible, of distribution of wealth as well. If current Church policy or practice can cause an eight-year-old boy to conclude that boys are more important than girls, then the Church must repent of policies that feed that sense of inequality. The only way to reject longstanding false traditions that have assumed institutional legitimacy is simple renunciation, just as the U.S. Supreme Court did in *Brown v. Board of Education*, where it publicly repented by reversing its doctrine of separate but equal as just plain wrong. The Church must do the same. It must admit that separate but equal in matters of gender is just plain wrong, an affront to the equal dignity and worth of women and men both.

It is ironic that the principle of continuing revelation in Mormonism, meant to facilitate change, is currently employed to preserve the status quo. Yes, we must be realistic about the resistance of people to change, especially when it involves vested personal and institutional interests. And we should creatively deal with problems in ways that do not alienate members. But surely, in a Church that claims the legitimate priesthood authority to act for God, social injustice based on race, gender, sexual orientation, or class must be eradicated not only as threats to the faith and well-being of members but also as sins intolerable in the sight of God in the Church that has been called to be a light to the world and a city on a hill. ☹

NOTES

1. My sister, Janice Allred, began "The Fall of Eve: Personal Identity and the Divine Mother" (in my possession) with this anecdote. In this speech, given at the 2004 Counterpoint Conference as she accepted the Eve Award, she also explicates President Hinckley's October 2004 conference talk and the way women's identity in the Church relates to the place of the Heavenly Mother.

2. See the online *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* entries on "feminism" and "justice" for helpful summaries of the scholarship on these issues. Two important introductions to feminist theory are: Josephine Donovan, *Feminist Theory: The Intellectual Traditions*, 3rd ed. (New York: Continuum, 2000), and Sandra Kemp and Judith Squires, *Feminisms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

3. In his talk "Stay on the High Road" in the General Young Women meeting of the April 2004 General Conference, President Hinckley also emphasized women's divine qualities inherited from a Heavenly Father that gives them "the potential to become anything to which you set your mind."

4. As biblical scholar Phyllis Trible points out, the Hebrew word "ezer" is "traditionally translated 'helper'—a translation that is totally misleading because the English word helper suggests an assistant, a subordinate, indeed, an inferior, while the Hebrew word "ezer" carries no such connotation." Trible instead translates the Hebrew word as "companion corresponding to it" in her book *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 90. My point is that most readers, unaware of the Hebrew meaning or such scholarship, see the passage traditionally.

5. It is standard practice for feminists to examine the ways words and pictures reinforce patriarchal structures and define women's roles, emphasizing the need for women to have their own "voice." See Dorice Williams Elliot's "Let Women No Longer Keep Silent in Our Churches: Women's Voices in

Mormonism," and Lavina Fielding Anderson's "The Grammar of Inequity" for examples of this pattern in contemporary Mormonism, both in *Women and Authority: Re-emerging Mormon Feminism*, ed. Maxine Hanks (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), 201–14, 215–30. In contrast, Vella Neil Evans argues that Mormon women having their own publications from 1872–1970 "empowered women of the church" ("Empowerment and Mormon Women's Publications," *Women and Authority*, 50).

6. Examples of these "role reversal" exercises can be seen in Louise Bell, "The Meeting," in *Only When I Laugh* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1990), 11–16; Carol Lynn Pearson, "Walk in the Pink Moccasins," *SUNSTONE*, May 2005, 21; Richard K. Circuit, "New Policies (Tribute to Manhood)" *SUNSTONE*, July/August 1982, 57–59.

7. Chandra Talpade Mohanty's *Feminism Without Borders* is a good representation of third world feminism. I owe thanks to Roberta Micallef, my former colleague at the University of Utah, for introducing me to these concepts.

8. My knowledge of this survey and the questions surrounding it come from an intern at the Smith Institute in 2003, though not the intern who conducted the study herself.

9. I keep a file of conversations and written statements, all qualitative rather than quantitative. I'm afraid a social scientist might be horrified at the unsystematic nature of this file.

10. D&C 18:10.

11. Lorie Winder Stromberg, "Power Hungry," *SUNSTONE*, December, 2004, 60–61.

12. See my article, "The Missing Rib: The Forgotten Place of Queens and Priestesses in the Establishment of Zion," *SUNSTONE*, July 1985, 16–22; my essay, "The Nature and Purpose of Priesthood" in *Strangers in Paradox: Explorations in Mormon Theology*, co-authored with Paul Toscano (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1990), 143–54; and "If Mormon Women Have Had the Priesthood Since 1843, Why Aren't They Using It?" *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 27, no. 4 (Summer 1994): 219–26.

13. Meg Wheatley uses business models to analyze the effects of including or excluding women from priesthood in her "An Expanded Definition of Priesthood?: Some Present and Future Consequences," in *Women and Authority*, 151–65. Two excellent analyses of the tensions that arise when churches inevitably operate according to business models are: J. Bonner Ritchie, "The Institutional Church and the Individual," *SUNSTONE*, May/June 1981, 28–35 (reprinted in the *Sunstone* 25th Anniversary Issue, *SUNSTONE*, June 1999, 98–112), and Jim Sawyer, "Enduring to the End . . . in Joy," *SUNSTONE*, October 2002, 60–62.

14. See Lyn Mikel Brown and Carol Gilligan, *Meeting at the Crossroads: Women's Psychology and Girls' Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992); Anne Campbell, *Men, Women, and Aggression* (New York: Basic Books, 1993); and Rachel Simmons, *Odd Girl Out: The Hidden Culture of Aggression in Girls* (New York: Harcourt, 2002).

15. Compare this passage to Christ's parable of the talents in Matthew 25:15–28.

16. Dallin H. Oaks, "Priesthood Authority in the Family and the Church," *Ensign*, November 2005, 24–27.

17. I do not have room in this paper to explore the complexities of defining gender difference and the issue of constructed versus "natural" difference. My argument here assumes difference while attempting to promote the welfare of all.

18. Sonja Farnsworth examines the motherhood-priesthood dichotomy in "Mormonism's Odd Couple: The Motherhood-Priesthood Connection," in *Women and Authority*, 299–314; Linda P. Wilcox examines the historical development of the emphasis on motherhood for Mormon women in "Mormon Motherhood: Official Images," in *Sisters in Spirit: Mormon Women in Historical and Cultural Perspective*, eds. Maureen Ursenbach Beecher and Lavina Fielding Anderson (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987) 208–26.

19. Feminist theologians, such as Rosemary Radford Ruether, have explored the damaging effects of this traditional dichotomy that goes back to early Christianity at least. See her *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983), 52–79.

20. "The Missing Rib," my first Sunstone symposium talk, which was later published in the magazine, focused on this question. See "The Missing Rib: The Forgotten Place of Queens and Priestesses in the Establishment of Zion," *SUNSTONE*, July 1985, 16–22. See also my "Put on Your Strength O Daughters of Zion: Claiming the Priesthood and Knowing the Mother" in *Women and Authority*, 411–37 and D. Michael Quinn's "Mormon Women Have Had the Priesthood Since 1843" in *Women and Authority*, 365–409.

21. For examples of this damage, see the roundtable discussion, "Speak the Truth and Shame the Devil," *SUNSTONE*, May 2003, 28–39.

Is it possible that the teachings of Jesus are so comprehensive they encompass the core spiritual principles of both East and West?

THE YOGA OF CHRIST

By Philip G. McLemore



“Practice my yoga, and your burden will be light.”
—MATTHEW 11:29–30

I WAS BAPTIZED INTO THE CHURCH AT AGE NINETEEN. Six months later, I received a patriarchal blessing from an elderly stake patriarch. I had never seen this man before, and the second and final time I saw him, he did not recognize me. Given this context, the blessing he gave me was amazingly prophetic in how it mapped out the development of my unfolding perspectives, personality, and life path. I’ll just mention two of these ways.

First, the blessing declared in very clear terms that I would provide spiritual leadership to people and groups outside of the organizations of the Church. Thirteen years after I’d received the blessing, that type of leadership seemed impossible. My life was completely consumed in my work as an LDS Institute of Religion director and seminary supervisor, along with long hours of service as a counselor in a bishopric. Then, in an amazing turn of events, the next year, I had become a military chaplain and was preaching in Protestant worship services, directing a Protestant Sunday School, and performing general Christian counseling, weddings, and funerals for people of many different denominational backgrounds. Since my 2004 retirement from the Air Force, I have worked as a hospice chaplain and meditation instructor, ministering to people of multiple faiths as well as to people who have no clearly defined beliefs. More than 70 percent of my spiritual service has been to those outside the Church, and I didn’t seek any of these career changes—they were offered “out of the blue.” The patriarch knew more about my upcoming life than I did.



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A second highlight from the blessing was its admonition that to fulfill my mission in life, I would need to have information, knowledge, and divine insight into the “principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ *and all truth*.” In context, tucked within its surrounding passages, the sense of this advice was that my understanding would be centered on the principles Jesus taught rather than on understanding his exact nature.¹

This emphasis on principles rather than personhood has served me well, since until recently, I’ve never been able to make much sense out of nor feel close to the God/man Jesus as explained by any Christian church, including my own tradition. In one strain of Mormon thought, Jesus is my elder brother who was more spiritually advanced than I but who still, like me, had to come to earth to be tempted, to demonstrate obedience, and grow from grace to grace to attain perfection. This line of thinking confirmed my inner feeling that Jesus was someone I could follow because he had trod the path, knew the difficulties, and could show me the way with compassion and understanding. However, we Latter-day Saints also present Jesus as the only one who in the pre-existence attained a pinnacle of intelligence which ranked him as a God.² Even without the perfecting experience of mortality, Jesus was still the Creator of this earth and other worlds without number. He is Jehovah, the God of Israel, the God of the Old Testament. To accomplish his atonement for our sins, he had to be absolutely sinless. In this strain of thought, Jesus is presented as being perfect in every way and demonstrating an impressive array of supernatural powers. These latter emphases led me to the same conclusion expressed by Marcus Borg in his most recent book on Jesus:

a figure who has superhuman powers is ultimately not one of us. Jesus’ humanity disappears. . . . [I]f Jesus had superhuman power and knowledge, he cannot be a model for human behavior.³

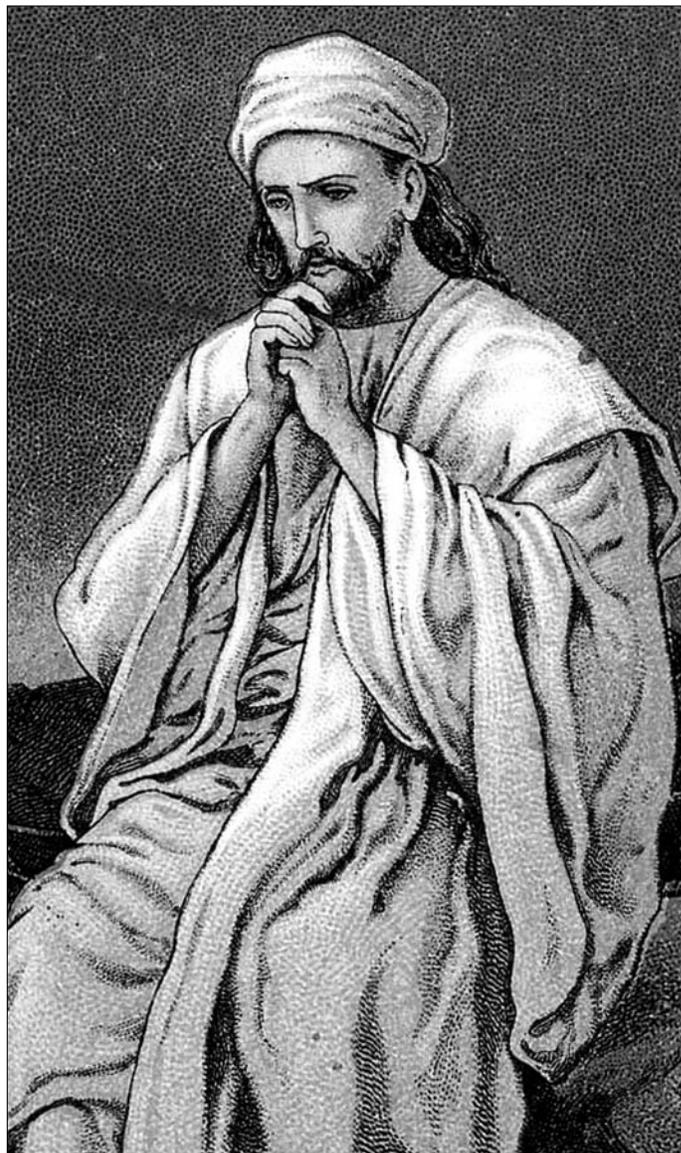
Although I was never perfectly comfortable with my understanding of the person of Jesus, I pressed on nevertheless, inspired by the principles he taught as well as those that were manifest in his interactions with God and man.

In the spirit of my patriarchal blessing's injunction to explore "all truth," and as I detailed in a previous article,⁴ I have spent the past seven years immersed in the practice of meditation and the study of Eastern spiritual practice and philosophy, principally in the Yogic tradition. For most people in the West, yoga is about stretching and body contortion. But in its original ancient context, yoga means two things: (1) a state of intimate union with God; and (2) the disciplines, practices, principles, and lifestyle that lead to this union. The goal of yoga is to open oneself to higher states of consciousness whereby one may have a direct experience of God and begin to see with and through His eyes. In John 13:34, Jesus gives us a "new" commandment that we are to love one another *as he has loved us*. Can we love as Christ loved without seeing through God's eyes?

Some Yogic traditions call this type of seeing Divine Consciousness. Paramahansa Yogananda called it Christ Consciousness. Yogananda, the author of the best-selling memoir, *Autobiography of a Yogi*, came to America from India in 1920 with the two-fold mission of "demonstrating the complete harmony and basic oneness of original Christianity and original yoga," thus uniting East and West, and helping others learn to experience God directly.⁵ When I first encountered Yogananda's work, I was intrigued by the idea that Yogic teachings and Christ's teachings could be in harmony with each other. However, as I studied various yoga philosophies, they seemed very different from my understanding of Christ's gospel. Although I failed to see core similarities, I was drawn to both even as I often felt torn between the two.

I ultimately realized that the tension I felt arose from the different ways Western and Yogic traditions see basic human nature and describe the way of redemption. The Western model, which includes Christianity and Mormonism as they are most commonly articulated, is based on what I call a deficiency model. In this paradigm, human beings are seen as flawed and deficient, needing redemption through the actions of an outside entity, a perfect being (Christ). Mormon teachings soften this sense of deficiency some through emphases on our eternal nature as God's children and our ultimate perfectibility through repentance, obedience, and righteous living, but Mormons still acknowledge the need for outside redemption to correct inner flaws. In either case, our human nature needs to be covered over by Christ's redeeming work, changed by grace—or by grace and good works, in the Mormon case.

The Yogic view, on the other hand, is based on a model of wholeness. We are whole (holy) and divine in our essential being, but due to our identification with a mortal mind and body, and because we are buried under a plethora of temporary material and mental attachments, we have become ignorant of our eternal nature and divine qualities as spirit.⁶ In this model, a redeemer figure acts as a revealer of the true nature of God and man as well as a liberator from the bondage of ignorance and worldly attachments. In short, a deficiency model focuses on the sins of a flawed nature as the primary problem and leans heavily on outside, supernatural redemption.⁷ A



PROVIDENCE LITHOGRAPH COMPANY, 1865



"No amount of sin can change [man's] eternal soul-nature of divinity. Sin is a crust of ignorance accrued during man's lost wanderings that hides the perfect soul; when by meditation the soul is led back to God, the crust is washed away and the perfection is revealed."
—Paramahansa Yogananda

wholeness model declares ignorance of our true nature to be the primary problem and focuses on enlightenment and liberation from the inside through the path of spiritual union.⁸ As Yogananda puts it:

No amount of sin can change [man's] eternal soul-nature of divinity. Sin is a crust of ignorance accrued during man's lost wanderings that hides the perfect soul; when by meditation the soul is led back to God, the crust is washed away and the perfection is revealed.⁹

In my work as a hospice chaplain, I usually read to patients from the New Testament since it is accepted scripture for most

reminds his father that he has “never transgressed . . . at any time,” the wayward child is received back as a son, with lavish gifts and a big party—something the elder son says the father has never offered him. This seems unfair to the good son; and, if I count as representative my own experiences participating in LDS classes for the past thirty-seven years, it seems unfair to many Mormons. Because LDS teaching often focuses on “commandment-keeping” as the highest good, how can the father treat this commandment-breaking son so wonderfully? Class members usually try to resolve the tension that arises from this seeming unfairness in the story by focusing on the love, compassion, and forgiveness of the father as examples of the kind



We are all prodigal children. Our inheritance is our divine inner nature, which can become obscured but never lost. As prodigal children, we have left our divine home and ended up poor and starving, living in a pig pen. When we remember our father's home and family status and make our way back, God receives us fully and joyfully, offering all that he has.

of the people I visit. At some point, a change in how I experienced the New Testament began to take place. I began to notice a new depth and breadth in the teachings of Jesus, which mirrored yogic thought and teachings. I began to see how many sayings and parables of Jesus that we often gloss over in LDS classes because they don't seem to fit the typical Mormon view make perfect sense in an Eastern philosophical context!¹⁰ Many of Jesus' parables and sayings discomfort us because they don't seem to reflect a kind or just God. I've observed considerable gnashing of teeth in church classes when we discuss parables such as the Laborers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20:1–16) in which the landowner (God) gives the same wages to all the laborers even though those who started in the morning worked many more hours than those who were invited in at the end of the day. Is God fickle and unfair? Shouldn't those who work longer receive more blessings and greater rewards? The Western mind says yes. The Yogic mind says God is always inviting people to serve him and is ready to bestow his full blessings as soon as they are receptive regardless of how long they have to serve to be prepared.

The Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11–32) reveals even more clearly the tension that arises when a common Mormon interpretation is overlaid on the story in contrast to the easy flow of a Yogic interpretation. A son leaves his father's (God's) home, squanders his inheritance in riotous living, and ends up poor and starving as a pig feeder. In fact, he desires the pigs' food, evidence that he hit rock bottom, that he can sink no farther. According to the text, the son “comes to himself,” and realizes the blessings of the father's domain. He returns ready to confess his sins and to submit himself fully to the father's will and assume the lowest status in his father's household.

To the surprise and distress of the “faithful” elder son, who

of love we should all strive for. They may suggest that Jesus' parables aren't meant to be perfectly applied to human circumstances. Or they may follow a similar line of reasoning found in Bruce R. McConkie's *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, glossing over the elder son's lack of compassion and self-centeredness to argue that he will inherit all the father has, while the prodigal son, though fortunate to get a nice party, will be demoted to a servant position and not be equal to the elder son in “power, honor, and dominion” because he had squandered his inheritance and it was lost forever.¹¹

These interpretations increase rather than resolve the tension for me. I have to ask myself who is closer to our Heavenly Father's heart—the one who through his mistakes has “come to himself,” grown in understanding of his father's blessings, and is willing to humbly receive with appreciation whatever the father will give him? Or the son who is outwardly compliant but inwardly unforgiving, hardhearted, and selfish? Does our Heavenly Father withhold family status and blessings from one who is honestly repentant?

In the Yogic interpretation, we are all prodigal children. In this perspective, our inheritance is our divine inner nature, which can become obscured but never lost. As prodigal children, we have left our divine home and ended up poor and starving (ignorant of our essential spiritual nature), living in a pig pen (the material world with its evils and distractions). When we remember our father's home and family status and make our way back (through spiritual disciplines), God receives us fully and joyfully, offering all that he has. For me, the Yogic interpretation is closer to what Jesus is teaching in this story and requires no strained explanations. This interpretation also makes better sense when we remember the context in which Jesus gives the parable—responding to “Pharisees and

scribes” who complain about Jesus’ receiving sinners and eating with them. Here, and in many other places throughout the gospels, Jesus contrasts “sinners” (prodigals) who seek him humbly and whom he receives, guides, and loves, to the outwardly compliant “Pharisees and scribes” (elder sons) whose hearts are far from him.

HAVE WE SO Westernized/Mormonized Christ’s teachings that we have lost critical perspectives and insights? Is it possible that the teachings of Jesus are so comprehensive they encompass the core spiritual principles of both East and West? A huge light came on for me one day as I was reading Matthew 11:28–30:

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

From my study of Eastern traditions, I knew that the words “yoke” and “yoga” are both cognates from the Sanskrit word *yuj*, which means to join or unite. In that moment, I realized that a legitimate paraphrase of this passage could be, “Practice my yoga . . . and ye shall find rest (relief) unto your souls.” Jesus is inviting those with heavy burdens to trade their burdens for his, which is “light.” So my paraphrase then became, “Practice my yoga, and your burden will be light.”

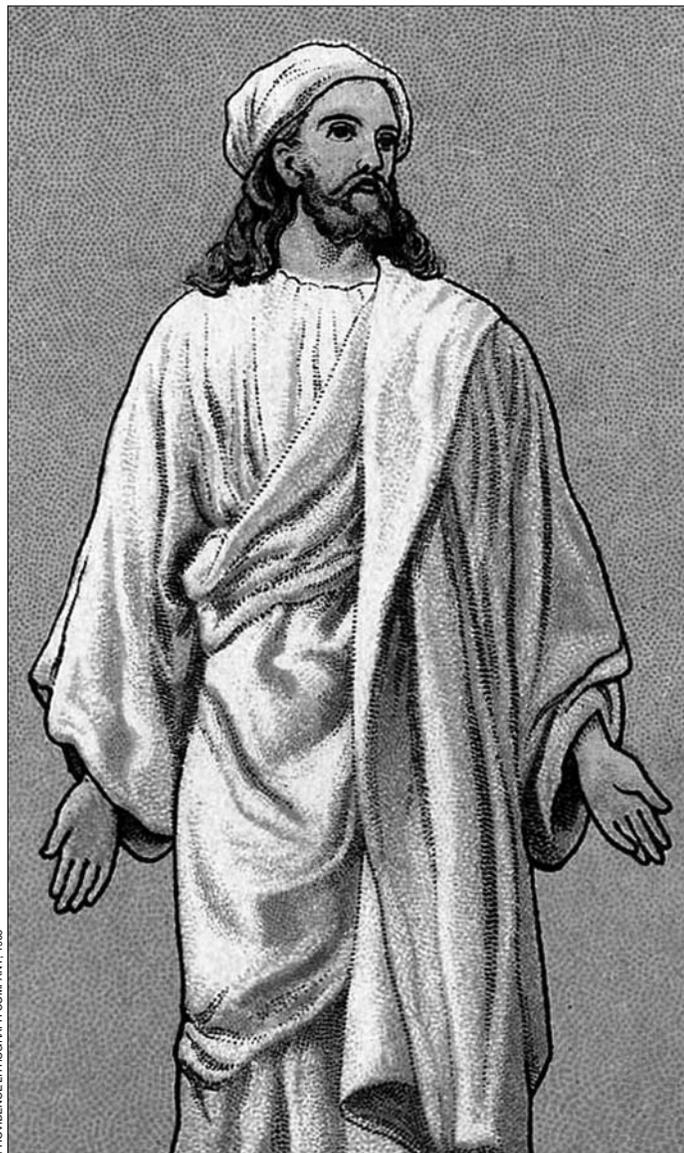
I realized that if one feels burdened, it becomes more difficult to live Jesus’ “new commandment” of loving like him. Soon after that insight, as I found myself in conversation with people of deep spiritual faith and commitment, I would ask them about their burdens. In spite of the fact that we normally interpret Jesus’ words to mean that his yoke lightens our burdens because he shoulders some or most of the weight, or because he makes us stronger so that the burden feels lighter, my “spiritual” friends reported a variety of family, health, work, and other burdens that were consistently stressful, if not overwhelming at times. They said they had just accepted the fact that spiritual living is bravely facing a series of burdens while keeping the faith and enduring to the end. I admire their courage and faithfulness, but I kept remembering that Jesus said “rest.” He said our burden would be “light”—if we practiced his yoga.

Most are familiar with images of yogis becoming so light they can levitate. I’ve yet to see or experience it, so for this discussion, I assume levitation is symbolic of someone so absorbed in Christ Consciousness that he or she is not burdened by the stresses and pressures of the world. Did Jesus levitate? Sure. After a period of communion with God in prayer, and I also think, meditation, he walked out to his disciples on stormy waters, demonstrating that one in communion with God is light and can live above the storms of human existence. We can follow him like Peter did at first and walk above those stormy seas—unless we lose divine communion and identify with temporal, material circumstances, which generate fear and heavy burdens that sink us (Matthew 14:22–32). At the end of his ministry, Jesus levitated all the way up into heaven (Acts

1:10–11). If someone can levitate that high, shouldn’t we listen carefully and practice the yoga that promises such lightness?

SO WHAT IS the Yoga of Christ? There are four classic Yogic paths/traditions.¹² In Yogic philosophy, when we leave the presence of God to experience incarnation and mortality, our consciousness becomes modified and limited such that we are more prone to identify ourselves with the temporal, external world instead of with our divine origin.¹³ Each of the yogas is designed to bring us back into intimate unity with God. This is done through practices that shift our awareness from identification with our body, its five senses, and its usual mental processes—which tend to direct attention outward to the people, things, and circumstances of our life and away from inner spiritual perceptions and qualities—to the wholeness of divine nature within. Each of these yogas has devotees (yogis) who follow it as a primary but not exclusive path. These yogas are:

- **BHAKTI YOGA**—*Bhakti* signifies a blissful, selfless, and overwhelming love of God. It is the spiritual practice of fostering loving devotion to God and takes the forms of singing and chanting God’s various names; glorifying and worshiping the Lord; offering devotional sacrifices, service, and prayer; fostering an intimate relationship with God; surrendering one’s thoughts and actions to God. Most Christian mystics followed this path. The Hare Krishna movement that came to prominence in the 1960s is an example. The famous Persian poets Rumi and Hafiz, who followed the Sufi version of Bhakti Yoga, often used the images of romantic love to describe the ideal relationship between God and man.
- **KARMA YOGA**—This is the path of selfless service. Karma Yogis dissolve their identification with body and mind by identifying with the whole of life, forgetting their finite selves in the service of others. Service is performed without the intent of benefiting oneself. Through this path, the practitioner purifies his or her consciousness and attains freedom from selfish conditioning. Gandhi was a Karma Yogi, and Mother Teresa is a well-known example of one who practiced the principles of this type of yoga but with a Christ-centered focus.
- **JNANA YOGA**—This yoga uses knowledge (*jnana*), clear thinking, careful logic, and even science to uncover spiritual truths that can lead someone to unity with God. It is sometimes referred to as the yoga of wisdom. Many modern writers who use the principles of quantum physics to elucidate spiritual principles fit into this path. Deepak Chopra considers himself a Jnana Yogi and believes that modern science is verifying spiritual truths taught by ancient seers.
- **RAJA YOGA**—Centered in meditation, this yoga includes the principles and practices that take one beyond normal states of sensory and mental awareness to higher states of



consciousness where God can be experienced directly.¹⁴ This direct communion with the Divine liberates one from confining perceptions and unhealthy conditioned behavior. The result can be a profound spiritual transformation. According to Yogananda, “Yoga mediation is the process of cultivating and stabilizing the awareness of one’s real nature. . . by which the narrow ego, the flawed hereditary human consciousness, is displaced by the consciousness of the soul.”¹⁵

I believe Jesus was a master and example of each of these yogas. Like a Bhakti Yogi, he glorified and “hallowed” the name of his Heavenly Father. He evidenced an intimate relationship with God as seen by his use of the word *abba* (Daddy). I believe the popularity of the LDS *children’s* hymn, “I Am a Child of God,” and the fact that it is often sung in *adult* meetings is evidence that a parent/child relationship is the preferred image for most Mormons’ relationship with God. The logic is clear. Heavenly Father is perfect and all-knowing; we are imperfect, ignorant, and in need of guidance. However, when Jesus refers to God as father, there is a sense of familiarity and intimacy that is beyond the usual parent/child image and is more consistent with a loving relationship between parents and their adult children, in which there is more of a feel of equal sharing. Although the typical parent/child relationship is a logical and appropriate image while we are spiritually immature, Jesus also used the image of a wedding in which he is the bridegroom awaiting us as his bride. This metaphor reveals the type of intimacy God desires with us as we mature (Matthew 22:1–14; 25:1–12).¹⁶ It is the kind of image that a Bhakti Yogi would use.

Seeing Jesus as a Karma Yogi is clearly the easiest. His compassionate service and healing ministry to people regardless of age, race, sex, and religious beliefs is legendary. And clearly his acts of loving service were intended not to benefit himself but to bless others and glorify his Father.

When we see how Jesus’ reasoning and wisdom easily destroyed the crafty deceptions of his enemies who sought to trick and mischaracterize him, we know we are meeting a Jnana Yogi. The depth and breath of the wisdom in his teachings is self-evident.

Did Jesus meditate? We have no direct evidence of this, but when the scriptures tell us he went up into the mountains early to pray or stayed up all night in prayer, my sense is that his prayer practice didn’t simply involve going through lists of what he was thankful for and beseeching God for what he wanted. I believe it is reasonable to conclude that he followed a meditative/contemplative practice of divine communion. Indeed, this pattern of early morning and late-night prayer fits the practice of many Raja Yogis. Using Jesus as an example, Yogananda taught that

even as Jesus . . . every man, by the right method of deep meditation, can learn consciously to lift the soul from body consciousness into the presence of God. . .

The prodigal soul is taken back from its wanderings in matter to its ever-blessed spiritual home in God.¹⁷

Some of the Desert Fathers and Mothers, spiritually sensitive



“Even as Jesus . . . every man, by the right method of deep meditation, can learn consciously to lift the soul from body consciousness into the presence of God. . . . The prodigal soul is taken back from its wanderings in matter to its ever-blessed spiritual home in God.”
—Paramahansa Yogananda

individuals in the third century who separated themselves from a corrupt church and lived in the Egyptian desert to commune with God, defined prayer the same way Raja Yoga defines meditation.¹⁸ Theologian Roberta Bondi, a leading expert on these Desert Abbas and Ammas, speaks to a key difference in how prayer is seen today in contrast to the ancient period:

We are so verbal [today] . . . that it's hard for us not to imagine prayer either as monologue, in which I tell God things and God listens, or as a conversation in which I tell God things and God answers back. But from what I understand out of the ancient monastic materials I work on, prayer is really an entire relation-

ship, and the verbal part is only one element. A lot of what we learn when we pray is to be quiet. We need to stop thinking that a relationship is constituted only by language. . . . The issue is not so much "Does God talk back and if so how?" but whether we can learn just to be in God's presence.¹⁹

I believe Jesus was deeply devoted to the practice of meditation.

THE BHAGAVAD GITA, written hundreds of years before the New Testament, is often referred to as the "jewel" of Indian scripture. It is a classic Yogic text that discusses each of these four forms of yoga. The last time I read it, I noticed that each of these yogas is rooted in and supported by a pair of principles and practices I have come to call the Yoga of Christ.

Simply stated, the Yoga of Christ consists of the principles and practices of communion with God and Non-Attachment.²⁰ I will focus first on Non-Attachment and then merge that discussion into the context of spiritual communion.

As I interpret Non-Attachment in terms of the Savior's teachings, our feeling "heavy laden" and "burdened" is a result of being overly controlled by our attachments to what we think will meet our needs and desires and our avoidance of what we believe gets in the way of these needs and desires. Buddhism's Four Noble Truths place this Attachment/Aversion complex at the core of its diagnosis of human suffering and its prescription for how to be free from it.²¹ Attachment and aversion also comprise two of the five obstacles to unity with God detailed in Yogic literature and referred to as the *Klaysh*.²²

Western minds usually cringe or even scoff at the notion that Non-Attachment is a good thing, much less a core spiritual principle. When we hear the term, many of us immediately think of all the people and things we love and enjoy to which we are deeply attached. We think to ourselves, "Life

would lack enjoyment and meaning without them," or we'll ask, "How can we love without being attached?"

Love. Love is indeed worth looking at a bit more deeply. I believe learning to love like Christ is the key to spiritual growth and to unity with God and others. If we link love with attachment, then it is logical to conclude that without attachment, we cannot love. On the other hand, the Yogic mind would ask, "How can you be free to love when you are stuck and attached to so many different things?" Clinging to people and things without being able to detach from them limits our vision, flexibility, creativity, and mobility—all of which are crucial for spiritual development and progression, as well as deep loving.²³



Non-Attachment is the basis for true love, true compassion, and truly righteous behavior since we come to operate from a divine point of reference in contrast to one embroiled in the endless churning of human desire and need that seldom, if ever, allows us to escape self-interest in even our most noble efforts.

Attachment comes in two basic forms: (1) attachment to specific outcomes of our actions and desires; (2) attachment to people, things, and situations. Aversion is simply the flip side of attachment since we resist those people, things, and situations that get in the way of the ones we want. Most of us function according to the pleasure/pain principle as we seek and cling to what we believe is pleasurable or beneficial and try to avoid what we perceive as painful or undesirable. It's easy to see in children. We do the same things as adults, but in a more sophisticated garb. Mature and responsible people will sacrifice lesser pleasures and desires for more noble ones, but it is still the same game. In the big picture, attachment is a very limiting and narrow way to live. It results in feeling heavy laden and burdened since we are typically at the mercy of people and events in the external world in spite of our best efforts to be in control. Very few of us, if any, are able to become attached to enough "good" people, things, and situations or to be able to avoid enough "bad" people, things, and situations to feel complete, whole, satisfied, and at rest (peace). The principle of Non-Attachment teaches that even if we are successful in attaching only to the most desirable people and things, this "success" comes with built-in fear, for there is always the possibility of their loss. The contemporary mystic, Eckhart Tolle comments on this problem:

You can never make it on the level of form. You can never quite arrange and accumulate all the forms that you think you need so that you can be yourself fully. Sometimes you can do it for a brief time span. You can suddenly find everything working in your life: Your health is good; your relationship is great; you have money, possessions, love, and respect from other people. But before long, something starts to crumble here or there, either the finances or the relationship, your health or your work or living situation. It is the

nature of the world of form that nothing stays fixed for very long—and so it starts to fall apart again. . . Watch the clouds. They will teach you about the world of form.²⁴

In the East, the concept of Non-Attachment is viewed positively since it refers to the ability to find happiness beyond the play of pleasure and pain, because it points to a kind of happiness rooted in something deeper than the world of form.²⁵ Also, practitioners of Non-Attachment know that being non-attached does not mean that you don't care, don't assume responsibility, nor ignore the needs and feelings of others. As discussed later, Non-Attachment is actually the basis for true love, true compassion, and truly righteous behavior since we come to operate from a divine point of reference in contrast to one embroiled in the endless churning of human desire and need that seldom, if ever, allows us to escape self-interest in even our most noble efforts.

DID JESUS TEACH the principle and practice of Non-Attachment? Why not ask the rich young ruler described in Matthew, who, though he had kept all the commandments, asked Jesus what he still lacked in order to attain eternal life. Jesus replied, “If you want to be perfect [whole, complete], go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me” (Matthew 19:16–22, NKJV). The young man went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. He had great attachments, and his attachments were so great he preferred to cling to them rather than to receive the perfection and treasure in heaven that Jesus promised.

Did Jesus teach the principle and practice of Non-Attachment for all of us? I think so, despite suggestions in church classes that Jesus' instruction to the rich young ruler was just a test for this particular person. A number of teachings of Jesus found in Gnostic Gospels or other extracanonical writings look like the Yogic philosophy of Non-Attachment. The same is true of the writings of many Christian mystics. But the principle of Non-Attachment is taught in many passages from the New Testament itself. The following is just a partial list:

- “If anyone wants to . . . take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also.” (Matthew 5:40, 42, NKJV)
- “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven. . . for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Matthew 6:19–21, NKJV)
- “[F]or one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.” Jesus then tells the story of a rich man who amasses great wealth and possessions so he can have many “years of ease” and so he can “eat, drink, and be merry.” But when the man achieves what he desired, God takes his life and asks

him who now will have his material abundance. Jesus concludes, “So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.” (Luke 12:15–21, NKJV)

*Jesus is telling us not to be attached to possessions, treasures, and riches; anything that can be destroyed or stolen.*²⁶



- Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? . . . Therefore, do not worry, saying, What shall we eat? or What shall we drink? or What shall we wear? (Matthew 6:25, 31, NKJV)

- If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. . . . If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off. (Matthew 5:29–30, NKJV)

Jesus is telling us not to be attached to our bodies themselves nor to the sins to which the body is inclined.



- I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. . . And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. (Matthew 5:39, 41, NKJV)

- Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men to be seen by them. . . . When you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you do not appear to men to be fasting. (Matthew 6:1,17–18, NKJV)

- But all their works they do to be seen by men. . . They love the best seats at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues. . . But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. . . . (Matthew 23:5–6, 11)

Jesus is telling us not to be attached to image, pride, reputation, position, and power.



- Do not worry about tomorrow. . . . (Matthew 6:34)

Jesus is telling us not to be attached to the future. This includes the desired outcomes of our behavior, as well as any dreams, fan-

tasies, or projected fears that divert our attention from living effectively in the present. Since Latter-day Saints are taught that laws and commandments produce specific desired outcomes (D&C 130:20–21), many Church members expect to control the future and secure the blessings they want by keeping particular commandments. Many lose their faith when the blessings don't occur or when tragedy enters their "commandment-protected" lives. A famous Yogic saying is, "Established in yoga, perform action." The meaning is that we should seek first to be in present union with God and then do our work accordingly, "without selfish attachments, and alike in success and defeat." (Bhagavad Gita 2:47–48)



- No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God. (Luke 9:62)

Jesus is telling us not to be attached to the past. Psychiatrists, psychologists, and counselors would go out of business if most people could eliminate their heavy burdens of unhealthy attachments to the pain and disappointments of their pasts. There are also those who are so unhappy with their present life situation that they suffer from a type of "Good Old Days" syndrome and look for happiness in pleasant past memories. Since spiritual unity with God (who lives in the eternal now) is a present-moment experience, attachment to both future and past divorces one from the inspiration and creativity of God's presence.



- If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. (Matthew 18:15, NKJV)
- If you bring your gift to the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. (Matthew 5:23–24, NKJV)
- If you forgive men their trespasses, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. (Matthew 6:14–15, NKJV)

Jesus is telling us not to be attached to anger, resentments, and offenses against us (victim mentality). These attachments disrupt unity with God and others, whether someone has sinned against us or someone thinks we have sinned against them.

The third passage states clearly that if we are unforgiving, we become unforgivable. Why? If we are attached and stuck, clinging to anger, resentment, and offenses, how can Heavenly Father bless us with the freedom that comes from the experience of forgiveness? In my dealings with people, it is clear to me that those who haven't experienced forgiveness and acceptance by God are unable to offer it to others. Since they do not feel acceptable to themselves and God, they need to hold others in a similar state of unacceptability, which means clinging to offenses and resisting the call to forgive.



- Judge not, that you be not judged. . . . Why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? . . . Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck out of your brother's eye. (Matthew 7:1–5, NKJV)

Jesus is telling us not to be attached to judgments, comparisons, and condemnations. Judging is often used to lift ourselves inappropriately or to exercise power over others. It disrupts personal spiritual growth and sabotages unity with others. I love Paul's words to the Corinthians: "Do you look at things according to the outward appearance? . . . For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But, they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise. . . . For not he who commends himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends" (2 Corinthians 10:7, 12, 18, NKJV).



- He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me. And he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. (Matthew 10:37–39, NKJV)

Jesus is telling us not even to be attached to our own family members! Jesus must have anticipated some distress with this attachment since he follows that statement with, "And he who does not take his cross and follow after me is not worthy of me." This is a particularly difficult one for Mormons to grasp for we are sealed (ultra attached) to our families for eternity.



In summary, Jesus asks us not to be attached to the following:

- Material possessions
- Our bodies and the life of the body
- Sin
- Image, pride, reputation, position, power
- The future
- The past
- Anger and resentments
- Judgments and comparisons
- Family members

SO WHAT IS it that burdens us and creates heaviness and suffering? Clearly, it's all of these things listed above. "Well, sure," you say. "If the Yoga of Christ means not being attached to these things, there seems to be no basis for burden and suffering. But wait! Not all of these things are bad in and of themselves! Many of the people, things, and situations in our lives bring satisfaction and happiness! Can't position and power be used to accomplish good? What's wrong with enjoying our material possessions? Yes, problems with family members can be tormenting, but these relationships are also deeply enriching. Non-Attachment might mean no burdens, but it also looks like it means no purpose, no accomplishments, and no happiness! Who wants to be a yogi in a cave with no job, no possessions, no family?²⁷ Where will we find meaning and happiness in life?"

Jesus answered all these questions with one simple perspective. We find what we are really looking for *in God*. He said we are to love God with *all* our heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mark 12:30). Did he mean we could go to church, pray, study scriptures, get 100 percent home teaching, and then go cling to our stuff? No. He said, "seek ye *first* the kingdom of God" (Matthew 6:33, *emphasis added*). And when asked by the Pharisees, who thought of the kingdom of God as an external thing, when it would come, Jesus replied, "The kingdom of God does not come with observation: neither will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:20–21). The answer isn't looking outside for good people and good things to cling to. The answer is found by looking inside where we experience the essence of our divine nature and the presence and fullness of God.

This solution is usually overlooked because of our external attachments. Once we seek and find wholeness in this inner kingdom, then Jesus says, "all these things (the potentially good things or proper application of the things listed above) shall be added to you." This phrase "shall be added to you" is contrary to the indulgent idea that we can do our spiritual things and *then* go dive into our attachments. Instead, it supports the perspective that once we are established in wholeness (the inner kingdom) then the people, things, and situations we need or would enjoy for mortal living will flow to us in a natural way. Commenting on this principle, Daya Mata, Yogananda's successor, said, "It is a most beautiful way to live. Everything you need, you find in Him. When you seek him first, so many blessings are given without your even desiring them."²⁸

This perspective is in harmony with the "taking up our cross" statement in Matthew 16:24–26:

If anyone desires to come after me, let him *deny* himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul? (*emphasis added*)

We assume that when Jesus says we should "deny" ourselves, he is talking only about sinful things. But he is really talking about the whole world of external attachment! In the context of properly "counting the cost" of becoming his disciple, Jesus states: ". . . Whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:33, NKJV). When Jesus says, "Whoever desires to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life . . . will find it," what is he referring to? When you meet someone new and ask questions to learn about their lives, how do they respond? They list their particular collection of attachments to people, things, places, and situations. A Yogic interpretation of this phrase would be "whoever desires to save his collection of attachments will lose his core spiritual nature, and whoever loses his collection of attachments will find his core spiritual nature."

Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8). Mormons usually associate impurity with immorality, but that is only one kind of attachment. Something is impure when it has become mingled with any other element from the outside, even if that element might be considered "good" in another context. Spiritual purity is the result of surrendering our external attachments. This purity opens up an awareness that allows us to see God, which helps us to see through his eyes and to love with his heart.

The Bhagavad Gita states:

The devotee whose mind is disciplined, who moves in the world with the senses controlled and is free from attachments and aversions, is established in tranquility. That purity of spirit removes all sorrow. That devotee is soon firmly established in permanent peace. (Bhagavad Gita 2:64–65)

Jesus leads us to find our peace, fullness, wholeness, happiness, and satisfaction *only in God*. Once that is established, our desires and relationships with people, things, and situations change radically in two ways. First, since we are complete (perfect) in God, anything ungodly becomes undesirable and unnecessary. Doctrine and Covenants 20:22 states that Jesus "suffered temptations but gave no heed to them." Why not? When there is no need, there is no heed. When we are established in something other than God, we have many needs and often give heed to anything we think will give us relief in the moment but which later typically proves to be burdensome. We take on many yokes looking for relief and end up crushed under the weight.

Second, anything good in the people, things, and situations of our lives now becomes an avenue for the expression of God's purposes and love rather than being used for our narrower desires and needs. As explained by the yogi Brijendra, Non-Attachment is not trying to become detached from something, but rather being so fulfilled in our relationship with God



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“You can never make it on the level of form. You can never quite arrange and accumulate all the forms that you think you need so that you can be yourself fully. Sometimes you can do it for a brief time span. . . . It is the nature of the world of form that nothing stays fixed for very long—and so it starts to fall apart again. . . . Watch the clouds. They will teach you about the world of form.” —Eckhart Tolle



Reconsider the famous words of Psalm 23: “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.” Jesus taught this lesson over and over.

that we feel less neediness and dependency on outside forms (people and things) and situations for our well-being.²⁹

In this context, re-consider the famous words of Psalm 23: “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.” Jesus taught this lesson over and over. He told the Samaritan woman at the well that he would give her “living water” and that she would never thirst again (John 4:10–14). In Capernaum, Jesus chided those whom he had miraculously fed the day before for following after him for more food! He then offered himself as the bread of life and promised that they would never hunger again if they would eat his flesh and drink his blood, which he defined as them dwelling in him and him dwelling in them (John 6:27–58). What did he mean? Certainly they would become hungry and thirsty and require food and drink for their bodies. In his commentary on the Gospel of John, Ravi Ravindra explains that

the knowledge of the Son, and the belief in his name, in the Gospel, means a participation in the being of Christ; this is conveyed concretely by an invitation to eat his flesh and to drink his blood, so that a disciple will become of one substance with him.³⁰

Clearly, the only thing Jesus could have meant was that having soul satisfaction from divine indwelling, they would no longer be dependent on external attachments to meet core needs.

Our attachments reflect our self-centeredness and spoil the expression of divine purpose and love. I think it is fair to say that 90 percent of most people’s prayers revolve around their external attachments. As long as we have a sense of neediness, there will always be an element of getting and using as opposed to serving. This is easy to see when it comes to money, things, image, and positions of power but harder to grasp when it comes to that most difficult attachment: our loved ones. Western culture is full of romantic notions about deep attachments to one’s beloved. These are often expressed in phrases such as, “I need you,” “I can’t live without you,” and “Life has no meaning or joy without you.” In twenty years of marriage counseling, I met many couples who “needed” and “had to have” the other and who alternated between moments of happiness and bitter conflict and disappointment. When I took them back to the point of their initial passionate attraction to and desire for the other and asked why they “needed” the other, their answers always reflected selfish interests: “She made *me* happy.” “He made *me* feel loved and secure.” What happened after that to cause these couples to experience conflict? As time passed, life became more complicated, weak-

nesses and flaws surfaced, and they each felt the other had stopped meeting their needs. The result was blame, anger, and resentment.

Little in these stories reflects real love. These couples are examples of using one another to meet personal needs and desires. But what if one’s needs and happiness were complete in God? Then a spouse’s problems, failures, weaknesses, and limitations would not be as threatening. He or she would be easier to accept and love in spite of imperfections. Rather than becoming wrapped up in disappointment and resentment from being attached to our spouse’s having to be a certain way so we can be happy, we could step back, look at our spouse from God’s perspective and offer the kind of love that would empower our beloved to put away imperfections. Non-Attachment opens space for love to really work!

Although I have always been committed to my children’s healthy development, most of the parenting mistakes I made had to do with my need for them to be and to act a certain way—all of which stemmed from my attachment to the image of being seen as a good and successful parent. That attachment only reflected a hole in me, one that often caused my children to feel unacceptable if they weren’t meeting my needs. When that hole was filled with God’s love and presence, they became wonderful whether they were currently meeting my needs and desires or not. I became free from the burden of expectation, and as a result, they became free from the burden of judgment, making the pure love of Christ a more real possibility. Wanting to be a good and successful parent is not a bad thing in itself, but attachment to that ideal or to a rigid map for our children’s life course can narrow our view of their needs or unique gifts. Real love detaches from preconceived notions and allows for endless, wonderful possibilities. It is the key for finding perfect love in imperfect relationships.

A MYSTICAL INTERPRETATION of two core scriptural events can help clarify the context for Jesus’ Yoga of Non-Attachment. The first is the Adam and Eve story, and the second is the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. In each of the stories, the key elements are Spirit, Nakedness, and Ego.

Our original state as Adam and Eve in Eden represents our core identity as spirit children made in the image of God.³¹ When we partake of mortality (the fruit) and our spirit nature is encased in flesh, we identify with our bodies and minds, particularly in comparison with the world around us, and realize we are naked. Both the Bible and the Book of Mormon use the word “nakedness” metaphorically. Consider the following passages:

I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may *be clothed*, that the shame of your *nakedness* may not be revealed. . . . (Revelation 3:18, NKJV. This counsel was given to the “lukewarm” church at Laodicea)

Wherefore, we shall have a perfect knowledge of all our guilt, and our uncleanness, and our *nakedness*;

and the righteous shall have a perfect knowledge of their enjoyment, and their righteousness, *being clothed* with purity, yea, even the robe of righteousness. (2 Nephi 9:14)

For behold, when ye shall be brought to see your *nakedness* before God. . . and the holiness of Jesus Christ, it will kindle a flame of unquenchable fire upon you. (Mormon 9:5)

Our “nakedness” is the awareness of our weaknesses, sins, foibles, flaws, fears, neediness, and vulnerabilities that we feel in our body/mind-identified state. This sense of nakedness generates a need for self-protection. What did Adam and Eve do when they felt weak and vulnerable? They hid. They covered themselves. And they blamed whomever and whatever they could.

In our state of nakedness, we do the same three things. We cover and hide behind an assortment of psychological defense mechanisms (such as denial, projection, repression), and when all else fails and we become exposed anyway, we claim that it's not our fault. Some other person or life circumstance is the culprit. Most of us fight ferociously to keep from being exposed, and this struggle for cover leads to the development of an Ego—a life story, a social mask that explains away our weaknesses and fears while accentuating particular strengths, associations, possessions, and sources of power or control.³² When these fail and our nakedness is in danger of being exposed, we often distract ourselves by turning to sinful activities to compensate, manipulate, or dominate. Others can't see our nakedness if we scare them away. On either side of this equation, separateness and individuality are accentuated and the spiritual ideal of unity is undermined.³³

All of these things, good and bad, are our attachments, and they are always attachments to something in the external world. Even mental images and emotional states that we usually consider to be internal are part of the external world since they are outside of our essential nature as pure spirit. A few people intentionally expose themselves in order to shock others, knowing that most will turn away and not look. Some craft victim identities out of their nakedness in the hope that someone else will cover them. In most cases, our attachments work fairly well, especially when they are honorable and respectable and even spiritual. Being a “good” or a “spiritual” person is the ultimate cover-up, something Deepak Chopra refers to as “spiritual materialism.”³⁴ Jesus is not impressed by the “spiritual materialistic” cover-up. In Matthew 7:21–23, Jesus rejects those who have “done many wonderful works” in his name but never experienced the intimacy of “knowing” him.

The problem with covering nakedness, whether with good or evil, is that it is ongoing, labor-intensive, and stressful because our nakedness is always lurking just below the surface. We soon feel “heavy laden” and “burdened” due to all the Ego stuff we have piled up. Worst of all, we become so lost in a forest of defense mechanisms and covered over by our stories about ourselves and others that we lose connection with our and others' divine nature. According to Yogic philosophy, we



Our spiritual experiences are windows into the true nature of our being. They offer a taste of the kingdom of God within.

suffer primarily as the result of our attachments to false ideas about God, ourselves, and others. We suffer because we are not living in harmony with our true nature. And the big secret is that we are not really naked after all!

A brief meditation: Stop reading, and recall a time when you had a profound spiritual experience. What were the qualities and characteristics of that experience?

As I have asked people this question over the years, the following responses have been prevalent:

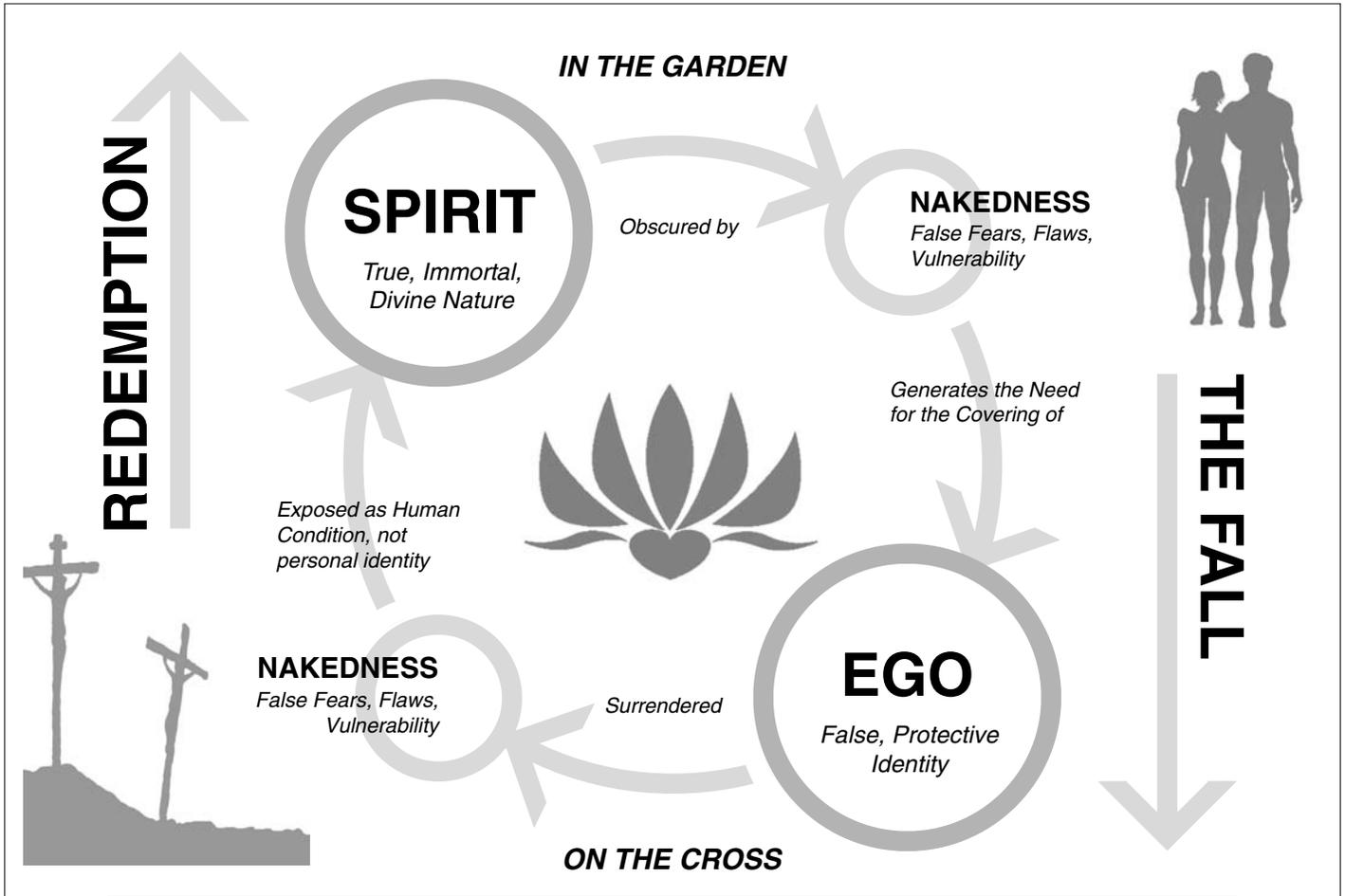
- Enveloping feelings of peace, love, and joy
- No fear, no needs
- No desire to do evil but only to do good
- Problems and worries seem external and unimportant
- Absence of hard feelings toward others
- A sense that forgiveness could be offered even to those who have seriously injured me
- A sense of wholeness, completeness, and satisfaction
- A sense of oneness with God, self, others, and creation
- A sense of lightness

Can you see how these qualities are the exact opposite of nakedness? Our spiritual experiences are windows into the true nature of our being. They offer a taste of the kingdom of God within which Jesus said we should be seeking. Most people think of spiritual experiences as being touched by something divine from the outside; they think that the wonderful qualities and characteristics listed above are external. What is truly external is the sense of nakedness that we try to escape from by running to and hiding in Ego games.

The truth is we are not weak, vulnerable, afraid, and flawed. We have experienced these qualities outside of Eden, and unfortunately we have identified with them and made them real. But identification with our spiritual nature is the ultimate reality. Satan's role in the Garden is to use fear to point out nakedness and embroil us in a lifelong, burdensome, cover-up. Jesus' role is to use love to point out our innate divinity, which liberates us from worldly burdens.

The way of the cross reverses the pattern established in Eden and is more about surrender than suffering (see diagram, next page). Jesus did not live in a state of Nakedness and Ego. He lived according to his true spirit nature. However, his body became our Nakedness and Ego. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus surrendered Ego: “Not my will, but Thine, be done” (Luke 22:42)

Is suffering involved? Yes—at first. We are determined to seek for salvation our way, clinging to our attachments and trying to force things to work according to our understanding



AS ADAMS AND EVES, we find that the experience of mortality generates in us a sense of fear and vulnerability, which accentuates the dark side of the human condition. We feel naked. As a result, we lose awareness of our core spiritual nature and feel the need to craft a protective identity. This inaccurate Ego overlay is burdensome and ultimately ineffective.

Following Jesus to the cross is frightening since it requires leaving behind our protective mask and facing our nakedness without covering, hiding, or blaming. If we resist the desire to return to and live from Ego, Jesus leads us back to the lightness and joy of our true divine nature.

in spite of the burdens these create. Surrender, like Non-Attachment, is another concept Western minds resist, but resistance or non-surrender only strengthens Ego function and takes us away from the flow of God's will and peace.³⁵ The day after his surrender of Ego in Gethsemane, Jesus allowed his body (now representing our Nakedness and Ego) to be nailed to the cross. In this, he taught us three crucial lessons.

The first is that we must deny our Ego attachments and nail them to the cross with the body of Jesus. Even though part of the shame of crucifixion was being hung up naked before all, we tend to cover the nakedness of Jesus in our images (paintings, icons) and in our minds. We do it instinctively. It's part of our cover/hide/blame survival programming. But in Christ's allowing his nakedness to be displayed, we learn the second lesson: nakedness is not to be feared. Jesus exposed the fallacy that our fears, flaws, and vulnerability are reality, revealing that they are simply characteristics of the overall human condi-

tion.³⁶ The exposure of our nakedness will not destroy us but open the way to spiritual unity.

Finally, Jesus commended his spirit into his Father's hands (Luke 23:46). We follow him by giving up our covering, hiding, and blaming and putting them on the cross. We stand naked and unafraid before God and the world and commend ourselves into the Father's hands, at which point, we learn the third and final lesson: Those loving hands will clothe us in our true identity as spiritual beings made in His image. As this happens, the qualities and characteristics of a spiritual experience become a permanent state of being.

Jesus' objective is not just to make Ego and Nakedness burdens lighter nor to help us hold them up. His mission is to assist us in giving up our burdens of body/mind identification, Ego/Nakedness strategies, and subjection to a pleasure/pain orientation. Christ's Yoga is to detach us from these and to help us assume his only attachment, the love of God, and to know

the “light burden” of rest in our true nature. In this way, we discover the “kingdom within” and become liberated from binding, external attachments. In the Bhagavad Gita, the Lord says, “I am easily attained by the person who always remembers me and is attached to nothing else. Such a person is a true yogi” (Bhagavad Gita 8:14–15). Daya Mata offered this encouragement: “Above all, as I urge you again and again, develop love for God. Hunger for just one attachment—to God.”³⁷

BOTH JESUS AND the yogis taught that understanding and being able to live this yoga of Non-Attachment can come only from deep communion with God. The entire Gospel of John is devoted to the concept that Jesus was able to accomplish his life-changing, world-changing mission only because of his oneness with the Father: “He that sent me is with me” (John 8:29). To eat his flesh and to drink his blood is to partake of the nature and presence of the Father. This spiritual communion completely satisfies and results in fulfillment and peace (John 6:56, 35; John 16:33).

Jesus spent substantial time alone in prayer. Prayer in its richest manifestation is pure communion with God. Meditation is the yogi’s preferred method of spiritual communion. The Ego and Nakedness concepts I have used are spoken of in the Yogic literature as lower functions of the mind and as barriers to spiritual communion. The Bhagavad Gita explains: “It is true that the mind is restless and difficult to control. But it can be conquered . . . through regular (meditation) practice and detachment” (Bhagavad Gita 8:35). Yogananda shares these perspectives:

Transparency to truth is cultivated by freeing the consciousness, the heart’s feeling and the mind’s reason, from the dualistic influences of attraction and aversion. Reality cannot be accurately reflected in a consciousness ruffled by likes and dislikes, with their restless passions and desires. . . . But when . . . human knowing and feeling is calmed by meditation, the ordinary agitated ego gives way to the blessed calmness of soul perception.³⁸

A true yogi is a practitioner of real renunciation (non-attachment), even if he lives in the world and to outer appearances looks like any ordinary person of the world. . . . Have God-contact first through meditation; and then through attachment to God, the attachment to material objects will drop away. . . . The physical austerities of renunciation (non-attachment) alone without the yoga of God-union are unnecessarily arduous.³⁹

In another classic Yogic text, the Katha Upanishad, which also predates the New Testament by hundreds of years, we read, “Like the sharp edge of a razor, the sages say, is the path. Narrow it is, and difficult to tread.”⁴⁰ In almost the same words, Jesus said, “Narrow is the gate and difficult is the way . . . and there are few who find it” (Matthew 7:14, NKJV). This teaching reminds me of Jesus’ concluding statement in Matthew 19:24, after the rich young ruler was unable to give

up his many possessions and walked away from Jesus and the promise of perfection (wholeness) and treasure in heaven: “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.” The “rich” man symbolizes any person laden with external attachments and points out the impossibility of trying to enter the “inner” kingdom of God so overburdened.

Jesus is asking us to follow him and to practice his yoga of communion with God and Non-Attachment, which enables us to easily pass through the narrowest gate and the eye of the smallest needle into the “inner” kingdom which expands into the fullness of the universal kingdom of God. This yoga means immersing ourselves in spiritual communion, which weakens the false identifications of Ego and Nakedness, along with their burdensome attachments and aversions, and restores the awareness of our divine nature. That awareness leads us deeper into our communion with the Father. In that holy presence, we are baptized in fire; our false ideas about God, ourselves, and others, as well as any ungodly desires, behaviors, and other barriers to loving like Christ, are consumed. This is followed by an unfolding of our innate divine qualities so that our relationships, activities, and possessions become expressions of divine nature and love. Then is the prayer of Jesus fulfilled: “that they may be one, even as we are one. I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one” (John 17:22–23).

I think Yogananda is correct: the core spiritual teachings of East and West are in harmony. “Original yoga” and “original Christianity” are joined by the yoke or yoga of Christ. Oneness with God, or the state of yoga, is the light burden Christ offers to us.

“Practice my yoga, and ye shall find rest unto your souls.” ☪

NOTES

1. Today, I have experienced a reversal of this, in that the person of Christ is now my guiding influence instead of a list of principles.
2. Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine* (Salt Lake City, Bookcraft, 1966), 129.
3. Marcus J. Borg, *Jesus: Uncovering the Life, Teachings, and Relevance of a Religious Revolutionary* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006), 10.
4. Philip G. McLemore, “Mormon Mantras: A Journey of Spiritual Transformation,” *SUNSTONE*, April 2006, 20–31.
5. Paramahansa Yogananda, *Autobiography of a Yogi* (Los Angeles: Self-Realization Fellowship, 1988), 481.
6. In the words of Roy Eugene Davis, my meditation teacher and a direct disciple of Yogananda: “At the deepest level of your being, you are pure, whole, and serene. It is only the surface of your awareness that can be modified or fragmented.” Roy Eugene Davis, *Guidelines to Inspired Living* (Lakemont, Georgia: CSA Press, 2006), 5.
7. Mormonism has elements of both the Christian (deficiency) and Yogic (wholeness) models. Mormonism’s dual perspective that human beings are literally the children of Heavenly Parents imbued with divine nature, and also carnal, sensual, and devilish, creates conflicting interpretations. A few LDS authors have leaned heavily toward the divine nature side and have taught that the carnal, sensual, and devilish characteristics are elements of the human condition layered over one’s divine nature, similar to the Yogic view. For instance, in Allan Bergin’s book, *Eternal Values and Spiritual Growth*, he writes: “Understanding your personal identity requires knowing that underneath your outward personality is a unique, indestructible, spiritual core. . . . ‘Mortal overlay’ . . . is the unique, complex set of characteristics that covers or overlays our spiritual selves during earthly life. It is the

combined physical body and mortal mind with all their positive and negative features acquired through biology, genetics, and life experience. . . . When we are born, our eternal identities are obscured by a veil. . . . between the physical world and the spiritual world. . . . [E]ach person has a brilliant inner core that is obscured by a mortal overlay." See Allan Bergin, *Eternal Values and Spiritual Growth* (Provo: BYU Studies, 2002) 27, 29.

Despite wonderful exceptions such as this, in my thirty-seven years of adult Church membership, my experience has been that the predominant teaching is that we have elements of both the divine and the diabolical at our core, and that our faithfulness and choice-making determine which one will prevail throughout eternity. Most Mormon preaching related to repentance and change of heart assumes deficiency. In my view, a loving God would never stop working with his children to bring them into a state of divine unity and wholeness (perfection) if they were capable. The fact that Mormon scripture places individuals into a lower kingdom with the edict that "where God and Christ dwell they cannot come, worlds without end" (D&C 76:112) is a statement about the eternal deficiency of a group of people "as innumerable as the stars."

8. Was Jesus endorsing the Yogic point of view when he uttered the famous words cited in Luke 23:34, "Forgive them Father; for they know not what they do?"

9. Paramahansa Yogananda, *The Second Coming of Christ* (Los Angeles: Self Realization Fellowship, 2004), 936.

10. Others have also noted that Jesus' teachings seem to have more affinity with Eastern spiritualities than the Jewish tradition from which Jesus emerged and the culture in which he taught. The following is the text of a footnote commentary found on page 949 of Yogananda's *The Second Coming*:

In *The Vision of God* (New York: Longman, Green and Co., 1932), Dr. Kenneth E. Kirk, Anglican bishop of Oxford, points out that Jesus' ideals of renunciation were not derived from traditional Jewish teachings:

The ascetic outlook of the Gospels is seen to stand out of any recognizable relation with contemporary Judaism. The passages about turning the other cheek, about taking no thought for the morrow, about laying up no treasure on earth, about forsaking parents and possessions, about bearing the Cross are foreign to the genius of the [Jewish] race.

Though Bishop Kirk concludes that the historical origins of these teachings are something of a mystery, other historians relate them to evidence of Jesus' link with India.



According to the tests, it's not water you are retaining.
You're holding a grudge.

The distinguished scholar (and former president of India) Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan writes in *Eastern Religions and Western Thought* (Oxford University Press, 1939): "In his teaching of the Kingdom of God, life eternal, ascetic emphasis, and even future life, Jesus Christ breaks away from the Jewish tradition and approximates to Hindu and Buddhist thought. Though his teaching is historically continuous with Judaism, it did not develop from it in its essentials."

11. Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1976), 1:512.

12. Each of these is detailed in the Bhagavad Gita, a classic Yogic text of which many translations are available. The translation I use and quote from in this article is: Eknath Easwaran, *The Bhagavad Gita Translated for the Modern Reader* (Tomales, California: Nilgiri Press, 1985).

13. A good explanation of this can be found in Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood, *How to Know God: The Yoga Aphorisms of Paranjali* (Hollywood: Vedanta Press, 1953), 40.

14. Hatha Yoga, the practice of postures for balance, strength, and flexibility, is one of the components of Raja Yoga that was designed to prepare one for meditation and direct communion with God.

15. Paramahansa Yogananda, "How to Use Thoughts of Immortality to Awaken Your True Self," *Self Realization*, vol. 77, no. 1 (Winter 2005): 11.

16. In Matthew 25:12, the virgins with oil (those who were not impure from worldly intercourse and who were rooted in spiritual communion) were those whom God "knew." This deeper "knowing" is the result of a mature relationship beyond parent/child.

17. Paramahansa Yogananda, *The Second Coming* (Los Angeles: Self Realization Fellowship, 2004), 364.

18. Evagrius Ponticus was a Desert Father who left his monastery for the Egyptian desert in 383 A.D. Father Laurence Freeman, a Benedictine monk, gave the following description of Evagrius's concept of prayer: "Prayer itself is the absence of all thoughts, even pure thoughts. . . . Pure prayer itself, he says, is like Moses who takes off his shoes when he approaches the burning bush. So we must leave thoughts behind, take our thoughts off, if we are to see the One who is beyond every thought and every perception." See Laurence Freeman, *OSB, All and Nothing: Following the Tradition of Meditation from the Desert Fathers and John Cassian to John Main*, six audiocassettes (London: Medio Media, 1993).

19. "Learning to Pray: An Interview with Roberta C. Bondi," originally published in *The Christian Century*, 20-27 March 1996; available online at <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=302> (accessed 2 May 2007).

20. Many Yogic and Buddhist writers use the terms "detachment" or "non-attachment" according to personal preference. Since the concept to which both terms refer has a built-in negative association to Westerners, I prefer "non-attachment" since it has a softer feel.

21. There are many translations of the Four Noble Truths. One I like is:

1. Life means suffering
2. The origin of suffering is attachment
3. The cessation of suffering is attainable.
4. There is a way leading to the cessation of suffering.

The way mentioned here is the Eightfold Path, which is: right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration. In this context, "right" does not refer to one specific way, but to a balanced and appropriate application.

22. The five *Klaysh* are seen as responsible for human suffering, uneasiness, and lack of satisfaction. They are:

1. Ignorance of one's true identity
2. Self-centeredness and a sense of separateness from God, others, and creation
3. Attachment to pleasure
4. Aversion to pain
5. Fear of death.

See Chapter 2, verse 3 of the classic Yogic text, *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, which is available in many different translations. Fear of death is a result of attachment to and identification with those things which are temporary.

23. The quintessential story used by yogis and Buddhist monks to illustrate the problem of attachment is the technique once used to catch monkeys in South India:

One takes a coconut and makes a hole in it, just large enough that a monkey can squeeze its hand in. Next, the coconut is tied down, and a sweet put inside. The monkey smells the sweet, puts his hand into the coconut, grabs the sweet, and because the hole is so small, he cannot get his fist out. The monkey doesn't consider letting go of the sweet, so it is

literally tied down by its own attachment. Often the monkeys only let go when they fall asleep or become unconscious because of exhaustion.

24. Eckhart Tolle, *Eckhart Tolle's Findhorn Retreat* (Novato, California: New World Library, 2006), 16.

25. It is obvious that for a human being to develop in a healthy and balanced fashion, a child needs to experience secure and appropriate attachments to people, places, and things. Children who do not form these connections are prone to psychological and emotional problems. We can transcend attachments and their limitations once a healthy personality has developed. This transition is reflected in the move from a Parent/Child relationship to a Bride/Groom relationship with God.

Many of my hospice patients express the anger and anguish of a sense of losing themselves, since each week seems to bring a new loss. They have lost or are in the process of losing their ability to work and to enjoy hobbies and interests. They have lost friends and family members. Their health, independence, and ability to care for themselves, along with their privacy and dignity, are ebbing away. Many have had to give up homes and lifelong possessions. The patients who suffer the most are those who have placed their identity and sense of being in these external things. My job is to help them reconnect with the part of them that is unchanging and eternal, the part that is beyond the world of form they are used to controlling. In my follow-up work with family members, I have discovered that those who experience unhealthy and unresolved grief are those who have persistent, inappropriate attachments. These are horrible burdens.

26. The tag on a Yogi Tea Bag came with the following aphorism, which captures this idea perfectly: "True wealth is the ability to let go of your possessions."

27. Although there are yogic, Buddhist, and Christian renunciates/monks who give up all possessions and family relationships to seek and serve God, Yogananda, who himself was a celibate monk, states: "The corollary of outer renunciation is the non-attachment of inner renunciations" (Yogananda, *The Second Coming of Christ*, 949). He does not believe that outer renunciation (the life of a monk) is necessary to attain the state of yoga (with God) but that inner renunciation (non-attachment) for either monks or "householders" is essential.

28. Daya Mata, "Spiritualizing Your Everyday Thoughts to Make Meditation Easier," *Self Realization* 78, no. 2 (Spring 2007): 22. An interesting sidenote about Daya Mata that relates to Mormonism: After Yogananda was in America a while, Yogananda heard that Mormons were devilish people who actually had stubby horns on their heads. Yogananda said, "I have to see this for myself." Accordingly, he came to Salt Lake City in 1931 to give a series of public lectures. He later reported that the stories told to him about Mormons were untrue and that he found the Mormon people to be good and reverent.

A young Mormon girl from Salt Lake City named Faye Wright attended his lectures, became convinced Yogananda was a man who really "knew God," and became a celibate nun in his monastic order. She received the monastic name of Daya Mata, meaning "mother of compassion." She later served as Yogananda's personal secretary for more than twenty years, and in 1955, became the president of his worldwide organization, "Self Realization Fellowship." Daya Mata holds that position today at age 93.

29. Brijendra, *The Essence of Patanjali Yog Sootras Course* (Boca Raton, Florida: Transformation Meditation, 2003), 34.

30. Ravi Ravindra, *The Gospel of John in the Light of Indian Mysticism* (Richester, Vermont: Inner Traditions, 2004), 199.

31. Another way of seeing Adam and Eve in the Garden is through the lenses of the LDS teaching about our pre-Earth lives. Adam and Eve's qualities are the same as what we are taught about spirit children in the pre-existence. If we follow this a bit further, Eden can be seen as the pre-existence, and partaking of the fruit as our decision to come to earth.

32. Although Yogic literature details the proper and ideal functions of body, mind, and ego, they are usually dealt with in a negative context—as things that need to be put away to unveil our divine nature. Body, mind, and ego can be reference points for God's love but only if they are our servants. Usually they are our masters.

Most of us are aware of the ways we use exaggeration and distortion to maintain an image. For instance, my home teacher, who played football in high school, remarked that he becomes a better player as each year passes.

Deepak Chopra contrasts Ego and Spirit:

Behind the curtain of your intellect and emotions is your self-image or ego. The ego is not your real self; it is the image of yourself that you have slowly built over time. It is the mask behind which you hide, but it is not the real you. And because it is not the real you, but a fraud, it lives in fear. It wants approval. It needs to control. . . . The world of ego is time-bound, temporary, fragmented, fearful, personal, self-centered, self-absorbed, and attached to the known. The world of spirit is time-

less and eternal, free of past and future, whole, joyful, open, and accessible to all . . . undivided, unshakable, dynamic creative, self-sufficient, powerful, and free of limitation, expectation, and attachment.

Deepak Chopra, *Power, Freedom, and Grace* (San Rafael, California: Amber-Allen Publishing, 2006), 81, 85.

33. Ego takes two forms: (1) soothing stories to cover nakedness; and (2) resistance and resentment that accentuate our individuality and separateness. The classic two-year-old armed with his battle cry of "no" signals the firm rooting of Ego.

Much like the comment on attachment in note 25, human beings need to develop a healthy, appropriate ego to even be capable of spiritual growth. That's why therapy and psychological work are needed for many to move on to greater spiritual development. Since even a balanced and healthy ego has limitations, once established, it needs to be transcended for deeper spiritual unity with God.

34. Deepak Chopra, *The Book of Secrets* (New York: Harmony Books, 2004), 49.

35. Consider this perspective on surrender from Eckhart Tolle:

Surrender. . . does not mean to passively put up with whatever situation you find yourself in and to do nothing about it. . . Surrender is the simple but profound wisdom of yielding to rather than opposing the flow of life. . . . Non-surrender hardens your psychological form, the shell of the ego, and so creates a strong sense of separateness. The world around you and people in particular come to be perceived as threatening. . . [Y]our perceptions and interpretations are (then) governed by fear. . . Tension arises in different parts of the body, and the body as a whole contracts. The free flow of life energy through the body, which is essential for its healthy functioning, is greatly restricted. . . . If you find your life situation unsatisfactory or even intolerable, it is only by surrendering first that you can break the unconscious resistance pattern that perpetuates that situation. . . . Surrender reconnects you with the source-energy of Being (God). . . . No truly positive action can arise out of an unsundered state of consciousness."

Eckhart Tolle, *The Power of Now* (Novato, California: New World Library, 1999), 171–74.

We have the habit of defining ourselves in terms of what is *not* me, and so our "me story" cannot be sustained without opposition and resistance, which becomes a barrier to spiritual unity.

36. Tolle says, "Your own frustrating story is not your personal dilemma but the human condition, and you derived your sense of self from that which is nothing personal whatsoever. It's the human condition in its unconscious, unenlightened state. And that's what gave you your sense of personal selfhood and what you wanted to cling to!" (From the audio recording of Eckhart Tolle's *Findhorn Retreat* (New World Library, Sept 2005).

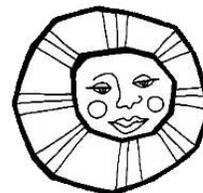
As we move from Eden to the cross and beyond, we experience the Atonement as detachment from Ego and Nakedness and a whole-souled attachment to God. In this process, any influence that creates fear and tries to get us to cover, hide, and blame as was done in Eden, should be met with Jesus' words from Matthew 16:23: "Get behind me, Satan! You are an offense to me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men."

37. Daya Mata, *Finding the Joy Within You* (Los Angeles: Self Realization Fellowship, 1990), 201.

38. Yogananda, *The Second Coming of Christ*, 440.

33. *Ibid.*, 769.

40. Katha Upanishad 1.3:14. Quoted in the Parabola Anthology Series, *The Inner Journey: Views from the Hindu Tradition* (Sandpoint, Idaho: Morning Light Press, 2007), xi.



silent, the deacon
waits while his brother ponders
his choice of bread crumb

—ELIZABETH PETTY BENTLEY

2005 Brookie & D. K. Brown Fiction Contest Sunstone Winner

VOLUPTUOUS

By Helen Walker Jones

RIGHT NOW, THE VARSITY BULLDOGS ARE SINGLE-file along the thirty yard line of Bulldog Stadium, doing Jumping Jacks—scissor-flashes of white Spandex against chalk lines on scruffy brown grass. I'm sitting in fifth-period physics, staring out the window, and it's impossible not to notice Max Whitmer in those stretchy, almost-see-through, girdle-type pants they wear to dress rehearsals, or whatever you call their last warm-ups before the game.

Max and I have been on a total of three actual dates (wrestling match, Bruce Willis army movie, and—my choice—a snappy FreezePops concert at Snowbird), plus a study session at my house while Mom and her boyfriend bickered in the kitchen. The ticket stubs from our three official dates are tucked in a diamond pattern around the frame on my bathroom mirror so I can think of Max while flossing and applying lash-lengthening Kitten Flips mascara. Max and I have kissed only once, and it was last night.

At this exact moment, I'm scribbling some last-minute homework—a one-hundred-word parody of *Crime and Punishment*. My mom keeps telling me, "Valedictorians are not slackers. They don't spend hours contemplating their navels." Mom's hippie-era vocabulary can be sort of amusing—a throwback to her youth, when she wore ragged bell-bottom pants with a palm tree embroidered on the butt and a T-shirt saying "Potential Mothers All-Girl Rock Band," for which she honestly played keyboards.

The clock is ticking on my Dostoevsky parody, so I keep scribbling, with the paper tucked inside my textbook, writing with a crooked wrist while pretending to listen in rapt fascination to Quackers as he extols the virtues of the Einstein-Minkowski theories of astrophysics. He wrote his master's thesis on Albert and Hermann (he seems to be on a first-name basis with the two of them). My high school is fairly small, so most of the faculty pull double-duty—like Quackers, who teaches both physics and English lit. And right at this moment, I'm hoping Quackers (whose real name is Mr. Delgado, but who got his duck moniker from walking with his toes turned

out) doesn't notice that I'm madly scrawling my English homework during his lecture.

On loose-leaf paper, I write:

Olga Marmelubsky sat on her shabby bed in the village of Shostakovich, distraught, thinking of the shabbily-dressed young man who had torn her heart to shreds. He was a notorious circus acrobat. Recalling the way he had hung from the trapeze, suspended by the reinforced toes of his badly-darned socks, Olga berated herself because she still voluptuously dreamed of marrying him.

"Dimitri is like a piece of iron," she whimpered, "and he has broken me like a pebble."

Poor Olga asked, in terror, "If a dog dies in Moscow but there is no vodka, can there be a funeral held?"

There. It's finished, and I can hand it in right before kick-off. Maybe Quackers will smile somewhat wryly at our own private joke about the word "voluptuous"—a Dostoevsky favorite. To me, it meant only one thing: Boob Job. So I quizzed Quackers, who told me "voluptuous" means "desiring sensual pleasure." That fits me to a tee: *Desiring*, but never *getting* that limp sticky feeling.

TRUE CONFESSION: MAX is the first boy who ever kissed me. Nobody knows this except Ashley Tyler, my best bud. Ashley pledged to be my social coach this year. She clues me in when I'm acting too nutso, in her words. Her number-one piece of advice was, "You scare boys away when you start talking about Lucia di Lammermoor and Albert Einstein. Stick to kung-fu movies and whoever's going to the Super Bowl, and you can't go wrong." Since Ash's advice directly led to Max Whitmer asking me out, I'll be eternally in her debt. The average girl in this high school can walk into a drugstore and ask for cherry-flavored condoms without batting an eyelash. Yet I, the 17-year-old virgin-lipped social retard, had to be rescued by her buddy-in-the-know, Ashley Tyler.

Other than kissing, only one thing renders me physically and emotionally limp: Puccini arias. When Quackers made us read "Euclid Alone Has Looked on Beauty Bare" I told him, "I'm not exactly turned on by angles and hypotenuses, but if you could substitute 'Puccini' for 'Euclid'—that I could envision." The class laughed, but I was completely serious. I have this CD of a hunky tenor named José Cura. At night, I replay "Nessun Dorma" about a hundred times in a row, imagining



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*There are lots of us teenage virgins around,
but nobody knows it since we don't appear
on Jerry Springer and Maury Povich.*

myself in a dark opera house, with José singing to me, alone, in Italian: “I shall win, I shall win, I shall win!” I suppose that’s the macho guy’s version of “I Am a Strong and Mighty Woman,” my mom’s favorite mantra for when she’s upset. Unfortunately, the album notes gush about José’s beautiful wife and three children, so he’s not likely to be pursuing me any time soon.

Quackers startles me by asking me to expound on Minkowski’s space-time triangle. As I toss off my little speech about Time-like Infinity, Euclidean hypersurfaces, and the Einstein cylinder, I stare at his nice brown eyes, his biceps under his pale blue Oxford-cloth shirt, and the thick waves of his almost-blue-black hair in light reflected from the window. I know I’m his all-time favorite student. I actually *read* every single word of *Crime and Punishment* while everybody else just did *Spark Notes*. I watched a nine-hour BBC video of it, too. Plus, in all modesty, I admit I inherited a pretty decent brain from the Plum Alley Queen and the Prince of Garbaga.

Lots of girls in school think Quackers is hot. Do I view him as an object of desire? No way. I don’t want him living the rest of his life, incarcerated. He’d have to move on first, anyway. Get a Ph.D. instead of teaching in this dungeon for the rest of his natural life. Anyway, rumor is he’s married and can’t wear a ring because he breaks out in a rash when gold touches his skin.

Besides, what would my mom say? Despite the fact that my sweetie, Max Whitmer, is basically a wholesome guy who’s planning a Mormon mission after he graduates, Mom thinks of him as a bad boy because (a) she caught him smoking a Tiparillo outside Food King (before he repented), and (b) he won a contest for good-looking jocks. The prize? A cameo in a cable TV show. Max earned a hefty check portraying a litter-bearer for a 320-pound Arab sultan. Onscreen, both the sultan and Max (in his loincloth) got devoured by a white tiger. Okay, it happened behind some palm fronds, but you saw blood spurting. Those little incidents totally colored Mom’s thinking about Max Whitmer.

MOM HAS THIS new boyfriend—Julius—a dermatologist. “Call me Dr. J.,” he says, like he’s one of the greatest basketball players in history. Mom is smitten with him even though his nose hairs are his most prominent feature. I nearly barfed when Mom plucked them for him one night while he sat at our kitchen table! I refused to eat there until Mom decontaminated the placemats with liquid bleach.

Julius is Jewish, whereas I must stick like glue to Mormon boys, even though (before my first date with Max) Nathan Steinmetz came to my cross-country meet twice, walked me home both times, massaged a charley-horse out of my calf, has the cutest chin dimple in school, and can do a right-on imper-

sonation of the vice principal. It’s not fair. I still plan to hang with Nathan after Max goes to preach the gospel who knows where. Nathan’s dad is, I think, the assistant rabbi at the Congregation Kol Ami. I went to a

party at their club once, with my buddy Sarah Light, who’s Jewish even if her name doesn’t sound like it. Nathan introduced me to his dad, who had a bushy brown beard and an outfit sort of like a Mormon missionary—dark suit, skinny black tie, and white shirt—at a pool party, no less. He told everybody—even teenagers—“Call me Abe.”

I don’t get why my mom is so hung-up on my dating “within the faith” since *she* goes to church only on Christmas, Easter, or if Grandma is in town. People assume we’re Catholic—with a name like “Delaney”—but we’re not. My ancestors joined the Mormon Church in Antrim (up by Belfast) more than a hundred and fifty years ago, and during the potato famine, they emigrated to Utah. The Delaneys and their nine kids walked from the Mississippi River to the Salt Lake Valley, dragging their only possessions in a wooden handcart. Mom says I got my bullheadedness from that side of the family.

All my mother’s friends are non-church-attenders and divorced, just like she is. They go out man-hunting on Saturday nights at The Plum Alley which features a cheesy disco ball plus drug-addled guitarists, tone-deaf vocalists, and bare-chested drummers. Wearing stockings with seams that look like miniscule eels crawling along their calves and up under their skimpy mini-skirts, Mom and her cradle-robbing pals ask thirty-year-olds to dance. Definitely kinky, and verging on perverted.

This apparel is fine and dandy for my mom, but if I try borrowing it, look out! Same goes for her bathing suit—that strapless number with the peek-a-boo sides. Hot pink with black piping. *Très low cut*, as she says, although Mom doesn’t have a clue about French “R’s” and pronounces the word as if she meant a salmon-colored slab of plastic on which you carry your Sloppy Joes in the high school cafeteria. That swimsuit is off limits to somebody like me who actually has the size-four body to wear it, with no post-childbirth abdominal pooches, saggy boobs, or cottage-cheese thighs. Last April, Mom made me purchase a creepy two-piece suit with “boy shorts” instead of a bikini bottom and a top that shows about as much flesh as a nun’s habit.



Mom, at fifty-two, is still very sexy looking. She and her buds all slave at underwater aerobics, regularly pay plastic surgeons to suck the fat out of their saddle-bag thighs, and always wear diamonds and pearls to put highlights back in their faces. No lie, these babes all pretend their thirty-fifth birthdays were recent events.

Dr. J. is always trying to push some new zit lotion on me, insinuating that I need it, which I don't. People have actually told me that my skin reminds them of porcelain, even if those people are all named Ethel, Myrna, Velma, and Fanny. So I told him, "Keep your meddling, latex gloves off my face." Mom told me to be quiet. If Julius hadn't been there, it would have been "Shut up," but she's ultra-conscious of her image when dating is involved.

My mom may be worried about lights in her complexion, but my buddies and I freak over too-tight thong underpants, kissing with cracked lips or Dijon mustard breath, and having your neck turn blotchy-red when the health teacher gives a frank demonstration of condom usage, employing a zucchini as a model. I've suffered through it twice now, and both times it verged on porno.

Mom's friends all have French-sounding names with three syllables: Evelyn, Sylvia, Jacqueline, Marilyn. It was their mothers' revolt against their own stodgy Ethel, Myrna, Velma and Fanny. Somehow, my name—Grace—sounds more like a ninety-year-old knitter than a kid who'll turn eighteen in a few months. Bad: It's a Biblical name, like "Charity," "Jezebel," and "Delilah." Good: It's short and easy to pronounce—perfect for a marquee, according to my vocal coach, Madame Beatrice Arbizu. She's positive I'll be headlining at the Met before I hit twenty-five.

MAX WHITMER WILL do for now. After plucking his protruding nose hairs, Mom keeps Julius around for breakfast, but she's frantic, worrying that Max and I are misbehaving. I don't know why. My personal chastity standards are posted on my bedroom wall: No Sex Before Marriage. There are lots of us teenage virgins around, but nobody knows it since we don't appear on Jerry Springer and Maury Povich. People tell me it's corny to want to be a virgin when I get married, but I don't want anything to compare with in that department. I never want to lie in my husband's arms, becoming worked-up during extensive and expert foreplay, and think to myself, "Wow, my old high school boyfriend was a much better lover than you, you little fleabag disappointing loser." I never want to be fifty-two-years-old, divorced, and bopping at the discos with my pathetic, face-lifted girlfriends.

I'm juggling my own romantic conflicts, my dream of being an opera singer some day, Mom's frequent love connections, and my own fiercely competitive desire to be valedictorian of my graduating class, which requires constant effort so that Samantha Freakin' Lewis doesn't exceed my G.P.A. So far I've had only one A minus, and Samantha's had three, so I have a bit of a cushion. Nathan Steinmetz is out of the running after getting mono last March and missing six whole weeks, including mid-terms.

Somebody yanks on my hair, and when I turn around, I see my bud, Ashley Tyler, who discreetly slips a wadded-up note into my palm. "Read this and freak," she whispers. "I found it on the floor by you-know-who's locker." Are people still communicating in quaint, handwritten notes? Ninety-nine percent of the kids I know contact each other by cell phone text-messaging, including me and Max Whitmer.

Ash is avoiding looking at me. I can tell by the way she's staring at her shoes in fascination. Holding the tightly-folded paper, I can almost feel the heat of Max's hands on it. I picture his fingerprints—little whorls verifying that he's touched it.

Last night, when Max came to my house to work on trig, he looked scrumptious as a Ken doll in his low-rider jeans with just a hint of Joe Boxers waistband peeking out. Looking serene and hairy, Dr. Julius was sitting at the table with his hands folded on a placemat. As a hint to Max, I rolled my eyes in the direction of my bedroom, but he stayed put. I was rather worried about any cosmetic undertakings my mother might be contemplating on Julius's behalf. "Please," I said under my breath to my mom, "if you're gonna pluck him, do it in the privacy of your own bedroom."

Let me preface this by saying that I absolutely never use profanity. Madame Arbizu insists that I use vocabulary befitting a professional singer, and I make an all-out effort to do so. But Mom misinterpreted what I said. "Young lady," she hollered, "you know I don't allow language like that! Just whom do you think you're talking to?"

"Excellent grammar," Max Whitmer said approvingly, bobbing his head and thumping his textbook with three fingers so it sounded like a galloping horse.

"You have no sense of irony whatsoever," I told him disgustingly.

To his credit, Julius told Mom, "I think you heard wrong, Cynthia."

But Mom was off on a rampage. "If you want to have friends over, you can at least address me with a little respect, Miss Grace Mariah Delaney!"

"You want respect, Cynthia?" Julius said. "Then for heaven's sake, put on an apron and pick up a broom." He laughed at his own cleverness.

"What on earth are you talking about?" Mom demanded, not getting the joke. Now it was Max's turn to roll his eyes and nod in the direction of the hallway, but before the two of us could escape, Dr. J. said, "Tell me, Mr. Whitmer, when you hear the word 'mother,' do you think of a woman in slinky black leather and chunky gold jewelry, or do you picture a gingham housedress and a cross-stitched apron?"

I was sure Max had never heard of gingham or cross-stitching, but he tried hard to accommodate Dr. J. by saying, "Well, my mother is a very modern and beautiful woman, too, sir, so I'm not really equipped to answer in the way you apparently want me to."

Dr. J. was stunned by this. He'd been hoping for a terse "Yup."

Mom said to Julius, "Are you implying that I need to look like a drudge so my daughter will do what she's told?"

How could I ever explain to Max, or to Quackers, or to my beautiful but lonely mother that we voluptuous types have to coax ourselves to be choosers in the realm of sensual pleasure, rather than beggars?



“My mother looked like that,” Julius said, “and I’ll bet yours did, too.”

“Why are you dragging *our* mothers into this?” Mom snorted and stared at the ceiling. Her eyes welled up with tears, and she did that little cheek squinch she does to keep them from rolling down. I was sure she was chanting, “I Am a Strong and Mighty Woman” like she tells me to do whenever I feel like crying.

Max was sighing and leaning into the doorframe with both arms elevated, like Samson trying to bring the building down around him. His textbook was balanced on his head in the cutest, most alarming way. “Shut up, you two!” I hissed, horrified at what Max must be thinking of me and my family. I whirled around and ran down the hall to my bedroom to grab my trig text so we could study in the family room. But when I picked it up and turned around, Max was sitting on my Italian silk bedspread that Julius had brought back from a dermatologists’ convention in Milan.

“Oh,” I said, surprised. “I’ve never had a boy in my bedroom before.” Then I hit my forehead, knowing what Ashley would say about this enormous social *faux pas*. Max and I tried to concentrate on studying. Really we did. But Dr. J. and my mom were freaking out in the kitchen, like a chapter out of my parents’ marriage. Sadly, the reason my parents finally got divorced is because Mom found out about Dad’s senseless affair with a toothpaste model. (Mom and I nicknamed her “Bucky Beaver,” and Mom really laughed when I asked, “Do you suppose she’s toothsome? Or just toothy?”) Dad had been Bucky’s lawyer in a messy divorce. But before that, Mom and Dad had nightly arguments about the thermostat setting and the Visa bill and whose turn it was to empty the “garbaga,” which is what my dad still calls it—like it’s a delicacy on an Italian menu or something.

And now Julius was flipping Mom’s switches just as surely. Finally, as Mom was screaming, “Just get out of here and take your stupid Efudex cream,” Max got up from my desk and walked over to the bed where I was sitting with the advanced trig text open on my lap, put his hands in my super-gelled hair, and kissed me right on the lips. His light blond, wispy moustache hairs tickled, and I could see a faint trace of that black stuff he smudges under his eyes during football practice to reduce glare. I didn’t close my eyes for a second, because every close-up detail about him was just too wonderful.

Julius was hollering, “Be that way, then, but don’t think I’ll come crawling back here, Cyn. Women your age are swarming

all over me, and I can take my pick.”

My lips were tingling, and my palms wouldn’t rise up off my silk comforter even though my brain was commanding them. I

was staring into Max’s dazzling, slate-colored eyes, and the thought occurred to me that in thirty years, he would have nose hairs, too, and maybe even tufts growing out of his ears.

My mom burst into my bedroom and said, “Exactly what is going on here, Grace? You know the rules of this house. No boys allowed in your bedroom, unchaperoned, ever!”

“I’ll see you, Babe,” Max said in a soft voice. “Tomorrow after the game. Meet me in the south end zone.” I nodded but didn’t make a move to see him out. He walked past the kitchen combatants and out the back door. Through my bedroom’s bay window, I watched him trot jauntily down the back steps. The engine of his rusted Nissan roared in the driveway. Then pebbles flew up against the bricks on the garage. My mom was still glaring at me, breathing hard, and toying with the fake fingernail on her pinky.

BUT THAT WAS last night. Right now, Quackers is discouraging on Hermann Minkowski (pronounced “Hair-mawn,” as if he’s Jamaican). The football players have trotted into the locker room for their pre-game pep-talk, and everybody in class is nodding off. If I make the slightest crackle while opening the note, Quackers will confiscate it.

Finally, it’s open on my desk, its edges ragged, the punched holes at left torn clean through, as if the writer couldn’t wait a moment longer. The writing is not Max’s. It’s loopy, slanted, and the capital I’s are exclamation marks with perky round dots under them. It says:

Max, PLEEZE don’t say ! think your a dum jock. Your real smart besides being athaletic too. YOU OWE ME GUM from 2 weeks ago. If you think I’m one of the cutest blonds in school, well your a stud yourslef! I love your jockeyness. And you use such awesome grammer. Write me again. And make a interseption for me today. I’ll be watchin. Love, Deb

P.S. HANGMAN.

I can’t think for a minute, or breathe, either. How could Max prefer this semi-literate dodo to me? The note proves that

he has personally commented on her physical attributes, borrowed gum from her, and shares a secret password with her (Hangman, whatever that stands for—probably a blatant reference to a certain person's male anatomy). Worse yet, my best friend Ashley knew all of this before *I* did! And what is the point of taking trig and physics and music theory if the stupid girls get the cute guys?

The inside of my lip is bleeding where I accidentally bit it while reading that rancid letter. I never wanted to be a serial dater like Mom. I dreamed of Max and me in a little condo while I was going for my Ph.D. in vocal performance and he was coaching the Junior Bulldogs to victory after victory. I even thought of giving up Juilliard for him.

I don't know how to do Mom's cheek squinch, so I'm squeezing my eyelids together, desperately trying to concentrate on anything but the agony of being duped and dumped and having tears streak my cheeks. I want to be invisible. I wish Quackers would look right through me, that the bell would ring and I could escape to the end stall of the girls' bathroom. If Quackers asks me to discuss some aspect of quantum mechanics, my melodramatic sobbing will be heard in the halls, the cafeteria, the auditorium—even as far away as the locker room. It's true what all those songs tell you: Love hurts. I can't bear to think about Max Whitmer and the malodorous epistle from his secret squeeze. I can't even bring myself to chant Mom's mantra.

I make casual swipes at my cheeks to clear the tears. I take deep breaths and try to think of: (a) maintaining my front-runner status for valedictorian, and (b) cultivating my coloratura soprano voice, diction, and knowledge of foreign languages for my future career. It doesn't help. How was I to know that innocuous, big-shouldered, loincloth-wearing Max Whitmer would smash my heart to a pulp? I wish the real Max *had* been eaten by the Sultan's tiger.

I'm so heartbroken I can't even think about my Dostoevsky parody, but if I don't turn it in, there goes my G.P.A. Regardless of my psychic pain, I smell Samantha Lewis's juicy-fruit breath about to overtake me in the valedictorian race, so I'll hand in the assignment. By tomorrow, everyone in school will know about Max Whitmer, the Master of Rejection, and his involvement with that Jezebel.

I'm not lucky in love. Am I predestined to be an unmarried career woman who uses man after man, then tosses them aside like so many empty Pepsi cans and struts away on her stilettos? Fat chance. I'm too much like my mother. I'll be sobbing nightly in my own kitchen, enduring all the crap—the man-hunts, the make-overs, the bikini waxes—always seeking my true love, either in a pair of white Spandex football pants or Rodolfo's clingy breeches and calf-hugging tights as he sings to me in *La Bohème* about my cold little hand. I'd be willing to wager my first year's paycheck that Little Miss Anonymous Deb—the girl who thinks enough of herself to use exclamation points as personal pronouns—shall never darken the stage of the Metropolitan Opera House and sing at the top of her voice while pretending to be dying of tuberculosis. But I will. Just you wait.

I'm wondering if Max dated me only so he could crib my trig notes. No way am I gonna meet him after the football game. I refuse to stick with somebody who could fall for the cutesy-poo crap in that note. Maybe in seven or eight years, when Barbara Walters asks me, in my tastefully appointed living room, to recall my first true love, I'll think of Max Whitmer and let one single tear roll down my cheek as the cameraman zooms in for a close-up.

Ashley hands me a follow-up note saying, "Who gives a care about old Max Whitmer, anyways?" She looks at me sideways with that good-hearted Brave Little Toaster grin of hers. Ash is such a loyal pal.

"Yeah," I respond in writing, "*given that he's cute, smart, buff, and Mormon—exactly what I want. Why should I care about somebody whose little slut writes mash notes to him behind my back? When I'm as famous as Joan Sutherland and Hermann Minkowski, you can bet I'll have my pick of any guy I want.*" I hope Ashley realizes I'm mocking Max's new girlfriend by using exclamation points. And I sincerely hope she didn't see me wipe my cheeks after I read the putrid, stinking note.

Confessing my heartbreak to Madame Arbizu will be wrenching, but she told me once that I would never be a fully mature singer until I had experienced life to the fullest. So I guess having a broken heart will improve my chances at the Metropolitan Regionals next year and in the Juilliard auditions.

I guess Max—like my dad—was corrupted by a conniving woman. Max was okay with my chastity rules, but I suppose his new gal-pal is hot to trot, tempting him by pressing her chest against him in the hall, playing tongue-tag when they kiss, and wearing stuck-in-the-crack thong underwear—all those verboten things I'd never dream of doing. I know absolutely that when I get home tonight, Mom will be there with Dr. J., grooming him like a cat. All will be forgiven. Mom and Julius will be crazy-in-love again. He'll be my new prospective stepdad. Maybe there'll be some new clothes in it for me—and I don't mean a spider-weave top and too-groovy bell-bottoms. I have in mind a ballgown with a beautifully-draped white silk bodice and a stiff black taffeta skirt with a cummerbund sash. Madame Arbizu would applaud, just looking at me in that get-up. And I'm pretty sure any adjudicator would be able to tell, just by watching the way my chest heaves under that white silk during the crescendos, that I have suffered through and overcome heartbreak of the most devastating kind.

SO NOW I'M shuffling my papers, lining up the textbooks in my backpack, and getting ready for the bell to ring. My fingers are trembling. I take a deep breath to expand my diaphragm, smile despite my sadness, then continue my silent chanting of, "I Am a Strong and Mighty Woman." By the time I've repeated it ten times, I, Grace Mariah Delaney, will pretty much have the rest of my life mapped out, starting with my plan to miss the entire Bulldog football game in order to consult Quackers on the further intricacies of Minkowski's space-time triangle. And later—right before I ask for the new silk-and-taffeta dress—I'll discuss with my mom the deep, cosmic, human need for love, affection, and (as

much as possible) the absence of pain.

When everybody has cleared the room, I dial my mom on my cell phone and when she answers, I say, "Mom? Can you pick me up? Nobody's carpooling tonight because of the football game." I feel about five years old, relying on my mommy to rescue me.

I toss my Dostoevsky parody onto Quackers's desk even though he's nowhere around. So long, Olga. How could I ever explain to Max, or to Quackers, or to my beautiful but lonely mother that we voluptuous types have to coax ourselves to be choosers in the realm of sensual pleasure, rather than beggars? Otherwise, love can ruin everything. They could never grasp that concept.

Quackers bumps into me as he bounds through the door of the classroom and knocks my backpack off my shoulder. "Sorry," he says. "Is there something you need, Grace?"

"Nothing," I say, deciding against my plan to talk space-time triangles with him. "But thanks, anyway."

I'm already across the hall, twirling the tumblers on my combination lock, when I hear him say from the door of his classroom, "Have you been crying?"

I shake my head and try to laugh in cascades like I do in my "Chiri-chiri-bin" song. It comes out really fake. "I'm fine, Mr. Delgado. I want you to know that I really loved your lecture on Minkowski and Einstein."

He beams. "Thanks, Grace. Having an appreciative student makes the daily grind a little less awful." Then he switches off the fluorescent lights in the classroom, locks his door, and strolls away, whistling.

I wonder if Max Whitmer will show up at my doorstep after the game, begging me to listen to his insincere apologies and explanations. Should I tear his heart to shreds and break him like a pebble? Oh, sure. Like I have that kind of power.

AS MOM PULLS up at the curb outside the east entrance, I wave at her until I remember where I am. Then I walk slowly down the stairs, heft my backpack onto the floor behind the passenger's seat, and say, leaning through the window, "Can we go get ice cream? Please?"

"Sure, hon," she says, patting the leather seat beside her. "Hop in. I have good news!" She wiggles the fingers of her left hand and flashes a huge diamond ring shaped like a teardrop.

"When?" I say.

"Next month. I'm so excited. You can be my maid of honor."

"And then we'll move into Julius's house?"

"Of course."

"I do not want to live at the Pimple Palace!" I announce. "A house built from the proceeds of dermatology. That's disgusting. What are you going to do—braid his nose hairs for the wedding?"

My mom pulls into traffic, doing her cheek squinch to keep me from noticing the puddle of tears at the outer corner of her eye. I've made her cry!

"Mom," I say, "I'm sorry I was so mean. I never realized how much agony you went through when Dad left. It must have been a trillion times worse, being dumped by a man who's slept in your bed for fifteen years straight, kissed your forehead during labor, and cried as he cuddled your newborn baby girl in his arms."

We drive on a bit. "I know you'll never take Dad back, even though he's begged twice. And I don't blame you," I said.

"Letting a man crush your ego *twice* is the worst kind of stupid." On the radio, one of those twangy country singers is lamenting, "You walked across my heart like it was Texas. . . ." I smile in spite of myself.

Dad's three-month, live-in mistake with Bucky Beaver ended in a whiz-bang midnight fracas—probably because he finally asked her to take out the garbage. And both my parents have spent the past year out there in the dating scene, relentlessly searching for what they already had in our comfy three-bedroom house.

"So, do I have your blessing, then?" Mom asks quietly.

"Sure," I say. "Julius is an okay guy. I promise I won't make any more pimple jokes."

Mom checks her mascara in the rearview mirror. "We're gonna be okay, sweetie," she says. "We're gonna be just fine. After all, we're strong and mighty women."

"Oh yeah," I say, supposing I am about to embark on the great adventure of my life. Even if I do end up having a successful career in opera, I'll probably never play the lead—always the handmaiden or the girl-in-pageboy-clothing or the best friend. Still, I'd be living in New York, making wads of money, hearing applause every night. "Birds gotta swim, and fish gotta fly," I tell my mom.

"I don't get that, Grace," she says. "Why can't you be happy for me? I don't understand you at all." She keeps on driving, straight ahead into the darkening October evening, oblivious to the roar of the crowd in Bulldog Stadium as we pass by it, the setting sun striking the huge rock on her finger, spinning prisms over the steering wheel, the dashboard, the backs of my hands.



TURNING THE TIME OVER TO . . .

G. St. John Stott

DOES GOD UNDERSTAND
OUR FEARS?

1. THE PROBLEM

*What a friend we have in Jesus,
all our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
everything to God in prayer!*

WE SING JOSEPH M. Scriven's "What a Friend We Have in Jesus"—or one of countless hymns that carry the same message of God's nearness in prayer—and are happy that we know Jesus' love. And then there comes a tragedy. A child dies, perhaps. Somewhere in the world, a child dies every three seconds (one has died since you began reading this sentence), but this time it is *our* child, and the pain is unavoidably, bitterly ours. We feel guilt. We feel fear, for the old certainties about life no longer apply. We sing "What a Friend We Have in Jesus"—and we wonder. Real friends know what it is to suffer, to grieve; they know what it is to fear. *Does God?* We know about the agonies in Gethsemane and at Calvary; we know that on the cross, Jesus shared humanity's deepest sense of godforsakenness.¹ But what about everyday suffering, everyday fear? Does God really understand?

Most Christians assume that God does, but there is room to wonder—for God is not just Abba, the Father to whom we relate in trust and love, but the Creator as well. That should give us pause, for the idea that the Creator understands his creation in the way that we are asking God to understand us cannot be taken for granted. "[O]ne attribute of God is absolutely fundamental in the Bible," it has been argued,

one attribute is absolutely necessary in order to render intelligible all the rest. That attribute is the

awful transcendence of God. From beginning to end the Bible is concerned to set forth the awful gulf that separates the creature from the Creator.²

Even if we question whether the gulf is as great as this author supposed, *some* gulf would be presumed in most theologies—and that being so, we might wonder whether God really can bridge the gulf and understand our griefs and fears.³ After all, if we assume that understanding fear, frustration, and despair fully entails having experienced the associated mental states,⁴ we might be unwilling to attribute such understanding to God. Fear, frustration, and despair are states that follow from incomplete knowledge or power, and such incompleteness is not what most of us normally associate with deity.

Faced with this objection, we might retreat from a position which expects God to experience fear, to one that assumes he knows about fear because he knows us. As Wesley put it, looking from heaven God "sees all [our] sufferings, with every circumstance of them." In his omniscience, "He knows all the hearts of the sons of men, and understands all their thoughts . . . and all they feel."⁵ But this, too, is an answer that leads us into controversy, for the implication that God is learning from us is itself problematic. The idea that God is subject to change was anathematized in the Nicene Creed, and though that objection might not carry much weight with most SUNSTONE readers, most of us would nevertheless be uncomfortable with the thought of a God whose knowledge of his creation is entirely contingent.

Given such problems, it is hardly surprising that St. Augustine tried to dismiss the whole question of God's understanding our suffering as misconceived—God's pity, he ex-

plained "is not the wretched heart of a fellow-sufferer . . . the pity of God is the goodness of his help."⁶ Nor is it surprising that traditionally Christianity would affirm a doctrine of divine impassibility, whereby God was unmoved by human suffering. However uncomfortable that idea might have felt, there seemed little alternative to it if one was to maintain the doctrine of immutability. After all, to be moved was to change, and to change was to be part of a temporal, and therefore bounded, universe. As Nicholas P. Wolterstorff has noted of this perspective, "If God responds, then God is not metaphysically immutable; and if not metaphysically immutable, then not eternal."⁷

However, we do not have to follow Augustine's lead here. We do not have to accept that God is impassible. There are other ways of answering the question as to whether God understands, and one is found in the thinking of Joseph Smith, Jr. Smith's answer allows for a God who suffers and yet is unchanging: a God who understands our fears and yet is still Lord. Ironically, it was not an answer that Smith thought meaningful to explore. The question of God's passibility, once raised, only served to direct us away from reflections on God's awareness of suffering to considerations of our own discipleship. It is almost as if, for Smith, there was a point beyond which talk of God becomes unprofitable for those who seek to be followers of Christ. Nevertheless, in reaching this point—in coming to focus less on the goodness of God's help than on the way in which the divine response to suffering should be a model for our own—Smith managed to reconcile the traditional attributes of God and the claim that God knows for himself what it is we suffer.

2. THE DOCTRINE

*Can we find a friend so faithful
who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness;
take it to the Lord in prayer.*

THOSE familiar with Smith's teachings might think that they know where this is heading. On 7 April 1844, addressing a general conference of the Church, Smith reflected on the recent death of the fifty-five-year-old King Follett, a convert to Mormonism of thirteen years standing. In doing so, Smith announced what is possibly his most controversial doctrine—that "God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens!" Starting from John 5:19, ("The Son



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can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do”), Smith argued that this text referred to Christ’s death and resurrection.

The scriptures inform us that Jesus said, as the Father hath power in himself, even so hath the Son power—to do what? Why, what the Father did. The answer is obvious—in a manner to lay down his body and take it up again.⁸

Smith was not concerned to address the link between experience and knowledge in this discourse, but it is not hard to see what his answer to our question would be. Does God understand our human fears? Yes, of course—for once he was human like us.

This is, to say the least, a challenging answer; but as it happens, it is not the only answer that we can find in Smith’s thought, and it is not the one that concerns me here. Some fourteen years before the prophet took the stand in Nauvoo, he had offered in the Book of Mormon another response, one that was very different although no less radical. Preaching in Gideon, Alma II prophesies of Christ, and in doing so tells of the circumstances of Christ’s incarnation. Alma II describes how as a man “he shall go forth, suffering pains, and afflictions, and temptations of every kind.” Christ will take upon himself, Alma explains, “the pains and the sicknesses of his people” as well as their weaknesses, so that he might know mercy “according to the flesh” so that “he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities.”⁹

This is a most remarkable claim (indeed, for me, far more remarkable than anything in the King Follett discourse). Sensing its radical quality, Alma almost apologizes for what he has said. “[T]he Spirit knoweth all things,” he immediately concedes. By virtue of his omniscience, that is to say, Christ did not need to learn of human suffering by suffering himself in the flesh. But Christ chose to suffer nevertheless, as an act of love—and that gives us a basis for trusting that he truly is “God with us”—that in every way, he understands.¹⁰

This might be thought unremarkable, as offering nothing more than what we learn in the Bible, but Alma’s words take us beyond the resources of the biblical narrative. There is nothing in the New Testament that yields precisely this insight. Although Alma’s words are reminiscent of the boast of the author of Hebrews that Christ “is able to succour them . . . that are tempted” because he too “hath suffered and been tempted,” the text of the epistle is primarily concerned with Christ’s suffering temptation.¹¹ In contrast, Alma’s

testimony focuses on God’s compassion and his wanting to share the vicissitudes of our life.

We might, of course, question how well-considered a testimony this is, for there are two ways in which Alma’s words seem to contradict other teachings in the Book of Mormon. First, it is generally reported that Jesus goes forth among men and women “working mighty miracles”—“healing the sick, raising the dead, causing the lame to walk, the blind to receive their sight, and the deaf to hear, . . . curing all manner of diseases,” and casting out devils¹²—and inasmuch as this is not a life like ours, it is hard to believe that his experience really matches that of humanity.¹³ Second, linking God’s knowledge of suffering with the ministry of Jesus¹⁴ implies that God changed in becoming incarnate. This might not seem unreasonable to those who accept a later Mormonism’s concept of eternal progression, but the idea of divine mutability is hard to reconcile with the witness of the Book of Mormon that God is “unchangeable from all eternity to all eternity,” and if he did change, “he would cease to be God.”¹⁵

Both objections can be met, however. First, even though the Book of Mormon unhesitatingly proclaims Christ’s power,¹⁶ it also presumes that there is parity between Christ and humanity in openness to suffering. When Alma insists that Christ will “suffer temptations, and pain of body, hunger, thirst, and fatigue” (and that his sufferings were not just those of Calvary and Gethsemane), we are meant to take him seriously. It is a property of bodies conceived “after the flesh” to suffer, and in choosing incarnation, Christ chose the pains of humanity. Besides, although Jesus ministered with power, his power was to be used only in serving others. There was no respite from the sufferings of the flesh for himself,¹⁷ for (as we learn again and again in the Book of Mormon) the power of the Spirit is given to allow us to be of benefit to our fellow beings, not to ensure our own painless ride through mortality.¹⁸

Joseph Smith would famously elaborate on this insight in Liberty Jail. “[T]he powers of

heaven,” he would write to the Saints, can be exercised only “upon principles of righteousness.” When we use the powers in self-interest, “the heavens withdraw themselves; the spirit of the Lord is grieved; and . . . amen to

the priesthood or the authority of that man.”¹⁹ Such thoughts had no doubt gained fresh—even bitter—relevance from the church’s experience in Missouri, where the Saints had slipped into self-righteous arrogance; but these thoughts were not the product of any new discovery. Rather they were the fruit of what, a decade before, had been the Book of Mormon’s witness to Jesus’ ministry.

Again, the idea of God’s learning from his creation is not as problematic as it might seem, even though Alma seems to compound the problem by making no attempt to reconcile constancy and change. Elsewhere in the Book of Mormon, God’s unchangeability is located in his moral qualities, as when Mormon reflects that “God is not a partial God, neither a changeable being.”²⁰ But while such a stance would allow us to argue that God might learn from experience without changing in his essential nature, Alma is silent on the question of

God’s moral attributes.²¹ What interests him instead is the way in which God’s timelessness embraces both changelessness and mutability²²—and by following his lead, we can see how the problem we seem to face is in fact a false dilemma. Time is known only by God’s creation, not by God himself: as Alma explains to Corianton, time is “only . . . measured unto men.”²³ Furthermore with timelessness, comes a knowledge of an all-embracing present.²⁴ From God’s perspective, that is to say, all of creation’s history can be contained within a single moment of timeless apprehension.²⁵

Although the implications of this idea are not formally explored in the Book of Mormon, divine timelessness is taken for granted in at least two passages, both belonging to the same period in Nephite his-

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tory. One is Alma's own argument that those called to the priesthood are "called and prepared from the foundation of the world, according to the foreknowledge of God, on account of their exceeding faith and good works." This foreknowledge would not have followed from any valiance in a pre-mortal life (a reading unduly influenced by later Mormonism), but from the way that, to quote Joseph Bellamy, God "knows himself, and all things possible, and beholds all things past, present and to come, in one all-comprehensive view."²⁶ The other passage is in Mosiah, where the marked tense of Abinadi's testimony that "the redemption which [Christ] hath made for his people . . . was prepared from the foundation of the world," logically follows from the belief that, from a timeless perspective, the atonement was already complete and available in the second century BCE.²⁷ If this is granted, God's timeless knowledge would include an apprehension of Christ's experience in mortality, and Alma's testimony would indeed fit within a coherent system of doctrine.²⁸

3. THE APPLICATION

*Do thy friends despise, forsake thee?
Take it to the Lord in prayer!
In his arms he'll take and shield thee;
thou wilt find a solace there.*

THUS far we have seen how Alma's words provide an answer to our question. Jesus knew fear and suffering. To both anticipate and deny the logic of the King Follett discourse: as a man, he suffered and feared as we do. However, as noted, Alma's words at Gideon force us to go beyond the delight of doctrinal discovery to the sobering recognition that such questions are ultimately unimportant. Alma's focus is pastoral rather than theological, on *this* world rather than the next, and in this context, our questions concerning God's foreknowledge and his impassibility can be unfruitful.²⁹ To read Alma in this way might seem surprising, for there is no explicitly ethical dimension to his words, and in telling of Christ's suffering Alma seems to have purely doctrinal concerns. He looks back to Second Isaiah's prophesy of a suffering servant³⁰ and moves from there to the good news that Christ will take upon himself both death, "that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people," and the sins of his people, "that he might blot out their transgressions."³¹ But there is more to Alma's testimony than this— as we should realize from his silences.

Those familiar with the Book of Mormon

will know that Alma's words imply a plan of redemption. Created that they might know joy, human beings choose sin over faithfulness, and God responds to this rebellion with three-fold grace. First, he provides death as an act of mercy. Because of death, men and women need not live forever as his enemies: repentance becomes a meaningful option, and a return to his presence, a possibility. Then, because moral perfection is impossible in mortality, and yet only those free from sin can enter the kingdom, God forgives our sins. He cannot do so automatically; that would imply a divine indifference to transgression. There must be a payment for the offense of human sinfulness, so that God might be just as well as merciful. Smith would eventually formalize God's three-fold providential concern for his creation—for all men and women, for those who were

nominal believers, and for the elect—in a soteriology that entails salvation in one of three kingdoms of glory. In the Book of Mormon, however, there is an undifferentiated offer of salvation. Christ atones for sin, providing unconditional pardon for the sins of those "who have fallen by the transgression of Adam, who have died, not knowing the will of God concerning them, or who have ignorantly sinned" and forgiveness conditioned on faith and repentance for those sins committed against the promptings of his Spirit.³² Third, and finally, because a fullness of joy comes only when body and soul have been reunited, God joins them in the resurrection so that the righteous will not linger in Paradise but "shine forth in the kingdom of God."³³

However, despite all the centrality of this plan to the Book of Mormon message, it is not elaborated on in the text of Alma 5. Although Alma tells his hearers of Jesus' birth to Mary and of his ministry before going up to Jerusalem a final time, he says nothing of the crucifixion nor the resurrection. To be sure, as noted, Alma foretells that Christ "will loose the bands of death" and "take upon him the sins of his people," but he does not tell of Calvary or the empty tomb. His rhetorical focus is elsewhere.

These are not the only silences we can find in the Book of Mormon, where even angels—within the book, the primary source of information about the plan of redemption—

give only partial accounts of the good news they bring. Jacob learns nothing of Jesus' ministry before the final ascent to Jerusalem. Benjamin is not told of a universal resurrection. Only Benjamin and Alma II learn specific details of Jesus' birth. Samuel's summary of what he was told makes no mention of any event between Jesus' birth and death. But these silences should not surprise us, for the prophecies and preaching of the Book of Mormon are not primarily intended to be doctrinal expositions. Rather, they are stories told to make a difference in the lives of those who hear or read. As Kevin Vanhoozer has observed of the Bible: in the narratives of scripture, "meaning is a three-dimensional communicative action" involving content, energy, and "teleology or final purpose"—and their

teleology affects their content.³⁴

Book of Mormon prophecies of the atonement are made in order to bring their hearers to repentance and are primarily concerned with our reconciliation to God, not the details of how reconciliation is possible.³⁵ The book's witness to the resurrection is both more and less than a testimony to the empty tomb (or, for that matter, the ministry in Bountiful). It is a message of accountability, in which the manner of Christ's rising from the dead—the means by which we are brought to account—is less important than the fact that we will stand before him to be judged.³⁶ And when, as in the present case, the focus of its prophecy is Jesus' ministry, his suffering is not just evidence of the condescension of God: it is a model for discipleship in that our response is supposed to be ministry of our own. Jesus learns from his suffering how to "succor his people," and we should do the same.

That too might sound like a statement of the obvious, but it should be remembered that the New Testament church usually saw Christ's suffering as redemptive rather than exemplary, and that the same perspective is also held within the Book of Mormon. Thus Nephi affirms that Christ would suffer the spiritual pain of all "that the resurrection might pass upon all men, that all might stand before him at the great and judgment day."³⁷ Furthermore, when Christ was taken as an

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example, what was held up for imitation in the New Testament and echoed in centuries of preaching was a mute acceptance of suffering that had usually been seen as a justification for accepting the political status quo. Smith's contemporary, Nathanael Emmons, noting how Christ "suffered weariness and pain" yet he did not "murmur at his unhappy situation," was only following tradition in seeing in such forbearance an example that all Christians should follow.³⁸ In the Book of Mormon, however, although evil is something to be accepted as the price of human agency and the saints are encouraged to be submissive and longsuffering in the face of persecution,³⁹ within the community of faith suffering is to be eased, burdens are to be borne—and Christ is the pattern to be followed.

It is here that we must finally part company with Scriven. Yes, when friends "despise, forsake [us]," we can have recourse to prayer. Yes, God is faithful in a way that human beings are not. But the inevitability of abandonment and contempt by friends is something we need to challenge; we should not view it with the kind of complacency we find in Scriven's hymn. As Christians, we are called to faithfulness; and, among other things, faithfulness means mourning with those who mourn. Needless to say, this calling is not an optional extra in God's plan. Sometimes God's answer to our prayers is silence. ("Of Course—I prayed—" Emily Dickinson bitterly writes; "And did God Care?")⁴⁰ If God's love is to be known when he is silent, those who suffer need fellow sojourners to be faithful to their call.

Such faithfulness is hardly easy. Human pride gets in the way of mutual concern. Justifying themselves by the "false, and vain, and foolish doctrines" of consumerism and greed, people neglect the physical, spiritual, and emotional needs of others. But that is why, for Alma II, the suffering of Jesus is not just an act of atonement, and therefore a means to our salvation; it is also an act of solidarity—an expression of compassionate concern for humanity's pain. As such, it models the covenant lifestyle that the saints in Gideon are urged to embrace. Although Alma testifies of redemption in Christ, his underlying concern is not—I suggest—to elaborate upon it, but to bring his hearers to the covenant that his father had introduced at the Waters of Mormon.⁴¹ In that context, the implication of Alma's words is clear. Christ chose to suffer as we suffer so that he might understand and reach out to us with healing—and so that we might know that he did, and do the same. ☞

NOTES

NOTE ON SCRIPTURAL CITATIONS. *In this article, the Book of Mormon references given are from the Community of Christ, "Authorized Version," as first published by the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Independence, MO: 1908). References to the editions published by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Salt Lake City, Utah) are given in brackets following. For an example, see note 9. The same system of double citation is used for references to the Book of Doctrine and Covenants.*

1. Mark 15:34, Matthew 27:46; Jurgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God* (London: SCM Press, 1981), 4–5.

2. J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (New York: Macmillan, 1923), 62–63.

3. The problem is expressed in non-theological terms in Thomas Nagel, "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?" *The Philosophical Review* 83 (1974): 439.

4. One might argue otherwise: as David Papineau has noted, although experience creates memory traces—and therefore the ability to recreate an experience imaginatively—it does not necessarily add to an individual's understanding of the experience itself. *Thinking About Consciousness* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 53, 56–57; cf. William J. Mander, "Does God Know What It Is Like to Be Me?" *Heythrop Journal* 43 (2002): 438–42. However, I find telling Kendall Walton's argument that fear, without its motivational force, "is not fear at all." See his *Mimesis as Make-Believe: On the Foundations of the Representative Arts* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990). 201–02. See also Michael Tye, *Ten Problems of Consciousness* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995), 169.

5. John Wesley, "On Divine Providence," *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. T. Jackson, 14 vols. (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1872), 6:317.

6. *Contra adversarium legis et prophetarium*, qtd. Paul S. Fiddes, *The Creative Suffering of God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 17.

7. "Does God Suffer?" *Modern Reformation*, September–October 1999, 45.

8. *Times and Seasons* 5 (15 August 1844), 614.

9. Alma 5:21–22 [7:12]. References to Book of Mormon history should not be seen as presuming the work's historicity; but that disclaimer should not be taken to mean that I am interested in proving it to be a nineteenth-century work. In what follows, I set the question of origins to one side.

10. Matthew 1:23. Jesus would know only his own experience of suffering, not that of others, but this is enough for us to count him as being with us—those who suffer—rather than with those who are spared the vicissitudes of the flesh. It is this that I see as important in Alma's witness, not the idea that Jesus might have gained in mortality a particular and contingent knowledge of suffering.

11. Hebrews 2:18; 4:15, NRSV.

12. 1 Nephi 3:75 [11:28].

13. This is not a problem unique to the Book of Mormon. It is easy enough to accept that "the Son of man . . . came not to be served but to serve" (Mark 10:45; cf. Mark 9:35), but the idea that in the incarnation he gave up some part of himself—that "though he was rich, yet for our sake he became poor" (2 Corinthians 8:9)—is more problematic. When we read that Christ willingly made himself nothing, and emptied himself for the sake of the

world, we might remember also reading that when Caesar "dedicated himself" to the world, he "robbed himself of himself" so that he could never again "do anything for himself" (Seneca, "To Polybus, On Consolation," *Moral Essays*, trans. John W. Basone, 3 vols. [London: Heinemann, 1928–35], 2:375)—and we know full well that we must allow for exaggeration in such a text. Caesar was not on the same plane as those whom he served, and neither, scripture suggests, was Christ.

14. Of course, locating God's knowledge in Jesus' experience brings with it the need to presume a continuity of knowledge between the son of Mary and the risen Lord, but this follows naturally from the Book of Mormon affirmation that memory is preserved in resurrection (2 Nephi 6:32–35 [9:13–14], cf. Alma 19:58 [40:23]). Needless to say, considering just how that might be possible, given current neurobiological understandings of memory, would be a separate project; here it should just be noted that Smith would himself have taken it for granted (a) that individual identity was linked to memory, and (b) that memory would be perfect at the day of judgment. See Orson Pratt, "On Language or the Medium of Communication in the Future State, and on the Increased Powers of Locomotion," *Deseret News*, 28 December 1854.

15. Mormon 4:82 [9:19]; Moroni 8:19 [8:18], cf. Mosiah 1:97 [3:5].

16. 1 Nephi 3:75 [11:28].

17. Alma and Amulek's self-liberation from prison in Ammonihah is problematic in this context, but it should be noted that their deliverance is presented as evidence that God is a God of power (Alma 12:151–52 [19:17]); arguably it is necessary for signs of power to be given sometimes lest God's actions be "resolved into natural causes"—as New Divinity theologians feared that they might. See Joseph Bellamy, *True Religion Delineated and Distinguished From All Counterfeits* (1750; Ames, Iowa: International Outreach, 1997), 33n; cf. Mark Thomas, *Digging in Cumorah: Reclaiming Book of Mormon Narratives* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1999), 42–47.

18. Even political shortcuts are eschewed (as when Ammon declines a place in Lamoni's household: Alma 12:35–36 [17:24–25]). Power is solely used in ministry (Alma 12:43 [17:29], cf. Alma 14:114–15 [26:29–30]).

19. To the Church at Quincy, Illinois, 20 March 1839, *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, ed. Dean C. Jessee, rev. ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2002), 440. Spelling normalized.

20. Moroni 8:19 [14:4]; cf. *The Lectures on Faith: On the Doctrine of the Latter Day Saints* (Kirtland, Ohio: The Church of Christ, 1835), 3:15, 21.

21. Although Alma argues that if "the work of justice" (the plan of redemption) were destroyed, "God would cease to be God" (19:95 [42:13]), the issue here is God's power, not his moral qualities. In the *Lectures on Faith*, 1:13–17, God's power is identified with his faith, and faith is considered to be an attribute of deity—but I do not think that this is implied in Alma's words.

22. Of course, the very idea of divine timelessness would be challenged in a later Mormonism by the idea that God, too, has his temporal context—the implication of "The Book of Abraham," paragraph 16, *Times and Seasons* 3 (15 March 1842), 719 [Abraham 3:3 in *The Pearl of Great Price*].

23. Alma 19:38 [40:8]. Blake T. Ostler, noting

that Alma also states that “All is as one day with God,” protests that we cannot see him as really affirming God’s timelessness “as such a reading empties the word ‘day’ of all temporal meaning.” See his *Exploring Mormon Thought: The Attributes of God* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2001), 152. However, Ostler’s argument relies on our taking “day” as a reference to a period of fixed duration, even though that is not the most obvious interpretation to be made. “Day” can also refer to an “appointed or fixed time.” See Noah Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language* (1828; San Francisco: Foundation for American Christian Education, 1967), s.v. *day*, def. 7. This seems to be the case here. Alma is discussing the chronology of the resurrection, and explaining that though there are many “days” (or times) of resurrection for men and women, there is only one “day” (time) for God—for all times are one for him.

24. Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. W. V. Cooper (London: J. M. Dent, 1902), 163.

25. There is a hint of this in the report that Moses “beheld the earth, . . . and there was not a particle of it which he did not behold, discerning it by the Spirit of God.” See “A Revelation, Given to Joseph the Seer, June, A.D. 1830,” v. 19, *Holy Scriptures, Containing the Old and New Testaments: An Inspired Revision of the Authorized Version*, New Corrected Edition (Independence, Missouri: Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, 1944) [Moses 1:27]; cf. Orson Pratt, Discourse of 28 December 1873, *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (London: Latter-day Saints’ Book Depot, 1854–86), 16:337. If we take this

to mean that all creation—at any one moment in its history—could be apprehended by the grace of God, it would not have been difficult to presume that God might see all history together in a single act of perception. After all, although the reality known to human beings is sequenced, knowing is not itself a process that takes time, “or an activity which entails the existence of earlier and later stages in the mental life of the knowing agent.” See William Mann, “Simplicity and Immutability,” *International Philosophical Quarterly* 23 (1983): 270.

26. Alma 9:65 [13:3]; Charles R. Harrell, “The Development of the Doctrine of Preexistence, 1830–1844,” *BYU Studies* 28:2 (1988): 75–96; Bellamy, *True Religion Delineated*, 26.

27. Mosiah 8:53 [15:19], cf. 2:10–11 [4:6–7]. The subject is too complex to be fully treated here, but one might note that the report that Jesus broke and shared bread “in memory” of himself (Luke 22:19) invokes a future (“my body . . . given for you”) as yet unimagined by the disciples. “Think of me, Jesus says to his friends while burdening their arms, in advance, with a bloody corpse. Prepare the shrouds, the bandages, the oily substances”—Jaques Derrida, *Glas*, trans. John Leavey and Richard Rand (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 66a. The reporting of the future as the past is not a problem unique to the Book of Mormon.

28. As it happens, both God’s timelessness and his foreknowledge have been questioned in the years since the publication of the Book of Mormon. However, although a full treatment of these themes

would need to take this into account, here I am just concerned to note the coherence of Book of Mormon theology.

29. This is not to suggest that such questions do not need to be asked. It is by asking them—and not resting content with easy answers—that we come to an understanding of God’s “character, perfections and attributes” (*Lectures on Faith*, 2:4). Our faith as a church (here I speak as a member of the Community of Christ) is the poorer if we do not pursue the theological task. But faith must ultimately inform action.

30. Albeit at second remove: Alma 5:21 [7:12] paraphrases Matthew 8:17, which references Isaiah 53:4.

31. Alma 5:21, 23 [7:12, 13].

32. Mosiah 1:107 [3:11].

33. Alma 19:59 [40:25]; cf. Matthew 13:43. The fall itself is thus ultimately fortunate; as Lehi explains, “Adam fell, that men might be” (2 Nephi 1:115 [2:25]).

34. Kevin Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1988), 218. Anthony C. Thiselton has similarly suggested that the words of biblical writers “are not for information transfer but have performative force.” See his *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Carlisle, England: Paternoster, 2000), 52.

35. 3 Nephi 5:34 [12:7].

36. 3 Nephi 12:26–27 [27:14].

37. 2 Nephi 6:47 [9:22].

38. 1 Peter 4:1, cf. Colossians 1:24; “The Humanity of Christ,” *The Works of Nathanael Emmons* (1842), ed. Bruce Kucklich, 6 vols. (New York, 1987), 2:757, 761.

39. Alma 3:20, 5:39, 10:28 [5:10, 7:23, 13:29]; for a particularly difficult application, see Alma 9:50–52 [12:30–32], where Alma feels constrained by the Spirit “not [to] stretch forth [his] hand” and save the families of converts who are being burned alive. Alma’s argument has a logic to it—it presumes that the guilty have not yet passed the point when repentance is impossible. For this, see Mormon 1:16–19 [1:15–18]; D&C 1:5g [1:33]; cf. Asahel Nettleton, “The Destruction of Hardened Sinners,” in Asahel Nettleton, *Sermons From the Second Great Awakening* (Ames, Iowa: International Outreach, Inc., 1995), 30–39. It is troubling, nonetheless.

40. Poem 581, *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. R. W. Franklin, reading edition (Boston: Belknap/Harvard University Press, 1999).

41. Mosiah 9:38–48 [18:8–16]; for the call to covenant in Gideon, see Alma 5:27 [7:15]. As Alma was ministering to an established church (Alma 4:9 [6:8]) this would presumably entail rebaptism as a sign of (renewed) willingness to keep God’s commandments (cf. 2 Nephi 13:38 [29:27]). The idea would not have seemed strange to Smith’s contemporaries. As the Rev. John Alonzo Clark noted in a sermon preached in Palmyra, 14 September 1828, the ordinances of the gospel were “both means of grace and badges of discipleship” (“God will not accept of a poor or partial offering,” 19, Rev. John Alonzo Clark Sermons, Special Collections, University of Delaware)—and though grace would not need to be renewed, discipleship could be appropriately reaffirmed. One could be “rebaptized into a different Spirit,” George Q. Cannon observed in his discourse of 8 October 1875. See *Journal of Discourses*, 18:107.



“Do you really believe in a higher power that has a hand in our lives?”

ANXIOUSLY ENGAGED

WHY THE HECK DON'T
MORMONS SWEAR?

MUSINGS ON THE SACRED AND THE PROFANE

By Jana Riess

I RECENTLY GOT a call from one of my colleagues, who apologized profusely for forgetting to teleconference me into an important meeting in New York. “Jana, I’m so sorry,” she said. “I f***d up.”

“Say that again!” I said.

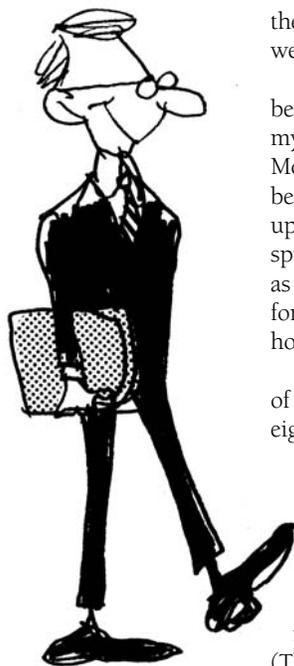
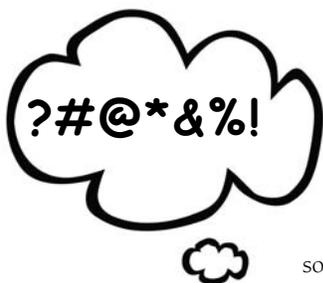
“I’m really sorry. I just forgot. I should have written it down.”

“No, not that part. The F word. Say that again!”

She seemed surprised that I’d want to hear her hurtling obscenities in my ear. Indeed, I was surprised myself. But the incident made me realize that hardly anyone ever swears in front of me anymore, and I miss it. Hearing my friend swear felt like a vicarious ordinance being performed on my behalf. I don’t swear much now, and sometimes I grieve the loss.

WHAT’S IN A WORD?

BY anyone’s estimation, I grew up in a sewer-mouthed family. My mother may come across as demure from the outset, but take my word that she can respond with such innovative phrasing as circumstances require. My father was not as linguistically creative as my mother, but he could put a sailor to shame. So my childhood didn’t feature the usual



PAT BAGLEY

proscriptions of Words That Must Not Be Uttered. I didn’t swear to show off or to be rebellious; this language was simply what one used at home. No one ever washed my mouth out with soap, but I learned pretty early on that words that were fine in the privacy of our own home were *verboten* at school.

Language reform has not been the most difficult part of my ongoing conversion to Mormonism, but it surely hasn’t been easy. When I’m tense or upset, my default vocabulary is sprinkled with expletives that, as in childhood, I reserve mostly for the privacy of my own home.

But no, I don’t swear in front of my daughter. Although she’s eight, I’ve never heard her speak what we in our culture would call a “bad” word—a problematic term itself. The worst I’ve ever heard from her is “butt,” which she acquired from the G-rated movie *Finding Nemo*. (Thank you, Pixar.) She always looks like the cat who got the cream when she says it, giggling

slightly and glancing around to see who might have overheard.

But why? Why has she already learned that “butt” is more questionable than “bottom,” and that some words are naughtier than others? Who decides which words are

acceptable terms for unmentionable things, and which are simply unmentionable? And when did Mormons transgress the Golden Age of J. Golden Kimball to become so, well, downright prudish?

Please don’t misunderstand me. I don’t advocate dropping the F-bomb into casual conversation. I agree with the advocates who want to fine shock jocks for on-air spewing and discipline high school students who imagine that the public realm is theirs to pollute with foul language. But I do want to exercise the privilege of using the language of my choice in my own home. I need to reserve a time and place for earthy talk should the situation call for its use. I breathe a little easier just knowing that such words are there. And although I feel that overly liberal “cussing” generally shows a profound failure of the imagination (or, at the very least, a sadly limited vocabulary), so too does unthinking abstinence from any words that would never qualify as polite conversation.

There are some biblical precedents for swearing, including Paul’s use of “dung” in the New Testament (Philippians 3:8). Here’s the passage in the King James Version:

Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ.

The Greek word Paul uses here, *skubala*, is rendered in our beloved King James as dung, a polite term for animal feces. The LDS Scriptures add a sweet little footnote telling us that *dung* is equivalent to *refuse*. But the elephant in the room is that what Paul actually says is that he counts it all as *shit* for the sake of Jesus Christ. Yes, there were other alternatives in Koiné Greek that Paul could have called upon. Just as we have demure euphemisms such as poop, caca, excrement, dooky, crap, dung, or my personal favorite, guano, so did the ancients. Yet the Apostle went out of his way to be obscene. Why?

Obviously, Paul was gunning for a reaction; this noun is used only once in the entire New Testament. He wanted shock value. And in his own day, he got it, though in ours, we have rendered this passage wholesome and entirely inoffensive. Paul wanted to say that everything was *shit* compared to knowing Christ. Everything he had—all his possessions, his self-righteousness, his pride in his identity—was just a pile of *shit*. (There, I said it again. Damn, that felt good.)

I’ll tell you one thing about that passage. Ever since I learned it in my college Greek



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I DON'T SWEAR MUCH NOW, AND SOMETIMES I GRIEVE THE LOSS.

class, I've never forgotten it. Sometimes, when faced with a decision in my life, I ask myself: *Am I willing to count this [insert worldly accolade or honor here] as shit for the sake of knowing Christ? Can I look at it the same way I would look at dog crap on the sidewalk?* More often than not, the answer is no, but just asking the question has changed my spiritual life for the better. And this brand of self-examination was brought to me by none other than our friend, the attention-getting expletive. Without it, Paul's words would have been so polite and florid as to pass unnoticed.

So, to me, there is a season for a light sprinkling of profanity, which of course begs the question of why we Mormons generally avoid vulgar language like the plague. Apart from the obvious exception that I get into below—taking the Lord's name in vain—there seems to be no justifiable theological reason why we don't swear. The reasons most

Mormons give have more to do with polite culture than religion. We are no longer moving toward middle-class respectability; we are defining it. For better or worse, Mormons are now famous for sensitive ears and self-censoring tongues.

It's a class thing. As Mormons seek top positions in the boardroom, the Senate, and even the White House, and as our education levels and affluence have increased, our aversion to profanity has increased accordingly. "Swearing is a vice that bespeaks a low standard of breeding," taught President McKay. And in our culture, he's right; certain words are more associated with the working-class South Boston police officer of a Martin Scorsese movie than they are with the rarefied world of the privileged elite. But if we're going to forswear swearing, shouldn't it be for a better reason than social pedigree?

I find that when pressed, most Mormons

can only offer vague reasons for our linguistic asceticism. We seem to be greatly concerned with what people think about us and how our language might reflect on the Church. We are encouraged to use words that are "clean," "pure," and "edifying" to better reflect who we are as a people. Such language suggests that certain words are inherently unclean, impure, and soul-destroying.

To be sure, *some* of them are. But which ones, and in what contexts? And who decides? Using the example of my daughter again, will I sit her down someday and tell her that "bottom" is okay in any context, "butt" is acceptable only with close friends and family, and "ass" has been decreed by society to be unladylike? That breasts are acceptable but boobs and tits are right out? She's smart enough to notice that most of the words we've decided are swear words fall into the categories of body parts—usually female ones—and bodily acts, such as defecating, urinating, and sexual intercourse. And she will, of course, wonder: what does our anxiety about these words reveal about our much deeper anxiety about our bodies and what they do? Why are middle- and upper-class Americans more concerned than others about the impropriety of even mentioning such acts? Our default mode seems to be to avoid speaking of body parts and activities altogether, and when we're in doubt, we try to use Latin terms so that we can avoid saying anything vulgar. (The word "vulgar" is itself a Latin term meaning common, coarse, or "of the people"—all subtle indications of reduced class.) Our most intimate body parts tend to have Latin names—e.g., *vagina* (sheath), *penis* (tail), or *anus* (ring). Though there are exceptions, in general, the more private the body part, the more distant and scholarly the language we use to discuss it. Common, exposed body parts tend to have names that derive from ordinary people's vernacular speech, especially proto-German. We use "foot" and not the Latin *pedis*, for instance, and "hand" instead of *manus*.

It's not just Mormons who are concerned about language and social mobility. Other religious groups who have been marginalized in the past have become exponents of the super-clean language movement as well. In my day job in religion publishing, I've followed with some amusement the strictures that various evangelical Christian publishing houses have for their authors. For example, one CBA publisher put out a historical novel set in the South after the Civil War. In it, a Southern character used the phrase "Damn Yankee," certainly a realistic sentiment and expression for the era. A customer com-

HONEST JON by Jonathan David Clark



Brother Johnson—stop saying "Aw heck!" and "H-E-doublehockeysticks!"
You can say the word now!!

plained to a bookseller, who complained to the manager at the top of the chain, who complained to the publisher, who had to take the books back and, at great expense, reprint the novel without the offending phrase.

And things seem to be getting even more restrictive. Last fall, a major Christian publishing house circulated an internal memo to its authors, citing new words and phrases that are considered unacceptable. In addition to the traditional swear words that you might expect, the publisher also nixed terms such as “bites,” “blows,” “sucks,” “darn,” “dang,” and “snafu” (which is apparently an acronym for something unsavory—who knew?).

THE NAME OF THE LORD

THE one exception to all these gray-area deliberations is the crystal-clear mandate we’re given in scripture to avoid taking the Lord’s name in vain. In my view, the third commandment of the Decalogue doesn’t leave us an ounce of wiggle room. In fact, I would argue that as a people, we don’t go far enough in keeping this commandment. We could take a cue or two from our Jewish neighbors. About ten years ago, I taught Hebrew part-time at a Reconstructionist synagogue in New Jersey. My class consisted of fourth- and fifth-graders who were still struggling with the basics such as the *alef-bet* and the blessing for food. (I got the job only because I was able to recite the Shema from memory to a very skeptical rabbi. The synagogue had never hired a Gentile to teach Hebrew before.) Even though the kids in my class needed some work on their Hebrew, one thing that had been drummed into their heads was to *never* take G-d’s name in vain.

The kids passed this vigilance on to me by their example. One day, I was innocently trying to illustrate a point about the Exodus when I said that God had led His people out of slavery and into the promised land. Suddenly their eyes were wide as saucers and someone said “Ummmmm,” in that sing-songy, I’m-going-to-tell you that only a ten-year-old can muster.

“You said The Name! You said The Name!” one of my favorite students told me, half-shocked, half-wondrous. Up to that point, I had meticulously observed the custom of always referring to God as “HaShem” (The Name) or “Adonai.” Was my misstep a big deal? Maybe not, at least not by Mormon standards. But for these children, well-schooled in the unutterable, it was a profoundly transgressive moment, one that

TO ME, THE SALTY LANGUAGE OF THE EARTH IS ONE THING WHILE BLASPHEMING THE NAME OF THE LORD IS QUITE ANOTHER.

disrespected the chasm that exists between profane humanity and the Holy One.

As with the other “Swearing Lite” terms, society has invented a number of faux terms for taking the Lord’s name in vain. My favorite is “Gosh!” which, in our post-Napoleon Dynamite world, has become counter-culturally cool by default. There are other substitutes as well: sheesh for Jesus, golly for God, crikey and criminy for Christ. They probably sound archaically quaint to my colleagues and non-religious friends, but they actually sometimes make me uncomfortable because they are placeholders for imprecations that holy scripture has forbidden me to use.

In my research into Mormons and swearing, I find a deep and rather baffling conflation of the terms “profanity” and “blas-

phemy”; Mormons use these interchangeably. But to me, the salty language of the earth is one thing (and with deep biblical precedents—have you read Song of Solomon lately?) while blaspheming the name of the Lord is quite another. “The Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain,” we’re told in Exodus 20. Profanity has a cultural origin, and what is considered profane in one time and place is perfectly unremarkable in another. Blasphemy is a much more serious and eternal matter. I pray that, as the Psalmist says, the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart are acceptable in God’s—I mean HaShem’s—sight.

But as for my non-theological flashes of earthy expletives, frankly, my dear, I don’t give a . . . darn. 

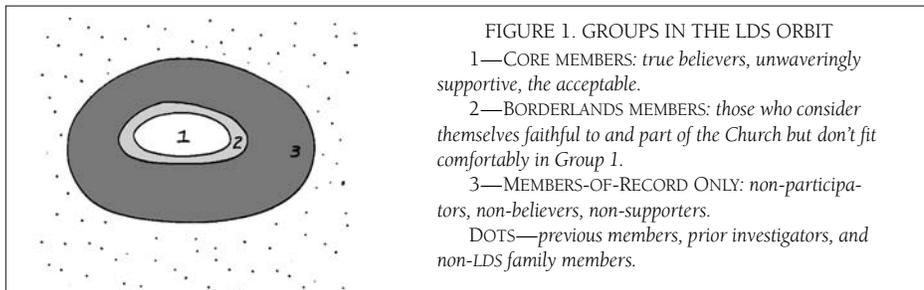


Although popular with the youth, Bishop Parker didn't last very long. . .

BRAVING THE BORDERLANDS . . .

IS LIFE IN THE BORDERLANDS
WORKING FOR YOU?

By D. Jeff Burton



IN THIS COLUMN, I share interesting news, letters, and comments; revisit the temple recommend interview discussion; and present suggestions to enhance the Borderland experience.¹

Recent Communications

Following are excerpts from recent reader comments and interactions I've had with Borderlanders via email, letters, and in person. All names are changed, and some details have been edited.

From "Peter": I recently read an article on the beliefs and practices of the various and often very active people in the different branches of the Jewish faith. It reminded me of your Borderland classifications, but with more categories and with widely different believers still being active and faithful. . . . It would be nice if Mormons with various beliefs and different practices could feel more accepted in the main group—as simply other faithful types but every bit as much still "Mormons."

From "James.": I just downloaded and read your December 2006 column, "The Borderlander's Gift," a very uplifting message. I am a recent convert, baptized around a month ago, and have often wondered if I will ever gain a strong testimony. Your article has given me hope.²

My response to James: Testimony is a personal experience, and everyone is different. Some come to "know" things quickly; others never "know" anything. Those are the extremes. I suggest that you take from (and give to) Mormonism all that works for you and don't worry too much now about "testimony." Eventually you'll find out how "true" the Church is for you.

From "John.": While sitting in church, I kept thinking of the people here in my ward in Orem. They are very good at working in how many times they get through the Book of Mormon a year or how inspiration comes to them. But I'm not sure I see a "reaching down" to us [in the Borderlands]. Oh, they are friendly enough, but not in a warm and personal way. It is like if you aren't on a self-directed course to the highest degree of the celestial kingdom, then maybe you are seen as risky, as someone who might taint them if they interacted with you on a personal friendship level.

My response to John: I appreciate your struggle about interactions with Group 1 members during Sunday settings. In many ways, the three-hour block seems more of a ritual than a spiritual experience, worshipful experience, or learning experience. Everything seems so tightly controlled that only the "standard" answers, comments, and talks are allowed. It sometimes seems cold and

methodical for us in the Borderlands. From my experience, "personal friendship" relationships of the kind you are hoping for are far more likely to develop through interactions with neighbors, home and visiting teachers, and in settings outside the Sunday block.

John responds: It is hard to express the gap I feel. I'm not perceived as a Borderlander because I don't say much, and so no one could know. I don't speak up often for several reasons. I can't hear well enough at times to really get all the fine points of discussions in lessons, so I keep quiet because I worry about saying something which is off the mark of what is really being discussed. Second, I don't see any time in the lessons for a laugh. Teachers are well-prepared and although a few might enjoy a laugh, there is "serious business" going with too little time to get through it all. Also, what I am smiling about or having a different perspective about might not come out correctly if I tried to interject. My thoughts are alternative thoughts, and I smile inside about funny things I have experienced and seen in others.

When I lived outside the Wasatch Front, I always felt such perspectives added some human outlook, but here there is no time for that. At times I wonder if there is the idea of a special breed of super souls. People flock to "Zion" to give their family a deep Mormon experience, and indeed flocking may benefit them, guaranteeing a full program for their children or giving them comfort as they age and want to feel secure. But I see a huge reservoir of talent which is taken out of the world and cloistered here. Oh, yes, religion can be practiced, but in some ways, there seems to be too much ease built into it all.

My ward is very friendly, but what is missing is that I've never been invited to a study group, a dinner group, or a book club. It may be that I'm not playing the role of those with super motivation and I wouldn't stand out to people who seem to be looking for close contact with those who express their same feelings. You are right that the Sunday block is not the ideal place to interact in these ways, but right now the block is all I have. I realize some of this is up to me, but the effort required is too much, especially when yoked to those who seem to have a somewhat different agenda. At times, I feel I ought to just bag it and not seek for friendships but export whatever abilities I might have to some place outside this area (a mission) and forget about myself because it isn't going to happen here. There isn't time. There is too much competition for the time.

D. JEFF BURTON is an author and a member of the Sunstone Board of Directors.

From “Mark.” I recently discovered your Borderlands columns. I am gratified to see you express some of the conflicts (and ways through them) that I’ve picked my way through over the years. You seem happy with your “Borderlander” status. For whatever reason, I’m not able to maintain quite your placid state. For the most part—as long as I don’t take the Church too seriously—I’m fine. Once or twice a year, though, things get interesting. I’m right now in the cool-down phase of one of those periods where I think I’d be happy to wade through brimstone up to my armpits to land a stout punch on the nose of whoever writes [a certain Church publication].

In the past, I have written letters to [a particular General Authority] about my concerns. But I’ve never sent them. I figure the Brethren have heard it all before. In their place, I’d probably be annoyed at receiving letter after long-winded letter from hordes of disaffected “ones” while trying to attend to the needs of the ninety and nine.

Jeff: I sometimes write to the Brethren if I see something that warrants a letter. Most of my letters are written to thank them when they say or write something that I think is insightful or very helpful for Borderlander-type issues. I usually try to be positive, business-like, cordial, and keep the letter to one page. I sometimes invite them to respond through my bishop, and I provide his name and address. Some of the Brethren do respond.

Mark: In his April 2003 General Conference address, “A Prayer For The Children,” Elder Holland describes skeptics as those who “always seem to hang back a little, who at the Church’s doctrinal campsite always like to pitch their tents out on the periphery of religious faith.” Elsewhere, he has suggested that these people merely “want to be clever or independent” or are “cynical.” This description may imply that those on the peripheries of the “doctrinal campsite” are there by choice, and if they choose, could merely pull up stakes and pitch their tents closer to the center. To me, it doesn’t work that way. Elder Holland was, however, absolutely correct that the skepticism of a parent may be multiplied in his children. I completely agree. So what do we do about it?

Jeff: First, keep in mind that Elder Holland spoke of “doctrine.” I don’t think most Borderlanders have much trouble with doctrine. Our concerns more often relate to history, social affairs, policies, and feeling ac-



AT TIMES, I feel I ought to just bag it and not seek for friendships but export whatever abilities I might have to some place outside this area (a mission) and forget about myself because it isn’t going to happen here.

cepted. Second, if we give our children the freedom to think and choose, as well as an excellent opportunity to participate and evaluate the Church for themselves, then we must be prepared for whatever they decide to do. It is unfortunate that after making their assessments, many young “thinking adults” choose not to have full participation in the Church. But if we’ve been fair in sharing our beliefs and reasons for our continued engagement as a Borderlander, I don’t believe we would fall under his charge of being “cynical” or acting simply from a desire to be “clever or independent.”

From “Paul.” My daughter gave me a subscription to SUNSTONE for Father’s Day this year. The *Ensign* has always been cookies and punch for me. SUNSTONE provides a good balance. It is very stimulating to my mind. As I read your column, I realize that I am a long-term Borderlander and would like to contribute my story, as you call for readers to do, but I think I would need to be prompted.

Jeff: Okay, consider yourself prompted: Why have you been in the Borderlands for so long?

Paul: Why have I stayed in the Borderlands?

(1) [Mormonism has] been my life for more than forty years. It’s the only religion I’ve ever known.

(2) I have never wanted to disappoint my folks. Truth be known, I’ve been a disappointment to them all of my life—especially to my dad.

(3) I do have a testimony of most things, but I do wonder and question at times.

(4) I’d be lost without my LDS friends. If I left the Church, I’d have to make new friends outside the Church. At times, I wish I had more friends on the outside. The Church preaches that we should make friends with people of other faiths, but it keeps us so busy

with activities and meetings that we hardly have time to take care of family responsibilities—let alone go out and make friends with outsiders.

(5) I would not want to disappoint God, either—any more than I already have.

(6) If I left, I’m convinced that I would no longer be worthy of God’s watchful care nor the multitude of blessings that he pours out upon me.

(7) Without the influence of the Church, I’m afraid I’d find reason to live a lifestyle not in accordance with the gospel. I’m a celibate, in-the-closet gay.

Jeff: What pressures do you feel to stay or to leave the Church?

Paul: The pressures to stay with the Church come from close friends, family, and priesthood leaders. Also, as I mentioned, guilt and fear are incentives for me to remain engaged with the Church. Pressures to leave, on the other hand, include extreme boredom. Also, I feel an inner pressure at times to go out and explore life and not be tied down to responsibilities.

A few months after our first exchange above, Paul sent this message. I haven’t been set apart yet, but, like you, I have been called to a Church service mission. I will report about the second week of March. I returned recently from a trip to Salt Lake City to meet with my supervisor. I’m really looking forward to this new venture in life.

This may sound strange, but I still harbor those feelings that I expressed to you regarding my reasons for staying, while at the same time acting and speaking in quite another way. Call me duplicitous, I guess. But, that’s the way I am. While I’m on my mission, no one will ever know or see the side of me that I have revealed to you.

Jeff: Why do you feel the need to be so secretive?

DUPLICITY, I suppose, causes me to lead a double life. I'm comfortable with it for now, but I know it destroys some people out there. I'm duplicitous because I must survive, I guess.

Paul's response. For the simple reason that if I were to divulge any of these feelings while on this mission, I might be asked to resign. Had I expressed feelings like this earlier to either my bishop or stake president, I may not have received a recommendation. Service missionaries really have no rules to follow other than the one big requirement: one must be temple-worthy. And I am.

Jeff: What does maintaining that secret and the duplicity do to you?

Paul: Duplicity, I suppose, causes me to lead a double life. I'm comfortable with it for now, but I know it destroys some people out there. I'm duplicitous because I must survive, I guess.

Jeff: Will you be able to cope with this duplicity for long?

Paul: I have been coping my whole life. I've been doing it for so long that it is a big part of who I am. I don't even think about it. It comes very naturally to me now.

Paul is now on his mission. We had the following conversation over lunch recently. Paul, what do you think would happen if you were honest or upfront with the people you now work and serve with?

Paul: I don't even want to think about that. I am determined to finish this mission. I absolutely love serving in this capacity. If I were totally honest with all the guys I work with, I'm quite sure I would be marginalized, especially about my being gay.

Jeff: Have you heard of BYU's new policy about their gay students? (See story, page 78) Some have called it: "Do ask; do tell; don't do." How would this new approach to being more open and honest about your sexual orientation fit with you?

Paul: The policy could change, but there are still two problems. (1) Just because a policy is changed doesn't mean people's biases and internal acceptance criteria will change just as quickly. (2) I can see the new policy as potentially dangerous in that someone may misuse it to snoop into and investigate private lives. So for right now, I can't see it working for me.

Honesty in Interviews

AT the recent Sunstone West symposium in San Francisco, one of the commenters in a session on faith development said the following (slightly paraphrased): "I have found for myself that being dishonest about things had terrible conse-

quences. . . . I would like to have a talk with the author of the Borderlanders column someday, because people have to be honest, otherwise they carry terrible consequences with them that will burst out."

This comment is very disturbing to me, for regular readers of this column know that one of its underlying foundations is the importance of honesty—both with ourselves and with others. But anyone who has written for publication knows that readers will sometimes misinterpret or misremember what they have read. Hence, I'm very grateful for this chance to clarify my position on honesty, especially regarding worthiness interviews.

Perhaps the misunderstanding arose when this symposium attendee confused my words with another's comments in a Borderlander column. In the March 2005 column titled, "Honesty," I shared "Sandra's" story. In it she told us, ". . . I also recognize that I might be a hypocrite. To get a temple recommend, I agree to statements that I don't believe. In essence, I lie. I do not like this, but I do not believe any greater good would be served by my quitting the church and hurting my husband and children."

In that column, I suggested that it is important for all of us to (eventually) come out of our closets and to gracefully and carefully become honest with those around us. It is not easy, and we may leave some things unsaid. But what kinds of LDS-compatible personal religions are we creating for ourselves if they are based, even partly, on dishonesty?

In the September 2005 column, in a response to "Ted" who also asked about temple recommend questions and "lying," I responded:

Yours is a familiar dilemma. Having recently re-obtained a temple rec-

Pontius' Puddle



commend myself, I know the quandary, but it . . . doesn't require lying. In fact, honesty is the best policy here. When asked, "Do you have a testimony of . . .," you can respond, "Well, I may not *know* everything, but . . ." then choose statements that fit your situation best, e.g., "I'm willing to accept that it is true through faith," "I'm willing to behave as if it is true," "I don't really 'know' *anything*, but I accept that it could be true," "I hope and pray it is true," and so forth.

Ted then asked me, "How open and honest should we be with other members if we have questions or haven't yet received the gift of knowing?"

NHOW OPEN and honest should we be with other members if we have questions or haven't yet received the gift of knowing?

My response to Ted was, "Honesty is one of the cornerstones of our religion. It is my testimony that when we are honest with ourselves and with others, we avoid the conflicts, the guilt, and the stress that comes with practicing a subtle deceit."

Finally, in the same column, regarding my own then-recent temple recommend interview experience, I wrote,

When I went to see my Stake President about my mission call [and obtaining a temple recommend], he asked me the regular temple recommend "do you have a testimony of . . ." questions, and I responded, "My testimony is mostly faith-based rather than knowledge-based." He said, "Well, in the end, isn't that all any of us have?"

To conclude, and I hope this will clarify my position to this symposium attendee, I strongly advocate honesty. If people feel they have no choice but to lie or deceive, I suggest that perhaps they should consider moving on to some other place where they can be honest. As some have suggested, it is better to be an honest outsider than a dishonest Borderlander (if those are the only two choices). And others have said that the main reason for going to the Borderlands is so that they could finally be honest.

Doing the Borderlands Thing?

SOME members who are struggling with "acceptability" issues that seem to be leading them to leave the Church occasionally wonder whether the Borderlands would work for them and write to ask my advice about staying in the Borderlands. I usually suggest staying (at least for a time) and making the most of it. In order to help them prepare to make the best decision possible for them, I often give them the following ten suggestions:

1. Learn something about what it means to be a "Borderlander" by reading past columns and my book *For Those Who Wonder*. (See Endnote 2.)

2. If you decide to try the Borderlands,

make a personal commitment that you're going stay in the Borderlands at least until you've moved beyond anger, frustration, and confusion and can maturely decide on a more permanent solution to your problems—moving back into Group 1, staying in the Borderlands for the long-term, or, if necessary, moving on.

3. Discuss your tentative plans with significant others who may be impacted by your choices and who will understand and be helpful—e.g., caring parents, spouse, children, friends, bishop.

4. Begin the process of developing an LDS-compatible personal religion. (I discussed this in my November 2005 column.)

5. Decide how much Church activity you'll continue with.

6. Determine whether or not you're going to keep/get a temple recommend.

7. Determine how much and how fast you will divulge "the truth" to others. Set a tentative timetable and make a plan for sharing your feelings and experiences with others and being more honest with them about your situation.

8. Join, participate in, and sustain healthy support groups. Sunstone can serve well in this capacity for many. Avoid ex- and post-Mormon websites and discussion groups at least until you've stabilized a bit, because these groups often come into being around

the perspective that people *should* leave the Church. Allow Sunstone and other groups to be healthy places to get your bearings before deciding what to do about your membership and other engagements with the Church.³

9. Stay flexible; make changes to your plans as necessary.

10. Give your situation or problem plenty of time to be completely resolved. (Maybe even in the hereafter?)

BORDERLANDS life isn't always easy. Best wishes to us all. ☺

Please send me any
of your experiences or tales
from life in the Borderlands.
D. Jeff Burton
jeff@eburton.com

NOTES

1. In my first column (this is the twenty-fifth), I introduced the Borderland member as one who may have an unusual but LDS-compatible outlook on life; a distinctive way of thinking about faith, belief, and testimony; a different view of LDS history; some open questions about a particular aspect of the Church; reduced or modified activity; or feelings of not meeting Group 1 acceptability criteria. See the figure.

2. All Borderland columns and the book *For Those Who Wonder* can be downloaded for free from www.forthosewhowonder.com.

3. I will be organizing a Borderlands session at the 2007 Salt Lake Sunstone Symposium to be held 8–11 August. Please put it on your calendar!



BOARDED UP

The end has been
happening for years.
The warped boards
are diaries
of rain. Termites comb
years out of wood.
Sparrows, a concert of them,
suspend in the rafters.
Absence remains,
grown tall in a doorway.
Chipped plates
fill up
with the moon.
The silence
of a black telephone
waiting to ring.

—DON WINTER

FILM REVIEW

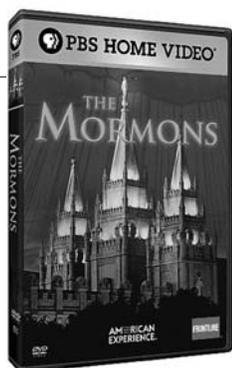
IMAGES OF FAITH: HELEN WHITNEY AND THE ART OF MORMONISM

THE MORMONS

a film by Helen Whitney

A *Frontline* and *American Experience* co-production
with Helen Whitney Productions, 2007

Reviewed by Matthew Bowman



It seems that what particularly draws Whitney to the Mormon faith is the artistic appeal of the unresolved paradoxes she senses within it. She does not want to explain the Mormons; she wants to present their experience as a work of art.

THE OPENING SEGMENT of the second part of Helen Whitney's documentary *The Mormons* is titled "The Great Accommodation." It recounts the period of Mormonism's "Americanization" or assimilation, a period of sixty years or so that began with the 1890 Manifesto, rejecting the practice of plural marriage, and ended in the Cold War era with such symbolic acts of acculturation as Dwight Eisenhower's selection of Apostle Ezra Taft Benson for a cabinet post. Historians generally characterize these years in terms of Mormonism's increasing acceptance of American cultural and political life and renunciation of its own distinctive theocratic social practices, such as polygamy, economic communalism, political separatism, and long, patriarchal beards. Summarizing widely shared sentiments, journalist Ken Verdoia appears in the film describing the Mormons today as "the embodiment of the mainstream." In her opening, Whitney makes these points visually, showing us nineteenth-century political cartoons depicting Utah as "Hell on Earth" giving way

to contemporary images of Mormons prominent in American society such as clean-shaven politicians Mitt Romney and Harry Reid. Finally, we see the striking image of the Salt Lake City temple draped in an American flag, celebrating Utah's admittance to the Union in 1896. Narrator David Ogden Stiers offers a neat parallelism: at their inaugurations, American presidents once denounced such Mormon villainies as polygamy and theocracy; today the Mormon Tabernacle Choir performs at those events.

Despite this scholarly consensus, it is apparent that the Mormons have never quite attained full assimilation into American culture. Indeed, one of Whitney's own examples—the candidacy of Mitt Romney for the presidency—has revealed an abiding American distrust of the faith. Mormonism is secretive; it teaches strange doctrines; its members follow their leaders mindlessly. Many evangelical Christians continue to declare that Mormonism is a cult, not a respectable branch of Christianity. Polling over the past several months has revealed that

some 40 percent of Americans would not vote for a Mormon candidate for the presidency. This is where Helen Whitney comes in. She made her documentary, as she claims, with the intent to "shatter stereotypes" about the Mormons, to dispel with the clean light of knowledge the lingering clouds of distrust that have shrouded the faith. But does she succeed?

IN her choice of subjects, Whitney seems to be content to explore in detail those well-worn themes that non-Mormons find interesting or provocative: polygamy, church authority, the church's legion of young missionaries. Whitney gives us Mormonism as a rainbow of engaging personalities. Through her interviews and profiles, we meet missionaries, apostates, polygamists, scholars, and prophets—Mormons all. They are empathetic, compelling, fervent, even funny.

The film attains moments of true grace and beauty, of honesty about human experience, of the pain and joy Mormonism evokes in the hearts of its members. The affection Whitney has for some of her subjects shines through the screen. There is value in putting a human face on a movement, to recognize and depict acts of faith and the meanings that people draw from them. But, of course, it is Whitney's purpose to weave these individual threads into larger cloth; to explore the meanings of the movement, not simply host an assortment of individual lives. And introducing this diversity of people to her viewers is not the same as explaining them or their faith. While Whitney clearly likes the Mormons, in the end, their faith is still a cultural other for her. Indeed, it seems that what particularly draws her to the faith is the artistic appeal of the unresolved paradoxes she senses within it. In short, she does not want to explain the Mormons; she wants to present their experience as a work of art.

Although Whitney's documentary is sponsored by the WGBH-produced programs *American Experience* and *Frontline*, it is not a typical episode of either. It is idiosyncratic, reflecting Whitney's own artistic sensibilities rather than providing the general introduction to a given topic that the programs usually feature. In her film, Mormonism is not so much explained or parsed or diagrammed as it is acted out, in thematic, rather than rigidly chronological, chapters. Whitney bothers little with exploring Mormon doctrine or leadership structure or the daily life of Mormon congregations; rather, she wants to tell a good story.

It is no coincidence that she divides the



MATTHEW BOWMAN attended the University of Utah and is currently a Ph.D. candidate in American history at Georgetown University, doing work on the rise of Protestant fundamentalism. He occasionally dabbles in Mormon studies.

film into ten segments she calls “acts.” For her, the faith is a work of narrative art as much as it is a religion, its history a grand novel, and the stories of its members, compelling anecdotes. She never quite shakes an old, old romantic impulse: her Mormonism is that of the lurid nineteenth-century tabloids which breathlessly described Brigham Young’s harems or warned of the mesmerizing powers of Mormon missionaries; the religion is foreign, exotic, romantic, and above all else, appealingly unexplainable to the modern mind. It is as odd and mysterious for Whitney as for those evangelicals who call it non-Christian. The difference between them and Whitney is primarily one of sensibility—while evangelicals object to Mormonism’s exoticism, Whitney revels in it.

Joseph Smith claimed that truth was to be found through proving contraries, but Whitney never quite manages the feat. She gets only halfway—delighting in juggling Mormonism’s contraries but never pushing further to conclusions. She seems taken with a question posed by Will Bagley, a historian and journalist who has done a great deal of research on the Mountain Meadows Massacre, the 1857 incident in which a group of Southern Utah Saints attacked a wagon train, killing more than a hundred California-bound immigrants. The question Bagley asks is: “How did these decent, religious men who had sacrificed so much for what they believed in—how did they become mass murderers?” Whitney poses the question several times but does not provide an answer. Bagley argues that the root of the crime rests in the paranoia and orders of Brigham Young. However, immediately following Bagley’s assertion that nothing happened in the Utah Territory that Young was not aware of, Whitney cuts to Glen Leonard, co-author of a nearly finished book on the massacre, who states unequivocally that Young had nothing to do with the tragedy. And Whitney leaves it there, with dueling and unresolved contraries.

This ambivalence symbolizes well her approach throughout the documentary. Again and again she allows her interview subjects to contradict each other; then she moves on, leaving the issue unresolved. Do Mormon women feel oppressed? Theologian Margaret Toscano speaks of Mormonism’s demand for domestic perfection, submissiveness, and early marriage; medical doctor Anne Osborn Poelman denies such pressure. Is the rigid discipline of the Mormon mission potentially traumatizing to those youth who serve it? Returned missionary and musician Tal Bachman says yes, describing his own lack of

preparation for the trials of his service in rural Argentina; returned missionary and General Authority Marlin Jensen says no,

by its mysteries, its inconsistencies, its compelling controversies, and its charismatic and mystifying history. An unwillingness to ex-

One gets the sense that Whitney is not only content to give contradictory answers to every question and to let the Mormons remain a paradox; it is her desire to do so.

emphasizing the spiritual rewards of his service in Germany.

One gets the sense that Whitney is not only content to give contradictory answers to every question and to let the Mormons remain a paradox; it is her desire to do so. Why this should be is an intriguing question. Is Whitney striving for even-handedness? Certainly, in part; this presentation of contrasting views is part of good journalistic practice. But another, and more deeply accurate, answer seems to rest in Whitney’s sense of herself as an artist and in her recognition of a deeply resonant streak of romanticism within the origins and doctrines of the faith she studies. For her, Mormonism is defined

plain, to come to categorical conclusions or to outline casual factors, lies at the heart of Whitney’s Mormonism. And therefore, ultimately, the Mormons remain elusive. It seems that she prefers them that way. This inclination has led her to create an artistically intriguing and resonant film; however, we would be wise to recognize that the same ambivalent impulse lies at the heart of forces that keep Mormons from the center of American life.

WHITNEY may be an even-handed journalist, but she is also an artist, and artistically, the film is a triumph. Just as her subjects were and



JANETTE ATWOOD

“How many times have I told you, we don’t allow that filth in this house!”

are, Whitney is compelled by the charisma and mysticism that permeate the life of Mormonism's young founder, Joseph Smith. She strives to use the language of film to draw from the dry pages of history the dramatic power of Smith's experiences. She begins with the land of his youth, the forests and fields where he had his first encounter with God, reportedly in the spring of 1820, when he was fourteen. The New York of the Second Great Awakening is illustrated with the stark black and white photographs of Rocky Schenck, featuring windswept landscapes, lonely trees, dark farmhouses huddled under gray skies. All of this is accompanied by eerie minor key music. We are told that prophets and preachers roamed

eyes; Southey's enigmatic triptych portrait; the dual profile, one in color, one a photographic negative, which graces the cover of Dan Vogel's skeptical biography *Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet*. For Mormons today, Smith has a variety of roles. He is the translator of the Book of Mormon, scripture the equal of the Bible. He is the high priest who restored God's priesthood authority to earth. Most of all, he is confident, settled, authoritative.

But for Whitney, Joseph Smith was first and foremost a charismatic visionary, a mysterious and strangely attractive seer whom we cannot today understand. In her telling, Mormonism rests neither upon the Book of Mormon nor upon the priesthood authority that allowed Smith to administer saving ordi-

Mormonism. Historian Kathleen Flake tells us why the membership of Smith's church exploded—it was, she says, because Smith promised the poor, the dispossessed, the marginals of society that they, too, could be like him, that they, too, could see God. Flake's proclamation comes early in Whitney's four hours, but we remember it again and again: when Marlin Jensen recounts a miraculous experience he had on his mission, when the charismatic convert Betty Stevenson explores her gritty conversion, when the Mormon father James Dalrymple tells of a divine prompting to have another child that he and his wife received. The heavens hang low for Whitney's Mormons; God guides their paths in the essential and

Whitney favors the expressionistic, dramatic renderings of artists such as Trevor Southey and J. Kirk Richards, whose conceptions of the supernatural events of early Mormonism are enigmatic, haunting, and jarring to Mormon viewers denied the comfort of the familiar.

the countryside in bearskins, that there is nothing today like the "strange and fervent place" of the Burned-Over District during Smith's formative years. And indeed, as depicted in both word and image, this is a country alien to twenty-first-century Americans, as distant in its landscapes as the deserts of the Exodus, as foreign in its culture as Egypt of the pyramids. And yet, for all its exoticism, it is weirdly compelling. Whitney chooses to bypass the standard artwork depicting the visions of early Mormonism; the naturalistic, often bland, somewhat sentimentalized prints that hang on the walls of every LDS chapel. These show Joseph placidly communing with a God and angels serene and statuesque; they are as dignified and as clean as classical sculpture. Instead, Whitney favors the expressionistic, dramatic renderings of artists such as Trevor Southey and J. Kirk Richards, whose conceptions of the supernatural events of early Mormonism are enigmatic, haunting, and jarring to Mormon viewers denied the comfort of the familiar. In this, perhaps, Whitney hopes to share with the viewer the darkly attractive weirdness that she herself sees in the birth of Mormonism.

And then we are introduced to Joseph Smith himself, with whom Whitney seems to have fallen a bit in love. Again and again, the images she selects illustrate him as a figure of contradictions and elusiveness—we see extreme close-up shots of Smith's placidly deep

nances—those things Mormons today stress as key to understanding or attaining salvation—but on the dramatic power of Smith's visitations, first of God the Father and Jesus Christ, then of a series of angels who guided him as he created his new church. This is history Whitney finds compelling on a deep aesthetic level.

When she lines up Smith's advocates, they include not only such prominent Mormons as Apostle Jeffrey Holland and historian Terryl Givens, figures one would expect. Whitney also includes such artistically inclined figures as the poet Alex Caldiero and the iconoclastic literary critic Harold Bloom, who extol the artistic genius, the metaphoric truths, the visionary sensibility of Smith's vision narratives. Even Smith's naysayers, such as the archaeologist Michael Coe and the Presbyterian evangelical Richard Mouw, are forced to concede that Smith's brilliant incomprehensibility is beyond them. As Coe says, Smith somehow managed to transform "something that was clearly made up into something that was absolutely convincing." The evangelical Mouw is able only to duel Smith to a draw; he concludes his discussion with a wistful smile and the concession, "I must live with the mystery."

THAT mystery—of the nature of spiritual experience, how it is attained, and what it bestows—rests at the heart of Whitney's understanding of

the mundane, and one gets the sense that the sheer drama of God-touched lives fascinates Whitney, though she does not claim to understand it.

In her retelling of the succession crisis, when Smith's abrupt death threw the leadership of his church into chaos until Brigham Young seized the reins, Whitney does not follow the standard Mormon narrative, which stresses Young's confidence in the priesthood authority Smith had given him. Instead, she tells a story few Mormons have heard: of Young's self-doubt and confusion, of his pervasive fear that he was not "like Joseph"—in short, that he was not a prophet. For Whitney, this lack of visionary confidence is powerfully significant; it strikes to the heart of Young's legitimacy as a Mormon leader, despite the institutional authority emphasized in the more well-known story. It seems entirely correct to her that Young should doubt. Young's fear, we are told, was resolved when Young himself had a vision of the martyred Smith, confirming to Young his rightful place at the head of the Saints. Similarly, Whitney even persuades current church president Gordon B. Hinckley to describe the powerful spiritual experience that occurred in 1978, when the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles—of which Hinckley was then a member—received divine affirmation (which Hinckley describes as "pentecostal") lifting the ban on ordaining male blacks to the priesthood.

Whitney may be fascinated by such revelation, but she does not quite trust it. It is simultaneously attractive and dangerous, compelling and antinomian. Bagley's haunting question—how could pious Saints engage in horrific violence—remains ultimately unanswered, and Whitney marshals the same cinematic vocabulary she used to illustrate Smith's genius to explore its sometimes troubling fruits. Place is a potent tool in her language; the haunted wilderness of prophetic New England gives way to the twisted strangeness of southern Utah rock formations at the same time that Joseph Smith's religious ecstasies give way to the religious paranoia of the Mountain Meadows Massacre. Whitney's presentation of Margaret Toscano's excommunication uses similar themes. Here, she seems to illustrate the artistry of Joseph Smith gone awry—again we are given the sort of dissonant music that accompanied Smith's visions, and the starkness of her burned-over landscapes are matched by the harsh light cast upon the vivid image that illustrates Toscano's narrative: the empty chairs of the church court. New England's loneliness—those solitary trees, those isolated church steeples—is echoed again in the painful narrative of loss—of family, of faith—that Trevor Southey, a homosexual and eventually an excommunicated Mormon, experiences. And indeed, Whitney even recycles some of the same artwork: a single figure, tiny and lost in a bleak black and white landscape. While once the viewer might have identified this wanderer as Joseph Smith, now, perhaps, it is Southey. Thus does Whitney visually yet subtly prod the viewer to connect the experiences of the two men and ponder the inheritance of Joseph Smith's prophetic spirit. And one gets the sense that Whitney is not completely at peace with that inheritance.

FROM one perspective, then, the viewer can see in Whitney the same sort of suspicion of Mormonism that has persisted since the nineteenth century, a suspicion based fundamentally on the faith's claims about the authority granted it through its claimed access to God's will. But it is true that Mormonism makes these claims—to be the only true faith, to possess exclusive access to the authority of God. Perhaps, then, it is entirely proper that Whitney keep her distance. Mormonism, certainly, has jealously maintained its own distance from the world. The Great Accommodation of the early twentieth century went only as far as was necessary. Whitney is correct to emphasize the cosmetic nature of many of its tactics—an

increased concern with public relations, the Mormon Tabernacle Choir's quest for commercial success; indeed, many Mormon leaders were convinced that the 1890 renunciation of polygamy was essentially a public relations move. Since that period, the Mormons have zealously pursued a campaign of integration into selected areas of American life. The Church encourages political involvement and has extended its charitable endeavors beyond its own borders, as Whitney illustrates in her coverage of Mormon efforts to relieve the damage of Hurricane Katrina. In the religious realm, Whitney accurately documents the recent maneuvers Church leaders have undertaken to emphasize their often questioned Christianity—a redesign of the Church logo to emphasize the words "Jesus Christ," an added subtitle to the Book of Mormon featuring the same words. More recently, Mormonism has found itself in common cause with other social conservatives, abandoning nineteenth-century political separatism and plunging into the thick of the culture wars over issues such as abortion and gay marriage that today dominate mainstream political discourse in the U.S.

However, scratching the surface of Mormonism's commitment to the nuclear family and monogamous marriage between a man and a woman reveals a theology—of marriage between literal, embodied Fathers and Mothers in Heaven—that makes the Mormons' allies in the culture wars cringe. Ironically, Mormon fervor for the conventional issues of social politics stems from doctrine decidedly outside the mainstream. Commitment to this sort of doctrine runs just as deeply through the core of Mormonism as its passion for the nuclear family, and it has led Mormons to keep their distance from the interdenominational coalition of American evangelicalism, wearing the badge of "peculiar people" with pride. They continue to insist on aggressive mission work and the necessity of their own ordinances for salvation; they claim a monopoly on authoritative revelations from the divine. Their leaders have taken only the most tentative steps toward ecumenical dialogue and none to-

ward ecumenical organization; they cling to secrecy in leadership, finances, and temple worship in a nation whose public culture demands rough and tumble transparency. None of these traits are likely to change in the foreseeable future, and they continue to make Mormonism an enigma to many Americans. If that is what intrigues Helen Whitney about the Mormons, it may be that the Mormons prefer it that way. ☞



SHAMAN

Now the wounded healer makes himself a stick,
One leg pronged in the bank of a rundown river.

When I walk the path beside it, head down hoping
To find prehistory artfully etched in stone,

And get close enough to be too close,
He spreads his wings and makes himself a shadow

Of clouds on the roiling ramble of waterway.
But only for seconds. He alights almost

At once with a nonchalance born of long practice
And its cousin kismet on a boulder

In the river's middle, resuming his disguise
As a stick the water threw

Up, then missed catching when it came back down
And sank itself instead in artless stone.

The path is afternoon, and full of children,
Not one of whom isn't mine. And now he breaks

His trance to turn his head
And stare me back into my name,

Water-Watcher, walking where
The gray cranes come to leave themselves behind.

—PAUL GRANT

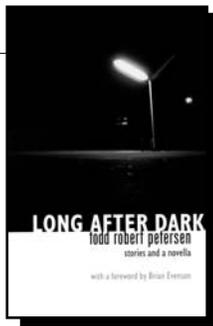
BOOK REVIEW

“REAL” STORIES

LONG AFTER DARK

By Todd Robert Petersen
Zarahemla Books, 2007
165 pages, \$14.95

Reviewed by Ann M. Johnson



Petersen's characters struggle with sin and don't always when. His short story characters remind me of people I've seen in Church—and have often ignored.

TODD ROBERT PETERSEN'S *Long After Dark*, a collection of short stories and his novella, “Family History,” is an intriguing read. His characters struggle with real problems that evade the stock answers offered in church. David, the character in the last segment of the novella, discusses the problems of the 2020s when he comes of age. The world economy has collapsed, World War III is impending, LDS members are leaving the Church because they can't afford the financial burdens of all the temple building, and the prophet's main advice is for the Saints to write their family histories before the Second Coming. The situation is just enough exaggerated from today's current climate to be humorous. David's dying father wants to know what will happen to him after death. He laments that the Church doesn't provide any information about what is now the most pressing matter of his life. “They just tell us to make sure we've got our food storage and to give away the Book of Mormon. I want to know what's going to happen. I don't want to be so goddamn afraid of what's next,” he rages.

David's parents struggle with the family histories they have written. Too much honesty may ruin their reputations. Worse still, the histories will not be uplifting. David's mother asks that he not destroy the original stories. She knows that real stories, those about “opposition in all things,” will help people survive difficult times. She laments that Mormons “want stories of success without having to hear about the struggles of sin.”

PETERSEN'S characters struggle with sin and don't always win. His short story characters remind me of people I've seen in Church—and have often ignored. Active member parents struggle with the embarrassment of an unwed, pregnant daughter. Chad, a drug-using, pony-tailed guy, shows up at Church on Sunday during a life crisis and is ignored until he steals a picture of Jesus from the wall. Carol, a recently released stake Relief Society president, needs to feel useful again. The collage of characters and their heart-rending problems in Petersen's story, “Sunday School,” remind me that the real lessons of life reside within the

class members instead of within the lesson manuals. Members of this class feel each others' pain but do not overtly acknowledge it because, “Church is not a place for burdens like these.”

My favorite story is “Parables from the New World.” When he stops by to check the lock on the back door, a small-town sheriff accidentally sees his deputy's naked wife getting into the hot tub in her backyard. Praying doesn't help the sheriff overcome his lustful thoughts. Later that night, he encounters a Native-American Latter-day Saint (possibly one of the three Nephites) who tells him a story about an adulterous wager made between a badger and a coyote. The Indian thinks it's funny that the Book of Mormon doesn't have stories like that. “Scripture can get you feeling like nobody's ever too horny for their own good,” he tells the sheriff.

Petersen's stories deal with real situations without being overly dark. His darkest story, “Saved,” involves two car thieves, one a less-active Mormon who pays the ultimate price because his partner believes the childhood religion will ultimately pull him back. In “Now and at the Hour of Our Death,” an Argentine bishop shoots and kills an intruder in his home, then longs for the penance and forgiveness a confession to a priest in his former religion would give him. “We have no priests to absolve us. We do not gain our repentance so quickly,” his stake president counsels him

PETERSEN is a convert to the Church as are many of the characters in his stories. Lifelong Church members can benefit from learning vicariously about the painful backgrounds and situations which impact converts long after their baptisms. In “When the Brightness Seems Most Distant,” a couple struggles with the news that the wife's previous husband is HIV positive. In “Redeeming the Dead,” a convert has to deal with the death of his father who never forgave him for leaving his Catholic faith. “Quietly” is set in Rwanda where John, an African priesthood holder, has been sent by his white American branch president to dedicate the grave of a member killed in a violent attack. John recognizes that it is safer for an African to make the journey to the remote village than for the white American but reflects that twenty years ago, the American would have had to go himself.

Petersen's stories offer a compelling argument that joining the Church and having a testimony does not necessarily make life easier for us. ☺

ANN M. JOHNSON lives in scenic Cedar City, Utah, where she teaches composition classes at Southern Utah University and practices yoga and meditation.

COMMENTARY

THE DEPARTED

By Stephen Carter

THE SUMMER OF 2000 I was out chasing some stories for the *Orem Daily Journal* when my editor called.

"There's this play or something premiering this afternoon at the Scera Theater, would you go cover it?" he asked.

A play premiering at the Scera at 2 o'clock in the afternoon? Weird.

When I got there I wasn't impressed. I saw three other people milling around the lobby looking kind of lost. Two of them were reporters, who are often lost anyway. That's why they're always asking questions.

Someone opened the doors and ushered us into the theater. When the projector turned on, I realized I wasn't here to see a play. But I was in no way prepared for what I did see.

Now, *God's Army* was Richard Dutcher's second film, so he was still learning plenty about his craft at the time. But none of that mattered to me as I watched this amazing look into a missionary's life. The only thing that mattered was that, for the first time in my life, I saw the potential of Mormon stories. I saw it was possible to create a morally complex world using the Mormon worldview as a foundation, to make fascinating characters that didn't convert at the drop of a testimony. I saw that faithful Mormon characters could actually propel a story, something I had never supposed. In other words, I saw a real storyteller at work.

By the end of the movie, I was converted. Mormonism wasn't just Sunday anymore. It was a seedbed for compelling, fully realized stories. It was a place where an artistic renaissance could find root. And I, a humble news reporter, wanted more than anything to be a part of it.

I had the chance to sit down and interview Richard after the movie, but I'm afraid I wasn't very professional. I was too overcome by what I had just experienced. But the question kept nagging at me: What was it about

Richard's work that made it so much more powerful than anything I had seen before in Mormon art? As a Utah County-raised Mormon boy, I had seen pretty much everything the Church had to offer filmwise. *Mr. Krueger's Christmas* bored me; *Legacy* was big; *On The Way Home* was definitely entertaining and had that guy from *CHiPS* in it. But none of them gave me the vision *God's Army* had.

A few months after *God's Army* had come into theaters, I attended some speeches Richard and his wife Gwen gave at Utah Valley State College. One person asked Richard if it had been difficult to get the approval of Church authorities to make *God's Army*.

"What kind of approval did I need?" Richard asked. "That was my story. You don't need Church approval to tell your own story."

Suddenly it clicked. That was what made Richard's work so different from every other story I had seen come out of the Mormon community. It was his own.

mountainside. And every time fresh actors tread the path of the story, the groove runs deeper. [...] A million unknowing actors have moved, unknowing, through the pathways of story.

Stories don't care who takes part in them. All that matters is that the story gets told, that the story repeats. Or, if you prefer to think of it like this: stories are a parasitical life form, warping lives in the service only of the story itself.¹

I was an unknowing actor, moving, unknowing, through the Mormon story. A story influenced by thousands of general conference speeches and Church magazine articles, and millions of subsidiary sacrament meeting talks and Sunday School lessons. In other words, a very deeply carved story. Practically a canyon.

So, when I tried to write, the boundaries of the Mormon story made themselves felt mightily, like walls of stone. It seemed that there were only two things to be done: follow that same path, making it a little deeper, or climb the wall. But as we all know, climbing the wall means getting out of the story. But where does that lead? According to the Mormon story, it means falling into the anti-Mormon story. Deep into its suffocating waters and violent currents. It was either one or the other.

THE VERY DEFINITE POSSIBILITY THAT RICHARD will never make another Mormon-themed film breaks my heart, as does the idea that Mormonism can't serve as a community to the person who helped me learn to tell my own story.

AT first, such a realization may look silly, but as I thought back on my own attempts at writing, I began to understand that I was hog-tied by the storytelling expectations of my culture and my church. I didn't have the ability to write my own story.

In his book *Witches Abroad*, author Terry Pratchett portrays stories as etching grooves deep enough for people to follow in the same way that water follows certain paths down a

But with Richard's initial push, I slowly began to conceive of the idea that there could be a third way to go. What if I could give myself enough authority to start my own story? I mean really delve into my life, really probe my thoughts, really lay out what my experience seemed to present to me instead of letting the Mormon story take over the interpretation of my life? What if I became a branch of the story, as small and uninfluential as it might be, rather than running with the mainstream?

This is what I spent five years doing as I earned my M.F.A. and Ph.D. in writing (I realized early on that I had no natural facility for storytelling; therefore I had to go to school longer to learn it). I was trying to find my way out of the huge story that insisted on telling me. I was also trying to find a way to not slip



STEPHEN CARTER is finally finished with *Alaska* and now lives in tropical Wyoming, where he makes animations with middle school students. His wife, Noelle, has an award-winning poem in the current issue of *Segullah*. Stephen and Noelle have two sons: one is a dragon expert; the other just had a tooth removed.

into the opposite path, the anti-Mormon story, since they are merely two sides of the same coin—both interested in me only as fodder for their own consumption.

So what happened after all this effort? What great reward came my way? Well, at the moment, I am an essayist of very small renown. I write stuff for *SUNSTONE* and *Dialogue* sometimes and get paid with contributors copies (strangely, there is absolutely no black market for these). From time to time, I win an award that, though few have ever heard of it, at least bolsters my bank account for a day or two. Only a very small handful of people even know that I write.

I guess I don't have a lot to show as far as accomplishment and popular acclaim are concerned. The only thing I have to say for myself is that I have bled over each of the essays I have published. I personally wrested each of them away from the two huge stories that wanted to take them over. They're my stories.

It was a lot of work to bleed these essays out, but that didn't bother me. I loved feeling like I was a part of the new Mormon artistic renaissance I had come to believe in during *God's Army*. I only wished I had more to contribute to it. Mainly because for so many

years, I have found little that nourishes me in the official church. I wanted the Church to be brought back to me through the art that arose from it. And I had hope, because things were progressing. I started to see a nook for myself; I started finding a community.

IN A RECENT essay, Molly Bennion wrote about a community of Mormon women she'd found when she joined the Church in 1967: "For about twenty years, I felt part of a community of seekers and finders. We who needed to know, who loved to learn, and who found new questions at the end of each new answer were not alone. It was a heady time."²

My heady period, when I felt as if I were not alone, lasted seven years: from the day I first saw *God's Army* to the day I read that Richard, for reasons that I'm sure are complex and deeply felt, has decided to graze in other spiritual pastures. (See story, page 79.)

When I first read about it, I immediately wrote to the Association for Mormon Letters email list defending Richard's decision. But I started to notice a significant alteration in my mood afterward. I felt like I was coming apart. I realized that I was grieving, and that the grief was attached to Richard's decision.

Now I can echo Molly as she writes, "The headiness is gone. Today church is the loneliest place I regularly go."

See, I'd be fine if Jared and Jerusha Hess decided they were done with Mormonism. I'd be fine if Ryan Little or Kieth Merrill decided to leave. It didn't bug me when Neil LaBute and Brian Evenson left. Why? Because their work doesn't enliven Mormon arts except indirectly. Hess's *Napoleon Dynamite* and *Nacho Libre* have pretty much zero Mormon references in them, much less ideology. The religious soldier in Little's *Saints and Soldiers* could have been of any religion. Merrill's artistic connection with Mormonism is strictly through institutional film. And I've watched people try to tease out Mormon ideology in LaBute's and Evenson's work, but I've never been convinced by their arguments.

The bottom line is, none of these people did what Richard did. He took Mormonism seriously in all its peculiarity, in all its promise, in all its paradox. He approached it unabashed. He was willing to stick his neck out and make real cinema for Mormons.

During the period between *Brigham City* (another slam dunk in my book) and *States of Grace*, Richard was on the Association for Mormon Letters list for a few months. During that time, he told us about a production of the musical *Chicago* he had seen in New York and how amazed he was at the dedication of the dancers, throwing their entire bodies into the dance every second, seeming to end the play on the brink of collapse.

You haven't seen me work like that yet, he wrote, but soon you will.

Then we got *States of Grace*. When I saw it, I could see exactly what he meant. Every bit of talent and energy Richard had was pushed to its breaking point. It was my first *God's Army* experience all over again.

But what was the larger picture? Essentially, *States of Grace* was a box office misfire. When I went to see it, there were two other people in the theater with me. What happened? The greatest accomplishment in Mormon cinema to date comes into our hands, and we ignore it? There is no doubt that *States of Grace* is gritty. My own brother couldn't handle it, so I can't claim that people who didn't like it are stupid. Maybe *States of Grace* just isn't the way most Mormons liked their gospel served up. I can appreciate that. I personally dislike the way the institutional church serves its cinematic gospel. So I guess we can all have our opinions.

But there is no doubt about one thing. Richard had put out a deeply personal story. He had bled it out the way one must in order

HONEST JON by Jonathan David Clark



Chuck finds another way in. . .

to make a story true. But then he found himself playing to an empty house. In fact, if you were reading the blogs at the time *States of Grace* came out, you would have found a lot of Mormons attacking Richard for his story. What's worse, apathy or antagonism? Richard got both.

MOLLY'S essay, from which I quoted earlier, focuses on the disappearance of intellectual women from the Church. One of the main reasons she gives for this disappearance is that, as a general rule, the Church doesn't value the contributions intellectual women can make. "Inside the walls of our chapels and classrooms, most of the talents we have developed and yearn to share with our brothers and sisters seem not to be wanted."

What do you do when a huge part of your community can't or won't hear the unique voice you've cultivated? What do you do when parts of your community condemn you for exercising your talents? What do you do when your community ignores or reviles the stories that nourish you?

During the 2006 Salt Lake Sunstone Symposium, a session was held in which several people gave their own interpretations of *States of Grace*.³ I listened to this session later on MP3, and the responses struck me as being too nice. It felt somewhat like a "Praise be to Dutcher" session. I was hoping for a little more rigor, a little more questioning. But then, at the end of the session, Richard got up and talked about the homeless preacher in the movie who says, "The only thing harder than being without a home is being without a church."

"I just realized that for the past few months, I've felt like I've been without a church," Richard said. Turns out this session was just what Richard had needed. It was the resonance he had hoped for. He had found a "church" among the motley crew who attend the Salt Lake symposium each year. People with ears to hear and eyes to see the beauty of his contribution. People who could hear the voice of his small stream of story over the roar of the mainstream Mormon story and find an unexpected, but wholly beautiful, harmony.

"**G**IVE," said the little stream. That's what so many of us try to do. But we have strange talents whose currency seems to have little value in the economy of Mormonism. So what do we do with our talents? Do we bury them? That would essentially be burying ourselves. I understand that we have started our own little streams; it's our own fault that we're harder to hear from

the main stream. But though we've departed from the primary current, our source is still in Mormonism.

According to psychiatrist Carl Rogers, the most valuable gift we can give to each other is understanding.⁴ This is why the story of the atonement has so much resonance. The idea that someone has walked with us through our lives and understood us to the core is a stabilizing and empowering one. We live in a culture so steeped in judgment that understanding is at a premium.

In M. Scott Peck's definition of community, you can't get away from the fact that everyone has to stop trying to convert one another in order to become a true community. A community is a place where people hear each other.⁵

Parker J. Palmer defines a community as a space that should honor the "little" stories of those involved as well as the "big" stories of the disciplines and tradition.⁶

JESUS said, "Judge not, that ye be not judged" (Matthew 7:1). Perhaps he meant that while we're in the act of judging, we're not in the act of understanding.

All of us want to have a community where we are heard, where we can hear other people, where our individual stories can cross-fertilize, making something new and beautiful. There are a lot of us, and we're very different from each other. That's why there are so many different communities. So many different ways to make new stories.

What I hope is that Richard is moving into a community that can hear him. I hope that he can nourish his community as it nourishes him. In fact, I hope this is the path of all who have left Mormonism.

The very definite possibility that Richard will never make another Mormon-themed film breaks my heart, as does the idea that Mormonism can't serve as a community to the person who helped me learn to tell my own story. Equally sad is that the field of Mormon arts has been left to hard-working, but only semi-talented artists like me.

Maybe one of Mormonism's roles in the world, besides producing FBI agents, is to export artists to the world. The way the Soviet Union used to, fostering talent like the composer Dmitri Shostakovich and the dancer Rudolph Nureyev so they could defect to the West and carry on their art without the government constantly looking over their shoulder. Just because Russia had a hard time keeping its artists didn't stop it from producing them.

But still, didn't the continent get a little

colder, and its nights a little darker, every time one of these artists left?

Molly's lament for the departing of talented, intelligent women, and mine for Richard, makes me wonder if, as a church, we need to follow Alma's advice a little more: to "mourn with those that mourn; . . . and comfort those that stand in need of comfort" (Mosiah 18:9). To me, that sounds like a good way to say, "Let's start listening to each other's stories." ☺

NOTES

1. Terry Pratchett, *Witches Abroad* (New York: Corgi, 2005), 3.
2. Molly McLellan Bennion, "A Lament." *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 39, no. 2 (Summer 2006): 115–22.
3. "Discussion of Richard Dutcher's *States of Grace*," 2006 Salt Lake Sunstone Symposium, 10 August 2006, audio/CD/download SL06–171.
4. Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person: A Therapist's View of Psychotherapy* (New York: Mariner Books, 1995).
5. M. Scott Peck, *The Different Drum: Community Making and Peace* (New York: Touchstone, 1998).
6. Parker J. Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known, Education as a Spiritual Journey* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993).



BREAKFAST WITH MY FATHER

*I'm going to Chillicothe
for breakfast with my father,
my neighbor harnesses
her gray hair and climbs
into a Chevy
and one of the four of us is back
in a kitchen smoky with bacon,
another back to read
of the paper boy's arrival
with the barrier that for years
separated two bowls.
One of us hears a sob
in the presence of an empty chair,
and I am bathed in the Saturday
his laughter dolloped each plate.
My neighbor knew that at her age
this occasion was a privilege.
I knew in truth that at any age
it was a luxury of good fortune
for who among us ever gets
breakfast with their father?*

—SHOSHAUNA SHY

UPDATE

LDS CONFERENCE FOCUSES ON
MORMONISM'S CHRISTIANITY

JOSEPH SMITH, THE BOOK OF MORMON, AND THE Restoration were frequent themes at the Church's April 2006 General Conference. Yet time and again, leaders reaffirmed that Mormons are Christians—indeed, that the LDS message is Christianity in its divine purity—making that message perhaps the conference's dominant theme.

During his Sunday morning address, President Gordon B. Hinckley criticized developments in Christianity leading to the First Council of Nicaea in 325 AD. "When a definition could not be reached, a compromise was made," said Hinckley. "It came to be known as the Nicene Creed, and its basic elements are recited by most of the Christian faithful. . . Personally, I cannot understand it. To me, the creed is confusing."

"Our knowledge comes directly from the personal experience of Joseph Smith, who, while yet a boy, spoke with God the Eternal Father and His Beloved Son, the Risen Lord," said Pres. Hinckley. He listed the Atonement of Jesus Christ, the restoration of the priesthood, and the restoration of temple ordinances as some of the key elements of his faith.

Elder L. Tom Perry of the Quorum of the Twelve echoed Pres. Hinckley's message, listing the First Vision, the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, the restoration of the priesthood, and the establishment of the Church of Jesus Christ as milestones of the Restoration.

"We invite all to listen to the message of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ from us," Perry concluded. "Then you can compare the glorious message with what you may hear from others, and you can determine which is from God and which is from man."

In contrast with this emphasis on Mormon distinctives, Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve, in an address about the Bible, reaffirmed LDS commonalities with traditional Christianity. "Those who think that members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints do not believe in Jesus Christ or in the Bible should take time to understand the Church, the significance of its name, and the power of its message," Ballard said.

"I am puzzled by any who would question this Church's belief in the Bible and our position as Christians. . . . In our last general conference, here in this building, our Church leaders quoted from the Bible nearly 200 times. This Church is organized and functions like the Church that Christ and his apostles established in the New Testament. Seated on the stand today are the prophet and the apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ."

In a *Salt Lake Tribune* article about the conference, reporter Peggy Fletcher Stack wondered if the "'we are Christian, too' mantra" was a response to public commentary on Mitt Romney's religion or to the anti-Mormon DVD recently deliv-



April conference attendees mill around the historic Mormon Tabernacle that was rededicated following a two-year closure for upgrades and retrofitting.

ered to hundreds of thousands of homes across the Wasatch Front (see story on facing page).

Notable among other conference addresses was Apostle Dallin H. Oaks's counsel about divorce. "When a marriage is dead and beyond hope of resuscitation, it is needful to have a means to end it," said Oaks. "We know that many of you are innocent victims—members whose former spouses persistently betrayed sacred covenants or abandoned or refused to perform marriage responsibilities for an extended period. Members who have experienced such abuse have firsthand knowledge of circumstances worse than divorce."

However, Oaks counseled couples with serious marriage problems to "not act hastily" and first talk with their bishop. "As the Lord's judge, he will give counsel and perhaps even discipline that will lead toward healing," he said.

"Bishops do not counsel members to divorce, but they can help members with the consequences of their decisions," Oaks added. "Under the law of the Lord, a marriage, like a human life, is a precious, living thing. If our bodies are sick, we seek to heal them. We do not give up. While there is any prospect of life, we seek healing again and again. The same should be true of our marriages, and if we seek Him, the Lord will help us and heal us."

The conference was also marked by the rededication of the historic Mormon Tabernacle, which had been closed since January 2005 for renovations and a seismic retrofit. Among the upgrades, the stairs leading to the mezzanine were widened and the old baptismal font was removed to make space for offices. The historic pine benches were replaced by replicas with more sloping backs and greater leg room.

"Some of the old benches have been saved and will continue to be used," said Pres. Hinckley prior to rededicating the edifice on Saturday afternoon. "But as you've already discovered," he quipped, "the new benches are just as hard as the old ones were!"

NEW ANTI-MORMON DVD SPARKS CONTROVERSY

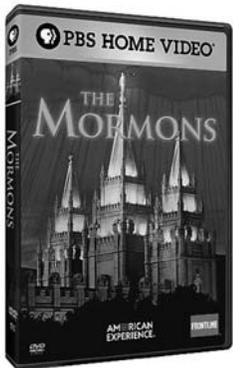
CALL IT *THE GODMAKERS* FOR A NEW GENERATION. Illustrated with PowerPoint-like graphics and hosted by actors who seem to have stepped out of a television news show, an anti-Mormon DVD entitled *Jesus Christ/Joseph Smith* has been

delivered to some 300,000 homes in Utah, with 200,000 additional copies distributed across the U.S. and Canada.

The video is a team effort by a broad coalition of evangelical Christians including Utah Lighthouse Ministry co-founder Sandra Tanner, Baptist preacher Floyd C. McElveen, and creationist crusader John C. Whitcomb. “The making of this DVD is an act of love and has been placed into your hands so that

LDS CHURCH CALLS PBS DOCUMENTARY “A WELCOME CHANGE”

THE TWO-PART, FOUR-HOUR DOCUMENTARY *THE Mormons* was aired on PBS stations across the country to mostly favorable reviews. On 30 April, more Utahns tuned to KUED and KBYU for the first episode of *The Mormons* than watched the *Utah Jazz* in a playoff game. KUED drew nearly 115,000 Utah households, and KBYU drew several thousand more.



The LDS Church issued a statement calling the documentary “a serious treatment of a serious subject” and “a welcome change.” Vince Horiuchi of the *Salt Lake Tribune* called the documentary riveting and balanced, pointing out that

“filmmaker Helen Whitney has combed through rapture and rants about the [LDS] Church to get to the simple truths.” LDS scholar Terryl Givens called Whitney “an exceptionally gifted filmmaker” who, for the most part, maintained “a good balance.”

Scholar Jan Shippo was favorably impressed, although, along with Givens and others, she felt that Whitney lingered too long on polygamy and the Mountain Meadows Massacre. “The Church should be pleased with this documentary because it’s a lot better than Krakauer’s [book],” Shippo told *The Deseret Morning News*. “In many ways, it’s a lot better than many things written before the [2002 Utah] Olympics.”

In an online interview published by the *Washington Post*, Whitney defended the inclusion of polygamy and the Mountain Meadows Massacre: “I spent considerable time in these two areas . . . because they are important in Mormon history and theology. Most people know very little about polygamy. They . . . are unaware that it was a spiritual principle of utmost importance to Mormons.”

According to a *Salt Lake Tribune* story, Whitney spoke with at least one thousand people, including scholars, historians, dissi-

dents, and devout Mormons. The forty hours of film produced were then cut down to four. “I heard so many extraordinary stories, it could have been six,” Whitney told the *Tribune*.

On 27 March, the First Presidency sent a letter to all general and local church leaders announcing the upcoming broadcast. “Because it will address some issues that could be considered controversial, the program will likely prompt questions from local leaders, members, and missionaries,” the First Presidency advised. The letter listed three points bishops and other leaders could use in responding to questions by local members: (1) The LDS Church did not produce the film, (2) the Church cooperated with the producers, and (3) members who are interested can seek further information at WWW.LDS.ORG/NEWSROOM.

DID YOU WATCH THE MORMONS ON PBS?



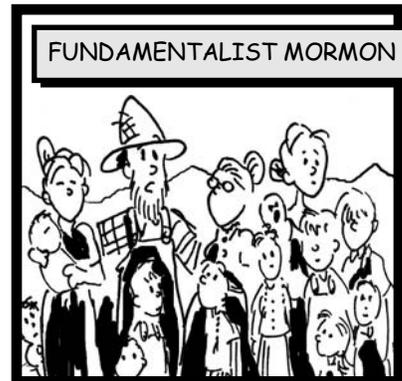
“We didn’t watch it—we had our Family Home Evening.”



“We watched it as our Family Home Evening.”

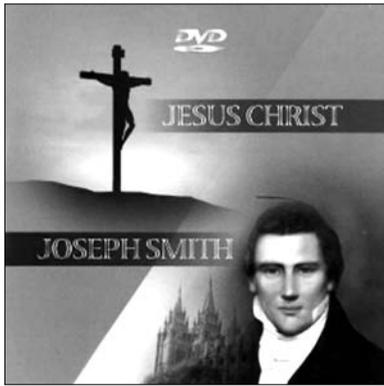


“We watched the Utah Jazz playoffs.”



“What is PBS?”

JEANETTE ANWOOD



This DVD, produced by evangelical Christians as an “act of love,” has confused some Mormons who received it thinking it was from the LDS Church.

you too can carefully examine the truth claims of the LDS Church,” the producers wrote at WWW.GOODNEWSFORLDS.ORG. “Just as we respect the right of Mormon missionaries to come to our doors and share what they believe to be true with us, we hope that members of the LDS Church will respect our right to come to your door through this medium and share with you what we have found to be true.”

According to a *Deseret Morning News* story, the disk’s cover depicting Christ on the cross, Joseph Smith, and the Salt Lake Temple led some recipients to believe the DVD was produced by the LDS Church. Said Judy Harper, who saw two men leave the video hanging from her doorknob in a plastic bag, “It just looks like something [the Church] would send you home from Relief Society with. We just assumed it was from the Church, and we threw it on the fridge for later.”

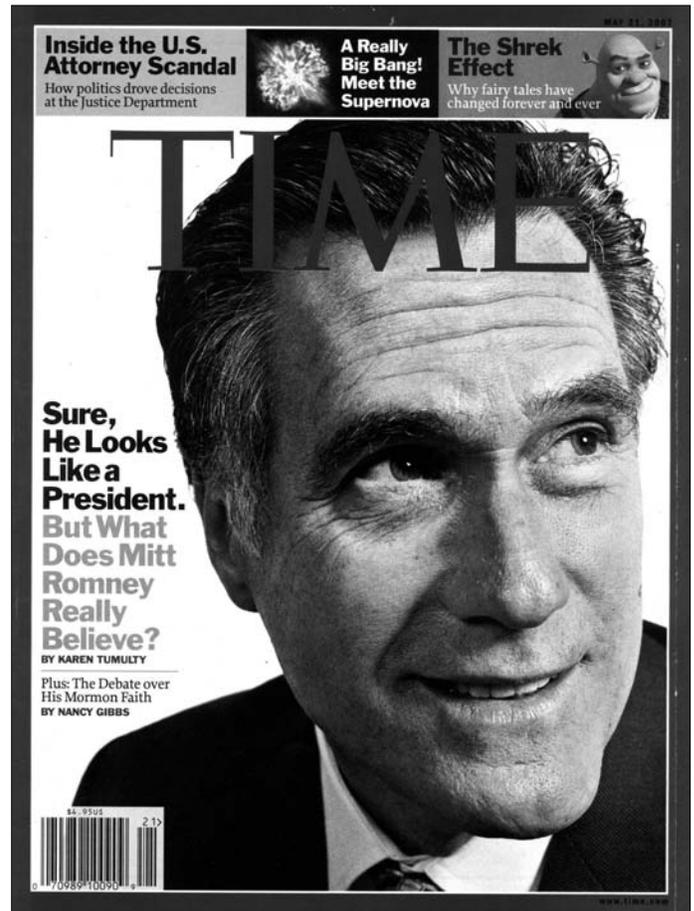
The DVD revisits criticisms of LDS origins and doctrine often leveled by anti-Mormons, such as Joseph Smith’s practice of polygamy, the lack of archeological and DNA evidence for the Book of Mormon, and incongruence between the Book of Abraham and Joseph Smith’s Egyptian papyri.

The Foundation for Apologetic Information and Research (FAIR) posted a point-by-point response to the DVD. “Although the producers of this video state that it was produced out of love, the numerous mischaracterizations, misrepresentations, errors, and outright falsehoods found on the DVD make it difficult for believing Latter-day Saints to see that expression of love as sincere,” FAIR authors wrote at WWW.JOSEPHSMITHDVD.ORG. “It unfortunately perpetuates the same shopworn criticisms of Mormonism that have been answered time and time again.”

On 29 March, the LDS Church issued a press release stating that the DVD is “full of distortions of [Mormon] doctrine and history, and misrepresentations so stark that they call into question the integrity of the producers.”

“When Latter-day Saint missionaries visit homes or engage others in conversation, they studiously avoid criticism of other faiths,” the statement reads. “They do not attack and they do not condemn. Instead, they declare their own message honestly and openly and allow people the freedom to choose. Above all, they encourage each person to find out for themselves through personal research as well as prayer. . . . [I]n our view, [this approach] best represents the spirit of the gospel of Jesus Christ.”

60 MINUTES, TIME PUT ROMNEY’S BELIEFS IN THE SPOTLIGHT



AS NEW POLLS SHOW SUPPORT FOR MITT ROMNEY ON the rise in Iowa and New Hampshire, two major media outlets recently focused on the presidential candidate and his LDS faith.

Following the same strategy he has used in the past, Romney stressed the similarities between Mormonism and Christianity yet acknowledged Mormonism’s peculiarities. “What’s at the heart of my faith is a belief that there’s a Creator,” Romney told *60 Minutes*’ Mike Wallace, “that we are all children of the same God, and that, fundamentally, the relationship you have with your spouse is important and eternal.”

“Polygamy, which was outlawed in our church in the 1800s, that’s troubling to me,” Romney added in a statement that seemed to both justify and condemn the practice of plural marriage. “I have a great-great-grandfather. They were trying to build a generation out there in the desert, and so he took additional wives, as he was told to do. And I must admit, I can’t imagine anything more awful than polygamy.”

“No, I’m sorry, we don’t get into those things,” Romney replied when Wallace asked him if he and his wife had premarital sex. “The answer is no.”

Time magazine gave Romney the cover of the 21 May issue. The cover story was accompanied by a smaller three-page piece dedicated to Romney’s religion. “Can you ask [a candi-

date] if he believed that the Garden of Eden was located in Jackson County, Mo., as the Mormon founder taught, and vote against him on the grounds of that answer?" the story asks. "Or, for that matter, because of the kind of underwear he wears?"

The *Time* story lists a number of issues that conservative Christian voters find troublesome about Romney's faith, including Joseph Smith's statements that God has a body of flesh and bone, that all the creeds of Smith's day were an abomination, and that the Bible is plagued with mistranslations and errors. Polygamy, the ban on blacks holding the priesthood, and Joseph Smith's method of translating the Book of Mormon are also mentioned.

"When [Romney] married Ann, a Mormon convert, in 1969 in the temple of Salt Lake City, her family could not attend the ceremony since only Mormons are allowed inside. A separate ceremony was held for 'gentiles,' as non-Mormons are called."

Richard N. Ostling, co-author of the book *Mormon America*, told *Time* that Romney's problem is both bigger and smaller than the one John F. Kennedy faced when he ran for the presidency as a Roman Catholic. "Bigger because the distance between the Mormon faith and conventional Judeo-Christian faith is wider," said Ostling. "On the other hand, I think Americans are more tolerant than they once were."

Salt Lake Tribune columnist Rebecca Walsh argues that with all the media attention on Mormonism, the LDS Church is getting hit harder than Romney is. Even though Romney has been compared to Kennedy, who overcame anti-Catholic sentiment to become the first Catholic president, Walsh believes a comparison with Reed Smoot may be more appropriate. Though elected to the U.S. Senate in 1902, Smoot was unable to take his seat for four years while his colleagues debated the merits of Mormonism.

Kathleen Flake, who has written a book about the Smoot hearings, told Walsh that Smoot finally prevailed "through a constant display of professional competency and upright character. I expect the same will be true for Romney, if given enough time with the electorate. His faith will matter less and his politics more, as time goes on."

She continues, "The flap over Romney's presidential aspirations—whatever it means for him as a candidate—may simply be an opportunity for the LDS Church to attempt to explain itself again and again while people are listening."

As the media continues to scrutinize the more peculiar doctrines of Mormonism, the LDS public relations department issued a statement intended to underscore the faith's similarities with mainstream Christianity and to attenuate differences.

"Some doctrines are more important than others and might be considered core doctrines," the 4 May statement declares. "For example, the precise location of the Garden of Eden is far less important than doctrine about Jesus Christ and His atoning sacrifice. The mistake that public commentators often make is taking an obscure teaching that is peripheral to the Church's purpose and placing it at the very center."

"Journalists, academics and laymen alike are encouraged to pursue their inquiries into the Church by recognizing the

broad and complex context within which its doctrines have been declared," the statement concludes, "in a spirit of reason and good will." (For more of the statement, see box below.)

On 14 May, CNN's Larry King explored the role that religion is playing in the race for the presidential nominations. One of King's guests was Rev. Albert Mohler, Jr., president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. "Does Romney's Mormon faith bother you?" King asked Mohler.

"Oh, it does certainly concern me, as an Evangelical Christian," responded Mohler. "That doesn't mean that I wouldn't vote for him under the right political circumstances and in the right context. I have to answer first as a Christian and say I believe Mormonism is false [and] antithetical to historic orthodox Christianity. But, at the same time, I'm not electing a theologian. I'm looking at electing a president, and I will have to consider all of those things in the context of what—what a candidate represents."

In contrast, Reverend Barry Lynn, executive director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, called the notion that voters have to know a great deal about the religious background of candidates "terribly dangerous."

"It is not necessary to know what Mitt Romney feels about every doctrine followed by any Mormon," said Lynn. "Similarly, it's not important for Senator Hillary Clinton to be asked and to answer the question: Do I literally believe in a virgin birth? This should be off the table in a country that is . . . made up of 1,500 different religions and twenty million non-believers and free thinkers."

MORE FROM THE 4 MAY 2007 CHURCH PRESS
RELEASE, "APPROACHING MORMON DOCTRINE"

* Not every statement made by a Church leader, past or present, necessarily constitutes doctrine. A single statement made by a single leader on a single occasion often represents a personal, though well-considered, opinion, but is not meant to be officially binding for the whole Church. With divine inspiration, the First Presidency . . . and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles . . . counsel together to establish doctrine that is consistently proclaimed in official Church publications.

* Because different times present different challenges, modern-day prophets receive revelation relevant to the circumstances of their day. . . . [T]he Church does not preclude future additions or changes to its teachings or practices. This living, dynamic aspect of the Church provides flexibility in meeting those challenges.

* Individual members are encouraged to independently strive to receive their own spiritual confirmation of the truthfulness of Church doctrine. Moreover, the Church exhorts all people to approach the gospel not only intellectually but with the intellect and the spirit, a process in which reason and faith work together.

For the full text, visit WWW.LDS.ORG/NEWSROOM
(Click "Commentary," then "Approaching Mormon Doctrine")

CHENEY'S BYU VISIT TRIGGERS PROTESTS, ALTERNATIVE COMMENCEMENT

AN INVITATION TO U.S. VICE PRESIDENT DICK CHENEY to speak at Brigham Young University turned into a lively debate over the morality of the war in Iraq, testing the limits of free speech at BYU and prompting a group of students to organize an alternative graduation ceremony.



Vice President Dick Cheney addresses BYU graduates while LDS Church President Gordon B. Hinckley looks on.

Soon after Cheney accepted an invitation by Pres. Gordon B. Hinckley and the board of trustees to speak at BYU's commencement, students and professors expressed displeasure in an online petition. Nearly four thousand people signed a document asking BYU and

the Church to withdraw the invitation to Cheney. In response, BYU's student Republicans sponsored a pro-Cheney petition that gathered more than a thousand signatures.

Four professors published a letter in BYU's *Daily Universe* asking the university to withdraw the invitation. "From all indications, Cheney is responsible for the manipulation of intelligence used as a pretext for declaring war, the abuse of prisoners in Guantanamo Bay and domestic wiretapping," reads the letter signed by Kirk Dearden, Ralph Brown, Marie Cornwall, and Tim Heaton. "There is every reason to question Cheney's ethics, including the conviction of his former chief of staff, Scooter Libby, Halliburton's financial gain for the bloodshed and many other scandals."

BYU spokesperson Carri Jenkins admitted that "there's a surprisingly large number of tithing-paying, faithful LDS members who believe strongly in church and political neutrality, and feel [Cheney's speech] is a threat to that neutrality," but she added that it was "too late in the game to disinvite Cheney." Jenkins added, however, that for nearly a year, BYU has been negotiating to have Democratic LDS Senator Harry Reid speak on campus.

In preparation for Cheney's visit, BYU took the rare step of allowing anti-Cheney demonstrations to be held on campus on 4 April and on 26 April. The demonstrations were authorized under strict guidelines laid out by BYU administrators: only BYU students, faculty, and staff were allowed to participate; no attacks against the Church or the First Presidency were allowed; and demonstrators were not to yell, shout, chant, or carry signs that include personal attacks. Such stringent restrictions led reporters in the *Deseret Morning News* and the *Salt Lake Tribune* to put the word "protest" between quotation marks in their descriptions of the events. Cheney supporters were also allowed to demonstrate on a different part of campus.

The BYU demonstrations received widespread media atten-

tion. The 4 April demonstration was covered by the Associated Press, and stories appeared in papers in the U.S., France, the United Kingdom, and Canada. The 24 April demonstration was covered by CBS Evening News, CNN, *Newsweek*, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and dozens of other media outlets. Diane Bailey, president of BYU's student Democrats club, was asked to appear on *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*—an invitation she ultimately turned down.

As soon as the authorized time for the 4 April demonstration had elapsed, BYU security took possession of protesters' signs and ordered them out of the designated protest area. Local filmmaker Steven Greenstreet posted online video footage of the demonstrations that shows a large male BYU security employee leaning very close to the face of a female student in an intimidating manner as he orders her to move. Greenstreet's footage also shows young BYU employees refusing to tell protesters what positions they hold at BYU. "I don't think that's really relevant," a young employee says. "We're just administrators."

Also posted online is footage of BYU student Adam Barlow confronting BYU president Cecil L. Samuelson during a press conference. "The Dick Cheney protest was limited to a small orange square," Barlow complains to Samuelson. "As soon as the clock struck 1:00, very large men in suits started intimidating students and forcibly confiscating their signs. . . . Why does the university so severely limit free speech, and what is the school so afraid of?" On camera, Samuelson dismisses the question by saying, "The school is not afraid of anything, Adam. Thanks for your input. Next question."

Online initiatives helped BYU's anti-Cheney movement raise funds to bring consumer advocate and former presidential candidate Ralph Nader to speak at an alternative commencement ceremony—the first in BYU's long history. Organizer Eric Bybee, who graduated in this year's class, said that twenty-four venues turned them down before they raised \$26,000 to book the McKay Events Center at Utah Valley State College in nearby Orem, Utah.



BYU students, graduates, and faculty demonstrate against Vice President Cheney's invitation to address graduation

"We want this event to be an alternative commencement, but also a commencement about alternatives," organizers wrote at WWW.BYUALTERNATIVECOMMENCEMENT.COM. "Instead of responding with criticism and traditional forms of protest, we want to give students, faculty, and community members an opportunity to express dissent in constructive ways."

At UVSC, Ralph Nader spoke to about 1,000 people, including some fifty graduating BYU students. Nader said that even though the LDS Church was born of "revelation, rebellion, and dissent," the Church's contemporary leaders appear to have lost that spirit. "Let's not marginalize dissent," Nader urged his audience. "Dissent is the fountainhead of justice."

After Cheney arrived in Salt Lake City, he met with the First Presidency before traveling with Pres. Hinckley to BYU's Marriott Center, where a crowd of more than 20,000 waited. During his commencement speech, Cheney congratulated BYU's ROTC graduates who were accepting commissions, but he refrained from mentioning the Iraq war. The crowd interrupted him with applause eighteen times. Cheney finished his speech to a standing ovation.

BYU's choice to award Cheney an honorary doctorate caused further controversy. "One does wonder what message

BYU intends to send with this," political science professor Darren Hawkings told the *Deseret Morning News*. "Honorary degrees are sometimes conferred by universities to proclaim their approval of the honoree's character and qualities, and if that's what BYU intends to do, I disagree wholeheartedly with the award of an honorary degree. I don't think BYU should be commending Vice President Cheney's character or actions to anyone."

Over the years, BYU has bestowed honorary degrees to more than 160 men and women, including founding administrator Karl G. Maeser, television inventor Philo T. Farnsworth, and U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor. Ten of the fifteen men who make up the current First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve also have received this distinction.



Ralph Nader speaks at BYU's "alternative commencement"

STUART JOHNSON, DESERET MORNING NEWS

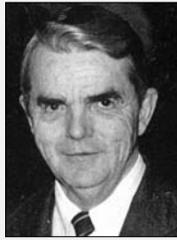
RABBLEROUSING IN PLEASANTVILLE: A CHRONOLOGY OF STUDENT PROTESTS AT BYU

- 1910: BYU students protest in support of Prohibition, which the Church and school officials opposed.
- 1911: Students demonstrate to oppose threats made by the administration to dismiss three faculty members who teach evolution.
- 1919: Students protest in support of the League of Nations.
- Early 1960s: More than 2,000 angry students who want extended Christmas vacations burn the dean of students in effigy and pelt the cafeteria with raw eggs.
- 1965: Worried about the possibility of campus protests against Vietnam, BYU President Ernest Wilkinson orders the dean of students to "look out" for "incipient tendencies" among students "so that we can nip [them] in the bud."
- 1968: Sixty students wear black armbands to a lecture by conservative candidate Curtis LeMay and disrupt his speech by applauding at inappropriate intervals.
- 1982: Students demonstrate against a campus visit by Gen. William C. Westmoreland, former commander of U.S. forces in Vietnam.
- 1985: BYU attempts to fire a group of student custodians for revealing that the Cougar eat is infested with roaches. More than fifty students march to the Cougar eat chanting, "Save the roach revealers!"
- 1987: Nearly three hundred students protest an administration initiative requiring BYU-employed resident assistants in all off-campus complexes.
- 1990: BYU students and faculty organize rallies against the Gulf War.
- 1992: VOICE, a group of feminist BYU students, sponsors Provo's first "Take Back the Night" demonstration to protest violence against women. The event is held annually through 1995.
- 1993: Holding a banner that reads, "STOP ACADEMIC TERRORISM," some 150 students march on campus protesting the firing of professors David Knowlton and Cecilia Konchar Farr.
- 1995: Off campus, VOICE protests a BYU visit by U.S. Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas.
- 1997: Two hundred students protest BYU's decision to censor one of Rodin's most famous sculptures, *The Kiss*.
- 2005: Pro-peace demonstrators disrupt a BYU event in honor of fallen soldiers, displaying signs that read "Renounce war, proclaim peace" and "Who would Jesus bomb?"
- 2006: Soulforce Equality Riders trespass to protest BYU's policies towards gay and lesbian students. BYU students join the demonstration and are arrested. Soulforce Equality Riders return in 2007.

Sources: *Brigham Young University: A House of Faith*; *The Lord's University: Freedom and Authority at BYU*; SUNSTONE; *The Deseret Morning News*

People

Deceased. Mormon historian R. DAVIS BITTON, 77. Following teaching stints at the University of Texas and University of California Santa Barbara, Bitton taught at the University of Utah for twenty-nine years, served from 1972–1982 as assistant church historian while Leonard Arrington was church historian, and wrote extensively about Mormon history. Bitton co-authored several of his books with Arrington, including *The Mormon Experience: A History of Latter-day Saints*, *Mormons and Their Historians*, and *Saints without Halos: The Human Side of Mormon History*. His most recent book was *George Q. Cannon: A Biography*. Bitton is survived by his wife, JoAn, ten children and stepchildren, and fifty-six grand- and great-grandchildren.



Divorcing. Singer, actress, and radio talk show host MARIE OSMOND, 47, and her husband of twenty years, Brian Blosil. “Our marriage has always been a faithful one, and neither of us is assigning fault for the divorce,” Osmond and Blosil said in a joint statement. The couple married in 1986 and raised eight children, including five adopted children and a son from Osmond’s first marriage.

Resigned. From the House Appropriations Committee, Latter-day Saint Congressman JOHN DOOLITTLE, 56, R–Roseville, CA, after the FBI searched his home during an influence-peddling investigation. Doolittle’s wife Julie is being investigated in connection with a fundraising business she ran for disgraced Washington lobbyist Jack Abramoff. The couple’s ties to Abramoff came under scrutiny when Abramoff pleaded guilty last year to conspiracy, mail fraud, and other charges.



Announced. V. GENE ROBINSON as the keynote speaker at the 2007 annual conference of Affirmation: Gay and Lesbian Mormons to be held 5–7 October in Washington D.C. The first openly gay bishop of the Episcopal Church, Robinson was elected in 2003 in the midst of a conflict that now threatens to create a schism in the Anglican Communion. Affirmation conferences attract people from across the U.S., Canada, Latin America, and Europe. For more information on this event, visit WWW.AFFIRMATION.ORG.

WARREN JEFFS: “I’M NOT THE PROPHET”

WARREN JEFFS, AWAITING TRIAL IN SOUTHERN UTAH, may no longer be president of the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. According to several *Deseret Morning News* stories, Jeffs abdicated his position during a jail-house conversation with one of his brothers, Nephi.

“He said he is the greatest of all sinners and, in so many



Warren Jeffs in court

words, worked his way to be the leader and prophet when he knew he wasn’t called of God to be a prophet,” a law enforcement officer told the *News*.

A photographer took pictures of a note that Jeffs attempted to give to

James Shumate, the judge handling the criminal case against him. The photograph was later enhanced and analyzed. The note reads, in part, “I have not been a Prophet and I am not the Prophet.” Another line reads, “failed (to) lead the people of the Fundamentalist Church.”

Jeffs is accused of performing a child-bride marriage and faces criminal charges of rape as an accomplice.

Under a previous president, Leroy S. Johnson, the FLDS moved from government by a council to “one-man rule.” In 2002, Jeffs claimed leadership of the FLDS Church, but some in the community disputed his claim and maintained he had never been ordained to the post.

BYU CLARIFIES HONOR CODE REGARDING SAME-SEX BEHAVIOR

IN AN ACTION THAT IS BEING BOTH APPLAUDED AND eyed with suspicion, BYU administrators have added a paragraph to the university’s Honor Code clarifying its position on homosexuality. The new Honor Code now includes the statement, “One’s sexual orientation is not an Honor Code issue,” opening the door for some students to openly identify themselves as gay who might otherwise not have done so. The new text continues, “However, the Honor Code requires all members of the university community to manifest a strict commitment to the law of chastity.” Those who see the changes as only cosmetic say that language would be fine if the Honor Code didn’t still apply a different standard to same-sex dating behavior than for opposite-sex dating.

The old Honor Code declared that “advocacy of a homosexual lifestyle (whether implied or explicit) or any behaviors that indicate homosexual conduct, including those not sexual in nature, are inappropriate and violate the Honor Code.” The new text clarifies what those terms mean. It now states that homosexual behavior includes “not only sexual relations between members of the same sex, but all forms of physical intimacy

that give expression to homosexual feelings.” Advocacy includes “seeking to influence others to engage in homosexual behavior or promoting homosexual relations as being morally acceptable.”

“Our Honor Code has not changed,” BYU spokesperson Carri Jenkins said, “but there has been a clarification. Some students have said some of the clarifications are confusing, and we have begun the process of going through and clarifying just what is meant.”

The change took place days after a group of gay rights activists protested BYU’s policies regarding gay and lesbian students. Soulforce Equality Riders drew media attention 20–22 March as they carried out a day-long “Walls of Jericho” walk around campus and held a protest that resulted in two arrests (SUNSTONE, March 2007, 75).

“We knew this group Soulforce was coming to protest at school,” said Robby Pierce, a BYU student who met with Vice President of Student Life Jan Scharman to request clarification of the Honor Code. “We felt they didn’t represent the voice of actual students who deal with homosexuality on campus.”

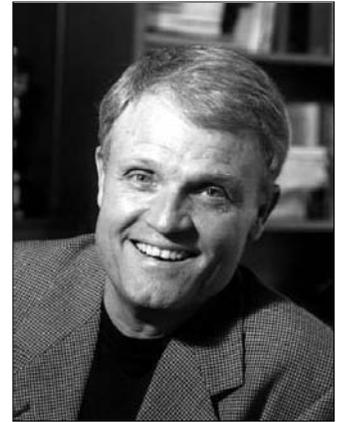
“We were also surprised when in the next meeting with her, she presented the new Honor Code clause,” he added. “We hadn’t expected anything that fast.”

MORMON FILMMAKERS FEUD

AN OP-ED PIECE BY LDS FILMMAKER RICHARD DUTCHER turned into a print altercation in which fellow filmmaker Kieth Merrill accused Dutcher of being an apostate. In a 12 April *Provo Daily Herald* editorial, Dutcher mentioned that he is “no longer a practicing member of the [LDS] church” and would no longer make LDS-themed movies. He also criticized the films that play in the Joseph Smith Memorial Building. “Shouldn’t these be the most powerful films on the face of the earth?” asks Dutcher. “For whatever reason—nepotism, igno-



Richard Dutcher



Kieth Merrill

rance . . . who knows?—this opportunity is squandered. Why not share with visitors the beauty and power of Mormonism, rather than treating them to polite, remedial, and not-so-factual recitations of Mormon history and scripture?”

Two days later, Kieth Merrill, who directed two of the three movies that have been screened in the Joseph Smith Memorial Building, wrote a scathing response in the *Herald* in which he accused Dutcher of arrogance, apostasy, and having always been “oddly out of sync with Mormonism.”

“More people have been inspired by *Mr. Krueger’s Christmas*, moved to tears during *Legacy*, and walked out of *The Testament* with spirits soaring than the total number of people who have ever bothered to go to Richard Dutcher’s movies combined,” wrote Merrill. “Your arrogance makes me bite my tongue to keep from turning a somber ‘goodbye’ into a cheerful ‘good riddance.’”

Two days later, Merrill published an apology. “I am clearly guilty of offending words and speaking with the tongue of devils not angels,” he wrote. “I wish Richard well in his righteous endeavors and pursuit of cinematic truth.”

Solar Flare



IN TUNE WITH THE SPIRIT

THE PROPHET AMULEK EXHORTED THE ZORAMITES TO PRAY IN THEIR fields and houses, in their closets and secret places, and in the wilderness (Alma 34:18–26). How about praying while giving a traffic report on the air?

That’s exactly what Christie Snow, a reporter for Salt Lake City’s KSFI FM-100, did. In a mid-May early morning traffic update now circulating on the Internet, Snow is heard giving the usual update on I-15 but finishing with an unorthodox formula: “Heading into Davis County, you’ll still run into some slowing going into the Bountiful area. For the most part, people are doing pretty well. And . . . we’re grateful for this wonderful day, and we humbly say these things in the name of thy Son, Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Had Snow forgotten to say her morning prayers and was she catching up during her traffic report? Or was she too sleepy to tell which was which? One thing is certain: as construction continues on various freeway expansion projects, Snow will not be the only one thanking God when the traffic moves swiftly on I-15.

AN OLIVE LEAF

A WOMAN SENT TO TEACH THE WORLD PEACE

By Laurel Thatcher Ulrich

This reflection by Laurel Thatcher Ulrich is excerpted from her essay, "Abigail," in the book, All God's Critters Got a Place in the Choir, which Ulrich co-wrote with Emma Lou Thayne (Salt Lake City: Aspen Books, 1995), 70–73.

HOW STRANGE THAT the story of Abigail has slipped from our latter-day consciousness. I grew up knowing about Sarah, Rachel, and Hannah, Ruth the Gleaner, and the valiant Esther, but I didn't discover the biblical Abigail until I began researching Puritan sermons in graduate school. My ignorance is not unique. When I presented my Gospel Doctrine class with a list of women in King David's time, everyone knew about Bathsheba. Several remembered Michal. Only one or two, primed by my supplementary reading assignment, knew Abigail, a woman whose story is told in rich detail in 1 Samuel 25. That chapter was omitted from the Gospel Doctrine study guide this year. I decided to teach it anyway. There are so few fully developed female characters in the scriptures, I'm not willing to omit even one. Abigail is worth remembering.

Chapter 25 of 1 Samuel begins by introducing Nabal, a man wealthy in sheep and goats but "churlish and evil in his doing," and his wife Abigail, "a woman of good understanding, and of a beautiful countenance." Nabal's churlishness soon gets the family in deep trouble. When David, who is fleeing the wrath of Saul, sends for provisions, Nabal pretends not to know who he is, though his comment that "there be many servants nowadays that break away every man from his master" is probably a slur on David's breach with his "master" Saul. Nabal is obviously a man who sees the world from the top down.

When David learns of Nabal's rebuke, he is so angry he tells his men to gird on their swords and prepare to take revenge on Nabal's house, at least the male portion of it. "So and more also do God unto the enemies of David, if I leave all that pertain to him by the morning light any that pisseth against the wall." The New English Bible cleans up the translation a bit: "God do the same to me and more if I leave him a single mother's son alive by morning!"

Enter Abigail. When a servant warns her of David's plan, she takes immediate action, loading up her asses with "two hundred loaves, and two bottles of wine [two skins of wine' in the New English Bible], and five sheep ready dressed, and five



PHOTO FROM THE BOOKS DUST JACKET

measures of parched corn, and an hundred clusters of raisins, and two hundred cakes of figs." Intercepting David, Abigail prostrates herself on the ground and offers her gifts, compensating for her husband's ill manners by her own graciousness and generosity. (Lest anyone think of this as a particularly feminine mode of dealing with conflict, think of Jacob's reconciliation with Esau in Genesis 33.)

Nabal saw the world in hierarchical terms. As long as Saul was king, he was unwilling to support the outlaw David. Like many men foolishly loyal to superiors, Nabal treated his own subordinates with contempt. His servant was afraid to go to him with bad news "for he is such a son of

Belial, that a man cannot speak to him." In contrast, Abigail was able to see through the outward trappings of earthly authority. When necessary, she called herself to an important duty, knowing better than to ask her churlish husband for permission. Like the prophet Samuel, she knew that "the Lord seeth not as man seeth" (1 Sam. 16:7). Like him, she also had the courage to instruct a king.

In her long speech to David (1 Sam. 25:24–31), she doesn't simply beg for mercy; she recalls him to a sense of his own mission, reminding him that he is not an ordinary warrior but a man with destiny, a man who should be above petty revenge. Prophesying that he will live to rule Israel, she urges him to recognize his grievance with Nabal for the small thing it really is. (Here I do like the New English translation better.)

When the Lord has made good all his promises to you, and has made you ruler of Israel, there will be no reason why you should stumble or your courage falter because you have shed innocent blood or given way to your anger.

What is even more remarkable, Abigail's little sermon worked.

And David said to Abigail, Blessed be the Lord God of Israel which sent thee this day to meet me: And blessed be thy advice and blessed be thou, which has kept me this day from coming to shed blood, and from avenging myself with mine own hand.

I think of Abigail as . . . a woman sent to teach the world peace. Practical and visionary at the same time, she shared the abundance of her storehouse and her heart. ☺

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FROM RECENT DISCUSSIONS:

BYU Circumcised?

MATT THURSTON, 26 March

I've been capsized, synthesized, de-emphasized, and frequently cut-down-to-sized (by my wife); I've been asked my suit size, shoe size, hat size. . . . I've exercised, Mouserized, and once even jazzercised (long story) . . . but a couple of weeks ago was the first time I've ever been downsized (by my employer). As such, I've fantasized and hypothesized about my next step in life, job-wise. This means I've font-sized and italicized my resume . . . while [associates] have scrutinized and constructively criticized my resume so that the pain of my job search might be minimized. This process led to a troubling discovery, school-wise: I was told that if I publicized my undergrad degree from BYU, it could get me ostracized from some employment opportunities. But if I circumcised those three offensive letters from my resume — snip, snip, snip! — my job search would be maximized.

This I Believe

RORY SWENSEN, 9 May

[My] belief in the long view extends into one of the doctrines I am drawn to — eternal progression. I like the concept of an eternity to grow, to improve, to get it right. I cling to subtle references to such a future, references like the first edition of Talmage's Articles of Faith, wherein he touches on the idea of progression within and between the kingdoms.

This belief in the long view also influences my concept of the atonement, as I lean toward the idea of a moral atonement that inspires me to be better, to reach higher, and away from a magical day when I get a pass. I want to grow, I want the experiences, I want the responsibility. I actually quite enjoy it, lumps and all.

Moms

ELISE EGGETT JOHNSON, 17 May

When I started to ask why church on Sunday, or why pray before bed, or why scriptures, my mom turned to research and experimenting yet again. We opened the Book of Mormon together, and she read to me [about] God's word [being] a seed that is planted in our heart. . . . Then off to the garden shop we went, where my mom bought me a seed and a pot so that I could learn what happens when a seed is nurtured.

That seed grew into a flower. And I did plant a seed in my heart, too, and tried to nurture it like my mom taught me to. The seed in my heart grew into a different looking flower than the seed in her heart, and our different-looking flowers have made it difficult for us to understand and relate to each other at times. . . . But although different, her flower is beautiful, and so is mine, and we are learning to appreciate that more and more.

SUNSTONEBLOG

FAITH SEEKING UNDERSTANDING

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