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June 2010—$7.50

by Robert A. Rees
For years, Johnny Townsend has been publishing award-winning Mormon fiction in many national magazines including *Glimmer Train*, *Sunstone*, and *Dialogue*. Now his work is gathered into seven compelling collections. Find them at Amazon or:

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This was issue 156

In October 2009, we published The Best of Mormonism under our imprint Curelom Books and sent it to our subscribers as an annual. It was counted as issue 156. We put up a survey hoping to hear what you thought of it and whether you would like us to continue sending The Best of Mormonism every two years. Visit http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/XYDDSL3 to give us your feedback. Thanks!

Front and back cover art by Jeanette Atwood
I SO APPRECIATED Holly Welker's erudite essay, "Divine Malfeasance," which served to clarify many fragments of thought that have been circulating through my brain for several years.

I, too, have questioned God's actions, shifts, and changes on so many occasions throughout the scriptures. Whenever I review the Ten Commandments in my mind, or see them written out (which they still are on a slab of granite in front of the Lovelock, Nevada, courthouse), I find myself adding, "Unless I, God, command otherwise" to just about every one! Of the Lovelock, Nevada, courthouse), I have similar problems with the way God commanded the early Saints to practice polygamy despite its categorical condemnation in the Book of Mormon (Jacob 2 and 3), and the deceptions and heartbreak that resulted from it.

There are so many mixed messages, and yet we are told that God does not change. Like Welker, I wonder: Why would not God hold himself accountable to the same dictums he requires of us? This is certainly a huge feast for thought!

CHRISTINE BURTON
Holladay, Utah
LOOKING AT THE SALT LAKE TEMPLE THROUGH A HEIDEGGERIAN LENS

In The Origin of the Work of Art (originally delivered in lecture form during 1935 and 1936 as Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes), German philosopher Martin Heidegger contrasts the “work-being” and “object-being” of works of art. When artworks are displayed in museums and galleries, Heidegger argues, they are treated as artifacts, as objects, severed from the context in which they were created. “The Aegina sculptures in the Munich collection, Sophocles’ Antigone in the best critical edition, are, as the works they are, torn out of their own native sphere. However high their quality and power of impression, however good their state of preservation, however certain their interpretation, placing them in a collection has withdrawn them from their own world.”

Consider this example: one walks into a Mormon home, encountering pictures of early LDS temples arrayed on the walls. Viewing a number of these pictures in tandem discloses a hint of the milieu these structures were created in, much more so than if one were viewing only a single picture. But even viewing them in a group, we come in contact more with the temples’ object-being than their work-being. Seeing them removed from the world of the late nineteenth-century American West and placed in a suburban home as objects of art obscures their work-being.

In order to discern the work-being of a work of art, we need to understand the social and natural setting within which the work was created. If, of course, the artwork was not created within our own socio-historical horizon, it is difficult to fully apprehend the atmosphere in which the work was made. Yet, in spite of our inability to fully imagine a work’s bygone world, to a great degree we can behold the work-being of a work by projecting a horizon of intelligibility from our knowledge of the culture in question and then interpreting the work accordingly—the enterprise of hermeneutics. (The importance of discerning a cultural horizon indicates Heidegger’s later emphasis on a whole people rather than the lonely individual of the earlier Being and Time.)

For Heidegger, the work-being of an artwork consists of two essential features: the “setting up of a world” and the “setting forth of the earth.” What is the setting up of a world? The world (Umwelt, meaning environment or surroundings) is a conglomerate of the possibilities and destiny of a historical people: possibilities actualized or unactualized, possibilities recognized or unrecognized. The world is the meta-network, the totality of all the relations and associations in the history of a people.

Heidegger illustrates the concept of setting up a world with the Doric temple of Poseidon at Paestum (south of present-day Salerno, Italy). The work-being of the temple evokes the world of ancient Greek colonists who came to Paestum in 600 B.C.E. “It is the temple-work,” Heidegger says, “that first fits together and at the same time gathers around itself the unity of those paths and relations in which birth and death, disaster and blessing, victory and disgrace, endurance and decline, acquire the shape of destiny for human being. The all-governing expanse of this open relational context is the world of this historical people.” The temple sets up a world by defining the horizon of the elements of destiny of a given historical people’s existence. The temple, standing in the valley and looking out over the ocean, is the locus of the settlers’ Being and from it opens up the horizon encircling their world, circumscribed by the hills and sea. The temple, as the center of the encircling horizon, sets up a world.

What does Heidegger mean by the setting forth of the earth? Heidegger equates earth (Erde) with ancient Greek φυσις (phusis, usually translated in English as “nature”). In simple terms, “earth” amounts to Heidegger’s concept of matter. Earth is that which gives things their thingliness, their presence. The earth is set forth in a work of art as the material instantiation of a people’s hopes, fears, desires. The temple at Paestum embodies the collective will of the colonists, their effort to create order—albeit temporarily—in the face of the impending chaos of the pounding surf and stormy sky: “Standing there, the building rests on rocky ground. This resting of the work draws up out of the rock the mystery of that rock’s clumsy yet spontaneous support. Standing there, the building holds its ground against the storm raging above it and so first makes the storm itself manifest in its violence.”

As the setting up of a world and the setting forth of the earth, the temple oriented the lives of these ancient colonists. Standing between heaven and earth, the temple
orients soil and sky, life and death, holiness and heresy; Being and nothingness, certainty and angst. "The temple, in its standing there, first gives to things their look and to men their outlook on themselves." This is to say that "setting up" and "setting forth" should not be thought of in strictly spatial terms, but more important, in religious terms. The temple consecrates life by providing a meaning for the colonists' existence. It opens up the world of Poseidon and his people, gathering together and projecting the possibilities of their Being onto the horizon, and drawing the world back to the temple and grounding it in the rude temporality of corporeal existence.

In light of the foregoing interpretation of the temple at Paestum, it is hard for anyone who has spent much time in Salt Lake City to not think also of the temple of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

The Salt Lake Temple, constructed out of large granite blocks cut and hauled from nearby Little Cottonwood Canyon, rises up into the arid desert air from the valley floor to which the Mormon pioneers descended from the foothills of the Wasatch Mountains on 24 July 1847. By the time leader Brigham Young declared "This is the right place," it was too late in the summer to cultivate a robust harvest or build substantial housing. But these pioneers who had traveled across the plains on foot and in wagons managed to eke out a living, survive the winter, and eventually build their city and temple. Built over the next several decades, the temple rises from the vastness of the Salt Lake Valley, with Ensign Peak to the north, the towering Wasatch to the east, Draper Ridge and Traverse Mountain to the south, the Oquirrh in the southwest, and the Great Salt Lake and Antelope Island hemming in the valley to the northwest. The mountains encircling the long valley provide protection from the dangers of frontier.

This was the Mormon pioneers' new home, from henceforth their native land. This was Zion, Jerusalem of the latter days. The temple represents the human participation in the eternal, and in this way consecrates Salt Lake City, the Mormon's city of God on earth. The temple rests in the sheltering valley, on the land from which the pioneers coaxed just enough food to survive the winter. The temple rests below the protective mountains, which provided lumber to make homes and fuel to burn through the Rocky Mountain winter. By setting up the world of the Latter-day Saints' promised land, the temple sets forth the earth, this valley in which they formed their small civilization. As this people's world rises up from the temple and out to the surrounding mountains and across the lake, incarnating the horizon of their Being, the density of the mountains and the valley floor draws the world back in and down to earth, down to actuality, down into Temple Square. The earth provides the sheltering seclusion which enabled the Mormon pioneers to create a life here, grounding divine aspirations in earthly temporality.

Truth emerges in the work-being of both the Greek and Mormon temple-works. Both temple-works set up the worlds of the respective historical peoples in which and for which the works were created. By setting up worlds, the works set forth the earth: the ancient hills and sea of the Mediterranean and the towering mountains of the Salt Lake Valley. These temple-works anchor the ancient Greek colonists' and Mormon pioneers' worlds, the worlds that embody their native ground, and the earth on which they made their homes. Thus, in art, human Being is unconcealed.

NOTE

This essay benefited greatly from the comments of Jacques Taminiaux, professor (now emeritus) of philosophy, Boston College.

David R. Keller
Salt Lake City, Utah

A place for every truth

DISPUTING THE WITNESSES

This regular Cornucopia column features incidents from and glimpses into the life and ministry of Elder James E. Talmage as com-
piled by James P. Harris, who is currently working on a full-length biography of this fascinating Mormon apostle. The column title is adapted from the statement inscribed on Elder Talmage’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.”

In 1914, James E. Talmage Wrote Three Journal Entries Regarding Charles Taze Russell, the founder of the Watchtower Tract and Bible Society, now more commonly known as Jehovah’s Witnesses.

On 17 May 1914, while visiting an LDS stake conference in Milwaukee, Talmage attended a meeting at the Great Auditorium where he heard “Pastor A. H. Macmillan of New York, who spoke on the subject, ‘Pastor Russell’s Teachings Examined.’” Pastor Alexander Hugh Macmillan was an official in the early Watchtower Bible and Tract Society movement. He and others in the movement thought that the end of the world/Second Coming would happen in October 1914. Captured in his journal entries is Elder Talmage’s concern that LDS Church members were being influenced by Charles Taze Russell’s writings.

Talmage’s somewhat lengthy journal entry about the lecture reads in part:

This occasion afforded another of the many evidences I have observed of Pastor Russell’s influence and popularity with certain classes of people. [ . . . ] Some of the Pastor’s teachings have been seized upon with favor by multitudes; and needless to say he has been assailed by the ministers of orthodox churches. The fact is beyond effective contradiction that Pastor Russell has been a student of ‘Mormon’ literature, and most of the telling points in his so-called system are based upon the teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, or the scriptures given to the world through that Prophet’s instrumentality. For example, Russell proclaims the possibility of repentance and progression beyond the grave; the absolute kinship of man and deity; the ultimate celestializing of the earth whereby this planet shall become the abode of the righteous who have dwelt upon it in tabernacles of flesh. These doctrines and others are regarded by many as original discoveries to be credited to Pastor Russell and his associates, whereas they were taught and published in the early days of the history of the restored Church. It is regrettable that in many instances, the Pastor changes the plain simple truth as revealed and colors it with the indelible dye of his own error. Notably is this the case in his teachings regarding the resurrection, which he declares does not comprise an actual reuniting of the spirit with the body, but is simply a spiritual awakening from the sleep which begins with bodily death.

Talmage concludes the journal entry by stating “Such doctrines as Pastor Russell proclaims to the world are dangerous in that they embody enough truth to be attractive combined with error in toxic amounts.”

About three weeks later, on 8 June 1914, Talmage was addressing a Monday night priesthood meeting in the Ensign Stake in Salt Lake City. In his remarks, he warned the brethren against careless and indiscriminate reading, pointing out that much of current literature, particularly on theological subjects, is a mixture of truth and error. I mentioned the work being done by Charles Taze Russell, of Brooklyn Tabernacle, and expressed the belief that he had been a student of Mormon literature. Today [9 June 1914] I received a letter from Brother Gomer M. Richards, who was present at the meeting. Brother Richards states that he and Elder William E. Pugh were missionaries in Pennsylvania in the late autumn of 1901, and that they met both the Pastor and his wife from whom, however, he had been separated on the wife’s complaint. Both Mr. and Mrs. Russell stated that they had read the ‘Mormon publications,’ and believed they had in their separate possession all important books published by the Church.

Talmage made his final remark on this subject on 23 August 1914, when he wrote: “I attended a lecture at the Salt Lake Theatre by a representative of Pastor Russell of New York on ‘The Second Coming of Christ.’ The address was replete with misapplications of scripture and garbled truth.”

Scripture notes

HOW SEXY IS THE SONG OF SOLOMON?

In this regular column, Michael Vinson, a master’s graduate of the Divinity School of the University of Cambridge and resident of Star Valley, Wyoming, delves into personal and scholarly aspects of scripture.

Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth, for thy love is better than wine.

SONG OF SOLOMON 1:2

OK, I ADMIT I WROTE THAT TITLE TO SEE HOW many readers I could grab. But you must admit that of all the books in the Old Testament, the Song of Solomon is looked upon with the most suspicion in the Church, and some of you may remember Church leaders warning against studying the Song of Solomon.

At first glance, the title, “The Song of Songs which is Solomon’s,” leads us to believe that Solomon wrote the song,
But the Biblical Hebrew construction of placing two nouns side by side usually indicates a superlative like “the best.” When the two nouns are followed by a possessive sign, as Solomon is here, the title could be read as “Solomon’s best [or favorite] song.”¹ Though he is mentioned twice, Solomon is probably not even one of the main characters in this song. Ancient Jews believed it was a song that he enjoyed either hearing or singing in his court. One Jewish tradition has it that Solomon is one of the names of God in the Song, so the title could also be rendered as “God’s Favorite Song.”²

Many have wondered what a book like the Song of Solomon is doing in the Bible, period. Joseph Smith’s Bible has a note reading “the Songs of Solomon are not inspired writings,” and he did not include the poem in the Joseph Smith Translation. Daniel H. Ludlow (former director of Church Correlation) gets right to the point for many LDS scholars: “This brief book of eight chapters contains virtually nothing that is edifying so far as the gospel of Jesus Christ is concerned.”³

But “not inspired” is not the same as “not of value,” so I would like to consider here what the Song of Solomon offers Latter-day Saints. After all, the Lord found the Song of Solomon inspiring enough to quote a verse from it three times in the Doctrine and Covenants, referring to the young Church as a beautiful wife: “fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners” (Song 6:10; D&C 5:14, 105:31, and 109:73).⁴

If the Lord quotes from the Song of Solomon, you might wonder when he would have heard it during his earthly lifetime. The Song of Solomon is one of the five “little scrolls” or Megilloth, which are sung on festive occasions and holy days. The Song of Solomon was sung on the eighth day of Passover as a celebration of God’s love for his bride, the covenant people. In addition, four different manuscripts of the Song of Solomon have been found among the Dead Sea Scrolls, which were roughly contemporary with Jesus, indicating that the Qumran sect of antiquity also perceived the book as holy.

Some scholars believe the Song of Solomon was sung at ancient wedding banquets; in fact, at least one rabbi’s complaint about singing the Song in banquet halls has been preserved. Rabbi Akiba (who lived just after the time of Jesus, around 50–135 CE) said, “He who recites a verse of the Song of Songs and treats it [in a secular manner] and one who recites a verse at the banqueting table [making it the subject of secular amusement], brings evil upon the world.”⁵

The Song may also have been sung by young women dancing out of doors in a courtship celebration during the fall harvest when they could woo young men. Rabbi Simeon
ben Gamaliel (ca. 140 CE) writes of those celebrations, “There were no happier days for Israel . . . for on them the daughters of Jerusalem used to go forth in white raiments . . . and the daughters of Jerusalem went forth to dance in the vineyards.” So it perhaps not too surprising that the Lord was familiar with the Song and would quote it in Latter-day revelation.

Though the Song of Solomon is largely ignored in Church today, the twelfth century saw an explosion of interest in it, when more commentaries were written about this book of the Bible than any other. Why the intense interest in the Song? The twelfth century was when “romantic” love was being re-discovered (as compared to arranged marriages for wealth, status, or advancement). A debate raged about whether the Song was an allegorical expression of God’s love for the Church, or whether it was just a poem about the physical love of a woman for her man. Perhaps not ironically, the twelfth century’s greatest commentator on the Song, Bernard of Clairvaux (who wrote 82 sermons about it), was also the fiercest critic of the greatest love affair of the 12th-century, that of Abelard and Heloise: Bernard tried to secure the death penalty for Abelard.

The same dualistic interpretation of the Song of Solomon that provoked the 12th century still makes many Latter-day Saints uncomfortable today—is it an erotic love story or an allegory of God’s love for his Church? The most compelling and productive answer is, “Both.” Without the Song of Solomon, we would lack a Biblical basis for a positive consideration of one of the most beautiful human experiences—sexual love, and we would also be deprived of a compelling metaphor for the love of the Lord for his Church.

Our tendency in Church meetings is to avoid discussion of sexuality (even in adults-only classes such as priesthood meetings and Relief Society). The only place it might be discussed is in marriage counseling, and even then I have my doubts. Perhaps the greatest harm from ignoring the Song of Solomon in Church is that we deprive married couples of a sexual discourse that they could use to approach and resolve their own problems of intimacy. It might be possible to use the Song of Solomon to fill this void. After all, the poem does not celebrate adultery or fornication; it is an ode to sexual love, and we would also be deprived of a compelling metaphor for the love of the Lord for his church.

What if we used the Song of Solomon as a text for the Marriage and Family course? Imagine a class discussion based on these five words: “thy love is better than wine.” We could talk about how the Hebrew word for love here, *dodim*, means intimate caresses and lovemaking—and we might also mention that it is plural, meaning multiple acts. The word “wine” is also idiomatic in ancient Hebrew, referring to “banquets of pleasure.” The best translation for this verse might be “our lovemaking is better than drinking or feasting.” Perhaps that discussion could lead to current research on the benefits of an active sexual relationship with one’s spouse. One study found that couples who have sex twice or more per week reduce the risk of fatal heart attack for men by half, compared to couples who have sex less than once a month. An active sexual relationship can also raise immunity levels by promoting production of immunoglobulin A, which can help protect people from colds and other infections. Sex also promotes trust and intimacy in marital relationships by releasing the hormone oxytocin, also associated with pain relief and sleep promotion—the more physical contact, the higher the levels of oxytocin.

The Song leads us to ask how many of us are still so deeply in love with our spouse that we would celebrate his or her beauty and charms so poetically? Remember that verse from the Song that the Lord quoted three times in the D&C about his Church? It came, appropriately enough, from chapter 6, the husband’s celebration of the awesomeness of his wife.

How does this sound? Let’s strengthen the marriages in our church as well as the health of its members by reading the Song of Solomon together with our spouses, remembering to follow the advice of our prophets and apply the scriptures to our daily lives. Who said obedience is onerous?

NOTES

3. Daniel H. Ludlow, *How to Get the Most from Your Study of the Old Testament*, cited at ldslibrary.org. He later revised his thoughts and agreed with the LDS Bible Dictionary definition that the Song was a useful metaphor of the love of the Lord for His Church.
4. Though I note here the small group of LDS scholars who insist (in yet another violation of Occam’s Razor) that these scriptures in the D&C are not quoting the Song of Solomon; instead they come from a now-lost and unknown book of scripture which the author of the Song of Solomon must have quoted from (implying, of course, that the Lord would not quote from the Song of Solomon).
7. Ann W. Axtell, *The Song of Songs in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), 10, notes that in the Middle Ages, the soul was considered feminine; hence monks at this time identified their souls as feminine and God as the Bridegroom. See also Betty Radice and M.T. Clanchy, eds., *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003).
8. Ezekiel 23:17, which uses this word to refer to the “bed of love,” and Proverbs 7:18, where the harlot says to the foolish young man, “let us take our fill of love till the morning.” The root of the word used for lovemaking here appears to signify “to move by thrusts or pushes” (see C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2006) 5: 512.
10. See www.webmd.com/sex-relationships/features/10-surprising-health-benefits-of-sex
Notes from inside

FOURTEEN DAYS

IN THOSE FLEETING MOMENTS BETWEEN dreaming and consciousness, relief appears real as my mind says, “Oh, it was only a dream.” But the short reprieve dissipates as I have to account for the giant knot in my guts. Unwanted images scroll through my head, and I realize that my nightmare is still here. It’s my real life.

Heartache consumes my chest, and once again I find that it takes nearly everything I have just to breathe. Sleep-deprived reasoning suggests that if I can just make the thick air move in and out, something will eventually heal. It has to, right? So I just focus on drawing in the next breath.

The support group assures me that I will not feel like this forever. “Two years” they say, “is what it usually takes. You have to give it some time.” That word. Ugh! “Time” implies a future, and the future is well beyond my ability to process. They say that I should take care of myself for now and see how I feel in two weeks.

I once thought that only losing a child could cause someone to hurt this deeply. Some of the people in the support group have lost children. One lost her only child, but she said that for her, this hurt was more devastating. I groaned at the implication. First for me, but then for her. One man in the group declared, “I have more heart than this has hurt!” Strong and inspiring words, but . . . I don’t know.

Two weeks?

I focus on my breathing, I do the “time” and find that, even if ever so slightly, I do feel different. “Two more weeks” the strangers tell me. In my mind I scream, “But this is going to take forever!” Out loud, I ask myself, “How do people do this? Would she have done this if she knew it would do this to me? How could this have happened to us?” Again I breathe, I listen to the words of the group, and do as I am told, “OK,” I tell them, “I will report back in two weeks.”

In two weeks she realizes that this is not just an initial reaction. Two weeks later, with my head on her lap, I sob as she confides in me with all the wrong words. Two weeks more and I continue to cry—just not for hours at a time. Another two weeks, and I run out of paid leave. Two more weeks, and I still can’t stop asking her why. Two weeks, and more truth trickles in, and I cry very hard. Two weeks, and I find the will to stand up for myself. Two weeks, and I resist scouring her phone records one more time.

Two weeks, and I’m thirty pounds lighter. Two weeks, and I pass one whole day without tears. Two weeks, and I come to accept that I will never be able to time travel, I can’t go back and stop them, and I will never forget what they did. Two weeks, and I consider forgiveness as an option. Two weeks, I wonder if I am deluding myself. Two weeks, and she whispers sincere apologies in my ear as she holds me tight at night.

Two weeks, and the knot in my stomach begins to loosen. Two weeks, and I tell her I will never go through this again—ever! Two weeks, and I tell her I still love her. Two weeks, two weeks, two weeks . . .

In increments of fourteen days, two years have nearly passed. I am sad to report that most days, I still think about what happened, and I still carry sunglasses—just in case. The two of us walk in a sober world, we do take better care of each other, and it is better to be together than apart. It is hard to define exactly what I lost, or how I would value it now. I would like to think that I have become wiser in the past two years. But instead, I am only aware of just how far behind I was, and how much further I may still have to go.

How am I doing now? I’m not really sure. Maybe check back in a couple of weeks.

ANONYMOUS
Through anger, the truth looks simple.
—Jane McCabe

It must be a decisive rule of every Christian fellowship that each individual is prohibited from saying much that occurs to him.
—Deitrich Bonhoeffer

THE “REAL” GLENN BECK

EVER SINCE LEARNING THAT GLENN BECK HAD joined the Mormon Church, I’ve been trying to understand who he is, what he does, and how his conversion to Mormonism has influenced him personally and professionally. Beck is an enigma, a chameleon, a shape-shifter, continually reinventing himself. He has gone from “zoo radio” cut-up, to stand-up comedian, to political commentator/entertainer, to Fox News firebrand, to cheerleader of a populist anti-government movement, to a modern-day Cassandra prophesying doom and destruction for a nation allegedly in the thrall of progressivism. A Latter-day Saint friend of mine calls him “a cross between a professional wrestler and a televangelist,” and some critics see him as the Barnum and Bailey of right-wing broadcast media.

Conservative commentator Mark Levin remarked recently, “I have no idea what philosophy Glenn Beck is promoting. And neither does he. It’s incoherent. One day it’s populist, the next it’s libertarian bordering on anarchy, next it’s conservative but not really.” Senator Robert Byrd’s recent characterization of certain Republican politicians’ “rantings” as “barkings from the nether regions of Glennbeckistan” suggests the extent to which Beck’s notoriety has become a part of popular culture.

Beck has constructed a universe where the U.S. is under siege by progressives plotting to transform the nation into a socialist or—worse—communist or fascist state. Using innuendo, chop logic, guilt by association, conspiracy theories, progressive and liberal bogeymen, and what seems a carefully cultivated image of righteous indignation, Beck presents himself as today’s Paul Revere, warning the countryside that the enemy is at the gate (or, in Beck’s words, actually “in the house”).

In his broadcasts, Beck uses all the tools of a showman propagandist: he makes absurd comparisons, uses false analogies, tells whopping “stretchers” (Huckleberry Finn’s term for statements with little regard for fact or truth), weeps on cue (YouTube footage shows him swiping Mentholatum under his eyes to induce tears), and lapses into sophomoric lampooning, mocking, ridicule, sarcasm, taunting, and joking. At times, his TV show resembles a circus side show. Alex Koppelman observes, “He laughs and cries; he pouts and giggles; he makes funny faces and grins like a cartoon character; he makes earnest faces yet insists he is a clown; he cavorts like a victim of St. Vitus’s Dance. His means of communicating are, in other words, so wide-ranging as to suggest derangement as much as versatility.”

What’s particularly seductive about Beck’s performance is that he wears many masks, which he deftly changes, alternately engaging, mesmerizing, and enflaming his audience, making them laugh one minute and inciting them to storm the Bastille the next. This mixture of clownish behavior and apparent deadly seriousness accounts for Beck’s appeal to a certain portion of the United States populace.
His charm, boyish good looks, adolescent pranks, and jokes keep viewers entertained so that when he takes aim at the latest “progressive” crime or whatever he sees as the most recent threat to freedom and free enterprise, his audience is ready to follow him to the outer edge of outrage. Beck describes his shtick as a “fusion” of entertainment and enlightenment. And it’s effective. When he shifts into his latest example of evil or corruption in the White House or Congress, his followers are ready to beat their plowshares into swords and join his crusade. In fact, he used to open his show by repeating the words of Jesus to his disciples: “Come, follow me.”

Beck now begins his TV show with a montage of patriotic images—George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, Martin Luther King Jr., the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights. His carefully constructed persona, balanced precariously between respectability and irascibility, is enhanced through his wardrobe—shirt, tie and jacket, blue jeans and tennis shoes. His most important prop is a blackboard on which he scribbles, pastes photos, and juxtaposes ominous images (Marx, Lenin, Hitler, Saddam Hussein, Fidel Castro, Hugo Chavez, Che Guevara—and his main target, Barack Obama). Beck poses as the professor of a populist uprising, teaching the “real” American history and warning viewers how Obama endangers their freedom and security.

It is important to note that some of the issues Beck addresses are legitimate—corruption in high places, abuse of power, misuse of federal funds, excessive governmental control, and Wall Street greed. But how such issues are addressed can either resolve or exacerbate them. Beck has a propensity to polarize rather than unify, demonize rather than humanize, and sow discord rather than promote dialogue.

“UNLIKELY MORMON”

All of this might be the story of one more charismatic, right-wing media personality whom Mormons might find either persuasive or repulsive, except Beck is a Latter-day Saint—the most visible and controversial one in the nation. He’s better known than President Thomas S. Monson or football star Steve Young and more popular than Harry Reid or Mitt Romney. His daily radio program, carried on 280 stations, has 6.5 million listeners; his television program on Fox has 3 million viewers, and his website, GlennBeck.com, receives more than a million visitors a month. In a recent Harris Poll, Beck finished second only to Oprah Winfrey as America’s “favorite TV personality.” But Beck’s followers may be more politically engaged and influential than Winfrey’s. According to a December 2009 Gallup poll, Beck ranks just below Nelson Mandela and above Pope Benedict as the most admired person in the United States. In April 2010, Time listed Beck as one of the 100 “people who most affect our world.”

Some of Beck’s popularity results from his shameless self-promotion. On radio, TV, and Internet, he urges people to buy his books, subscribe to his newsletter, buy his CDs and videos, and attend his public appearances, whether live or via satellite. One recent promotion is for his new venture, “Insider Extreme,” a “new six-camera broadcast quality stream of the radio program,” with “more cameras, more truth, more Glenn.” The promotional come-on for potential subscribers (only $6.26 a month) is “Want to be happy?” Forbes magazine praises Beck for being able to “monetize virtually everything.”

Latter-day Saints display a range of attitudes toward Beck. For some, his being Mormon is enough for them to like him; for others, his Mormon identity only increases their antipathy. As one blogger observed, “Glenn Beck is a complex figure, especially for Mormons.”

In a SUNSTONE article titled “Glen Beck, Cleon Skousen, Amerigo Vespucci, & Me,” Eric Samuelsen writes, “A large number of Utahns have been watching Glenn Beck, and taking him very seriously indeed.” Speaking of the Obama/Democrat health care bill, Samuelsen observes,
For many of my LDS brothers and sisters, ‘Obamacare’ is a catastrophe, the apocalypse, the end of everything good. I’ve felt for years that the best guide to the Mormon zeitgeist is the letters-to-the-editor page of the Deseret News. If that’s true, then Utah Mormons are collectively losing their cool. President Obama is routinely described as a socialist, a fascist, a Maoist and a communist and his administration as something dark and seductively satanic. Our nation is descending into chaos and anarchy; we’re in the Last Days; we’re just about beyond redemption.12

Although Beck’s broadcasts often reflect Mormon beliefs, practices, jargon, and symbols, he has positioned himself to speak the same language to Mormons as to conservative Christians (many of whom consider Mormonism a non-Christian cult). On a recent show, he said, “I’m a gospel-believing brother.” When Beck invokes the founders of the United States and framers of the Constitution, most viewers don’t realize that, as Mormon scholar Joanna Brooks points out, such ideas stem from Beck’s Mormonism: “It is likely that Beck owes his brand of Founding Father-worship to Mormonism, where reverence for the founders and the United States Constitution as divinely inspired are often-declared elements of orthodox belief.”13

The more favorable Mormon views of Beck may spring from his portrayal in the Deseret Book DVD Unlikely Mormon: The Conversion Story of Glenn Beck or the many verbal and graphic allusions to Mormonism in his shows. Consider these comments from the Millennial Star blog:

I watched Unlikely Mormon Glenn Beck the other night and was really moved. I loved hearing his story! Everyone in my family was really inspired. I know some people’s personalities don’t mesh with Glenn’s, but as a person who has met him face to face, I have to say he has an incredible Spirit and desire to do good. I admire this greatly. Anyone who is courageous enough to take a stand like he does is worthy of respect in my book even if I didn’t completely agree with him.

I once met Beck after one of his shows a few years ago (back before all the security when he’d do free-for-all meet and greets), and I actually did feel the spirit. Pretty strong, too.14

Two recent Internet articles by Latter-day Saint writers portray Beck in a less favorable light. In “Mormon Like Me: Black Saints, Bigots, and Beck,” Margaret Blair Young writes of growing up in Provo during the sixties, the same time as Darius Gray, her black Latter-day Saint collaborator on the Standing on the Promises novels and the documentary Nobody Knows: The Untold Story of Black Mormons. The political climate in Provo then made Darius and other blacks living there uncomfortable and sometimes fearful. Margaret recounts visiting a library with Darius in Marshall, Missouri, his ancestral home. As they left the library, she was stunned to see the 17 September 2009 Time magazine cover, with a full-color photo of Beck sticking his tongue out “like a petulant four-year-old”:

Why did Beck’s infantile sneer matter? Because Beck is a Mormon. Because his mocking presence in the small town of Marshall, Missouri, meant he was sticking his tongue out at patrons in every library in the nation. Because the city of Provo, Utah—where I still live and now teach—sometimes invites him to be part of our Freedom Festival and host our “Stadium of Fire,” as though his ultra right, self-assured conviction and his bifurcated view of contemporary issues comprise a worthy resume. Because he is a disciple of W. Cleon Skousen, whose conspiracy theories resulted in students spying on each other and on their professors at BYU and fomented terror and suspicion throughout Provo—even at Provo High—and created a climate which made Darius fear for his family’s life. Because Beck has said such race-baiting things as, “This president has exposed himself as a guy . . . who has a deep-seated hatred for white people, or the white culture.”15

She further explains why Beck’s pose offends her:

He is inviting me and any who will listen to the world I was terrified of as a child, and which, by the time I was in high school, I realized was an outlandishly hokey creation—a world which invents and obsessed on cloaked conspiracies; a world which encourages racial division; a world which loops a soundbite (“Not God bless America . . . ”) and calls it an identity. A world which reduces the president to a well-spoken, “credit-to-his-race” guy who hates white people. He exhumes skeletons from our closets and coffins, and unholy passions from our past which should stay buried—or be instantly cremated if they still happen to yet be hovering. For me as a Mormon, Glenn Beck’s invitation to return to childish things forces me to confront anew the unsavory aspects of my religion’s past, and all the things we Latter-day Saints are now attempting to heal.16

BECK, SKOUSEN, AND THE JOHN BIRCH SOCIETY

CERTAINLY BECK HAS been influential in resurrecting Skousen, and Skousen has influenced Beck. Beck’s biographer calls Skousen “The Man Who Changed Glenn Beck’s Life.”17 Beck has touted Skousen’s The Five Thousand Year Leap as a “must read” and speaks of his discovery of Skousen in terms most Mormons would associate with divine inspiration if not intervention. He
says that walking down the Avenue of the Americas in Manhattan,

The answer came to me. It was so dramatic that it made me stop in the middle of the sidewalk. . . . The answer was obvious and[,] best of all, the thinking and worrying had already been done for me. The questions that we face were foreseen by the greatest group of Americans who ever lived; our Founding Fathers.

In language strangely evocative of Mormon feelings about the Book of Mormon, Beck adds, “They knew we would be grappling with issues like the ones we face today. . . . They knew that we would eventually lose our way and that we would need a beacon to lead our way back.” Several weeks after this “revelation” (as he calls it), Beck says, “A friend—without solicitation—sent me a copy” of Skousen’s book. Beck ends by telling readers in urgent, dramatic language, “You, me, all of us were born for this day, to stand responsible before God and future generations to keep this torch of freedom lit, and bear it away from ruin.”

Such an appeal is seductive for Latter-day Saints who believe in personal revelation, America as a promised land, and the Constitution as divinely inspired. Some, however, especially older members who recall the negative influence Skousen and other right-wing conspiracy theorists had on the Church, might be more skeptical, more hesitant about jumping on the Beck bandwagon.

Beck speaks with great reverence for the Founding Fathers. His views are simplistic and idealistic, influenced no doubt by books published by the Skousen-founded National Center for Constitutional Studies: The Real George Washington, The Real Thomas Jefferson, and The Real Benjamin Franklin. Beck frequently cites these books.

In “What’s Going On at Fox News?” conservative commentator David Frum describes Skousen as “one of the legendary cranks of the conservative world, a John Bircher, a grand fantasist of theories about secret conspiracies between capitalists and communists to impose a one-world government under the control of David Rockefeller.” Beck has found such ideas attractive and has given them new expression.

Inevitably, with Skousen as mentor, Beck identifies with the John Birch Society and has been instrumental in its recent resurgence. In an interview with Society spokesman Sam Antonio, Beck said, “I have to tell you, when I was growing up, the John Birch Society, I thought they were a bunch of nuts; however, you guys are starting to make more and more sense to me.” In the Salon article “What’s Beck Doing with His Bigger Audience? Promoting Birchers,” Alex Koppelman calls Beck’s championing of the Birch Society “a blast from the radical past.”

Apparently Beck is unaware that in 1963, the First Presidency stated: “We deplore the presumption of some politicians, especially officers, co-ordinators and members of the John Birch Society, who undertake to align the Church or its leadership with their partisan views.” Summarizing a meeting he’d held with Church president David O. McKay, President Hugh B. Brown wrote, “We agreed that we had done the right thing in letting the members of the Church and the world know that the Church does not in any way endorse or subscribe to the John Birch Society.” Later, when the Birch Society was working with Apostle Ezra Taft Benson to get President McKay’s photo on the cover of the Society’s American Opinion magazine, President McKay said emphatically, “I do not want anything to do with it. I do not want my name associated with John Birch.”

I confess that my reaction to Beck may be influenced by the time Cleon Skousen was my teacher and the advisor to the BYU debate team, of which I was a member. The question we debated that year was “Should the United States Extend Recognition to Communist China?” Under Skousen’s sway, I also briefly believed in the dark, conspiratorial world he and others painted. I too was convinced that our country was on the precipice of a Communist overthrow, as Joe McCarthy had claimed a decade earlier. As did many Mormons back then, including Apostle Ezra Taft Benson, Beck seems to believe “in his heart, that creeping socialism, or growth in the size and scope of government, [will] ultimately end in a communist take-over of our Republic, whether from without, or from within.”

BECK AS LATTER-DAY JOE MCCARTHY AND FATHER COUGHLIN

You’ve done enough. Have you no sense of decency, sir? At long last, have you left no sense of decency?
—Joseph N. Welch to Senator Joseph McCarthy, Army-McCarthy hearings, 9 June 1954

SOME SEE BECK’S tactics as similar to McCarthy’s, especially his propensity to see a socialist or communist bear behind every progressive bush and his “outing” of those he considers socialists and communists. In “Glenn Beck: Joe McCarthy Lives!” Los Angeles Times writer Bill Press sees striking similarities between McCarthy’s 1950s witch hunts and Beck’s activities today. Press cites Beck’s crusade against Van Jones, the man Obama selected as his “Green Czar”: “In 14 episodes of his show, Beck . . . paint[ed] Jones as a dangerous ‘communist-anarchist radical’ heading a vast radical/environmental/black nationalist takeover of America from within the Obama White House.” Press adds, “It was a page ripped right out of the book of Comminie witch hunter Joseph McCarthy: personal attacks on little-known government officials based on nothing but lies, smears, and innuendo (‘Are you now, or have you ever been . . . ?’)—yet ultimately, just as successful. Within two weeks, Jones was forced to resign.”

On 11 March 2010, explicitly invoking McCarthy, Beck
accused President Franklin D. Roosevelt of hiring communists as government employees and praised McCarthy for working to root out such people: “It was Republican Sen. Joe McCarthy, who shined the spotlight on the Communist Party again. McCarthy later led a Senate committee investigation into inefficiencies in the government. Critics accused him of falsely identifying Communists, and smearing their names.”

Beck’s characterization of McCarthy’s aims as “investigation into inefficiencies in government,” reveals deliberate distortion or colossal ignorance of what McCarthy’s destructive campaign was really about—and Beck’s segue from this observation to a discussion of the “domino theory” popular during the Cold War and his ominous, “Kind of feels like that now, doesn’t it?” is an example of his propensity to invent history both to attract and frighten his audience.

Older Latter-day Saints may remember the extent to which Mormons (especially those in Utah) were divided during the McCarthy era. Mormon Senator Arthur Watkins recalled the time he and McCarthy were members of the McCarran Internal Security Committee, charged with investigating possible communist infiltration of the federal government. Watkins was convinced that there was evidence of such infiltration but objected to McCarthy’s methods: “The great issue in McCarthyism was the way he ran wild. The people brought before him were not given a chance to defend themselves. They were pawns in his effort to obtain publicity.” Like Beck, McCarthy “condemned people as communists perhaps without submitting a shred of evidence.”

Partly because of his role in the Senate censure of McCarthy, Watkins lost his bid for reelection. One of his opponents, J. Bracken Lee, “sent a telegram to the mass meeting of McCarthy supporters in New York saying that McCarthy deserved a medal rather than a censure.” Watkins said, “That kind of thing can happen in Utah.”

An entire website (GlennMcCarthyBeck.com) is devoted to describing Beck’s McCarthy-like tactics, which are defined as “the politically motivated practice of making accusations of disloyalty, subversion, or treason without proper regard for evidence.”

Beck plays as fast and loose with the facts as McCarthy did, often relying on the slimmest connection or coincidence to build his case that sinister forces are at work in the government. Beck may potentially be more destructive than McCarthy was, as he mixes Christian end-of-times rhetoric with political and social fear-mongering. Certainly Beck has a much more powerful media megaphone with which to shout his alarm.

Some Latter-day Saints find Beck puzzling and disturbing because, although in an immensely influential position from which he could present to the world a reflection of the best of Mormonism, he has instead chosen to resurrect a past many of us thought we had outgrown or hoped to have kept buried. In that past, Mormon apostle and later Prophet Ezra Taft Benson nearly became the vice-presidential running mate of a racist white governor, George Wallace. Small wonder one commentator has called Beck “The Most Dangerous Demagogue since George Wallace!”

Others have likened Beck to Father Charles Coughlin, the infamous Catholic firebrand whose popular 1930s radio program launched merciless attacks on President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. In Harper Magazine’s “The Heirs of Father Coughlin,” Scott Horton observes, “The voices of Glenn Beck and Rush Limbaugh have much in common with Coughlin. But their message is distinct in many ways—they are not anti-Semitic, for example. And they have different targets for their hatred. But Beck and Limbaugh are more powerful than Coughlin ever was. They have tight ties to the Republican Party, and their messages quickly emerge as partisan political dogma.”

“America saw and rejected this strain of paranoid politics before,” Horton continues, “but it was a test of the nation’s political mental health and stamina then. It likely will be so again.”

A prime example of Beck’s Coughlin-like demagoguery is his unfounded characterization of President Obama as someone who “over and over again” has expressed “a deep-seated hatred for white people or the white culture.” When challenged, Beck replied, “He has a problem. This guy is, I believe, a racist.” These words are akin to those Beck said to Representative-elect Keith Ellison (D-MN), America’s first Muslim congressman: “What I feel like saying is, ‘Sir, prove to me that you are not working with our enemies.’ I’m not accusing you of being an enemy, but that’s the way I feel, and I think a lot of Americans will feel that way.”

Such rhetoric is irresponsible and dangerous, as evidenced by the disrespectful, hateful, racist, violent language and images emerging from “Tea Party Patriots” and other groups who seem to be enlisting in Beck’s army. Signs at Tea Party events identifying Obama with Hitler, Marx, Lenin, Saddam Hussein, and other notorious despots come right off of Beck’s blackboard. Many recent polls assert that, contrary to the opinions of the majority of Americans, large percentages of those in Tea Party-type groups don’t like the...
President, feel he favors blacks over whites, and believe he's moving the country toward socialism. Some of the more extreme beliefs of these groups are that Obama is a Muslim, was not born in the U.S., wants to take away citizens' guns, violates the Constitution, and, most bizarrely, is the Antichrist.

These polls' emotional-based statistics reflect the tenor and many of the talking points of Glenn Beck's various programs, publications, and outlets. He isn't the only right-wing media personality to influence such uninformed and misguided opinions, but he is certainly one of the most persistent, mean-spirited, and strident voices. Along with others who espouse such sentiments, Beck needs to be held accountable for the increasing racist rhetoric expressed by those on the far right. As with McCarthy and Coughlin, Beck's incendiary campaign against the government will eventually implode, but before it does, a number of good people are likely to be adversely effected, as will the LDS Church itself.

A CIVIL SOCIETY?

I know no religion that destroys courtesy, civility, and kindness.

—William Penn

You can turn on the television and see people who claim expertise that they don't possess. And I say that, because the kind of expertise we need is not a facile grasp of policy, but a love of humanity. That's what we need.

—Barry Lopez

HIS YEAR, FORMER Congressman Jim Leach (R-IA), Chairman of the National Humanities Foundation, is on a fifty-state “civility tour” emphasizing the importance of civility in public discourse: “Little is more important for the world's leading democracy in this change-intensive century than establishing an ethos of thoughtfulness and decency of expression in the public square.” Leach continues, “It is particularly difficult not to be concerned about American public manners and the discordant rhetoric of our politics. Words reflect emotion as well as meaning. They clarify—or cloud—thought and energize action, sometimes bringing out the better angels in our nature, sometimes lesser instincts.” Commenting on the latter, likely Leach had Beck in mind when he added, “Public officials are being labeled ‘fascist’ or ‘communist.’”

Beck appears oblivious to Leach's message, given that his discourse is habitually uncivil. He calls his opponents “idiots” (one of his books is titled, Arguing with Idiots), speaks of hating President Woodrow Wilson, labels Wilson and President Franklin D. Roosevelt (and Iranians) “bastards,” and speaks of others as “dirtbags,” “nutjobs,” “crybabies,” “brownshirts,” “thugs,” and “pinheads.” As Lacey Rose writes in a recent issue of Forbes, “He's left a long trail of words—millions of passionate, angry, weepy, moralizing, corny, offensive words—in his wake.”

The following examples reveal Beck's tendency to draw absurd conclusions and make outrageous statements:

- “I'm thinking about killing Michael Moore, and I'm wondering if I could kill him myself or if I would need to hire somebody to do it.”
- “Al Gore's not going to be rounding up Jews and exterminating them. It is the same tactic, however. The goal is different. The goal is globalization.”
- In attempting to diminish Supreme Court nominee Sonia Sotomayor, Beck asks sarcastically, “What would Sonja do?”
- Beck portrays Obama and Democrats as vampires “going after the blood of our businesses,” and suggests “driv[ing] a stake through the heart of the bloodsuckers.”
- Claiming Obama is “letting our troops literally bleed and die” in Afghanistan, Beck suggests he will “pay for it” in the afterlife.
- On TV, Beck imitates Obama pouring gasoline on “average Americans” and says, “President Obama, why don't you just set us on fire? . . . We didn't vote to lose the Republic.”

Whether aimed at Beck or not, an October 2009 statement on the news section of the Church's website could certainly apply to him. Called “The Mormon Ethic of Civility,” it states, “So many of the habits and conventions of modern culture . . . undermine the virtues and manners that make peaceful coexistence in a pluralist society possible. The fabric of civil society tears when stretched thin by its extremities. . . . Civility is not only a matter of discourse. It is primarily a mode of engagement.” The article adds, “The Church views with concern the politics of fear and rhetorical extremism that render civil discussion impossible. . . . The Church hopes that our democratic system will facilitate kinder and more reasoned exchanges among fellow Americans than we are now seeing.”

Emphasizing core gospel values in its position, “The Mormon Ethic of Civility” states, “The moral basis of civility is the Golden Rule, taught by a broad range of cultures and individuals, perhaps most popularly by Jesus Christ: ‘And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise’ (Luke 6:31). This ethic of reciprocity reminds us all of our responsibility toward one another and reinforces the communal nature of human life.”

Beck seems unaware of or indifferent to the fact that some fellow Saints are liberal/progressives. Further, he seems insensitive to the fact that hundreds of thousands of Latter-day Saints live happily with the full blessings of Church membership in countries with socialist governments. The Church's statement on civility recognizes the virtue of pluralism in an international church: “The need for civility is perhaps most relevant in the realm of partisan politics. As the Church operates in countries around the
world, it embraces the richness of pluralism. Thus, the political diversity of Latter-day Saints spans the ideological spectrum.  

"HANGING BY A THREAD"

A PERSISTENT MORMON MYTH that Beck has passionately latched onto is the infamous “White Horse Prophecy,” the prediction, attributed to Joseph Smith, that “there will be confusion, revolution, and wickedness in the last days prior to the coming” of Christ. There will be “turmoil and trouble and great tribulation” and the people represented by the white horse (the Mormons) “will become rich and powerful and will see many come to them for safety.”

The most commonly cited portion of the prophecy (which has not been officially disavowed) is that at some future point, the U.S. Constitution will “hang by a thread,” and if it is to be rescued, it will be so only by the intervention of “the elders of Israel.” His belief in this aspect of the prophecy was confirmed in an interview Beck conducted with Senator Orrin Hatch:

BECK: Senator, do you believe—I mean, when I heard Barack Obama talk about the Constitution and I thought, we are at the point or we are very near the point where our Constitution is hanging by a thread.

HATCH: You got that right . . .

BECK: We are so close to losing our Constitution. We are so close to losing what we have, and people aren't thinking.

The next generation, our children will look to us and say, “You sold my freedom for what?”

HATCH: Well, let me tell you something. I believe the Constitution is hanging by a thread.

Beck appears to see himself as one of those called to “rally the righteous of our country and provide the necessary balance of strength to save the institutions of constitutional government,” to be one of those who will “step forth” to “save [the Constitution] from utter destruction,” “to rescue that great and glorious palladium of our liberty.”

Church leaders have good reasons to fear the extreme rhetoric of someone like Beck. If Beck’s fearmongering or that of the Tea Partiers and other anti-government groups, should lead to violence against the President, then people like Beck who have fomented such anger and hatred could legitimately be held responsible, even if they attempt, as Beck sometimes does, to warn his viewers against violence. That Beck has become concerned about his listeners’ committing violent acts is evidenced by his recent plea to have them sign a non-violence pledge and send it to him.

The pledge, borrowed from Martin Luther King, Jr., is found on Beck’s website, along with “Five Principles of Non-violence,” many of which Beck violates almost every day on his programs:

- Walk and talk in the manner of love; for God is love.
- Observe with friend and foes the ordinary rules of courtesy.
- Refrain from violence of fist, tongue, and heart.

Though Beck tries to wrap himself in the mantles of Gandhi and King, his behavior, like that of his followers, is far from the principled actions of such non-violent leaders. If, indeed, Mormon elders are ever called on to save the Constitution, it will not be because they are partisan, political, or powerful, but because they will act on principles of righteousness—humility, mercy, forgiveness, long-suffering, and love.
For Beck, America is a ticking time bomb about to explode. He warns that we could be on the verge of "the darkest period in American history."

—Glenn Beck

APOCALYPSE NOW!

People should be scared!

—Glenn Beck

The Spirit of the White Horse Prophecy is woven into Beck's persistent warning that the Republic is about to collapse, be invaded, or suddenly and subversively occupied from within. He also implies that his listeners and viewers are those "called" to rescue it. Night after night he uses end-of-times scare tactics. In almost every broadcast, Beck warns that the impending Apocalypse is upon us. Beck's apocalyptic vision is often articulated by his guests. One, Damon Vickers, warned on Beck's TV show in February:

The other side of a debt implosion, which is what we're in the process of realizing right now, is potentially even anarchy. Anarchy in a society. And so individuals and families have to have the foresight—that's situational awareness—to perhaps consider, maybe, maybe having a farm, maybe growing your own food, maybe you need to take up arms if you have any to protect your family. The period that's emerging in front of us could be very, very scary.61

Vickers' recommendations are hardly disinterested since he is the chief investment officer of Nine Points Investment62 and, like Goldline, one of Beck's corporate sponsors, promotes investing in gold as a hedge against the coming economic and social collapse.

For Beck, America is a ticking time bomb about to explode. He warns that we could be on the verge of "the darkest period in American history" and predicts that we will have a civil war sometime in the future. His nostalgia for the early days of the Republic punctuate nearly every broadcast. Inspired by Skousen's view of history, Beck suggests that if we can just get back to the glorious days of the American Revolution, we will find our way out of the darkness. Of course Beck's idealization of the founding of the United States relies on a selective, hagiographic reading of American history.63

As with his other key points of emphasis, Beck bolsters his vision of the apocalypse with scripture, end-of-times mythology, and guests who support his point of view. On a recent show he said, "If you look at the extremist Muslim version of the Mahdi, and then you read the Book of Revelation, he suspiciously looks like the Antichrist. Seeing that he's the one that's running a one-world government and executing everyone that disagrees with him from Babylon." Then he added sarcastically, "I don't know where I've heard that one before."64

BECK, ROMNEY, AND REID

Latter-day Saints can't help wondering what influence Beck might have on Mitt Romney's presidential ambitions. Some see Romney caught between wanting to capitalize on Beck's popularity, especially with the Far Right whose support Romney likely needs to win a presidential election, and worrying that association with Beck might negatively impact his attempt to tack to the center. In "New and Improved Romney," David S. Bernstein reveals what he believes to be the new Romney strategy—to surrender most of the South (which never trusted him during the last campaign), distance himself from the Far Right, and embrace what many consider his true moderate position.65 If so, association with Beck could confirm impressions many moderates have of Romney's conservative leanings and, worse, his reputation for "flip-flopping."

Yet, judging from some recent statements, Romney is having a hard time truly moving to the center. Some of his remarks seem to approach Beck's extremism. At the recent Conservative Political Action Conference, Romney referred to the Obama administration as "Liberal neo-monarchism," a tag suggestive of Skousen via Beck. Shortly after passage of the health care legislation, Beck's website linked to Romney's response which denounced what he called "Obamacare," even though, as many commentators have remarked, the new healthcare bill is remarkably similar to what the Massachusetts legislature enacted while Romney was governor.66

In "Latter day Taint: How Glenn Beck Is Driven by Mormonism—and why his fellow faithful (including Mitt Romney) should be worried," Adam Reilly of the Boston Phoenix writes, "Should members of the LDS Church be cheering or lamenting Beck's protracted moment in the spotlight? Could Beck's forays into stealth Mormon sermonizing make his conservative evangelical fans rethink their loyalty?
And if Beck’s religiosity finally becomes a story, what might that mean for the lingering presidential hopes of 2012 Republican contender Mitt Romney? Beck’s recent alienation of a broad swath of Christians over his views on “social justice” (see below), could also prove problematic for Romney. Responding to Beck’s statement, a Presbyterian friend of Mormon writer Joanna Brooks writes, “[Beck] has gone too far. The only thing that’s going to come of this is that Christians in the South will dislike Mormons even more.”

Others, however, see Beck’s Mormonness as helping Romney. In “Glenn Beck and Mitt Romney’s ‘Dirty Little Secret,’” Dave Rosner speculates that Beck’s confrontational style will cause him to challenge any anti-Romney sentiment on the right: “Beck’s popularity has the ability to quash much of the anti-Mormon feeling from both sides of the aisle. Beck will speak in his blunt no-nonsense way about the idiocy of opposing Romney for being Mormon. No one knows who Beck will support, but Beck taking those to task for fomenting religious discrimination will pay in votes. Any airing of Beck being a Mormon will help Romney.”

Certainly, the Beck-Romney link would help Romney among Mormons, if he needed any further help with them. Romney praised Beck in a recorded introduction to Beck’s address at the George Wythe University gala in Salt Lake City in June 2009, calling Beck “a friend and a statesman in his own right.”

But contrast Beck’s evidently friendly relationship with Romney to his attitude toward fellow Mormon and Senate Democratic leader Harry Reid. On 5 March 2010, Beck criticized Reid’s comments about the lower-than-expected number of job losses as “upping the idiocy ante.” Beck’s criticism of the Obama healthcare bill targeted Reid as well, since he was the bill’s driving force in the Senate. Beck’s Nevada affiliate heavily promoted an anti-Reid rally in Searchlight, Nevada, on 26 September 2009 and Beck seems to favor Reid’s opponent, Danny Tarkanian, in next November’s election.

Given Beck’s conservative leanings, his call for the defeat of three-term conservative Mormon Senator Robert Bennett may be more troubling. On his radio program in late April, Beck said dismissively, “I may vote for a mouse over Bob Bennett.” By all objective measures, Bennett is a tried and true conservative. According to the New York Times, “Conservative advocacy groups have consistently given Mr. Bennett high marks, including an ‘A’ ranking from the National Rifle Association, a 98 percent rating by the United States Chamber of Commerce and an 84 percent rating from the American Conservative Union.” Yet Bennett was not chosen by Utah’s Republican delegates, who considered him too moderate and too bipartisan to be returned to the Senate.

Beck seems to be applying a rigid litmus test for politicians. In this he resembles other resentful purists on the right. As the New York Times reports, “Tea Party movement and advocacy groups on the right are demanding that candidates hew strictly to their ideological standards and are moving aggressively to cast out those they deem to have strayed, even if only by participating in the compromises of legislating.” Beck contributes to, rather than diminishes, the polarization presently plaguing our society.

**SOCIAL JUSTICE = SOCIALISM?**

This is the one cause that ranks above all others in bringing about the social justice so much desired in governments.

—Church editorial issued during the Great Depression

A RECENT EPISODE on Beck’s program illustrates the risk he represents to the Church. On 2 March 2010, Beck outraged a broad array of Christians when he said, “I beg you, look for the words ‘social justice’ or ‘economic justice’ on your church website. If you find it, run as fast as you can. Social justice and economic justice, they are code words.” Just in case his viewers weren’t able to decode the words, Beck held up a swastika in one hand and a hammer and sickle in the other: “Communists are on the left, and the Nazis are on the right.” (A couple of nights earlier, Beck had both placed on the left.) He said, “Am I advising people to leave their church? Yes! If I am going to Jeremiah Wright’s church [Obama’s former church in Chicago]. If you have a priest that is pushing social justice, go find another parish. Go alert your bishop.” He further said that social justice “is a perversion of the gospel.”

Watching this, I thought, “Is he totally unaware that social and economic justice are woven into the fabric not only of American history but of the gospel itself? Does he not know a group of active Latter-day Saints has formed an organization called Mormons for Equality and Social Justice? I was not surprised to see a tremendous backlash to Beck’s words from everywhere—the left, center, and right. Jim Wallis, a respected Christian writer and social justice advocate, said in “An Open Letter to Glenn Beck: Social Justice and the Gospel,” “Perhaps you don’t realize that most Christians believe social, economic, and racial justice are at the heart of the gospel, not a perversion of it.” In another article, “Biblical Social Justice and Glenn Beck,” Wallis added, “The Bible is clear: from the Mosaic law of Jubilee, to the Hebrew prophets, to Jesus Christ, social justice is an integral part of God’s plan for humanity.” Wallis called on Christians who believe that social justice is an expression of their faith to “send [Beck] thousands of names.” As of April 2010, more than fifty thousand believers from many denominations had responded.

In the New York Times’s “Outraged by Glenn Beck’s Salvo, Christians Fire Back,” Laurie Goodstein observes that Beck’s attack on churches includes his own church. She quotes Phillip Barlow, the Leonard Arrington Professor of Mormon History and Culture at Utah State University, as
saying, “A lot of Latter-day Saints would think that Beck was asking them to leave their own church.” Barlow adds, “One way to read the Book of Mormon is that it's a vast tract on social justice.” Barlow also notes that Beck's position is at variance with the Church's recent addition of caring for the poor to its list of central missions.

Responding to such criticism the next day, Beck tried both to spin his words and blame the Times (which he called “the organ of the Obama administration”). On his website, he said he was referring only to churches like that of Jeremiah Wright, but his original words were very different from this narrow parsing. Instead of admitting he was wrong and apologizing, Beck called Wallis “a leftist,” “an operative for the Democratic Party,” “an apostle communist for atrocities in Cambodia and Vietnam,” and “a dedicated foe of capitalism.” On his radio program the next day, Beck personally threatened Wallis: “The hammer is coming . . . and when the hammer comes, it's going to be hammering hard and all through the night, over and over.” On his 5 April 2010 telecast, Beck said Wallis is “a political hack [who is] using his religious background to do the President's dirty work.”

Michael Otterson, Director of L.D.S. Public Affairs, argued that the conflict between Beck and Wallis is “political, not theological,” but Beck’s statement is clearly theological even if also political. Otterson asserted that Beck does not speak for the Church and that his identification as Mormon “is irrelevant in this debate.” It might be irrelevant to this particular issue, but viewers who know that Beck is Mormon are likely to confuse his values with those of the Church. An indication of that possibility is seen in the following response to Beck's social justice comments by Dan Neif, of Faith in Public Life: “I don't know what to make of Beck's absurd rant. The fact that a person with a multimedia platform and an audience of millions is either so addled that he believes social justice is a tool of tyranny, or so craven that he would use fearmongering and vitriol to come between people and their churches, is—to say the least—a troubling indictment of what we as a society value and reward. I just hope nobody comes to believe that the Gospel According to Beck is the word of the Lord.”

In her Time magazine blog Swampland, Amy Sullivan asks, “Does Glenn Beck Hate Jesus?” She says Beck “managed to outrage Christians in most mainline Protestant denominations, African-American congregations, Hispanic churches, and Catholics—who first heard the term 'social justice' in papal encyclicals and have a little something in their tradition called 'Catholic social teaching.' (Not to mention the teaching of a certain fellow from Nazareth who was always blathering on about justice . . . ).” Peg Chemberlin, President of the National Council of Churches of Christ, weighed in: “If Mr. Beck’s rants stemmed simply from an honest lack of familiarity with Scripture, that would be one thing. But what is perhaps most disturbing about Mr. Beck's recent statements is that he is urging his listeners to follow a piecemeal Gospel because it better fits his worldly political views.”

Several Latter-day Saints responded to Beck’s criticism of churches that promote social justice. In the Deseret News’s “Mormons, Other Christians Decry Glenn Beck Comments on Social Justice,” Lynn Arave cites a Church spokesman as saying that Beck’s statement represents his own views and not those of the Church. Further, Arave quotes BYU
Associate Dean of Religion Kent P. Jackson as saying, “My own experience as a believing Latter-day Saint over the course of 60 years is that I have seen social justice in practice in every LDS congregation I’ve been in. People endeavor with all of our frailties and shortcomings to love one another and to lift up other people. So if that’s Beck’s definition of social justice, he and I are definitely not on the same team.”

From the beginning, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has been committed to social justice, a principle supported by ancient and modern scriptures and prophets. The Church has always taught that working for social justice is the responsibility not only of individuals, churches, and organizations, but also of governments, although Beck often tries to make a contrary distinction: “I want to make this clear: Some people look at social justice as going out on mission[s] and going out and doing good works for God. That's great—as long as it’s Jesus and the church or your synagogue or whoever it is who you are serving, not a government-bloated program.” How diminished social justice would be without the actions of local, state, and national governments and joint-national organizations such as the United Nations.

“NONE DARE CALL IT SEDITION”

Beck’s reaction to Klein included one of his favorite strategies—accuse his critics of baiting him: “It’s a game. They’re trying to set us up to argue and call us names and just ratchet it up and umm . . . I’m not going to play that game.” He repeated his patriotic mantra, “I love my country,” adding, as if he has been the most reasonable person in the world, “I don’t hate Obama. I pray for this president every single night with my children.” He added that he merely wants to have a conversation with the President and progressives about the Constitution—“A real debate in the open.” Looking like someone wrongly accused of a great crime, he concluded, incredulously, “If that’s seditious . . . whew!”

Beck’s describing his attacks on Obama and his administration as just a simple guy wanting to have a reasonable conversation, a guy who’s “just asking questions,” is dishonest and disingenuous, as is his statement, “I think I may be the most naïve person in America.” In this way, he presents himself as just a lone and lonely voice crying in the wilderness: “I don’t think anyone really wants to tell the truth anymore in America. . . . I . . . I . . . don’t know what it is, but I don’t think there is anyone else” (that is, anyone besides Beck). Then, like a typical confidence man, he brings his audience into his circle of virtue, “Many in America are just like me and you. We get it; we talk to one another and to lift up other people. So if that’s Beck’s definition of social justice, he and I are definitely not on the same team.”

In several telecasts following Klein’s accusation, Beck seemed somewhat sober and subdued, possibly genuinely hurt by the charge: “Time Magazine’s Joe Klein said I’m engaging in sedition. It was like a horse stepped on my chest.” Then, as if a simple declaration of patriotism were sufficient to counter Klein’s charge, he exclaimed, “I love my country!” His impulse is characteristic: attack Klein and defend himself by deliberately distorting the facts: “I don’t understand how speaking out now can be sedition. That’s what Klein said about me and then Sarah Palin and Rush Limbaugh. . . . How is it sedition to disagree with the President of the United States? How is it sedition to say the Democrats and Republicans spend too much money? How is it sedition to tell people to get involved?"

Responding to Beck and other conservative commentators who considered his remarks over the top, Klein said: “Let me be clear: dissent isn’t sedition. Questioning an Administration’s policies isn’t sedition. But questioning an Administration’s legitimacy in a manner intended to undermine or overthrow it certainly is.” He added, “It’s not illegal—unless actions are taken to overthrow the government in question—but it is disgraceful and the precise opposite of patriotism in a democracy.”

For several weeks before 20 April 2010, Beck had been promoting “The Plan”—a plan to restore our country from its fallen state to its original greatness, to restore the pristine government and society the Founding Fathers shaped for our future, a plan of salvation for America. While many pundits offer plans to get us out of our present financial, political and social morass, Beck presents his as The Plan, revealed to him by God. After telling viewers that there is no such thing as coincidence (meaning their watching his program is no accident), he tells of a coincidence in which he and fellow Mormon Pat...
Gray, co-host of *The Glenn Beck Program*, felt simultaneously inspired to look in the Bible for the answer to our nation's troubles. The next day, they reported having arrived at the same conclusion through different but complementary scriptures. Beck says,

> God is giving a plan, I think, to me . . . I think the plan that the Lord would have us follow is hard for people to understand . . . . Because of my track record with you, I beg of you to help me get this message out, and I beg of you to pray for clarity on my part. The plan that He would have me articulate, I think, to you is “Get behind me.” And I don’t mean me, I mean Him. “Get behind Me. Stand behind Me.” I truly believe I have done years now of reading the Founders, their diaries, their letters; the Pilgrims, their diaries, their letters . . . I have seen it with my own eyes . . . and I will tell you that God was instrumental, and they knew it! They knew they had very little to do with it. They just stood where they were supposed to stand, and they said the things that they were supposed to say as He directed. . . . That’s what He’s asking us to do . . . is to stand peacefully, quietly with anger, loudly with truth.95

Beck sees himself as a vessel for God's revelation, the spokesman for God's Plan to help us restore America's greatness, to make it once more "a city set on a hill:"

> Faith . . . is the answer. Get on your knees, don't let it take a September 11th, get on your knees, please. I don't care what church you go to, no church at all, I don't care. Turn to Him.96

Doubtless for some Mormons, such language confirms that Beck is inspired, that he is called to be God's prophetic voice to a fallen America, and the one (or at least one of the ones) to save the Constitution. Other Latter-day Saints are disturbed by such language because they distrust a divisive and polarizing spokesman and because they've been taught that if such a plan were to be revealed, it would be to the Prophet, not to a Fox television commentator.

Not coincidentally, one of Beck's next books is called *The Plan* and will soon be available for purchase. Of Beck's promotion of his “plan,” liberal commentator Bob Cesca says, “It's classic televangelism, which is commonly seen as nothing more than an exploitation of religious naïveté with the goal of making the televangelist rich.”97

Perhaps the most salient question to ask about Beck is—does he believe the things he says, or not? Either answer is disturbing. If he does believe them, then we should at least question his judgment if not his stability. If he doesn't, if it is all a Wizard-of-Oz-behind-the-curtain-manipulated show, then the situation is much more serious. Michael Harrison, publisher of *Talkers*, a magazine devoted to talk radio, says of Beck, “I don't necessarily believe that [what Beck says] is reflective of his own personal politics—I don't even know if he has personal politics. I see him as a performer.”98

The 1 March 2010 *Forbes* cover displays a photo of Beck, dollar signs scribbled in chalk all over his grey pin-stripe suit, looking like a smug Wall Street tycoon. The lead article is titled, “Glenn Beck Inc.: Inside the Cash Machine.” A report of the *Forbes* article in the *New York Daily News* titled, “Cash from Controversy: Glenn Beck Made $32 M In the Last Year,” avers, “Beck insists he's not political, even after leading the charge against health care reform, feeding the frenzy of the Tea Party members, and telling his loyalists President Obama has 'a deep-seated hatred for white people.' Speaking of his company, Glenn Beck, Inc., he says, 'I could give a flying crap about the political process. We're an entertainment company.'” Beck adds, “I aspire to Walt Disney's never-ending quest to try to improve the quality of what he's doing, his never-ending vision of, ‘Yes, it can be done.’”99 A startling confession. If Beck is playing with his audience, and if individuals are hurt by the fury he unleashes then, to quote from one of Emily Dickinson's poems,

> Would not the fun Look too expensive! Would not the jest— Have crawled too far!100

Responding to criticism of his comment in *Forbes* (“I got all kinds of heat for telling *Forbes* magazine my company is an entertainment company, but only after they printed half of the quote from that conversation”), Beck launched into his shape-shifting revisionist mode: “My company is an entertainment company, but now I find myself in the position that I believe my country is on fire . . . . The reason I tell you this is because I believe our lives are about to change . . . . I find myself talking more and more about God these days because that's where our solution lies.”101 In other words, if people see Beck as just an entertainer, then they may stop listening to and watching his programs and stop buying his products.

Beck seems to be saying, *I used to have the luxury of being a funny man and an entertainer, but now that our President has shown he is a Marxist and our country is going to hell, and I have been called to save it, I must put away foolish things*. In this vein, Beck launches again into his prophetic mode. Speaking of why he introduced his trinity of Founding Fathers—Samuel Adams (representing faith), George Washington (hope) and Benjamin Franklin (charity)—Beck says, “I introduced them on TV because I felt led. I felt led by the promptings of the Spirit or whatever you want to call it.” He adds, “I'm being completely honest with you . . . I'm not sure where this is going to lead. I don't know how this ends. I really don't.” Seemingly as surprised as a Galilean fisherman called from his nets, he continues, “I'm just a guy who happens
to be sitting in a chair. It doesn't seem to me anybody else is going to do it, and it makes me . . . It's changed my life.”

Then, acting as if the past year of broadcasts had been delivered by some other “guy,” he says,

I sat down with my family one-and-a-half years ago, and we got down on our knees and prayed, and we had a family conversation, and I said, ‘You guys believe your Dad, don't you?’ ‘Yeah.’ ‘If I say these things and if I start to do these things on television and radio, it's going to change our lives, and not for the better. . . . And we made a decision as a family that we didn't really have a choice.102

If we are to understand that the whisperings of the Spirit, the “call” to save the Republic, and the family council's decision to courageously accept opprobrium had transformed Beck from clownish entertainer into a sober prophet, the programs broadcast since that supposed turning point offer no evidence of it. Beck continues to cultivate his sardonic sideshow persona: criticizing the President, demonizing progressives, castigating his critics, mocking everyone on “the Left,” lampooning those who disagree with him, moving photos around on his blackboard in a flurry of fury to unmask the conspiracy he sees as a cancer on the body politic.103 Beck seems as unrepentant and out of control as ever. I wonder if he is even able to stop himself.

In a 2007 interview with Doug Robinson of the Deseret News, Beck seemed to acknowledge the disconnect between his public persona and his religious identity. Robinson writes, “Outspoken, blunt and confrontational on the air, Beck wrestles continually to reconcile the man he is on the radio and the Mormon he wants to be.” Robinson quotes Beck as saying, “At first I told people on the air that I was a Mormon all the time, but as I became more and more converted and saw others in the Church I wanted to be like, I stopped saying it. I didn't want people to think that's the way Mormons are.”104 (Contrary to this claim, Beck has since referred to his religion numerous times on the air.) Beck added, “The show is such a balancing act. I do stuff on the show every day that I regret or question. My language is loose. I'm just different. Every day I get off the air, I think, 'Lord, help me be better. How do I balance this and be a good reflection of you?’ I don't think I hit it very often.”105

“Okaaaaay. Looks like being called to Nursery is out.”
THE BECK PROBLEM

THE PROBLEM FOR Mormons is that Beck is unlikely to change his aggressive, bombastic, confrontational style or to be deterred from his self-appointed mission to rescue the nation and set the world aright. Since Beck is a recovering alcohol and cocaine addict, one might propose that he has replaced substance abuse with the adrenaline rush of celebrity and notoriety. Having grown up in a family of addicts, I recognize some of the signs in his behavior.

Another reason Beck is unlikely to change tactics is that they have made him fabulously wealthy, earning him an estimated $32 million in the twelve months between February 2008 and March 2009, thus making him one of the most highly paid people in the political/publishing/entertainment industry. Although much he does and says seems at variance with his newfound religion, Beck is unlikely to surrender his fame and fortune or modify his style in any way that would diminish his colossal media power.

Beck has become such a giant on the entertainment/media landscape that he cannot help impacting the Church and its central missions. Many of Beck's non-Mormon followers, who include evangelicals and fundamentalists, may have difficulty reconciling their devotion to him with his religion. Yet some may be willing to overlook his being Mormon because of their fervor for the cause he represents. Because of the Church's past history of racism, its recent involvement in Proposition 8, its connection in the public mind with Mormon fundamentalists, and its general conservatism, the moderate-to-liberal populace may see Beck as confirmation of what they are already convinced is Mormonism's extremism. Thus Beck's identification with Mormonism could hardly be positive for the Church.

Some have argued that Beck's conservatism led him to Mormonism, but in “How Mormonism Built Glenn Beck,” Mormon writer Joanna Brooks argues, “The extent to which Mormonism has given Beck key elements of his on-air personality and messaging—and how it may shape the future of American conservatism.” Brooks quotes from Beck's conversion narrative: “I was baptized on a Sunday and on Monday—Beck's throat tightens again; he wipes tears from his eyes with his index fingers—an agent called me out of the blue.’ Three days later, Beck was offered his own political talk radio show at WFLA-AM in Tampa, Florida, the job that put him on the road from 'morning zoo' radio prankster to conservative media heavyweight.”

A recent Beck telecast shows how completely the “gospel of wealth” has infiltrated Beck's consciousness. In encouraging viewers to invest in gold through Goldline, one of his show's corporate sponsors, Beck touts the virtues of gold as the soundest investment against what he sees as the coming financial collapse: “When the system eventually collapses, and the government comes with guns and confiscates, you know, everything in your home and all your possessions, and then you fight off the raving mad cannibalistic crowds . . ., don't come crying to me. I told you: get gold.” On radio and TV, he not only promotes Goldline, he tells his listeners and viewers they should pray about whether to invest in Goldline! The problem, as some critics have pointed out, is that Beck has a clear conflict of interest in this case, because, as Media Matters reports, he is (or at least was at the time) “a 'Paid Spokesman' for Goldline International, which has an 'exclusive' sponsorship deal with his radio show and bills itself as 'Glenn Beck's Choice for Gold.' Goldline is also listed as "the exclusive sponsor" of Beck's "Common Sense Comedy" tour.

Some feel Beck's commingling of fear and financial advice is unethical and possibly illegal. In an article on Politico, “Rep. Anthony Weiner targets Glenn Beck and Goldline International,” Weiner (D-NY) is quoted as saying, that “Goldline rips off consumers, uses misleading and possibly illegal sales tactics, and deliberately manipulates public fears of an impending government takeover – this is a trifecta of terrible business practices.” Weiner says that Beck “should be ashamed of himself” for scaring his audience into investing with Goldline. Again, typical of his response to criticism, Beck has launched a savage and mean-spirited attack on Weiner, even starting a website called WeinerFacts.com.

Instead of reflecting the messages of the New Testament, the Book of Mormon, and the more enlightened teachings of the Restoration, Beck has latched on to some of the worst ideas from the Mormon fringe to shape his political and social persona. Where in Beck's universe do we find the messages of the Sermon on the Mount, King Benjamin's address, or the 121st section of the Doctrine and Covenants? Where are the long-held Latter-day Saint principles of respect for civil authorities? Has Beck read the 134th section of the Doctrine and Covenants which states, “We believe that all men are bound to sustain and uphold the respective governments in which they reside. . . . We believe that every man should be honored in his station, rulers and magistrates as such”? (D&C 134:4–5) There is a dramatic disconnect between these texts and the critical, pejorative, mean-spirited labeling, name calling and demonizing characteristic of much of Beck's broadcasts and writing.

The extent to which Beck and Mormons can be identified with virulent right-wing hate groups is seen in a video posted online by AmericaForever.com, a Utah-based super patriotic, anti-homosexual, anti-government organization. The video, called “Obama Killer Song,” which sets new words to the Paul Simon song, “The Sounds of Silence,”
shows a figure wearing a mask of President Obama strangling an old woman in her sleep, stabbing a pregnant woman in the stomach, hanging a CIA agent, brainwashing children, stealing money from taxpayers, crossdressing, shooting Representative Joe Wilson with an assault rifle, and forming a shadow army. Three times in the video there is a cut to Beck's TV program. Beck likely had nothing directly to do with the video, but his ideological fingerprints are all over it.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

LENN BECK POSES a challenge for the Church. Because its publishing company has produced a DVD describing Beck's conversion, and because a significant number of Mormons follow his radio and television shows faithfully and identify closely with his political views, the Church may have difficulty distancing itself from so prominent and visible a figure. Beck is especially popular among Utah Mormons. He has been the speaker at Provo's Stadium of Fire celebration and its Freedom Festival's Annual Patriotic Service. He was the keynote speaker at the Mormon-associated George Wythe University gala in Salt Lake City in June 2009, and he will be appearing at his American Revival show in Salt Lake City on 17 July 2010 titled “The End of America and Looking Back to the Founders as a Plan to Find a Way Out.”

Beck's Mormon conversion seems genuine and appears to have profoundly impacted his and his family's life. Apparently, he serves faithfully in his ward as a priesthood instructor, ward missionary, and—with his wife—in the Church's addiction counseling program. I understand he holds a temple recommend and, one would guess, pays a gargantuan tithing. However, the difference between Beck's Sunday demeanor and his weekday media personality makes him a Mormon Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, which may portend trouble for the Mormon community and beyond since religious incoherence (or, worse, hypocrisy) does not engender trust or confidence.

When Beck takes positions such as denying global warming and warning viewers against having their children vaccinated for swine flu, when he indicates that he doesn't believe in evolution and says he refuses to complete the required information on the Census survey (contrary to the First Presidency's specific directions that Latter-day Saints should complete the survey114), he risks endangering those who accept his positions as enlightened.

Were I called to counsel Beck, I would urge him to be more temperate in his expressions, more moderate in his style, more sensitive to the ways his positions and language might affect others and the Church itself. I would also counsel him to be more attuned to political and social diversity within the Church and the culture at large. I would ask him to be more respectful of our leaders, including those in government, treating them the way Beck himself would like to be treated. I would encourage him to read more broadly than he apparently has; in addition to the scriptures and the writings of General Authorities, I would suggest that he read Mormon writers such as Lowell Bennion, Eugene England, Terry Tempest Williams, Claudia Bushman, Levi Peterson, and Margaret Young. I would also recommend he rely on more reputable and mainstream historians than Skousen and the like, read the best books from other spiritual traditions, and good novels and poems as well. In brief, I would like the more expansive, compassionate, and inclusive voices among us to be part of his regular reading fare. Most of all, I would encourage him to read deeply and thoughtfully the words of Nephi, King Benjamin, Alma, Moroni, Joseph Smith and, especially, Jesus. I would hope he would take such counsel into his heart.
Perhaps the most salient question to ask about Beck is: Does he believe the things he says, or not? Either answer is disturbing.

As I watched General Conference on Easter Sunday 2010, I hoped that Beck was also watching—and listening—especially to those who spoke about the core principles of the gospel and how those principles should govern our relations with one another and our behavior in the world. I particularly hoped he heard the following words of Apostle Quentin L. Cook:

“As we listen to the messages of this conference, we will be touched in our hearts and make resolutions and commitments to do better. But on Monday morning we will return to work, school, neighborhoods, and to a world that in many cases is in turmoil. Many in this world are afraid and angry with one another. While we understand these feelings, we need to be civil in our discourse and respectful in our interactions. This is especially true when we disagree. The Savior taught us to love even our enemies. The vast majority of our members heed this counsel. Yet there are some who feel that venting their personal anger or deeply held opinions is more important than conducting themselves as Jesus Christ lived and taught.”

But in watching Beck’s first broadcasts after Conference, I was disappointed to see the usual sophistry, fear-mongering, and demagogy. Holding up a “Chairman Mao” doll bought at Disneyland, he asked, “What in the hell is going on in our country? We’re selling Chairman Mao dolls at Disneyland!” He instantly segued to a photo of President Woodrow Wilson and said, “I hate this guy.” Pointing to the photo, he added, “That guy was one of the most evil dudes ever.” Then, indicating that his viewers didn’t know the truth about the real Woodrow Wilson, he said, “We didn’t learn anything about him for a reason— the Progressives controlled the history books.” He accused Wilson of abridging free speech and controlling the media and then connected Wilson with President Obama. Arguing that we now have a “new anti-free speech government,” he asked, “Why is our government teaching people all over this country to shut up and sit down?”

As usual, Beck stirred up a witches’ brew of photos, film clips, and diagrams to warn his audience of threatening conspiracies: “The free ride our grandparents gave us—it’s all over! Our rights are slipping away. They are trying to squash free speech through mockery, intimidation of advertisers, the Internet, any way they can.” He warned his viewers that they are the target of the administration’s nefarious campaign: “They think you’re dangerous . . . They want to teach you a lesson . . . They want to convince you that you can’t make a difference . . . They want you to believe that your vote doesn’t matter, that your voice doesn’t matter. They want to silence your speech by silencing my speech.” Positioning himself on the side of the angels, Beck pointed to three, large, captioned photos referred to earlier (Samuel Adams—“Faith”; Washington—“Hope”; Franklin—“Charity”). “This is about the Founders,” he intoned. “It’s about the Constitution, it’s about our country and our children.” Indeed it is, Brother Beck; indeed it is.

POSTSCRIPT

When I began my study of Beck, I regarded him as a comic curiosity. The more I have listened, watched, and read from his books, the more my attitude has shifted from curiosity to concern. The more I have learned about Beck’s life story, the trajectory of his professional career, his conversion to Mormonism, and his gravitation toward the extremes of Mormon and American culture, coupled with his growing popularity, the more my concern has turned to alarm.

Instead of being just another charismatic, wacky, out-of-control entertainer or news personality, Beck has evolved into a dangerous figure. I find it difficult to reconcile his values and his behavior with the Church to which we both profess allegiance.

I suspect that many fellow Mormons will be displeased by what I have written here. I ask them to consider how they would feel were a powerful, prominent radio and television host to be as critical of President Monson or Mitt Romney as Beck has been of President Obama. Should Romney run for the presidency again, as most people assume, he will get his share—perhaps more than his share—of negative publicity. Some will distort his record and disseminate misinformation about his religion. Should he eventually become president, I hope he would not be subject to the kind of savage criticism and personal attacks Glenn Beck has unleashed on President Obama.

In writing this article, I have been aware of constant tension between my wish to be fair to Beck as a human being...
and fellow Latter-day Saint and my concern for the damage I feel he is doing and will likely continue to do to the country and the Church. Endowed Latter-day Saints make a covenant in the temple not to “speak evil of the Lord’s anointed.” While most Latter-day Saints tend to understand this charge as referring exclusively to General Authorities, like Titus who admonished, “Speak evil of no man” (Titus 3:2), I feel it refers to all who have been anointed by the mercy and grace of God. And for me, that includes Brother Glenn Beck.

NOTES

14. Mormon lore about the Founding Fathers is reflected in an 1877 vision of President Wilford Woodruff that prompted him to be baptized by proxy for the signers of the Declaration of Independence. In his last conference address, Woodruff recounted George Washington’s words to him in this dream: “We laid the foundation of the government you now enjoy and we never apostatized from it, but we remained true to it and were faithful to God.” Thus Beck’s identifying with the Founding Fathers is something that many Mormons identify with. See “Willford Woodruff’s Final General Conference Talks as LDS Church President,” Mormon’s Latter-day Saint Page, http://www.mormon10.com/General_Conference/Willford_Woodruff_Final_Talk.html (accessed 8 May 2010).
16. Ibid.
18. Mormons will recognize this as an echo of the saying, “When our leaders have spoken, the thinking has been done.”
20. Ibid.
25. Ibid., 291.
26. Ibid., 309.
32. Ibid., 116. The opposition Watkins experienced is similar to that faced by Senator Bob Bennett in his quest for reelection.


46. “Radio host Glenn Beck ‘thinking about killing Michael Moore,'” Media Matters for America, 18 May 2005, http://mediamatters.org/research/200505180008 (accessed 9 May 2010). This is what Beck said on his program for 17 May 2005: “Hang on, let me just tell you what I’m thinking. I’m thinking about killing Michael Moore, and I’m wondering if I could kill him myself, or if I would need to hire somebody to do it. No, I think I could. I think he could be looking me in the eye, you know, and I could just be choking the life out—is this wrong? I stopped wearing my What Would Jesus—hand—and, I’ve lost all sense of right and wrong now. I used to be able to say, ‘Yeah, I’d kill Michael Moore,’ and then I’d see the little band: What Would Jesus Do? And then I’d realize, ‘Oh, you wouldn’t kill Michael Moore. Or at least you wouldn’t choke him to death.’ And you know, well, I’m not sure.”


88. Ibid.


90. Ibid.


96. Ibid.


99. Ibid.


105. Ibid.


108. Ibid.


LIBERATING THE CART-HORSE

GLENN BECK’S CONTRIBUTION

By Carrie L. Thatcher

My daddy served in the army, where he lost his right eye. He flew a flag out on our porch till the day that he died. He wanted my mother, my brothers, my sister and me to grow up and live happy in the land of the free. Now this nation that I love has fallen under attack. A mighty sucker punch came flyin’ in from somewhere in the back. Soon as we can see clearly with our big black eye, we’ll light up your world like the Fourth of July.

—TOBY KEITH

K EITH WROTE THESE WORDS FOR PATRIOTS in the wake of 9/11. They were used to inspire servicemen and -women heading into harm's way. Today, those words could as easily be sung by everyday citizens, though in this case, the enemy is not a nation far across the ocean but the leadership in America’s own backyard.

In the aftermath of the 2008 election, an unexpected cry came from a quiet corner of America—Main Street. Inch by inch, dime by dime, hard-working Americans became aware of a creeping encroachment; they felt abandoned, usurped, and disregarded. They had done nothing wrong. In fact, they’d done everything right: voted in elections, written their representatives, signed petitions, written letters to newspaper editors, and donated money to political candidates.

But the battle against them seemed to intensify. More and more working citizens had begun to feel like Boxer, the cart-horse, in George Orwell’s Animal Farm: valued only as far as they were willing to work, pay taxes, and cooperate.

They hadn’t always felt this discontent. As recently as 1993, cart-horse Americans had waged a fierce battle against the health care plan the Clinton administration had tried to persuade Congress to enact. Both sides mounted an effective campaign, but when the final ballots were tallied, Main Street had won. More important, the citizens felt they had been heard.

This group of cart-horse citizens takes pride in being bedrock Americans. They look at their families, homes, private achievements as a validation of the American vision they’ve been taught. That vision is simple—any person who has the determination to work for a better life can succeed. How each person defines that achievement is an individual choice.

For years, the American Way had consisted of ordinary citizens electing other perceived ordinary citizens to represent them. Following such elections, the voters would return to their business of raising families and increasing America’s prosperity through labor and ingenuity, confident that their elected officials would, as the Preamble to the Constitution states, “provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty.” That was the agreement. Simple and purposeful. In short, “The American Way.”

However, a strange thing happened on the way to 2008. In September 2001, the world—not just America—was rocked by terrorist attacks. “Horrifying, devastating, earth shattering” were the first words used to describe our feelings on 11 September. But following those were the words “heroic, selfless, triumphant.” In the days following the attacks, Americans seemed to have regained purpose. Their purpose: common defense, general welfare, blessings of liberty. Tragedy had put everything on the right track again.

But by December another feeling had begun to surface. Frustration. It began at the airports.

Following 9/11, the Office of Homeland Security was expanded to help secure America against any further attacks. It was a good idea. However, checking through an airport became a nightmare in short order. At first, citizens were willing to cooperate, though privately they may have won-

CARRIE L. THATCHER, a beginning historian, is working on a history of the books of John Dennis Fitzgerald, author of the Great Brain series. She blogs at FindingFitzgerald.blogspot.com. She enjoys studying American history, gardening, and spending time with her family.
dered who was watching whom. Former Marine-turned-Tae
Kwon Do instructor Bob Maves stood in line with team
members to board a plane and watched an official confiscate
a set of knitting needles from a kindly-looking grandmother.
Incensed, he shared his frustration, “It wasn’t a ninety-year-
old’s knitting needles that did us in,” he complained. “For
me, I would want those needles on the plane. I might have
to use them to defend myself.” In a small act of civil disobedi-
cence, he began telling his Tae Kwon Do students what
type of ballpoint pen to carry with them on flights. “Those
aren’t on the list yet,” he said.

The airports were secure, but our national borders surely
weren’t. In 2006, Gray Davis, former governor of California
warned, “We have a right as a country to say who comes into
this country and who does not . . . only
so many people can fit into a lifeboat
or it will sink.” Other smaller, less ob-
vious injustices were occurring as well:
new tax codes for small businesses,
m mandates on local education, and sky-
rocketing gas prices. These and more
began to take their toll.

Public officials, those elected by
common citizens, seemed to have for-
gotten who had hired them. As citizens
worked to voice their views through
their representatives, they found their
voices stifled. Phone calls were just
routed to operators—how could
anyone be sure messages were being
passed along? Senators’ responses to citi-
zens’ letters often read like form letters
instead of thoughtful, personal replies.
Months after writing to a governor, one
woman received a response beginning
“Dear Mr . . . . “ The women kept the
letter as a reminder of how thoughtless
that leader had become.

By election time in 2008, cart-horse citizens had had
enough. Frustrated with bank bailouts, misused funds, gov-
ernment fraud, and individual rejection, Americans cried
out for change. Some citizens chose to vote a face fresh to
politics into the office of President. Others chose to vote for
one of the many independent candidates. Still others voted
for a petite brunette and her running mate, “because she was
just like them.” But the election did not correct the problem.

People who were watching the bigger picture realized the
problem did not lie in politics alone but in the nation’s lack
of understanding and education about its own origins. In
2005, historian David McCullough shared an example of the
problem. “I had a young woman come up to me after a talk
one morning at the University of Missouri to tell me that she
was glad she came to hear me speak, and I said I was pleased
she had shown up. She said, ‘Yes, I’m very pleased, because
until now I never understood that all of the 13 colonies—
the original 13 colonies—were on the east coast.’ And you
think: What in the world have we done?”

There is a national need to educate. Though McCullough
and other respected historians and political scientists have
worked hard to do just that, it has taken a shock-jock named
Glenn Beck to actually carry it off.

With his eccentric style and Dead Poet’s Society teaching
style, Beck began to teach the floundering masses how to
swim in political waters. Starting from Solomon’s wise
counsel in Proverbs 29:18, “Where there is no vision, the
people perish,” Beck began on 12 March 2010 to restore a vi-
sion to Americans with his 9/12 Project. He reminded
people of what we as a nation had felt on 12 September
2001, rehearsing the heroic acts of firefighters, airline pas-
sengers, and everyday folk across the land. He helped
viewers recall how they’d felt, wherever they had been, nearly a decade ago.

If Beck could sing, he might have sung Alan Jackson’s
“Where Were You When the World Stopped Turning on
that September Day?” However, in his own words, he
helped viewers remember their own selfless acts. He
brought back to them the pride of being a nation that
everyone else in the world turns to when in trouble. He
tried to help us recall the willingness we’d had to look one
another in the eye and be friendly, pointing out that we
hadn’t needed anyone to tell us how to assist or react. We’d
done it naturally. The blood we’d donated was voluntary,
the prayers we’d offered for the living and the dead had
been sincere offerings of individual hearts, the collection
drives for socks for soldiers, bake sales, and other
fundraisers had not been government-ordained. Those acts
were part of being an American, as they have been for a long
time. James Wood points out that in 1831, while travelling
through the United States as research for his Democracy in America, Alexis de Tocqueville “admired [America’s] provincial decentralization, marveling at the busy way every small township managed its own affairs and happily organized committees and meetings on every subject.”

Building on that vision, Beck created a plan of action—The 9-12 Project. In its introduction he states, “This is a non-political movement. The 9-12 Project is designed to bring us all back to the place we were on September 12, 2001. The day after America was attacked, we were not obsessed with Red States, Blue States, or political parties. We were united as Americans, standing together to protect the greatest nation ever created.”

With that, smaller political organizations that had been struggling to be heard were given a support system. From all over the nation, they began connecting under the banner of the 9-12 Project. It was the old adage of how a bundle of sticks is much harder to break than a single stick is. The cart-horse Americans found a unity they had previously lacked. Pooling their skills with Beck’s, they became a flotilla of ships and barges heading down the treacherous waters of a democratic republic.

Though there was much to do, teaching the populace about America’s founding ideals was the first priority. Without knowledge, no project can succeed. “Education is the key,” writes Beck, “and not just for our children.” David McCullough had said the same thing five years earlier: “We have to do several things. First of all . . . we have to know who we were if we're to know who we are and where we're headed.” Four decades earlier, John F. Kennedy had similarly said, “There is little more that is more important for an American citizen to know than the history and traditions of his country . . . The American past is a record of stirring achievement in the face of stubborn difficulty.”

Beck chose an obscure book to begin the education process. W. Cleon Skousen’s The 5000 Year Leap. But it worked. By introducing his viewers to this book, Beck succeeded in getting cart-horse Americans to read about the Constitution. Not since James Madison had published the Federalist Papers has such a large segment of the American population read a political science book. Though books about the creation of the Constitution have existed for two centuries, they have failed to gain the rapt attention of the masses. But The 5,000 Year Leap breaks the mold by offering a condensed, quick-read. Whatever its merits or failures, it is a good beginning.

From there, Beck did what any good student, trial lawyer, teacher, or physician would do—he dug more deeply. He broadened his personal reading list by diving into such texts as Samuel Adams by Ira Stoll, American Prophet by Bruce Feilers, Original Intent by David Barton, and Lies the Government Told You by Andrew Napolitano. According to Steven F. Hayward, author of The Fall of the Old Liberal Order, Beck is willing to wade into political writing that is “often dense and difficult, but Beck not only reads it, he assigns it to his staff.”

As The 5,000 Year Leap spread through private book clubs, community gatherings, and neighborhoods, the seed of Beck’s purpose began to take root. The purpose was knowledge on a mass scale. Because if Animal Farm is to be believed, knowledge is the key to a successful society. The 5,000 Year Leap created a hunger for knowledge.

Of their own accord, cart-horse citizens began to read more about the Constitution and its governing principles, not just in the books Beck suggested. They began inviting speakers about the Constitution to meetings. They book-swapped and debated with friends. They created specialized reading groups whose sole purpose was to study the works that the Founding Fathers had used when they created the Constitution over 200 years ago.

Without knowing it, the people were following David McCullough’s 2005 outline for increasing good citizenship. “You can’t understand the 18th century . . . unless you understand the vocabulary of the 18th century.” McCullough writes, “Those weren’t just words. They were quoting scripture of a kind, a kind of secular creed if you will. And you can’t understand why they behaved as they did if you don’t understand that.”

As cart-horse citizens began to understand the Constitution, they realized that their understanding created a call to action. Their actions came in many forms: tea parties, town assemblies, political candidacy, and ballot measures. This group of hard-working Americans put their tenacious skills to work in ways beyond merely voting.

Using his firebrand style, Beck has helped the once ignored majority to see that their voices are necessary to the cause of a democratic republic. After all, the Constitutional Convention was not a quiet affair. Its delegates used strong words, delivered lengthy diatribes and orations, took time to compromise and reach eventual consensus.

The point is to get together and do something to improve situations instead of just complaining while allowing others to push their own agendas unchallenged. True, the cart-horse citizens may not have the polish of a George Washington. They are more akin to the Sons of Liberty from Boston—a rag-tag, fearless band of citizens whose only wish is stop usurpations.

Beck may not achieve anything close to the historic stature of leaders like Abraham Lincoln and Winston Churchill, but if tomorrow were his last day, he could be proud of having been the Samuel Adams for this generation of cart-horse citizens.

NOTES

1. David McCullough, “Knowing History and Knowing Who We Are,” Imprimis 34, no. 4 (April 2005).
3. David McCullough, “Knowing History.”
5. David McCullough, “Knowing History.”
MORALITY ON THE AIRWAVES

ABOUT ONCE A YEAR, SPORTS TALK SHOW HOST Jim Rome reluctantly repeats a personal story to his listeners in the “jungle.” Rome had left home in Los Angeles to attend college in Santa Barbara and returned some months later to find all three family dogs missing. His mother wouldn’t talk about it. His father explained that the oldest dog was getting up in years and had to be taken to the vet to be put down. His father didn’t explain why the other two dogs had gone along for the ride. Jim was devastated and has never gotten over it. The story has become a part of the jungle lore known as the Rome Family Dog Holocaust. It tells us how not to behave.

At their core, radio talk shows are about right and wrong. For commuters and drivers of heavy equipment, daytime talk radio helps keep the mind active as hosts display their unusual talent to point out the absurdities of life against a backdrop of morality. Dr. Laura Schlesinger is the most up-front about preaching morality; she even closes her show with the edict, “Do the right thing.”

Since Rush Limbaugh’s revival of talk radio in the late 1980s, several liberal talk show hosts have tried to match Rush’s popularity but have failed every time. The root of their failure is the lack of a moral foundation that a talk radio host must have to be effective. If there is no good, there is no evil. And if there is no evil to click our tongues or laugh at . . . well, what fun is that?

And listening is about having fun. We seem to never tire of such topics as:

• Another reason to hate Heidi Klum
• Craziest Hollywood Moms
• If Sting is smart, he won’t stand so close to me.

Now don’t call Glenn Beck an uptight xenophobic, homophobic, hollywo-phobic hater. After all, those topics were not addressed by Beck, but by radio host newcomer (and well-heeled Mormon performer) Donny Osmond.

Listeners grow tired of a host advancing a give-me-more political agenda (welfare, government spending, wealth-redistribution, immigration amnesty, tort awards, feminism, homosexual rights). They don’t want to listen to a know-it-all saying the government should do more. It sounds too much like a whine. They don’t want to hear that complex problems require complex solutions. They know all problems can become complex, and getting hung up on that just prolongs the solution. They need someone or something to judge. They want a fixed moral compass informing that judgment. They can forgive later.

GLENN BECK AS A BORN-AGAIN MORALIST

GLENN BECK IS a media success because of his moral view of the world, enhanced by his miraculous conversion—not just to Mormonism, but to a conviction that righteousness is adherence to natural law. He lives the born-again mantra of a man who, with God’s help, turned his life around. He makes no secret that he is on his second marriage and that his divorce resulted from his alcoholism and drug addiction. He richly describes the squalor when he hit rock bottom, sometimes relishing in it. Being a recovering alcoholic, he can sound more forgiving but also more indicting of those who haven’t had their come-to-Jesus moment. He doesn’t care if people have done wrong, only if they have changed—he said as much in a recent commentary about actor Robert Downey, Jr.

It seems appropriate that Beck’s religious conversion was to the Mormon faith—it is hard to imagine his having the same patriotic appeal and moral ecumenicalism (for lack of a better word) had he become Southern Baptist, Buddhist, or Jehovah’s Witness. Southern Baptists don’t seem to cut other religions much slack, Buddhists are not much into change, and Witnesses aren’t patriotic. Mormonism is all three and doesn’t give up on individual salvation in this or the next life. Mormonism, correctly understood, doesn’t in-
MORMONISM TAUGHT BY BECK

HOW DOES BECK’S Mormonism permeate his radio and television broadcasts? Does the gospel and Mormon doctrine constitute an unseen basis for the morality he espouses? And do his listeners notice? Let’s look at a few of the Mormon principles he advocates:

1. **Store food and necessities.** Beck advises gradual food storage to prepare for the coming apocalyptic storm, as LDS General Authorities also counsel.

2. **Pay tithing, and give to charity.** Beck encourages listeners to tithe their income and give to charity. He helps friend Jon Huntsman Sr., the millionaire philanthropist who funds the Huntsman Cancer Research Center at the University of Utah, and promotes other charities.

3. **Prayer.** Beck encourages listeners to pray more than ever hosts do on Christian radio stations. He talks about the power of prayer in his life and gives air time to callers—most of whom are not LDS—relating their stories of the power of prayer. Even during his commercial endorsements, Beck advises listeners to pray about the product to see if it is right for them.

4. **Freedom and free will.** God told Enoch that “In the day I created them and in the Garden of Eden, gave I unto man his agency,” (Moses 7:32). He often tells the story of Satan’s wanting to destroy man’s agency. Beck wants to ensure people preserve their agency against the pressure of larger government. Although Beck’s political views are conservative, he has a libertarian streak, considering it his God-given right to not answer all the questions on the 2010 census. He speaks out for the freedom to fail, using his own experience to emphasize that failure is another beginning of opportunity.

5. **The atonement of Jesus Christ.** When Beck talks about hitting rock bottom and the conversion that brought him back out, he practically starts singing “Amazing Grace.” He frequently invokes the atonement as a way to overcome personal trials.

6. **Personal responsibility.** Beck stresses that each individual is responsible to participate in the gift of redemption, a sound Mormon teaching. He once said “men will be punished for their own sins” and not their fathers’ sins. And he explains that on judgment day, God will not ask if your government cared for the poor but if you cared for the poor.

7. **The U.S. Constitution is divinely inspired.** Beck repeatedly says so, agreeing with D&C 101:79–80. He encourages listeners to contemplate the Constitution as a contract between the government and free men that limits the power and scope of government. He asserts that several powers have been wrongly seized, such as Presidents declaring war, the Supreme Court conjuring special rights, and Congress passing laws to limit free speech. In the debate over a living Constitution whose interpretation is adaptable (proponents include Thurgood Marshall and Lawrence Tribe), Beck sides with those favoring adhering to strict original intent (William Rehnquist, Robert Bork, and Antonin Scalia). He promotes American exceptionalism—the belief that America stands for the best principles in this age. He sincerely wishes for an “American Renewal”—the title of his touring show due in Salt Lake City in July 2010.

8. **The Constitution will hang by a thread (and the elders will save it).** Beck never uses those precise words, but he contends that the U.S. has changed radically from a republic with a constitutional framework into a progressive European-style nanny state. The statement about the Constitution hanging by a thread was first attributed to Joseph Smith and should not be discounted just because it was included in the discredited White Horse Prophecy; it was well known and quoted by Brigham Young, John Taylor, Parley P. Pratt, Orson Hyde, Jedediah M. Grant, and George Q. Cannon. It was repeated by Melvin J. Ballard, J. Reuben Clark, Ezra Taft Benson, Harold B. Lee, and L. Tom Perry.

9. **Non-violence.** To answer recent criticism of himself and the Tea Party movement he helped initiate, Beck has daily called for restraint among protesters.

10. **Miracles.** Lately, Beck has been promising miracles to those who get their lives in order, exercise faith in fighting for civic and personal liberties, and protest big government. He believes in a “God of miracles” (Mormon 9:10) who inspired the American Revolution and who will help the “Second Revolution” today.

11. **The last days.** Beck often speculates about future worst-case scenarios preceding the Second Coming, for example, the Israeli problem. He doesn’t scare audiences by quoting modern scriptural prophecies but ruminates about government overspending, excessive debt, perfect storms, and a...
constitutional crisis that will bring about social unrest, riots, chaos, and leaving the state of Israel undefended.

12. *The family is the basis of society.* He admonishes listeners to teach their children, and he often shares the insights he gains from fatherhood and marriage. He encourages extended families to pull together during trying times.

13. *Service and leadership.* Beck adheres to the non-paid leadership ethic of King Benjamin, who provided for his own livelihood through manual labor while he presided over the Nephite kingdom (Mosiah 2:12–14), and who voluntary resigned his office (Mosiah 2:29). Beck echoes Benjamin in two ways: first, in calling to remove the burden of taxation to enable citizens to practice charitable giving, and second, in preaching humility that inspires non-judgmental giving (Mosiah 4:14–27).

Clearly, Beck is well versed in *Provident Living* principles and the *Gospel Principles* manual.

**BECK THE MISSIONARY**

LIKE IT OR not, Glenn Beck is a missionary. Doubtless some have joined the Church because of knowing Glenn Beck. He tells his conversion story on the DVD *Glenn Beck—an Unlikely Mormon*. An unofficial website GlennBeckMormon.com directs inquirers to Church-sponsored websites.

Occasionally Beck quotes or paraphrases scripture though he doesn’t distinguish (or doesn’t know) whether the origin of the scripture is ancient or modern. Perhaps he fears preaching Mormonism outright. This stealth preaching style was suggested by Brigham Young.

You know that I have said that, if it were now my calling to go and preach the Gospel, I could make as many converts as I ever did; for I would go in such a manner that the bitterly prejudiced would have to labor hard to find out that I was a “Mormon,” until I had induced them to love the truth. Then they would say, “If that is ‘Mormonism,’ I want it.”

Of course, LDS listeners’ ears will prick up when Beck says something like, “Men are that they might have joy.” Occasionally he sounds like a local bishop, only less reserved and more imaginative. Sometimes he veers from acceptable Mormon speech with the exclamations “Good Lord” and “Sweet Jesus,” or with mild vulgarities: “damn,” “fat ass,” “flying crap,” “screw the damn fish,” or “go to hell.” Such language might make his bishop uncomfortable—it certainly does me, but only because he is LDS; if he were Lutheran, I wouldn’t give a damn. Beck has even pondered aloud what LDS Church leadership thinks of him, and of course, what God may say to him and his fellow clowns at the judgment bar.

Do non-Mormon listeners notice the Mormonism? Probably only a small fraction of it. To his larger non-Mormon audience, Beck is a stealth missionary in his role of moral judge and jester. Remember, Dr. Laura doesn’t say she’s giving her callers advice based on Jewish law. Most listeners will learn the context and moral personality of the host and take their advice and commentary with a grain of salt. Perhaps Dr. Laura has led a handful of listeners to Orthodox Judaism, but more important she has inspired millions to act morally. The same goes for Beck, who has inspired millions to value freedom, prepare for the coming calamities, and resist government benevolence.

What most impresses listeners about Glenn Beck is his “Damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead!” attitude. He is much like the sports talking head Charles Barkley. Some say Sir Charles has no filter between his thoughts and words—he would say the same thing whether on or off camera. Beck is not quite 100 percent on the Barkley scale, but probably a healthy 92—and that adds to his entertainment value. When he steps over the line, he is quick to apologize, as he did recently for critical comments about President Obama’s daughter.

Besides, Beck and Barkley give the impression, like the boxer Mohammed Ali, that though they have opponents and may mock them to hype a fight, they don’t really hate them. Beck was surprised when his opponent Van Jones publicly declared that he loves his brother Glenn Beck and there is nothing that Beck can do about it. Beck had thought the
fight was only about Van Jones' statist ideas—and not about liking the man. Why shouldn't he?
That ingenuousness lets Beck come out with guns ablazing. For politically correct, measured, political discourse from the conservative right, there is always Mitt Romney. Mitt would never tell voters that an economic calamity is ahead. Mitt would never cuss on-camera. Mitt would never admit he’d been wrong in the past. Beck does all of that. He’s much like nineteenth-century Mormonism—quaint, peculiar, ostracized, vocal—and certain that he has a mission from the Lord.

“ALL THOSE MORMONS ARE THE SAME.”

SOME HAVE ATTEMPTED to tie Beck to Commie-hating Mormons of an earlier generation in order to condemn him by association. Biographer Alexander Zaichik links him to Cleon Skousen and Ezra Taft Benson. Others believe that conservatism first attracted Beck to Mormonism, not vice versa, reasoning that Mormonism doesn’t have a monopoly on conservatism. Zaichik’s forthcoming unauthorized biography will likely seek to tie Beck to a caricature of Mormonism (prudish, white, weird) thus injuring two birds with one stone. But Beck likes Skousen and Benson only for their ideas about the Constitution. He probably knows nothing about the misguided zeal that led to purported secret spy networks at BYU. I suppose we could always ask Beck: “Do you now, or have you ever, supported spying networks to expose Communists at religious institutions of higher learning?”

Zaichik’s caricature of Beck as a latter-day Joe McCarthy is unfair because although he was correct in his assertion that communists existed in the State Department, McCarthy brought spurious accusations. In contrast, Glenn Beck’s calling out of self-proclaimed communist Van Jones was specific, accurate, and successful.

Zaichik’s guilt-by-association ploy should make us all nervous. If everyone who ever quoted Ezra Taft Benson is suspect, then virtually all Mormons over 35 are condemned, including some of us who especially liked Benson’s conference talk against pride because we could bash others with it. (Not Benson’s intent, of course.)

Attempts to discredit Beck through association with Mormonism may please liberals who already disapprove of conservatives and Mormons, but they’re likely to backfire among Beck’s predominantly Christian conservative listeners with libertarian sympathies. They have common political ground with this Mormon guy and will likely take his side when attacked by the left. In what may be a great breakthrough for Mormon acceptance, Jerry Falwell, Jr., invited Glenn Beck to give the commencement address at the religiously conservative Liberty University, where Beck received an honorary doctorate of letters. Most graduates found his speech inspiring, uplifting, and not at all controversial, as he encouraged them to exercise courage, keep the faith, and remain humble and close to God. While not trying to convince anyone of the Restoration, he told of his life-changing conversion through the atonement of Christ. If a Mormon can witness for Jesus like Beck does, what are his Christian brethren to think?

Also fascinating is how he tearfully pleads with listeners to wake up and see the fragility of America. Jewish mothers may use guilt, but this Mormon bawls. Even Van Jones publicly praised Beck’s family values and his ability as a heterosexual man to weep in public. Beck’s tears bring to mind Anne Osborn Poelman’s story about her first sacrament meeting where she felt the spirit so strongly she began to cry uncontrollably and was needlessly embarrassed. She remarked that she hadn’t then known that a ward can’t make it through a monthly testimony meeting without a half box of tissues. Perhaps Van Jones and Jerry Falwell, Jr. are both im-
pressed with the weeping man of Mormonism. (Apologies to Eugene England).

GLENN BECK HATES JESUS?

When Beck suggested members withdraw from churches that preach government-run social justice, the response of conservative Christian radio was peculiar. While agreeing with his stance that charity should not be a governmental function, many Christian radio hosts noted that Beck was a Mormon (hence non-Christian), and that Beck's debating partner, Bill O'Reilly, was a Catholic (a Christian who didn't get it). Praising Beck while condemning his Mormonism, these hosts put their listeners in the position of agreeing with Beck's Mormon understanding of individual liberty and free choice. Maybe conservative Christian listeners will eventually resolve that tension in Mormon-friendly terms.

Debate about social justice in churches has been going on for years, but *Time* magazine saw controversy and wrote, "Glenn Beck hates Jesus." President Obama's spiritual advisor Jim Wallis and others quickly attacked Beck for taking sides in a century-old debate while giving the impression that the debate had never occurred. Scott Baker of Breitbart TV described an interview with Wallis:

"If there's anybody in America who really does know exactly what Glenn Beck is talking about, it would be Jim Wallis. He knows that for a century there's been debates in Christianity about social gospels and personal gospels and his issues have been very divisive within the church. And so for him to come out and say this is what Glenn Beck is speaking against (caring for your neighbor and loving your neighbor as yourself), is absolute bull."

Baker compelled Wallis to acknowledge the ongoing debate among the Plymouth Brethren with whom he had grown up. Baker then accused Wallis of bearing false witness for not putting Beck's words in the context of those debates. Three times Wallis "wouldn't come to," and countered that Beck has offended people and needs to apologize.

To link Beck to the John Birch Society is probably moot. People in the 60s and 70s easily ridiculed the Society as a bunch of fear-mongering anti-communists. After all, Birchers believed the United Nations was a joke, the Soviet Union was oppressive and evil, China would be our future opponent, and runaway government spending would ruin the US economy. Now ten years into the new millennium, it seems history has Birch-slapped us.

To paint Beck as a racist, hate-monger, and Jesus-hater is to take some statements out of context and ignore the good he has done, his humility, and his warning voice. The late President Hinckley said:

To highlight the mistakes and gloss over the greater good is to draw a caricature. Caricatures are amusing, but they are often ugly and dishonest. A man may have a wart on his cheek and still have a face of beauty and strength, but if the wart is emphasized unduly in relation to his other features, the portrait is lacking in integrity.

Criticizing Beck's caricature is complicated by the caricature's being Mormon. Because religious conservatives and libertarians already like him, denigrating Beck will likely be successful only among those leftists who hate Mormonism already.

So what can you do if Beck's style and politics grate on you? You could imagine he is the politically incorrect J. Golden Kimball of our century and laugh along. Besides, what if someone joins the Church because of GladysKnight's popularity? Would you say to the new convert, "I think her music sucks ever since she left the Pips?" Probably not. So cut Beck a little slack.

Like a young zealous missionary, Brother Beck is far from perfect; but because he is so forthcoming with his emotions, spirituality, and mortal mistakes, people easily relate to him, criticize him, and love him. The man is reminiscent of the Lord's estimation of Dr. Faust in the play by Goethe, "Es irrt der Mensch so lange er strebt." Roughly translated: "Glenn Beck is bound to screw up occasionally as he progresses."

NOTES

2. The White Horse Prophecy was disavowed by the Mitt Romney presidential campaign in 2008, along with the notion that Mitt was the Mormon who would ride the white horse to save America.
Seeing capitalism in a cooperative light

ECONOMIC EQUALITY

A WORLDLY RATIONALE FOR A HEAVENLY REQUIREMENT

By Roger Terry

In all four standard works of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, a common theme appears whenever the Lord establishes his church among his children: economic equality.

After the Savior’s ascension, his followers “were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need” (Acts 2:44–45).

In the Book of Mormon, when Alma first established the church of God among the people of King Noah, he commanded that the people of the church should impart of their substance, every one according to that which he had; if he have more abundantly he should impart more abundantly; and of him that had but little, but little should be required; and to him that had not should be given” (Mosiah 18:27).

Later, after the resurrected Lord’s appearance among the descendants of Lehi, “they had all things common among them; therefore there were not rich and poor, bond and free, but they were all made free and partakers of the heavenly gift” (4 Nephi 1:3).

In the Pearl of Great Price’s account of the city of Enoch, we read that “the Lord called his people Zion, because they were of one heart and one mind, and dwelt in righteousness; and there was no poor among them” (Moses 7:18).

The Doctrine and Covenants is unique among the standard works because it contains revelations given to Joseph Smith to direct the restoration of Christ’s church on earth. Among these revelations are specific instructions about how the Lord intended to establish economic equality among the Latter-day Saints. Indeed, these revelations repeatedly touch upon economic themes, including the following:

But it is not given that one man should possess that which is above another, wherefore the world lieth in sin. (D&C 49:20)

Nevertheless, in your temporal things you shall be equal, and this not grudgingly, otherwise the abundance of the manifestations of the Spirit shall be withheld. (D&C 70:14)

I, the Lord, stretched out the heavens, and built the earth, my very handiwork; and all things therein are mine. And it is my purpose to provide for my saints, for all things are mine. But it must needs be done in mine own way; and behold this is the way that I, the Lord, have decreed to provide for my saints, that the poor shall be exalted, in that the rich are made low. For the earth is full, and there is enough and to spare; yea, I prepared all things, and have given unto the children of men to be agents unto themselves. Therefore, if any man shall take of the abundance which I have made, and impart not his portion, according to the law of my gospel, unto the poor and the needy; he shall, with the wicked, lift up his eyes in hell, being in torment.” (D&C 104:14–18)

It could not be more clearly expressed in scripture that the Lord wants his children to live in economic equality. No rich, no poor. And this is not just a special test he gives...
to those who are trying to establish Zion. It is the way the Lord wants us to live on his earth.

The question no one seems to ask is “Why?” Elsewhere in scripture we read that opposites are essential for our existence: light and darkness, health and sickness, pleasure and pain, happiness and misery, corruption and incorruption (see 2 Nephi 2:11–13). But why is it not so with poverty and wealth?

Perhaps the Lord gives us a clue in section 104, quoted above, when he says that “the earth is full, and there is enough and to spare.” It is apparent from the context of this statement that there is enough and to spare only if we practice economics the Lord’s way. And his way is to exalt the poor “in that the rich are made low.” Apparently, if some of his children consume or hoard far more than they need, there is not “enough and to spare,” causing others of his children to go without.

Although the Latter-day Saints made several attempts at implementing the economic principles outlined in the Doctrine and Covenants, the Church officially abandoned its United Orders in the latter years of the nineteenth century and began embracing the economic system that prevailed in the United States, seeking assimilation in place of the independence it had so jealously guarded during its first sixty years. Gradually, the Saints moved away from their communitarian roots, not just in practice but also in point of view, until today’s Mormons are among the nation’s most ardent supporters of conservative economics.

In this context, it is significant that present-day Saints are not asked to live the law of tithing as it stands in section 119 of the Doctrine and Covenants. If we did, we would first place “all [our] surplus property . . . into the hands of the bishop. . . . And this,” the Lord reminds us, “shall be the beginning of the tithing of my people.” Then, “after that, those who have thus been tithed shall pay one-tenth of their interest annually” (D&C 119:1, 3–4, emphasis added). As the Lord revealed it, the law of tithing included an initial requirement that leveled the economic playing field, much as the law of consecration did. Our present interpretation of tithing, however, has the opposite effect. It requires the poor to sacrifice more in relative terms than the wealthy. In this sense, tithing is consistent with conservative economic dogma and does not directly promote economic equality. Economic equality is, in fact, so far from LDS thought today that most Utah Mormons saw no red flags at all in the flat income tax that was legislated in 2008.
capital (generally defined as the means of production). To do this, business enterprises pursue two strategies. One is to constantly increase revenues; the other is to constantly decrease expenses. The resulting profits go almost exclusively to those who supply or manage capital. These individuals, who comprise the capitalist class, are thus paid as much as possible. But on the other side of the ledger, a vital expense that corporations seek to minimize is the cost of labor. They do this in two ways: first, by increasing productivity, which enables workers to produce more product per dollar spent on wages (and simultaneously reduces the number of workers needed); and second, by moving production to locations where wages are lower. Within legal and socially acceptable parameters, corporations seek to pay their productive workers as little as possible. At its foundation, then, corporate capitalism is a system explicitly designed to increase the gap between the owners or managers of capital and everyone else. Trickle-down economics, as this arrangement is sometimes called, is a fairly apt description. If those at the bottom are receiving a trickle, those at the top generally receive a flood.

And here is where the first serious internal conflict of corporate capitalism erupts. As inequality increases in a tax-averse and loosely regulated corporate economy, the wealthy class does not spend a proportionate share of their income on the products corporations need to sell in order to generate profit. Instead, directly or indirectly, these individuals invest a significant portion of their earnings in new production capacity, often in developing countries, expecting a bountiful return. The logical consequence is an excess of productive capacity feeding the U.S. economy, from both domestic and foreign sources—excess because the lower and middle classes don’t have enough disposable income to purchase this increased supply of goods and services. Compounding this shortfall of disposable income is the fact that a large portion of new productive capacity increases employment abroad at the expense of domestic wages, and workers in developing countries are simply not paid enough to purchase the consumer goods they are creating. (Neither are Americans, but as we shall see, we have found a way around this little speed bump on the road to artificial affluence.)

In his 1997 book One World, Ready or Not, William Greider demonstrated at length how and why nearly every major industry in the global economy—from automobiles and steel to pharmaceuticals and textiles—had achieved 20 to 50 percent overcapacity. This trend did not reverse itself in the next eleven years. After the 2008 financial crisis, production declined temporarily as consumers and businesses suddenly slowed their buying, but overcapacity did not vanish. It is merely lying fallow for the moment. But why such an excess in production capacity in the first place? Why didn’t the laws of supply and demand kick in and bring things into balance? During economic crises, multinational corporations scale back production; however, in the “normal,” pre-2008 economic circumstances, instead of cutting back capacity when demand was merely insufficient for the pool of suppliers, which economic theory suggests they should have done, corporations kept adding, investing heavily in the Third World, building new lower-cost plants in a self-centered effort to ensure that overcapacity became their competitors’ problem.3

This is not an exclusively U.S. predicament. It affects all interconnected national economies. In Greider’s assessment, “The imperatives of industrial revolution create more supply faster than new demand, and the expanding productive capacity overruns the available market of consumers. Together and separately, no one in the global system—not governments or enterprises—is willing to face the gathering crisis of inadequate demand and to reverse the flows of incomes between capital and labor.”

The net effect of this unequal wealth distribution and its resulting overcapacity is that the lower and middle classes have relatively less disposable income with which they can be expected to purchase the products corporations need to sell to stay in business. Having been thoroughly indoctrinated by corporate advertisers, however, the consumer classes know it is their responsibility to consume, and so they do—on credit. Indeed, according to Richard K. Green, director of the USC Lusk Center for Real Estate, consumer purchases account for 70 percent of U.S. gross domestic product (GDP), up from 63 percent in the 1950s and 1960s, in spite of the increasingly unequal distribution of wealth over the same time frame. Not surprisingly, “the driver of [this increase in] consumption,” says Green, “was consumer debt: the ratio of consumer debt to GDP rose from about 60 percent in 1995 to over 100 percent in 2007.”5 Ivan Lee, former head of Citigroup, cites the same statistics but adds that growth in consumer debt has far outpaced the growth of business debt in recent years: “U.S. households were accumulating debt at a pace equal to about one half of China’s national output every year, between 2001 and 2007. And China is the world’s third largest economy!”6 Most economic commentators admit that such debt levels are unsustainable, but the common solution is simply to say that up to 30 percent of this debt must be either paid off or written off. Unfortunately, this solution ignores the source of our exponentially expanding debt—the imbalance between capital and labor we have just discussed—as well as the inevitable result of not correcting this imbalance: namely, decreased demand, which causes the downward-spiraling domino effect of faltering industries, soaring unemployment, and even lower demand.

An economy that grows by financing consumption with increasing debt endures only until the consumer class extends itself too far, as it finally did in the United States with the 2008 subprime mortgage debacle. And then the house of (credit) cards starts to collapse. Alas, the remedy for this sickness prescribed by economic doctors on both sides of the political divide is a second dose of the very microbe that caused the malady in the first place: huge infusions of
debt-generated cash to bail out faltering financial institutions and other industries.

In summary, a major malfunction of global corporate capitalism is the lopsided distribution of capital. This is the source of what has already become a dangerous predicament, and it will worsen unless we can fundamentally alter the way our businesses do business. Indeed, the current “jobless recovery,” in which corporations become profitable again without hiring new employees, is another indication of how out of balance things have become.

If we were looking for a convenient scapegoat, we could blame Reaganomics for these dire circumstances, but this would be a simplistic overreaction to the depth and breadth of our current dilemma. The very fabric of capitalism practiced by the multinationals that dominate the global marketplace is woven from the illogical thread of supply-side economics. Reagan or no Reagan, corporate capitalism is a supply-oriented system. His shortsighted philosophy simply hastened the global economy on its inevitable course.

Is it any wonder that an economic system focused primarily on increasing supply should produce immense government debt? Someone has to buy the excess production, and consumers don’t have the wherewithal to do it, so the federal government, the “consumer of last resort,” has to pick up the tab, either through tax breaks and welfare spending to prop up individuals and corporations, bailouts of faltering industries, or direct spending. China and other foreign countries that do not share our national interests are now financing the U.S. devotion to inequality, but sooner or later these countries will decide that U.S. government bonds are not a wise investment, and then we will be forced to look at other options.

The primary problem with the supply-side doctrine is that the consumer half of the equation can never catch up. Why? Because too little of the profit the system generates is used to purchase all the products pouring into the marketplace; instead it is reinvested to create even more productive capacity. This produces an imbalance we can never “grow out of.” The growth is too lopsided: too much going to the owners and managers of capital, too little to the consumers. In fact, growth exacerbates the imbalance.

The Census Bureau uses a statistic called the Gini index to measure income inequality. Applying this measurement to the nations of the world reveals a fairly consistent pattern: those countries with the greatest economic equality generally have the strongest economies, while nations with less equality (South and Central America, Asia, Africa) tend to have weaker economies. The glaring exception is the United States, which despite its traditionally strong economy, exhibits income inequality similar to that of a Third World country. And U.S. inequality has increased markedly in recent decades.

According to News Batch, “The index reflects the rather dramatic increase in the inequality during the past 25 years. . . . What is truly remarkable is that this change has occurred at a time when overall economic growth has been unprecedented. In real dollars, the GDP has tripled since 1960 but wage increases have been stagnant, . . . The income level of the upper 1% of families has almost tripled and only the income levels of the top 20% of families have significantly increased in the past two decades. Today, the top 20% receive over half the country’s income and their share is growing.” Even though economic growth from 1983 to 2008 was exceptional, almost all the resulting

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Many modern Americans would be surprised to learn that the definition of the American Dream is not “a mansion, a million dollars, and twenty milligrams of Ambien before bedtime.” The dictionary defines it instead as a “social ideal that stresses egalitarianism and especially material prosperity.”

WIDESPREAD, LIMITED OWNERSHIP

Wealth went to the economic elite. As they sought to invest their wealth in high-return ventures, they increasingly purchased highly leveraged and highly speculative financial instruments. In order to create these investment opportunities, the financial sector extended credit to many who were poor credit risks. The result is the disaster we are still trying to survive. And the trillions of dollars it took to bail out Wall Street and stave off total economic collapse merely added to the already immense debt burden that will sooner or later bring the corporate economy to its knees.

The wealth imbalance directly and severely impacts individuals and families. For instance, 13.2 percent of U.S. citizens (39.8 million) now live in poverty; half of American children live in households that will use food stamps before the children reach age 20; in July 2008, more than 35.8 million Americans used food stamps; in 2008, 49 million U.S. citizens (14.6 percent of households) struggled to put food on the table, and 16.7 million children didn’t have enough to eat; roughly 46.3 million Americans do not have health insurance; about 700,000 U.S. citizens declare bankruptcy every year because of medical expenses; and 22,000 Americans die each year of treatable diseases because they lack insurance and can’t afford a doctor. These are results one would expect from such a marked wealth imbalance. But my point here is that there is also an unexpected result; over the long haul, wealth inequality creates an inherently unsustainable economy. The preceding evaluation of our economic troubles is admittedly brief, but it may nevertheless have some relevance to the Lord’s insistence that we seek to establish economic equality.

Were we to become serious about restructuring our errant economic system and equalizing wealth, we could go about it in two very different ways. The first would be to redistribute significant amounts of income through taxation and entitlement programs. We are all familiar with this method and its inherent weaknesses, which include breeding a spirit of dependence among the recipients of redistribution, generating resentment among those being taxed, and creating a cumbersome and flawed tax code that will always be subject to manipulation by the wealthy. Because of a half-century of tax cuts, U.S. citizens, particularly the wealthy, have come to expect low tax rates. Indeed, most Americans today would be shocked to learn that the top marginal tax rate in 1953 under Republican President Dwight D. Eisenhower was 92 percent (on any income over $400,000); it then dropped to 91 percent for the rest of his presidency. This tax rate did not change until 1964 when Democratic President Lyndon Johnson signed into law a 20 percent tax cut proposed by President Kennedy a few months before his assassination. The top rate hovered near 70 percent (with an income threshold of $400,000); it then dropped to 91 percent for the rest of his presidency. This tax rate did not change until 1964 when Democratic President Lyndon Johnson signed into law a 20 percent tax cut proposed by President Kennedy a few months before his assassination. The top rate hovered near 70 percent (with an income threshold of $400,000); it then dropped to 91 percent for the rest of his presidency.
threshold to $85,600). under Reagan, Congress again cut
the top marginal tax rate in 1988, this time to 28 percent,
and lowered the income threshold to $29,750.18

The high marginal tax rates following World War II helped pay off war debts, rebuild Europe, establish
the American middle class, and create greater economic
equality; but as mentioned, taxation and redistribution pro-
duce imperfect results and cause a variety of societal
problems. So, if redistributing income, which is only the fruit
of productive endeavor, is a flawed approach, what other
option do we have?

The alternative is to redistribute ownership, the source of
productive endeavor. This is economic heresy in today's cor-
porate capitalist economy, but it is not so un-American as
we might assume. Historian Paul Johnson points out that
the Declaration of Independence “laid down what no other
political document in the whole of history had yet claimed,
that men were 'endowed by their Creator' with the right not
only to 'Life' and 'Liberty' but the pursuit of Happiness. By
this last, what the Founding Fathers had in mind was the
acquisition of property, which they saw as the precondition
of human felicity. Without widely dispersed property, true
individual independence, and so a sound Republic, was
impossible.”19 Limited, widespread ownership is not a new
idea. Thomas Paine, for instance, declared, perhaps naively,
that “commerce is capable of taking care of itself;”20 but he
also condemned “all accumulation . . . of property, beyond
what a man's own hands produce.”21 This idea of limited,
universal ownership persisted well into the nineteenth cen-
tury. A mid-century labor leader named Robert MacFarlane
declared that “small but universal ownership” was the “true
foundation of a stable and firm republic.”22 During this era,
it was generally agreed that freedom could not thrive in a
nation of hirings.

But a nation of hirings is exactly what we have be-
come. This is a second, and particularly ironic, internal
conflict within corporate capitalism. William Greider iden-
tifies one fundamental element of freedom that the free
market does not disperse very broadly: capital. “The
problem,” says Greider, “is not that capital is privately
owned, as Marx supposed. The problem is that most people
don't own any.”23 One might wonder how we can even call
a system capitalism when only a small minority of the pop-
ulation can be considered capitalists.24 The cause of this
disparity in ownership is inseparably connected with cer-
tain developments that accompanied the Industrial
Revolution, primarily the rise of the modern corporation.

The Revolutionary War liberated the colonists not just
from the British monarchy but also from the oppression of
British corporations. Consequently, citizens of the new
United States and their elected leaders were justifiably sus-
picious of corporations. In 1816, Thomas Jefferson ex-
pressed this distrust: “I hope we shall . . . crush in its birth
the aristocracy of our moneyed corporations, which dare
already to challenge our government to a trial of strength
and bid defiance to the laws of our country.”25

For many years, government chartered these businesses
cautiously and kept them on a very short leash, dissolving
them if they violated the restrictions specified in their char-
ters. Unfortunately, this sense of caution did not last.
According to Kalle Lasn, the Civil War was a great turning
point in American economic history. “Corporations made
huge profits from procurement contracts and took advan-
tage of the disorder and corruption of the times to buy leg-
islatures, judges and even presidents. Corporations became
the masters and keepers of business.”26

President Lincoln foresaw the likely consequence of this
development. In a letter written on 21 November 1864 to
 Colonel William F. Elkins, Lincoln expressed his dismay: “I
see in the near future a crisis approaching that unnerves me
and causes me to tremble for the safety of my country . . .
Corporations have been enthroned and an era of corrup-
tion in high places will follow, and the money power of the
country will endeavor to prolong its reign by working upon
the prejudices of the people until all wealth is aggregated in
a few hands and the Republic is destroyed. I feel at this mo-
ment more anxiety for the safety of my country than ever
before, even in the midst of war.”27

“President Lincoln's warning went unheeded,” says
Lasn. “Corporations continued to gain power and influ-
ence. They had the laws governing their creation amended.
State charters could no longer be revoked. Corporate
profits could no longer be limited. Corporate economic ac-
tivity could be restrained only by the courts, and in hun-
dreds of cases judges granted corporations minor legal vic-
tories, conceding rights and privileges they did not have
before.”28

A watershed year for corporate rights was 1886, when
the Supreme Court decision in Santa Clara County v.
Southern Pacific Railroad (a simple property tax dispute) es-
}
able, and his wages equitable. “Hardly anyone asked any more whether freedom was consistent with hired labor. People groped instead, in effect, for a moral and social equivalent of the widespread property ownership once considered indispensable to the success of democracy.” But redistributing income, guaranteeing job security, and turning the working classes into consumers are nothing more than pale substitutes for ownership of capital; for none of these strategies produces “the kind of active, enterprising citizenry envisioned by nineteenth-century democrats.”

This idea of widespread, limited ownership was also at the heart of the many utopian and communitarian experiments of the nineteenth century, including the failed attempts Joseph Smith and Brigham Young orchestrated among the Mormons. Indeed, our communitarian past makes the current dedication of Latter-day Saints to conservative economics that much more mystifying.

Many modern Americans would be surprised to learn that the definition of the American Dream is not “a mansion, a million dollars, and twenty milligrams of Ambien before bedtime.” The dictionary defines it instead as a “social ideal that stresses egalitarianism and especially material prosperity.” Yes, interestingly, one of our central social ideals combines the notions of prosperity and equality, suggesting that they are not incompatible after all.

We live in a democratic republic, which, while imperfect, is better than any other political system humankind has yet devised. Within this democratic republic, we enjoy a wide variety of freedoms as well as having a voice in electing our governmental representatives. This is a right our forebears and many other oppressed peoples around the globe have been willing to fight for. Does it not seem odd, then, that we so willingly embrace economic authoritarianism? This mindset represents a third internal conflict within our system of corporate capitalism. Anyone who has worked as an employee in a corporation, or even in a limited partnership or a small business, has firsthand experience not with what could be termed an economic democratic republic but with an authoritarian organization.

A fundamental philosophical incongruity separates our nation’s founding principles from the economic tenets that govern corporate capitalism. This disparity would be of little consequence were its impact limited to the esoteric arguments of scholars. Unfortunately, this is not the case. The incompatibility between our political ideals and our economic realities affects each of us at a very personal level. Indeed, the authoritarian nature of our economic institutions effectively prevents most U.S. citizens from achieving their innate potential as they seek a fulfilling life, an equal share of liberty within the shelter of democracy, and a true and independent sense of happiness. A sobering corollary to this reality is that these authoritarian economic institutions are also permitted to exert so much political influence that for most individual citizens the constitutional ideal of equal participation in the democratic republic is a pipe dream at best.

Some may choose to discount this argument, insisting that most workers prefer to be employed from eight to five each workday by someone else and are fully satisfied with their work. This argument, however, runs counter to both common sense about human nature and recurring research. A worker survey published in 2010 by the Conference Board, for instance, found that “only 45 percent of those surveyed say they are satisfied with their jobs, down from 61.1 percent in 1987.” Even though 10 percent of American workers were unemployed at the time of the survey, “their working compatriots of all ages and incomes continue to grow increasingly unhappy,” says

The problem with the easy economic choice most people see—between corporate capitalism and communism—is that it does indeed distract us from a third alternative.
Lynn Franco, director of the Consumer Research Center of the Conference Board. “Through both economic boom and bust during the past two decades, our job satisfaction numbers have shown a consistent downward trend.” The survey reveals that the drop in job satisfaction between 1987 and 2009 covered all categories measured. Apparently, spending forty hours or more each week performing tasks someone else requires of us is not so enjoyable to most of us—especially when we are paid as little as possible while those who own our time and productive output live in increasing relative opulence.

A popular argument in favor of our current form of capitalism is that it works in tandem with the “free market,” in contrast to the command economies of communism. But the free-market system is misnamed, as is free enterprise. In the free market, freedom exists only between businesses, not within them. And free enterprise is not the same as what Gifford and Elizabeth Pinchot have called “free intraprise.” Of course, even between businesses, the free market itself is a misnomer, because in a world of mammoth corporations, the exchange of goods and services in the marketplace is anything but free. Not only do individual consumers have very little bargaining power in their relationship with corporations, but a careful examination of corporate behavior shows that these large institutions do not actually favor unfettered competition in a free market. As David Barash explained, they prefer the current corporate welfare system, with its bailouts, special benefits, tax breaks, and behind-closed-doors deal making for government contracts. The only competition corporations really desire is competition among the wage earners, because this sort of competition results in lower wages and a more submissive workforce.

Unlimited ownership of capital is based on flawed reasoning anyway. The rule most capitalist businesses have always followed is that the entire harvest of profit should go exclusively to those who supplied the seed. But what about those who planted, weeded, watered, cultivated, nurtured, harvested, packaged, and delivered the produce? In reality, pragmatic concerns may soon make the legal and ethical questions irrelevant. If we continue down the corporate path to inequality, we will find ourselves in a land of shrinking employment opportunities and declining real wages for an increasing number of workers, as well as deteriorating public services for everyone. If we truly wish to solve our economic problems, we must reshape the system so that it creates greater economic equality, and the most sensible method of doing this is to share ownership of capital with those who through their efforts actually help create it.

A THIRD ALTERNATIVE

HUGH NIBLEY EXPOSED a fallacy in the two-dimensional thinking most people employ—which is also one of Lucifer's most common ploys. Said Nibley:

When I find myself called upon to stand up and be counted, to declare myself on one side or the other, which do I prefer—gin or rum, cigarettes or cigars, tea or coffee, heroin or LSD, the Red Rose or the White, Shiz or Coriantumr, wicked Nephites or wicked Lamanites, Whigs or Tories, Catholic or Protestant, Republican or Democrat, black power or white power, land pirates or sea pirates, commissars or corporations, capitalism or communism? The devilish neatness and simplicity of the thing is the easy illusion that I am choosing between good and evil, when in reality two or more evils by their rivalry distract my attention from the real issue.

The problem with the easy economic choice most people see—between corporate capitalism and communism—is that it does indeed distract us from a third alternative that is more consistent with scripture and with our American social and political ideals than either of these two corrupt systems, both of which are authoritarian in their economic practices and both of which concentrate capital in the hands of people who do not do the productive work or create the product. Plainly stated, the only way people can experience freedom and representative democracy in all facets of their lives is by possessing a share of ownership in their places of work and having a voice in the decision making, including the opportunity to choose their organizational leaders.

Ownership of capital is the central factor that defines and differentiates economic systems. Under communism, ownership supposedly resides in the hands of the people as a whole, but in practice the Party elite control capital. Corporate capitalism also concentrates ownership in the hands of a small but elite group. The law of consecration, however, offers a very different ownership model. Granted, we cannot resurrect the United Order without divine direction, and we certainly cannot expect the entire U.S. population to embrace the law of consecration, but perhaps we can find viable principles in the Lord's revelations to guide us in reforming our economic system.

A thorough analysis of the law of consecration as applied under Joseph Smith and Brigham Young is beyond the scope of this article, but such an examination can be found in Working toward Zion: Principles of the United Order for the Modern World, by James Lucas and Warner Woodworth. After outlining the history of the United Order, Woodworth and Lucas suggest ways in which we might apply principles of the Lord's economy in our modern organizational world. They conclude that worker-owned businesses or cooperatives are the form of enterprise most consistent with the principles the Lord has revealed.

In short, if workers own their time, effort, and product, they will not pay themselves as little as possible. They will pay themselves as much as possible with a sense of equity absent from typical corporate pay structures. They will not
The Mondragon Cooperative Experience

A COMMON REACTION to the possibility of worker ownership on a large scale is to dismiss it as pie-in-the-sky idealism, something that could never work in the real world, especially in the rough-and-tumble, high-tech global economy of the twenty-first century. If this is your reaction, I invite you to take a half-hour tour of the Mondragon website (http://www.mondragon-corporation.com/ENG.aspx). What you will find is a $45 billion (€33.5 billion) organization that is the seventh-largest business group in Spain, with annual revenues of nearly $23 billion (€17 billion) and a workforce of 93,000. You will also find a group of people who are very conscious of the unconventional principles that guide their success.

The Mondragon cooperatives' product line is diverse, encompassing such goods as domestic appliances, office furniture, home furnishings, sports and fitness equipment, machine tools, automobile parts, automation systems, and electrical transformers. Mondragon is involved in the construction of large buildings and major infrastructure projects; operates 2,600 retail outlets, including hypermarkets, supermarkets, and specialty stores; manufactures complete installations for the hotel and catering sector; manages its own financial group, embracing three specific activities: banking, social welfare, and insurance; sponsors a university and several training and research centers; provides consulting services for civil, urban development, industrial, and environmental engineering; and offers a state-of-the-art language service. The Mondragon group of businesses is an impressive and vibrant operation, built upon the foundation of worker ownership and participative management.

All this began in 1943, when José María Arizmendiarieta, a Catholic priest assigned to Mondragón in 1941, established a polytechnic school in the town. On 14 April 1956 (which, by coincidence, also happens to be the day I was born), five graduates set up the first cooperative, based on Father Arizmendi’s economic principles, and soon began producing petrol-based heaters and cookers. As the cooperative grew and members developed ideas for additional products, new cooperatives were spun off and ventures were started in numerous industries, until there are now 256 separate companies under the Mondragon Corporation umbrella. Because of rapid expansion outside the Basque Country of Spain in recent years, only half of the companies are currently cooperatives and roughly a third of the workers are cooperative members. This is because capital can move from place to place with ease; not so cooperative workers. A core of workers who understand cooperative culture and principles is required for this form of organization to take root in a new area. In the short term, then, the umbrella organization has opted to create formulas that facilitate worker participation in the ownership and management of the companies in which they work. Eventually, these companies will become cooperatives. In fact, the Mondragon business group estimates that in three years, 75 percent of its workers will be cooperative members.

In the early years of the Mondragon cooperatives, the pay ratio of the highest-paid worker to the lowest was 3 to 1. To account for income tax changes, this was later increased to 4.5 to 1. In the 1990s, after the creation of the Mondragon Corporation and due to the growing complexity of the organization and the day-to-day activities of the cooperatives, a salary ratio of 6 to 1 was implemented, reaching 8 to 1 for certain exceptional top-level managers. Job security is a high priority, and Mondragon offers better retirement conditions than most other businesses do. It also distributes a portion of its profit annually to all members, although most is reinvested to strengthen the cooperatives and ensure a secure future for the worker-owners. Because of these principles, the Alto Deba region (where most of Mondragon’s cooperative businesses are located) is ranked highest in Spain for both per capita income and equitable wealth distribution.

When asked if they consider cooperativism to be an alternative to the capitalist production system, the Mondragon response is typically practical: “We have no pretensions in this area. We simply believe that we have developed a way of making companies more human and participatory. It is an approach that, furthermore, fits in well with the latest and most advanced management models, which tend to place more value on workers themselves as the principal asset and source of competitive advantage of modern companies.”
fire themselves or move production to a low-wage country or eliminate their own health insurance and other benefits. If more people receive a direct share of the profits instead of a marginal wage, they will have more disposable income to spend on the products generated in the marketplace. Conversely, if fewer people are reaping exorbitant profits from the labor of others (what Gandhi would label “wealth without work”), then there will be less excess capital to invest in unneeded productive capacity or speculative financial instruments. Overcapacity will correct itself, as will the exaggerated economic growth that multinationals require to reap the unrealistic rates of return demanded by out-of-touch financial markets.

Interestingly, even though there are only 300 worker-owned cooperatives with a total of 3,500 worker-owners in the United States, a variety of religious and secular perspectives have promoted this very economic form for many reasons. From a historical and social angle, Christopher Lasch argues for worker ownership’s being consistent with capitalism as Adam Smith and other early economic thinkers conceived it. In his economic treatise *Adam Smith’s Mistake: How a Moral Philosopher Invented Economics and Ended Morality*, Kenneth Lux arrives at a similar conclusion. So does William Greider in his examination of the global economy, *One World, Ready or Not: The Manic Logic of Global Capitalism*, where he attempts to prescribe a cure for what he sees as the inevitable shortcomings of globalization. In his tour de force *When Corporations Rule the World* and his more recent *Agenda for a New Economy*, David Korten argues persuasively for worker-owned businesses. Although farmer cooperatives are not an exact parallel to worker-owned enterprises, there are overlaps, and Ezra Taft Benson, as U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, promoted farmer cooperatives as an alternative to the government subsidies, price supports, acreage allotments, and overproduction that prevailed in the United States during his years in Washington.

In 1941, when Catholic priest José María Arizmendiarríeta arrived in the town of Mondragón in the Basque Country of Spain, the region was suffering from mass unemployment in the wake of the Spanish Civil War. Drawing on his studies in Catholic social doctrine, Father Arizmendi determined to focus his energies on economic development. He settled upon a system of worker cooperatives. The area surrounding Mondragón has since become one of the most vibrant regions in the Spanish economy. (See sidebar on page 44.) These cooperatives have been studied for decades now and provide ample proof that worker ownership is indeed a viable economic model on a small or a large scale. As a Latter-day Saint, I am not willing to take my lumps in a world in which little is certain, but I deserve a say. Not just some cosmetic “input,” but significant power in good times or bad. A place at the table where the decisions are made. Nothing less is fair. So nothing less is moral. . . . It takes more than investment and management to make a company live. It takes the
labor, skill, and talent of the people who do the company's work. Isn't that an investment? Doesn't it deserve a fair return, a voice, a share of the power? . . . If the people who do the work don't own some part of the product, and don't have any power over what happens to their enterprise—they are being robbed. You are being robbed. And don't think for a minute that those who are robbing you don't know they are robbing you. They know how much they get from you and how little they give back. They are thieves. They are stealing your life.38

The corporate system of ownership is a strange thing indeed and is a remnant from our aristocratic past. We speak of stock market transactions as investing, but Marjorie Kelly reminds us that “there is only the smallest bit of direct investment in companies going on. What is at work is speculation, the trading of shares from one speculator to another. Another word for it is gambling.”39 In reality, most companies have not sold any new common stock for decades, and new stock offerings in the market are generally exceeded by the amount of stock corporations buy back and retire. In this sense, as Ralph Estes observes, the stock market works very much like the used car market.40 When you buy a used Ford Taurus, none of the money goes to Ford. Similarly, when you buy Ford stock on the New York Stock Exchange, that money does not change Ford's balance sheet by so much as a penny.

But the stock market is very different from the used car market in a crucial way. Because a company's workers are both ingenious and productive, the value of the company generally increases over time, whereas the value of a used car decreases. The effect this produces is that a company's initial stock offering usually represents a very small fraction of a company's current worth. But that enormous increase in value was not created either by those who purchased the stock initially or by those who acquired it later on the stock exchange. It was created by the productivity of the workers. And yet, the corporation's number one priority is to maximize shareholder wealth, not employee wealth. Thus, people who have nothing to do with the day-to-day operations of the business, and who didn't even provide capital directly to the business, are the ultimate insiders, while the workers, who are there every day creating the wealth, are not even corporate citizens (citizens have a vote); they are subjects or even commodities, a cost to be minimized. They are treated as outsiders. This doesn't make any sense, but it's the way we have traditionally done things in the corporate world. In fact, if workers in a corporation increase their wealth (their pay), this is viewed by the corporation not as a success but as a failure. Success occurs only when shareholder wealth increases.41

Conventional reasoning about capital distribution ignores the fact that corporations are not only chartered by government, but also that they were originally established to serve public purposes. They were originally tightly regulated for the same reason. Businesses exist at the pleasure of the people. Even a sole proprietorship must file for a business license with government before it can legally engage in commerce. It is certainly within the rights of the people and their representatives in government to regulate...
business, including, I would argue, more carefully defining ownership requirements and reversing faulty legislation and judicial blunders.

Even though the debate over who ought to own corporate assets and products is both contentious and legally labyrinthine, capital redistribution doesn’t need to involve what Greider calls “the expropriation of anyone’s existing wealth.” He points out a fundamental paradox of capitalism: “People do not usually get rich by saving money but by borrowing it. . . . The problem, in other words, is not debt per se, as people are led to suppose. After all, the capitalist process relies on debt, continuous lending and borrowing for its creativity and progress. The problem is that most people cannot get into debt—not the kind of debt that will enable them to become capital owners.”

Kelso conceived more than fifty years ago: the employee stock ownership plan, or ESOP. Kelso’s financial innovation enabled ordinary workers to borrow money to buy stock shares in the companies where they worked, using the companies’ productive assets as collateral. As stock owners, they received dividends and could use their share of the profits to pay off the loans. This arrangement may sound vaguely familiar because it is the same principle corporate raiders employ to orchestrate leveraged buyouts (LBOs), a financial strategy used and often abused during the 1980s.

Moving from our current system of ownership to a more equitable system ought not to happen abruptly, barring some drastic crisis, but government at both the state and federal levels can do much to begin the necessary transformation. For instance, by increasing taxes on traditional corporations and other businesses owned by one person or a closed group, and by simultaneously offering tax breaks to worker-owned businesses, government can create attractive incentives for businesses to begin this shift willingly and immediately. Government should also move toward reinstating a top marginal tax rate of at least 90 percent to prevent the continued accumulation of wealth in a small minority of hands and to help pay down the immense national debt we have accumulated over the years.

Latter-day Saints can promote such changes by first rethinking their political ideology. But perhaps the most important step Latter-day Saints could take would be for those among us who own or manage corporations and other businesses to lead out in the transition to a new sort of economy by sharing ownership with their employees, which might include using profits to buy back stock from absentee owners (another topic altogether) and offer it through compensation programs to workers within the business.

A detailed description of how worker-owned businesses should be structured is beyond the scope of this article, but I will offer a few general guidelines. Some economic thinkers, including Indian philosopher Prabhat Ranjan Sarkar, have proposed a three-tiered economy. Following is a simplified outline of such a system.

- The first level would consist of small enterprises that produce mainly nonessential goods and services and perhaps a few essentials. These enterprises would generally have a single founder or a few partners, who would welcome on board new associates and offer them a share of ownership. These organizations could operate as small democracies.

- The second level of economic activity would consist of larger enterprises owned collectively by the workers. No shares of ownership would be held by absentee stockholders. This level would encompass the bulk of what we now call corporate America. Whereas level-one businesses could operate quite easily as true democracies, level-two enterprises would generally be too large for this. These organizations would have a republican form of leadership, patterned after our political system, in which workers would be able to elect the leaders.

- The third level would consist of basic industries that benefit everyone in the community, such as transportation, communication, education, defense, health care, sanitation, and utilities. These industries are too large to be managed effectively as cooperatives and too important to be driven by the profit motive. Of necessity, many of them must be monopolies. They must therefore exist in the public realm. Public boards or local governments would be the logical bodies to manage most of these entities, and they would be supported by taxation.

- Equality in most worker-owned businesses would need to be carefully defined. Since it would not be just to give an eighteen-year-old high school graduate an ownership share equal to that of a Ph.D. in mechanical engineering and thirty years experience, the ownership equation would need to incorporate such factors as age, experience, education, seniority, and financial investment. But the differential between the workers with the largest and smallest portion of ownership would be dictated by a factor of, say, five to ten, rather than what we see in today’s corporate world, where owners and professional executives earn hundreds of times as much as some of their employees.

- Economic enterprises should be free to hire some workers part time (because some people do
not desire or cannot manage full-time work) or to create an apprenticeship program in which new workers can be trained and carefully evaluated before being given full ownership rights and responsibilities.

These and other parameters for an economy based on worker ownership would have to be thoroughly weighed and discussed in public forums before being implemented. But regardless of how change begins, common sense suggests it should occur gradually—unless, of course, the current system collapses and we are forced to deal with a different set of realities.

THE ECONOMICS OF BABYLON

WHY SHOULD WE even consider the possibility that the current system might fail? Aside from the suffocating quantities of debt our inequality has generated, 2008 brought the distinct possibility of “sudden death by derivative.” The world economy came closer to collapse than most people realize. And we have not corrected the systemic flaws that pushed us to the precipice. According to figures published by the only institution that tracks the derivatives market (the Bank of International Settlements), the size of that market—consisting of both over-the-counter and exchange-traded derivatives—exceeded $1.1 quadrillion in July 2008.45 Yes, quadrillion. “By contrast, the value of the world’s financial assets—including all stock, bonds, and bank deposits—was pegged at $167 trillion” in 2007.46 In other words, the derivatives market was almost seven times as large as the world’s combined financial assets. To put this in another context, world gross domestic product in 2008 was just over $61 trillion. The derivatives market, then, was eighteen times as large as the total of all goods and services produced in the world in 2008. But these financial instruments are not like stocks or bonds, and they certainly have little similarity to bank deposits. Even though David Korten has labeled them “phantom wealth,” they are massive in quantity and frightening in their destructive potential.

The derivatives market is something akin to a global casino. It consists of bets financial speculators place in hope of winning the jackpot. These “investors” can bet on anything from the future price of crude oil to the financial solvency of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey. Derivatives also include insurance contracts on regular financial instruments such as corporate bonds. The problem with derivatives is that they are highly leveraged, meaning that a small foundation of real assets supports an immense tower of speculation. This is the bubble that almost popped in 2008. In March of that year, Bear Stearns, with derivatives valued at $13.4 trillion (larger than the U.S. national income), almost failed. Because the financial sector is so interlinked, this would have caused a complete systemic collapse. Disaster was averted because the Fed allowed J.P. Morgan to add the endangered Bear Stearns derivatives to its own $77 trillion portfolio.47 Then, in September 2008, AIG and its derivatives—called credit default swaps—almost sank the whole financial sector.48

Investment sage Warren Buffett had good reason to call derivatives “financial weapons of mass destruction.”49 “We view them as time bombs,” he wrote, “both for the parties that deal in them and the economic system.”50 This was five years before the 2008 meltdown, which would have been catastrophic without government intervention. But the derivative bubble still exists, and even if Congress enacts financial reform, the market will still be largely unregulated and highly leveraged.

A more cryptic reason to consider the possibility of economic collapse is that we believe in scriptural prophecy. We read in the Revelation of St. John the Divine about a day when Babylon the Great will fall—a day when “the merchants of the earth shall weep and mourn over her; for no man buyeth their merchandise any more” (Revelation 18:11). What could cause the merchants of the earth to marvel and say, “In one hour so great riches is come to
nought” (Revelation 18:17)? What event could create circumstances in which merchants would suddenly no longer be able to sell their wares and shipmasters would mourn because the source of their wealth is suddenly destroyed? If this question brings to your mind thoughts of global financial and economic collapse, who am I to argue with you?

If Babylon the Great is not global corporate capitalism, then the global economy is certainly the central nervous system of Babylon. As Hugh Nibley repeatedly insisted, Babylon is the opposite of Zion in every way. Thus, if Zion is a society in which there are no rich or poor, then Babylon is a society with extreme forms of wealth inequality. From scripture we know this: Babylon will fall, and Zion will rise. In other words, all systems of wealth inequality are doomed, including corporate capitalism.

So, the question we ought to consider is this: If our current economic system collapses under the weight of its own excesses and imbalances and its merchants can no longer sell their wares, will the Saints be ready, or will we still be supporting Babylonian economics? Perhaps we should consider the thoughts of Brigham Young, the last prophet to make an earnest attempt at establishing economic equality among the Saints:

We have a great work before us; and that portion of it we are now trying to inaugurate is not new. The doctrine of uniting together in our temporal labors, and all working for the good of all is from the beginning, from everlasting, and it will be for ever and ever. No one supposes for one moment that in heaven the angels are speculating, that they are building railroads and factories, taking advantage of another, gathering up the substance there is in heaven to aggrandize themselves, and that they live on the same principle that we are in the habit of doing. No Christian, no sectarian Christian, in the world believes this; they believe that the inhabitants of heaven live as a family, . . . and are willing to do whatever is required of them and to work for the interest of the whole community, for the good of all. We all believe this, and suppose we go to work and imitate them as far as we can.51

I have looked upon the community of the Latter-day Saints in vision and beheld them organized as one great family of heaven, each person performing his several duties in his line of industry, working for the good of the whole more than for individual aggrandizement; and in this I have beheld the most beautiful order that the mind of man can contemplate, and the grandest results for the upbuilding of the kingdom of God and the spread of righteousness upon the earth. Will this people ever come to this order of things? Are they now prepared to live according to that patriarchal order that will be organized among the true and faithful before God receives His own? We all concede the point that when this mortality falls off, and with it its cares, anxieties, love of self, love of wealth, and love of power, and all the conflicting interests which pertain to this flesh, that then, when our spirits have returned to God who gave them, we will be subject to every requirement that He may make of us, that we shall then live together as one great family; our interest will be a general, a common interest. Why can we not so live in this world?52

NOTES

2. Although a corporation can be structured in a variety of ways, including some very positive ones that I will mention later in the article, I use the term corporate capitalism to describe the form of ownership that almost exclusively prevails in the global economy today: large commercial entities that are owned not by the workers but by either a small group of owners or a host of absentee owners. This separation of ownership and productive labor lies at the heart of the inequality that defines modern capitalism.
4. Greider, One World, Ready or Not, 195.
7. Reaganomics restored to prominence three incompatible conservative economic doctrines that had been discredited in the collapse of 1929: They were: monetarism (managing the economy by controlling the money supply), supply-side economics (reducing taxes on the wealthy so that they would invest in new production), and balancing the budget. William Greider sums up the theoretical incompatibilities as follows: “How could the supply-side tax cuts pump up economic growth if the monetarists’ money policy was simultaneously retarding it? How could the Reagan program lead to a balanced budget if the tax cuts were at the same time increasing the deficits?” William Greider, Secrets of the Temple: How the Federal Reserve Runs the Country (New York: Touchstone, 1987), 366. Reagan’s economic advisors were drawn from all three conservative schools of economic thought and argued intensely among themselves, prompting Fed vice chairman Fred Schultz to refer to the whole affair as “a zoo.” Unfortunately, these conflicting theories, along with Reagan’s inability to reduce government spending, transformed America from the world’s largest creditor to the world’s largest debtor, a legacy that still burdens us.

18. Top U.S. Marginal Income Tax Rates, 1913–2003, http://www.truthandpolitics.org/top-rates.php#r2 (accessed May 1, 2010). Although it is true that U.S. presidents do not have the ability to reduce tax rates—this power resides with the House of Representatives—they are generally given credit for them, since Congress usually acts on a president’s economic initiatives. Hence we speak of Reagan’s or Bush’s tax cuts.


23. Greider, A Moral Philosopher

24. The fact that I may own a little stock through a pension plan or mutual fund does not make me a capitalist. Being a capitalist has more to do with the control of capital.


28. Lasn, “Uncooling.”


36. For more specific information about the Mondragon cooperatives, see their website, http://www.mondragon- corporation.com/ENG.aspx. For an extended recounting of Father Arizmendi’s arrival in Mondragon and the genesis of the cooperative movement he started, see Kenneth Lux, Adam Smith’s Mistake: How A Moral Philosopher Invented Economics and Ended Morality (Boston: Shambhala, 1990), 169–90.


42. Greider, One World, 418.

43. For a more detailed discussion of how we might transition from corporate capitalism to a system based on worker ownership, see my book Economic Insanity: How Growth-Driven Capitalism Is Devouring the American Dream (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 1995).


47. Jutia Group, “Global Derivatives Market.”

48. If you’re interested in learning more about how derivatives work and why they almost brought the house down, a good place to start is Adam Davidson, “How AIG Fell Apart,” http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSMAR85972720080818 (accessed May 1, 2010).


WAKING

... step back,
Heave, and a light, a little light, will nimbus your going forth.

—Charles Wright
Apologia Pro Vita Sua

You’re seeing the world with its sharp-angled shadows, colorless, speaking in your sleep like an inward prophet with the window-sills’ ashes in his hands. Only cold light weeps, but the heart tries to swallow it, the stark refractions, scrambled landscapes, the gleaming beads of violet transcendence. What part wakes in the actor’s mask of your blinking shutter? What part breathes the sky’s resuscitating breath leaking through the blinds? The day itself, a sacrament: the mundane as sacred bread; and the opposite of fear pulsating, moving you through the truth—that is held like light in the center of your deep sleep.

—BARRY BALLARD
PART I–THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

T HE PROBLEM OF EVIL IS ALMOST ALWAYS presented as a challenge to God’s existence. The question posed is simple: “In light of all the evil and suffering we witness in the world, how can an all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-loving God exist?” If God is all-powerful, then he would be able to prevent evil; if all-knowing, then he would know the evil to prevent, and if all-loving, he would lovingly prevent evil. Given the presence of evil in the suffering we witness around us, some conclude that God does not exist. While in the context of these debates, evil is usually broken down into moral evils (suffering resulting from the actions of human beings) and natural evil (suffering resulting from natural forces such as earthquakes), for the purpose of this paper, I broadly define evil as the physical, emotional, and psychological suffering of human beings.¹

Traditionally, responses to the problem of evil come in two forms: the free-will defense and the soul-making theodicy. The free-will defense argues that free will is so high a good that God restrains himself from interceding to allow his creatures to be free. Human suffering is an unfortunate consequence of that free will. Thus God permits evils, even as horrendous as the Holocaust, to maintain free will for his creatures. The soul-making theodicy argues that God allows suffering and evil in order to teach us something important, to give us the opportunity to be or learn to be moral, to bring us closer to God, or to otherwise improve the moral and spiritual quality of our souls. Such a theodicy is perhaps expressed in Doctrine and Covenants 122 when Jesus tells Joseph Smith, who was unjustly suffering in Liberty Jail:

And if thou shouldst be cast into the pit, or into the hands of murderers, and the sentence of death passed upon thee; if thou be cast into the deep; if the billowing surge conspire against thee; if fierce winds become thine enemy; if the heavens gather blackness, and all the elements combine to hedge up the way; and above all, if the very jaws of hell shall gape open the mouth wide after thee, know thou, my son, that all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good. (D&C 122:7)

Thus, whether we recognize it or not, God allows evil and suffering for the good of our souls.

Before moving forward, let’s consider an example to act as crucible for the theories we’re discussing: Recently, a 13-year-old girl—we’ll name her Jane—was kidnapped while walking home from school. Her kidnapper brutally raped, tortured, and murdered her, leaving her body in a shallow mountainside grave.² If we try to make sense of this atrocity in light of the problem of evil, one might conclude that God was unable to prevent it from happening, did not know it was happening, or did not care enough about the young girl to prevent it. The fact that this evil occurred could be held up

LOYD ERICSON is studying for a master’s degree in philosophy of religion and theology at Claremont Graduate University. He is a co-editor of Discourses in Mormon Theology: Philosophical and Theological Possibilities (2007) and is currently an editor for Greg Kofford Books.
as evidence that God does not exist.

Those upholding the free-will defense might argue that God was able, knowing, and desirous to stop Jane's rape and murder. However, he willed not to do so in order to maintain the greater good of the killer's free will (and that of all humanity). Those opting for the soul-making theodicy might argue that God allowed this horrendous evil in order to provide Jane, the killer, and/or others an opportunity to improve their souls—perhaps by providing opportunities for empathy, guilt, and moral learning.

There are serious challenges facing Latter-day Saints who wish to support the free-will defense. First a God who refuses to intervene to prevent suffering is hardly the God of Mormonism. The God of LDS scripture is described as miraculously preventing evil, alleviating suffering, and transforming the hearts of his creations. The God who worked miracles to free the Israelites from Egyptian oppression, raised the dead, healed the sick, reformed Alma the Younger, protected the pioneers, and miraculously saved Zion's Camp seems entirely different from a God who stays his hand in order not to interfere with human beings' free will. Furthermore, the prayers of Latter-day Saints and other theists throughout the world often include petitions for healing, food, liberation, peace, and reforming the hearts of prodigal children and friends. These prayers are made in the belief that God does in fact intercede to improve the world and prevent suffering.

Not only does the free-will defense seem incompatible with the God of Mormon scripture and history, it goes against a common-sense understanding of the relation between free will and our responses to the suffering of others. When my four-year-old nephew crashes on his bicycle and scuffs up his elbow, it would seem callous to argue that I was infringing on his free will by responding to his cries, picking him up, and helping him recover from his pain. When someone gives a warm bowl of soup to a homeless and hungry child, when a philanthropist engineers sustainable crops for a drought-ridden Third-World country, or when a medic injects pain-relieving narcotics into a dying soldier, it would again seem unfeeling for someone to argue that the freedom to starve, die, or suffer was being denied these persons. If out of deference to the kidnapper's free-will, I witnessed Jane's kidnapping but refused to intervene, an observer would likely regard me with horror. Yet those asserting a free-will defense postulate that God behaves likewise.

Similar challenges arise from the perspective of a soul-making theodicy. If God allows Jane's rape, torture, and murder for the greater good of some soul-making objective, who am I to thwart God's will? If such suffering leads, in fact, to a greater good, then by intervening, I would be precluding that greater good. Taking this argument to its logical extreme, we would conclude that each and every instance of suffering that God permits creates a greater good, and therefore no purposeless suffering exists. Thus, if I permit suffering to occur—or if I even cause suffering myself—I actually contribute to the world's greater good and assist God with his soul-making process.

Philosophers and theodicists can and do make important responses to these challenges. Those appealing to the free-will defense could argue that there is a key difference between God’s intervening

**In answer to this prayer, a philosopher of religion comes and says: “Jane, God is allowing your suffering because he doesn’t want to interfere with this man’s free-will. While your pain is great, it is much more important that this man is able to do as he chooses.”**
to stop the kidnapping and my intervening to stop it. My intervening is an expression of human free will—my own. Thus, even though my action counteracts the kidnapper’s free will, the world of free creatures created by God remains intact, without outside intervention. But if God were to intervene, then one person’s free will would be negated without any other person’s free will being affirmed—and this would violate the world of free creatures.

Those arguing for a soul-making theodicy may point out another important difference between God’s intervention and my own. What if Jane’s kidnapping was allowed for my own soul-building process—that is, to provide me the opportunity to intervene? Because my intervention (or non-intervention) when witnessing the kidnapping would act as part of a soul-making process for me, my intervention is entirely different in nature from God’s as he is already perfected and therefore stands outside the soul-making process. God’s intervention would interrupt the soul-making process; my intervention is part of that process.

Some may argue that unbeknown to us, God does intercede, occasionally or often. In this view, God prevents all suffering which he knows will not lead to a greater good. Thus, each instance of suffering that does occur is allowed because God knows that it will lead to some greater good—or at least that the probability or quality of the resulting good is worth the risk of allowing it. According to this theodicy, because God leaves no trace of the potential suffering he prevented, we have no knowledge of God’s intervention. (Countless children may safely return home each day, all unaware that God miraculously prevented their kidnapping.) In order to provide a sufficient logical response to the problem of evil, this theodicy must postulate that God allows all actual suffering in order to promote the greater good either by maintaining free will or by supporting a soul-building process. Any suffering not meeting these criteria would still serve as evidence against God’s existence.

All the theodicies I’ve discussed so far clearly approach the problem of evil from a believer’s perspective, where God’s existence is assumed a priori and left unquestioned. Because the theodicies leave God’s existence unquestioned (since God’s existence is the proposition they are defending), their attempt to explain how both God and evil can coexist ultimately focuses on explaining the existence not of God but of suffering. That is, suffering exists only because it serves God’s plan for humanity by providing benefits of some kind. However, because much of this suffering happens to people who die and thus do not directly benefit, these responses also imply that God allows unwilling victims to suffer purely for the benefit of others.

With this in mind, let us return to the example of Jane.
Imagine that in the midst of her suffering, she prays to God and asks: “Why is this happening to me?” In answer to this prayer, a philosopher of religion comes and says: “Jane, God is allowing your suffering because he doesn’t want to interfere with this man’s free will. Your freedom from suffering is less important to God than this man’s being able to do as he chooses.” Or perhaps the philosopher of religion tells her: “Jane, God certainly has the power to help you, but your unbearable suffering creates a soul-making opportunity for someone else which is more valuable than your freedom or even your life.” Or perhaps the philosopher says: “Jane, if you saw the big picture—God’s eternal plan—you would realize that you are merely one of millions whom God has allowed to suffer for his ultimate goal. It is all for the good.”

As the theodists attempt to defend God from the problem of evil, they portray him as both allowing and supporting evil. This portrayal can lead to a mindset that defends suffering instead of confronting it.

### PART II–THE PROBLEM OF MAN

**W**

ile suffering is often defended and justified as being necessary for God’s plan, it is unclear whether each of us individually shares the burden of that necessity. As D.Z. Phillips points out,

> When a sense of the limits of human existence has led to bewilderment and to the natural cry, “Why is this happening to me?”, “Why are things like this?”, it is essential to note that these questions are asked, not for want of explanations, but after explanations have provided all they can offer. The questions seem to seek for something that explanations cannot give. This is what theodicies . . . fail to realize.³

For the believer, the problem of evil is not about the existence of God. No, the problem of evil brings forth the “problem of man.” The “problem of man” asks: “While God may have a plan for humanity, does he have a plan for each individual? Or is the individual like the ant whose individual life has been provided all they can offer. The questions seem to seek for something that explanations cannot give. This is what theodicies . . . fail to realize.³

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Perhaps this is what Moses experienced following his revelation recorded in the first chapter of the Book of Moses. After being shown “the world and the ends thereof, and all the children of men which are, and which were created,” Moses wakes up and says to himself: “Now, for this cause I know that man is nothing, which thing I never had supposed” (Moses 1:8, 10). After witnessing the seemingly endless numbers of people whom God has placed on the earth, Moses logically announces that his own life seemed like a single grain on an eternal beach of sand. To make things even worse, after the vision, “the presence of God withdrew from Moses, that his glory was not upon Moses; and Moses was left unto himself.” Moses is suddenly small, insignificant, and alone. Like Tyler Durden in the movie *Fight Club*, this realization tells him and us: “Listen up, maggots. You are not special. You are not a beautiful or unique snowflake. You are the same decaying organic matter as everything else.”

The believer might quickly respond that God knows each of us individually. After all, Jesus once said, “Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin. . . . [I]f God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?” (Matt. 6:28, 30). But what does this say about the Cambodian sex slave, the child suffering from bone cancer, or the lonely and forgotten widow?—those who, unlike the adorned lilies, feel like trampled weeds unrecognizable in an open field. If God’s love for the lilies is expressed by their adornment, what does the allowed—or even promoted—rape and torture of Jane say of God’s love for her?

In an effort to defend God’s existence against evil, have the theodists and those who accept their responses denied the individual’s identity and value? Does insisting on the absolute value of free will or the soul-making virtues of suffering render our individual existence meaningless and irrelevant?

If as William James, Peter Geach, and many others have suggested, God is “like some grand master of chess” who maneuvers through free-will and suffering to achieve his win⁴ then are some of us his sacrificial pawns, written off and thrown to the rook?

If we believe that God is all-powerful and all-loving, does an individual’s intense and, to all appearances, meaningless suffering indicate that individual’s insignificance to God—especially in a tradition where the miraculous interventions of God are affirmed? While God may love his children as a whole, is not the sufferer justified in asking, “But does God love me?”

To emphasize this sense of loss and insignificance that Moses felt, suddenly, at the very moment God recedes, Satan comes to attack Moses at his weakest. “And it came to pass that when Moses had said these words, behold, Satan came tempting him, saying: Moses, son of man, worship me.”

In response, Moses scoffs at Satan saying, “Who art thou? For behold, I am a son of God, in the similitude of his Only Begotten; and where is thy glory, that I should worship thee?” (Moses 1:13). Moses’ statement that he is a son of God may seem at first to be declaring that he is a spiritual child of God—as Latter-day Saints usually understand that phrase today. However, within the context of the Book of Moses, one can argue that a “son of God” is not something
that one is by virtue of being human, but rather is what one becomes through conversion to Christ. As Enoch says a few chapters later: “Behold, our father Adam taught these things [of Christ], and many have believed and become the sons of God” (Moses 7:1, emphasis mine).

PART III–THE ATONEMENT AS LIBERATION

The problem of man brought on by the problem of evil presents us with two related challenges. First, a vast amount of suffering exists in the world—suffering that not only hurts the individuals directly affected but also all those who are touched by its evil. The theodist's attempts to account for this suffering can leave sufferers questioning the value of their own existence. Second, there is truth in affirming that as individuals, we are nothing in the eternal scheme of things. The world was not constructed around us. At any moment, I could become the victim of pain, suffering, or death. Nobody is free from this. And in the history books that future generations read, I will most likely not even appear as a footnote.

What, then, is the appropriate response? A step toward understanding God's own response to the problem of evil may lie in the writings of liberation theologians, particularly those from Latin America. Far from philosophers of religion who argue that the correct response to the problem of evil is to defend God by justifying evil, these theologians argue that God's response to evil is to defend individuals by confronting suffering as Christ did during the Atonement.

One key to understanding a liberation theologian's concept of the Atonement is Ignacio Ellacuria's argument that the question “why did Jesus die[?]” is inseparable from the question “why did they kill him[?]” Ellacuria’s friend, fellow liberation theologian Jon Sobrino, adds:

Persons who preach an exclusively transcendent Reign of God do not get themselves murdered. People who preach a Reign that is only a new relationship with God, or only “love,” or only “reconciliation,” or only “trust in God,” are not murdered. All these things may be legitimately regarded as elements accompanying the message of the Reign of God, but they alone do not explain Jesus’ death, and therefore they alone cannot be the central element of the Reign. The

Reign of God must have had some bearing on the historico-social, not only the transcendent.

According to Ellacuria and Sobrino, God as Jesus did not come to earth to be hung on the cross as a means of providing transcendent or metaphysical grace to absolve persons of transcendent or metaphysical sin. Instead of coming to earth to die, God came to earth to live a life that confronted sin and to teach his followers to do the same. So the cross is not a symbol of violent sacrificial death for the sake of sacrifice. Instead, the cross signifies the question, “Why did they kill him?” When we ask this question, we come to realize that Jesus was not executed for teaching love and transcendence. He was murdered for confronting oppressive systems and trying to liberate the oppressed from their suffering. The value of the cross is that it symbolizes, points to, and embodies the life that Jesus of Nazareth lived.
For an analogy, compare Mel Gibson's *Braveheart* with *The Passion of the Christ*. In *Braveheart*, the torture and execution of William Wallace at the end of the film acquires meaning and value in the context of Wallace's lifelong efforts to free the Scots from British rule. The scene is powerful and meaningful because it emphasizes that life. In *The Passion*, the torture and execution of Jesus occupies the whole film and is stripped of the context of Jesus' life. *The Passion* makes Jesus' death the only purpose of his incarnation. Liberation theologians, such as Ellacuria and Sobrino, reject this understanding of Jesus' death. As with Wallace's death, the meaning of Jesus' death is found in the life that inevitably led to his murder.

But, many argue, the scriptures are clear: Jesus died for the sins of the world. To this, those who argue for a liberation theology would answer: Yes, Jesus did die for the sins of the world. But, Ellacuria adds,

> We must ask in all seriousness what the sin of the world is today, or in what forms the sin of the world appears today. . . . If we look at the reality of the world as a whole from the perspective of faith, we see that the sin of the world is sharply expressed today in what must be called unjust poverty. Poverty and injustice appear today as the great negation of God's will and as the annihilation of the desired presence of God among human beings.8

God's response to the problem of evil is the Atonement. Not an abstract or soteriological atonement, but an atonement that confronts the historical and material sins of the world: poverty and suffering. God shows that his response to suffering is not to justify or understand it, but to confront and end suffering at its roots. When we understand this goal, we also understand our own identity and purpose as Christians. According to Sobrino:

> Christian spirituality is no more and no less than a living of the fundamental spirituality that we have described, precisely in the concrete manner of Jesus . . . [T]o be truly a human being is to be what Jesus is. To live with the spirit, to react correctly to concrete reality, is to re-create, throughout history, the fundamental structure of the life of Jesus.9

Through this process, we encounter God. Sobrino continues: “The believer who follows Jesus, who lives in history, who makes history and suffers it, finds himself or herself confronted with truth, life, cross, and hope. All of this is placed by the individual in reference to the mystery of God.” Crossing out the believer's nothingness, “this mystery comes forth to meet the individual, as well, giving him or her a concrete, nontransferable name. . . . In giving us names, God enters into a personal relationship with us.”10

Just as Moses found value and pride in his existence through his conversion to Christ that allowed him to confront Satan with the claim, “I am a son of God, in the similitude of his Only Begotten,” liberation theologians assert that by living the life of Christ by confronting evil, we come to realize our own value in the world. To intervene and prevent Jane from being abducted by her kidnapper is to be a follower of Christ. To confront oppressive systems is to be a follower of Christ. To push for social and economic justice in a world that seems to teach that suffering from poverty is a good is to be a follower of Christ.

**CONCLUSION**

THE PROBLEM OF EVIL, as framed by theodicists, is not a problem for God but a problem for the value of human existence. Attempts to defend God from the problem of evil that fail to recognize the problem of man ultimately justify suffering and thereby amplify the real problem. According to a theology of liberation, God's response is not to defend suffering but to defend the individual through confronting evil. As Jesus, God came to earth to set the example of how each of us must become like him: by confronting the suffering we witness in the world. Liberation theology addresses the problem of man both by confronting suffering and by giving the individual a valuable purpose in a world that might otherwise leave her or him feeling insignificant. Because of our own long tradition of describing the gospel primarily in terms of a transcendent atonement, many Mormon theologians may be uncomfortable with liberation theology's approach to the problem of man. But I believe that a gospel of liberating atonement is a perspective that has been ignored for too long and deserves further discussion by Latter-day Saints.

**NOTES**

1. This paper was originally presented at the annual conference for the Society for Mormon Philosophy and Theology on 25 March 2010 at Utah Valley University in Orem, Utah.
2. Though my example is fictional, the reality of seemingly all-too-frequent and similar accounts in the news would act as strong evidence against the existence of God by those appealing to the problem of evil.
5. Thanks to Charles Harrell for pointing this out to me.
10. Ibid., 699.
MANY TIMES OVER THE PAST DECADES, I HAVE described Lowell Bennion as having “Max Weber in his bones.”1 Weber, a self-professed agnostic, is arguably the most influential thinker of the late nineteenth century. His ideas have profoundly affected political science, sociology, public administration, economics, and sociology of religion. It was Weber who described the link between religion and economics that is commonly called the “Protestant work ethic.” It was Weber, also, who identified the importance of charisma2 as a key to leadership, religious or otherwise. Weber described how two opposing leadership roles in religious organizations—the priestly and the prophetic—interact and sometimes clash. In his time, Weber was deeply concerned about the growing power of bureaucracies and their tendency to reduce human beings to a “well-oiled cog in the machine.”3 Bennion once told me that Weber was “the most creative mind I have ever encountered.”4 Bennion’s knowledge of Weber’s thinking was unusually deep for his time; when Bennion studied him, Weber was practically unknown among American sociologists. To Bennion, Weber’s most meaningful idea was his insistence on separating value judgments from factual propositions—that is, value judgments cannot be established by empirical methods, and statements of fact cannot be established by value judgments.5 Weber taught that scientists must pursue truth without regard to personal or political benefit.

Weberian ideas also provided Bennion, a devout and thoughtful6 Latter-day Saint, with important frameworks for “sensemaking.” Sensemaking refers to how individuals interpret, or make sense of, what happens around them. Weber understood that organizations are contradictory.7 Bennion used Weber’s ideas to make sense of the inherent contradictions one can experience in religious organizations in general and the LDS Church in particular. As this essay explains, Bennion experienced these challenging contradictions firsthand.8

BORN IN UTAH in 1908, Bennion grew up in a religious environment dominated by a major contradiction: the LDS Church had renounced plural marriage, yet some members still lived in accordance with its principles. Polygamy was against the law, and Church members who had practiced it—although devout in their religious beliefs and otherwise strictly law-abiding—had been prosecuted. Families were split up. During Bennion’s early years, the institutional Church was vigorously distancing itself from polygamy without disciplining those members who had earlier

LAURIE N. DIPODOVA-STOCKS is Dean of the School of Graduate and Professional Studies at Park University in Kansas City, Missouri. Her Ph.D. comes from the Rockefeller College of Public Affairs and Policy, State University of New York at Albany. She serves as second counselor in the Relief Society of the Parkville Ward, Platte City Stake.
entered into it. Like many of his generation, Bennion grew up knowing friends and family members who lived in polygamy while simultaneously he heard the practice being condemned in Church conferences and elsewhere. While polygamy does not surface in Bennion's later writings, nor did it in my conversations with him, the contradictions and weight of the inconsistencies likely attracted young Bennion's thoughtful attention and may have been exacerbated by well-argued cases, decades earlier, in Utah courts and the U.S. Supreme Court contending that laws against polygamy violated the free exercise clause of the First Amendment.9

It is important to recognize that during the time of Bennion's youth, polygamy was the most current and visible instance of conflict that had fostered a pervasive "us versus them" attitude within the Church at large. Throughout its first century of existence, the Church had suffered recurrent conflicts and outright persecution in numerous locations within the United States and had ultimately sought security by moving to Utah to distance itself from the non-Mormon culture. As a result, Church members inevitably developed the sort of distrust of the non-Mormon community that is best described by the phrase, "us versus them." This social and political polarization was almost complete during Bennion's youth. The contradictions inherent in the Church's treatment of polygamy within this framework provided a probable catalyst for developing Bennion's skill of sensemaking.

In Vienna, during a tense time when he escorted a Jewish friend to safety,15 Bennion had wished he could have done more, but instead, he and Merle had to flee to France for their own safety. Over the next decade, following their return to the United States, the Bennions saw the Third Reich extend its influence across the continent, denying millions of people—even German citizens—their identity as human beings. The Bennions remained deeply concerned for the welfare of their German brothers and sisters in the gospel, especially given Mormons' religious duty to follow the Twelfth Article of Faith by submitting to government authority.16

More than three decades later, in the late 1960's, I met Dr. Bennion when I was a recent convert to Mormonism and a graduate student in sociology at the University of Utah. He was my master's thesis committee chair, and I was assigned as his graduate teaching assistant. The late 60's and early 70's were times of intense political turmoil in the United States. Influenced by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech, hundreds of thousands marched for civil rights at the Washington Mall. Anti-war protesters held disruptive sit-ins on university campuses such as

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Berkeley, Columbia, and UCLA, taking over academic and administrative offices. More than 50,000 American young people were drafted and killed in the Vietnam War. In 1968, Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King were assassinated. In 1970, students were killed on the Kent State campus in Ohio. It was evident that in troubled times, American society was not immune from destructive “us versus them” sensemaking.

Meanwhile, despite growing social and political pressure, the Church continued its long-standing practice of withholding the priesthood and temple blessings from people of African descent. Bennion was among the few prominent people who raised questions about this practice, and he insisted on doing so as an insider, his good standing in the Church never in doubt. Always non-confrontational in tone and without compromising his integrity, he pointed out that the priesthood ban was not rooted in doctrine but was instead a practice for which purported doctrines had been created. He was once invited to advise President David O. McKay on appropriate action to take in the case of a student who had been forbidden to pass the sacrament. The reason given the student was that people in his grandmother’s town in South Carolina believed that she (and therefore he) had Negro blood. Bennion recommended to the Prophet the wisdom of “errring on the side of mercy.” The student later was ordained to the priesthood and served a mission.

Given the gospel’s profound inclusivity, how could the Church exclude anyone in this way? The priesthood ban was as disconcerting to me after my conversion as separate water fountains had been during my Southern childhood. One day as I met with Bennion in his Park Building office, I mentioned that Alex Haley, author of The Autobiography of Malcolm X as told to Alex Haley, was speaking in the Student Union ballroom. Walking over, we found seats at the back of the packed ballroom. During the question-and-answer period, I asked Mr. Haley his thoughts about the Mormon Church’s denying the priesthood to black males. He dismissed my question with this: “I do not care what the Mormon Church does with its priesthood.” While his response stung, under the circumstances, it struck me as a fundamentally healthy reply.

Meanwhile, Bennion endeavored to help me deal productively with this issue. Drawing on Weber’s distinctions between value judgments and factual propositions, he pointed out the dangers of confusing the factual proposition of skin color with the value judgment of worthiness. The hazards included Caucasians advancing an “us versus them” stance, casting black people as the outsiders. He also frequently reiterated the greater effectiveness of working for change within the Church in contrast to attempting to do so as an outsider. He advised me that membership in the Church is like a marriage: just because a spouse disagrees with one thing does not mean the couple divorces.

I always walked away from these encounters admiringly wondering: “How can Dr. Bennion be so deeply concerned about this issue and yet be accepting of the Church?”

Only a few years earlier, a similar and more personal contradiction, probably the most profound of his life, had brought Bennion, a gentle, humble man, to the University of Utah as professor of sociology and associate dean of students. Despite his years of faithful service, he had been summarily removed from his position as Director of the LDS Institute of Religion adjacent to the University of Utah. Widely known as “the best teacher in the Church,” he was a founder of the LDS Institute programs in Utah and Arizona. He was given no honest or satisfying reason for his removal; he was merely informed that the Church Education System was being reorganized under Ernest L. Wilkinson, president of Brigham Young University.

Perhaps for his first time in the Church, Lowell L. Bennion may have felt like a “them.”

Clearly Bennion’s influence on his students was enormous, so his willingness to speak out on the priesthood ban was likely an issue. More than six years later, when he recounted these events to me, I expressed outrage: “How could they do this to you? It is stunning that the Church could betray you after three decades of dedicated work. Didn’t your students protest? How could Church headquarters receive thousands of letters and still did not relent? How on earth can this be justified on any level?”

Had Max Weber been present for the conversation, he might have explained to me that part of the General Authority role is the responsibility to protect and stabilize the organization, which may at times require suspending the Church’s own principles. He might also have noted that in a bureaucratic setting, once someone has received authority by delegation, it is very difficult for leaders in the hierarchy to overturn that subordinate’s decision.

Building on what might have been Weber’s response to my protests, Bennion focused on reconciling a dilemma with the Church. He worked patiently through my naivete, pointing out that while the Church will not do everything we want it to do, it still merits our allegiance as it most fully reflects—however imperfectly at times—the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Bennion, drawing on Weber’s warnings about bureaucracy, devoted his career to the daunting task of helping LDS students reconcile personal integrity and difficulties with any organization, including the Church, to which they might be committed. As he explained in his classes, every organization is characterized by contradictions. It is simply unavoidable. A school might embrace the ideal to offer the best educational opportunity to students yet find that it cannot afford to meet that ideal. The police department might embrace the ideal of swift and timely justice, only to have to conform to the tedious requirements of due process along the way. The first priority of any organization is to survive and to protect itself from perceived threats, at times employing operational requirements
that can be inconsistent with its own central purpose.\textsuperscript{18}

Drawing on Weber's typologies, Bennion would describe the Church as highly organized, bureaucratic, and hierarchical. Interpersonal interactions in any bureaucratic structure (not only the Church) are impacted by what I term as authority dynamics.\textsuperscript{19} Examples include (but are not limited to) altering one's actions in the presence of someone in authority,\textsuperscript{20} deference to those in authority, regarding the views of persons in authority as inherently more credible than those with less or no authority, fear of disagreeing with someone in authority, and not being candid in expressing one's views within an organizational structure.\textsuperscript{21}

Considering these dynamics, we understand that while the Church may embody the fullness of the gospel of Jesus Christ, it is constrained by the limits of human understanding and capacity, as explained in D&C 1:24.\textsuperscript{22} As Bennion would detail in class, the gospel is reality—the ultimate reality—and the Church is an expression of it within the boundaries of time, space, language, and culture.

FOR LATTER-DAY SAINTS today, what is relevant about Lowell Bennion's remarkable journey with Max Weber? Living from 1864 to 1920, Weber was no stranger to political upheavals; he witnessed wars, the creation of the German Empire, and the adoption of a new constitution, along with disruptions that accompanied industrial revolution, a long depression (1870s–1890s), and the rise of Marxism. Neither was Bennion a stranger to political unrest as he lived through the Great Depression, the rise of Nazism, several wars, riots on American campuses, and the killing of Freedom Riders in the South. Both men met their challenges with contributions that benefit others.

Now here we are in the twenty-first century—a time of globalization, technology, and relentless change leading to who knows where? We face our own set of challenges and upheavals.

Many Americans are still experiencing the most severe financial difficulties since the Great Depression. Some are expressing anger and disillusionment through a new anti-intellectual populist movement known as the “Tea Party.” Some say they “want their country back.” Some studies\textsuperscript{23} suggest that many in this movement object to having an African-American president. Some cannot accept that Obama is constitutionally elected and claim he was not born in the U.S. At the same time, reckless equations of Obama and Hitler are a common theme at political rallies, on cable news channels, and especially on a program hosted by LDS Church member Glenn Beck.\textsuperscript{24} Mormons have long relied on a paradigm of “us versus the world” or “us versus anti-Mormons.” Now, among some Mormons, additional varieties of the “us versus them” sense-making are flourishing: us versus Washington, or politicians, or immigrants, or Wall Street, or corporations, or welfare mothers, or Democrats, or Republicans In Name Only, or liberals, or socialists. Death threats received by public officials have risen dramatically. There are credible reports that people purporting to be temple-worthy Church members have threatened LDS members of the U.S. Congress. This phenomenon was addressed by Elder Quentin L. Cook at General Conference on 4 April 2010 when he took the extraordinary step of issuing a strong caution to any Church members who might contemplate vandalism or violence as a way to express disagreement.\textsuperscript{25}

Max Weber may not have had the answer for how to address this dynamic, how to defuse the dangerous “us versus them” mantras, but he did point out the deadly perils of confusing value judgments (“Democrats are evil”) with factual propositions (“The Republican Party was the majority party in the U.S. Congress from 1994 to 2006”).\textsuperscript{26}

But perhaps Weber would say to us in early twenty-first century times: Things have been difficult through all ages of human civilization, but we are still here. Human societies have survived, and even advanced. Bureaucracy, which I warned about, is a critical tool that fuels much of the progress. Germany, for instance, is in its best shape in centuries despite the horrors of its recent past.

Bennion might add that despite the turmoil of the twentieth century, Mormonism, the most optimistic of all religions, enjoys more widespread respect than it has at any other time. More than 130 LDS temples are functioning in the world right now; he would be able to recall when there were only six. He might also remind us that Jim Crow laws are gone, Civil Rights Acts were indeed passed, and separate water fountains no longer exist. Church members of black ancestry enjoy the same Gospel blessings as everyone else.\textsuperscript{27}

In the face of today's challenges, the issue is: how do we begin to meet these challenges in order to shape a better future? How do we make sense of what is around us and contribute to the betterment of others? Likely Bennion would remind us to start with the teachings of Jesus: Be of good cheer! Follow him and serve others! Never fear, for he is with us always.

Most important, Bennion would turn to the essence of the gospel—that both here and in the eternities, there is no “us and them.” There is only “us!” This was the truth that defined the marrow of Bennion's bones. It is the sensemaking framework taught by the Savior himself and, for many of us, the most difficult of all to master. It recently found eloquent and moving expression in the words of President Dieter F. Uchtdorf of the First Presidency in April 2010. In his General Conference address, he described an “us versus them” framework that arose among members of his ward in Germany in the wake of World War II. He repudiated that and similar frameworks as follows:

I hope that we welcome and love all of God's children, including those who might dress, look, speak, or just do things differently. It is not good to make others feel as though they are deficient. Let us lift those around us. Let us extend a welcoming hand. Let us bestow upon our brothers and sisters in the Church a special measure of humanity, compassion, and charity so that they feel, at long last, they have finally found home. . . .

"[And] he saith: Come unto me all ye ends of the
earth, ... [for] all men are privileged the one like unto the other, and none are forbidden” (2 Nephi 26:24–25, 28, emphasis added). . . .

As I read the scriptures, it appears that those who receive the Savior’s strongest reproach are often those who hold themselves in high esteem because of their wealth, influence, or perceived righteousness . . . .

I am not suggesting that we accept sin or overlook evil, in our personal life or in the world. Nevertheless, in our zeal, we sometimes confuse sin with sinner, and we condemn too quickly and with too little compassion. We know from modern revelation that “the worth of souls is great in the sight of God” (D&C 18:10). We cannot gauge the worth of another soul any more than we can measure the span of the universe. Every person we meet is a VIP to our Heavenly Father. Once we understand that, we can begin to understand how we should treat our fellowmen.28

Bennion advanced these teachings in all his writings and demonstrated them in his life. Even as he faced difficulties with the Church he so dearly loved, his devotion never faltered. How fitting that this early twenty-first-century teaching of divine sensemaking is issued by the first apostle of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, who is a native of Lowell and Merle’s beloved Germany and a countryman of Max Weber.

NOTES


2. Charisma is a trait Bennion had in spades, although he was too humble to recognize it.

3. Current familiar phrase drawn from Weber’s work describing the individual’s accommodation to bureaucratic structure. See Eisenstadt, S. N., ed., Max Weber on Charisma and Institution Building: Selected Papers, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968, where Weber states “the individual bureaucrat cannot squirm out of the apparatus in which he is harnessed . . . the professional bureaucrat is chained to his activity by his entire material and ideal existence. In the great majority of cases, he is only a single cog in an ever-moving mechanism which prescribes to his activity by his entire material and ideal existence.”


5. DiPadova and Brower, “A Piece of Lost History,” 49. Perhaps the clearest articulation of Bennion’s application of this idea is expressed in his 1978 book titled The Things that Matter Most, as he explained that he lives in two worlds: the empirical factual reality and the world of values.

6. Frequently drawing on the “first and great commandment” detailed in Matthew 22:37–38 (“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind”), Bennion taught that thoughtful reasoning is an integral part of religious life.


8. I am deeply indebted to my good friend and buddy, Bennion biographer, Mary Lythgoe Bradford, for her work on Bennion and her insights into his life. For this essay, I drew heavily on her book: Lowell L. Bennion: Teacher, Counselor, Humanitarian. I am also indebted to my dear eternal companion, Hugh G. Stocks, who provided valuable insights to this work. I take responsibility for any errors.


11. One indicator that is decades later, the couple will have so infused their own family with everything German that their grandchildren would call them not Grandma or Grandpa, but Oma and Opa, as is customary in German families.


13. When Bennion published his dissertation, the only book available in English about Weber was Talcott Parsons’ translation of The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism.


16. The Twelfth Article of Faith states: “We believe in being subject to kings, presidents, rulers, and magistrates, in obeying, honoring, and sustaining the law.”

17. See Bradford, Lowell L. Bennion, 165–166, for a detailed account of the circumstances. In recounting this situation to me, Bennion referred to the weight of being asked to advise a Prophet of God, and cast his advice this way: “If I am going to be in error, I would rather err on the side of mercy.”

18. A clear example of this contradiction in a personnel issue was provided by a colleague (who must remain nameless for obvious reasons) at the Harvard Divinity School. He recounted serving as a minister in an inner-city church staffed with a secretary who was quite incompetent. The entire congregation suffered as a result. After training her at length on training, coaching, and pastoral counseling and seeing no improvement, he terminated her employment. Her response to his action was to object strongly, pointing out that this was a church and he was a minister, and thus he was not supposed to fire people.

19. DnSC 121: 33–46, in its stern rebuke of the misuse of priesthood authority, provides the most explicit and compelling defense against authority dynamics found in sacred scripture. While this section is often taught and discussed, many authority dynamics are so embedded in the expectations of the organizational structure that they are not easily recognized nor acknowledged.

20. These dynamics can afflict Relief Society presidents and other women leaders at times in their meetings with groups of priesthood leaders, resulting in the muting of their insights and contributions as women; leadership training on effective ward councils by Elder Ballard of the Council of the Twelve widely distributed in the mid-1990s helped address these concerns.

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22. “Behold, I am God and have spoken it; these commandments are of me, and were given unto my servants in their weakness, after the manner of their language, that they might come to understanding.”

23. There are more than a dozen surveys (of varying levels of credibility) on the Tea Party movement. By the time this essay goes to press, there will be more studies. At this point, we can offer only general indications. Tea Partiers appear to be more likely than the rest of the population to be educated, older, white male, Republican (more conservative than most in the GOP), and to think that government provides too much support to black people and other minorities.

24. Beck may pose an increasing dilemma for faithful Latter-day Saint viewers. LDS members accept the President of the Church and Apostles as God’s mouthpiece on the earth. Beck claims to know the mind of God, pronouncing, among other things, that “Jesus is against cap and trade.”

25. Cook, Quentin L., “We Follow Jesus Christ” Ensign, May 2010, 83–86

26. One difficulty with anti-intellectual populist movements is that, by definition, facts and analysis do not matter and are of no concern to their members.

27. See Official Declaration 2 dated 30 September 1978, Salt Lake City, Utah. Published in LDS Scriptures.

BRAVING THE BORDERLANDS . . .

RESPONSES TO BRAD’S DILEMMA AND FINDING A SUITABLE MATE

by D. Jeff Burton

I RECEIVED THE following emails from readers of our last column concerning “Brad,” who finds that his Borderland status complicates his dating life. Names and some details have been changed.¹

FROM RYAN: In my dating experience, being honest can be trying, but everyone deserves honesty in the dating relationship. When I hear the inevitable “Are you an active Mormon?” question from an LDS woman, I respond with “Mostly,” or “Sort of.” When she asks what I mean, I typically say that I am a liberal, agnostic Mormon. The reaction is sometimes comical—some women physically step back from me, as if they might catch something. Some don’t know what I mean. Others want to debate me into believing. Others want to bear their testimony, which can feel uncomfortable. Others want to debate me into believing. Others want to date me, and were surprised to learn she knew who I was. In those days, I didn’t think any girl would know who I was or be interested in me. We met many times after that, eating at the cafeteria together, going on an afternoon walk, studying in the library. We seemed to be building a friendship, and I liked her. It helped that when I didn’t know what to say next, I could fall back on topics in our shared studies.

The Church was a common subject of conversation with us, but we didn’t dwell on any “mysteries.” However, I suspected from her comments and mannerisms that she might have a liberal bent concerning religion. One Sunday, she went with me to my ward meetings, and I noticed that she rolled her eyes when one of the bishopric stated bluntly in a Sunday School class, “We brought the talents and all we learned in the pre-existence into this life. We’re here in this church because of our successes in the pre-existence.” My heart leaped a bit when I saw her almost imperceptible reaction to something that has no hard scriptural support.

At our next lunch together, I very carefully and casually asked her about her testimony. She hesitated and then said that she didn’t have a testimony in the regular way. She actually put her hand on mine (our first physical contact) and explained that her interest in science and the scientific method didn’t seem to allow her to have a sure knowledge about mystical things. In fact, she was mostly skeptical about such things. A very good feeling suddenly rippled through me. We didn’t go much farther that day, but my heart was soaring.

One thing led to another and over time, we discovered that we were quite compatible in our outlooks on religion and life. Neither of us had ever felt free to talk candidly with others about our questions, doubts, and concerns, so our conversations were exhilarating. We had a few differences, such as how to handle money, where to live after graduation, and how much to be involved in the Church, but in about a year, we married in the temple. Now, two children later, we are very happy and content. We have a lifestyle built on love for and accommodation of each other. I feel tremendously blessed that fate, God, or pure chance brought us together. Although we live and move quietly in the Borderlands of the Church (another story), our little corner of the world is quite satisfying.

So, my suggestion to all Bradess (and Bradesses) is to look carefully for someone just like them. Their counterparts are out there looking, too. And per-

D. JEFF BURTON is an author and a former member of the Sunstone Board of Directors.
haps be a little more forward about your uniqueness than I was. There are dating services online, for example, that let people advertise for the kind of person they’re looking for. That might work.

FROM DUSTIN (a young Borderlander who has lost his “knowing” testimony but wants to remain active in the Church and would like to get his “knowing” testimony back or at least find a satisfying arrangement so he could stay with the Church): I have a girlfriend whom I really love. She is an “Iron Rod,” to use Richard Poll’s term, and doesn’t really know or understand where I stand. I have struggled deeply with a desire to be what she wants while retaining my own integrity. I cannot make myself believe in the Church like I used to. And trust me, I want to believe. I want to know that the Church is true. I want to be an “Iron Rod.” But wanting it doesn’t make it so. So I remain frustrated. I remain fearful that my friends will misjudge me. I am afraid my girlfriend will dump me (which might be a relief in the end?). I have decided that I want to stick with the Church. I believe in God and have my questions about Christ, but I know what good the Church can do, and I want to be part of that. But what should I do about my girlfriend?

JEFF (TO DUSTIN): “Knowing” is a complex subject for those inclined to think about it. You might look up “epistemology” on Wikipedia. That entry has an excellent overview of the subject of knowledge, its nature, origins, and limitations. Not believing is not the same as disbelieving. Doubts, questions, and skepticism are a natural part of life for most people (but can be suppressed by those not inclined to follow those feelings and thoughts).

Your situation with your girlfriend complicates matters, of course. If you are to continue with her, you will sooner or later need to be both honest and willing to make compromises and accommodations, as Jason has described above. But at this late stage, if she is not willing or able to go along with you as you are, you must be prepared to part ways. As I’ve stated in this column before, if she loves you for you, and for who and what you are, if she is able to trust you, she will likely find a way to make things work.

Consider the idea that we all are continually developing our own relationship to our Father in Heaven. When we are willing to allow others to have their own pathways to God (or no defined pathway, if that is the case), we can relax and even help them in their quest, as appropriate. This attitude could work for you in dealing with your girlfriend. Unfortunately, many true believers are either unable or unwilling to reciprocate. You should explore these issues with your girlfriend before either of you commit to anything.

Another thought: your relationships to God and religion will change as you gain more knowledge and experience. Don’t assume you’ve hit the end of the road. Life is a series of learning steps. What you and your girlfriend think, believe, or “know” at this time will likely change in a few years or even a few months.

At our next lunch together, I very carefully and casually asked her about her testimony. She hesitated and then said that she didn’t have a testimony in the regular way. She actually put her hand on mine (our first physical contact) and explained that her interest in science and the scientific method didn’t seem to allow her to have a sure knowledge about mystical things. In fact, she was mostly skeptical about such things.

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don't have a “knowing” testimony of some things associated with the Church, I love the good things about the Church, and, more important, I respect your testimony and would never try to make you think or believe the way I do. But I do think that for us to be happy together, I need you to know how I feel, and I need to know how you feel. I’m wondering if you can work with me on this. I need to know that you love me for who I am and trust that I wouldn’t do anything to hurt you or undermine your beliefs.

“Now, I can see you’re eager to respond, but hold your response for just a few more minutes as I complete my thoughts. Thanks.

“I’m also wondering if we can be really open and honest with each other, and, through our love for each other, work out a life together that meets both our needs and desires. For example, I know that you want a temple marriage and an active LDS family. I am willing to work with you to achieve those goals. For me, I need the freedom to be myself, to think and believe as I do, and to talk with you openly about these things. I need to know that our relationship won’t suffer if I am honest with you.

“I need to know that we can communicate on any subject in a fair, loving, and understanding way, and then that we will both be willing to make adjustments and compromises that will make us feel comfortable being ourselves.

“Okay, that’s all I have to say. Now, what do you think?”

An approach like that could begin a lifelong arrangement that will leave both of you satisfied, fulfilled, and accepting of each other.

DUSTIN (a few months later): My girlfriend and I discussed my heterodox beliefs and doubts several times, leading to several inspiring spiritual conversations that we both enjoyed. However, despite my being the “best boyfriend ever” (her words), she continued to have a hard time with my doubts. I tried to show her that I could act as a believing member and keep the commandments in spite of my doubts and questions. I even got my temple recommend. My answers were not “Iron Rod,” but I felt okay with getting my recommend.

At that point, we began to talk about marriage. Both she and I were in love and wanted to marry, but she said she wanted to pray about it first. I decided to go to an endowment session to receive some guidance of my own. My brother and sister-in-law came with me and acted as the witness couple. At one point, I looked up to see them kneeling at the altar, and the Spirit testified that I should marry my girlfriend. My girlfriend, however, didn’t feel she was getting any response and still felt bothered by my doubts.

Then, finally, she did receive an answer. It was a “no.” So we have broken up. It’s painful; she still loves me, and I her, but she didn’t see why we should keep dating if God told her ‘no.’

I have been furious at God since, not only because he took a perfect girl away from me but also because he would be inconsistent, telling me “yes” and her “no.” I don’t trust him anymore. I’m trying to make sense of it all. I’ll tell you this, I’ll never pray about who I should marry again! I’ll stick with Elder McConkie’s plan, who said he didn’t pray about marriage because he was the one getting married, not the Lord. This development has added more fuel to fire my doubts, but I retain my hopes.

JEFF: What an outcome! Sorry to hear that in God has diminished.

I think we need to be very careful when making life-altering decisions. First, individual “felt answers from God” may not always be reliable. The “felt” difference between a yes and a no is sometimes small, and one can easily mistake one’s own feelings, concerns, and fears with “the answer.” We all know how unreliable some “hunches” can be, how determined we can be when we want to get a certain answer, and how different environments factor in. If I pray at the edge of a beautiful forest or while listening to “Come, Come, Ye Saints,” I get more positive answers than if I pray in the median of a freeway. Even Joseph Smith talked about being occasionally confused about the source of some of his inspiration.

To me, genuine love and its accompanying commitments between two people is a “yes” answer! God wouldn’t let you two get that far, would he? He wouldn’t break up two people who are genuinely in love with each other, would he? That isn’t the kind of caring Heavenly Father we love and worship. I would be willing to bet that if your girlfriend discussed her story with any General Authority, it could have a different ending.

Perhaps you should discuss this again with your girlfriend.

NOTES


Please send me your experiences from life in the Borderlands.

D. Jeff Burton, djeffburton@gmail.com
Women of fiction, history, humor, verse, and polygamy ...


HUMOR. Madam Ridiculous and Lady Sublime Elouise Bell ➔ The Marketing of Sister B Linda Hoffman Kimball ➔ Only When I Laugh Elouise Bell ➔ What’s a Mother to Do? Ann Edwards Cannon

VERSE. The Eyes of a Flounder Laura Hamblin ➔ Harvest: Contemporary Mormon Poems Eugene England & Dennis Clark, editors ➔ On Keeping Things Small Marilyn Bushman-Carlton

POLYGAMY. Four Zinas: A Story of Mothers and Daughters on the Mormon Frontier Martha Sonntag Bradley & Mary Brown Firmage Woodward ➔ “God Has Made Us a Kingdom”: James Strang and the Mid-west Mormons Vickie Cleverley Speek ➔ Nauvoo Polygamy: “… but we called it celestial marriage” George D. Smith ➔ In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith Todd Compton
BOOK REVIEW

A CAMPAIGN MOST MORMON

A DIFFERENT GOD? MITT ROMNEY, THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT, AND THE MORMON QUESTION

By Craig L. Foster

2008

244 Pages, $24.95

Kofford Books

Reviewed by Blair Dee Hodges

What about Romney's Mormon religion made Americans wary of him? Or did wariness of Romney contribute to their reluctance to vote for a Mormon?

THE OLD STORY about America's Pilgrim forefathers setting sail to find religious freedom in a new world simply doesn't bear the weight of historical scrutiny. Freedom they sought, but not necessarily for all, and "they" weren't the only ones around, of course. Life is seldom so simple. Although religion has often played a leading role in shaping the political and social values of Americans, the relationship between faith and politics has been rocky overall. A recent manifestation of this uneasy relationship is Mitt Romney's failed presidential run.2

Foster completed the book quickly enough to make it available before the 2008 general election. It was published shortly after Romney ended his campaign in December 2007. Romney has not yet announced an intention to run for president in 2012. If he does run (as expected), I hope Foster will produce a second edition of his book. It could be an important contribution to national discussion about religious right and politics. And a second edition would give Foster the chance to jettison a few now-irrelevant points.3 After a brief overview, I will examine two larger subjects that require further elucidation: Foster's analysis of "the media," and his definition of "the Mormon question."

Craig L. Foster's A Different God? Mitt Romney, the Religious Right, and the Mormon Question explores the interplay of faith and politics in the United States through Romney's failed presidential run.2

Foster quickly traces the religious right from Republican Mormon who actively supported Mitt Romney and "political junkie," lists several reasons for Romney's comparative success. For instance, Romney was running for the Republican nomination instead of as a third-party candidate. He began campaigning earlier, ran longer, and spent more money than did any previous Mormon. He also won several state primaries. Finally, the "increasing public presence, power, and influence of the Latter-day Saints" gave much credibility to his campaign (xi-xii).

However, Foster argues that this strength—the Mormonism which inspired Romney's patriotism and strong work ethic—ultimately became a crucial weakness for his campaign.

The "Mormon Question," Foster writes, is one of the "major reasons" Romney's first quest for the presidency failed (xiii). As Foster formulates it, the question is: "Because Mormons believe in what most Americans see as alien, even non-Christian, doctrines and strange practices, can a Mormon be trusted to preserve, protect, and promote the common good of the United States as president?" (xiii).

Before analyzing Romney's campaign, Foster uses the first three chapters to provide some historical context. Chapter one briefly explores the "rise of the religious right," an "awkward coalition of different groups" of Christians instead of "a unified monolith" (1).

Chapter two describes "the power of the religious right" and the divisions within, and political differences between, evangelicals and fundamentalists. By outlining perceived similarities in "social characteristics, lifestyle, and attitudes," Foster demonstrates a "closer kinship" between Mormons, evangelicals, and fundamentalists (28). Significant doctrinal differences have nevertheless done much to prevent an alliance between Latter-day Saints and the religious right. Foster quickly traces the Republicanization of Utahns, which began in the early 1900s. The chapter closes by noting the frequent disappointment the religious right has sustained from Republican candidates' failed political promises.

BLAIR DEE HODGES is earned a BA in mass communications with a minor in religious studies from the University of Utah. He lives in Centerville, Utah, with his wife Kristen and their dog Chicken Delicious. He currently blogs at LifeOnGoldPlates.com.
In contrast to the over-simplified Legacy depiction of early Mormon difficulties, in which ravenous mobs drive Mormons from state to state without much explanation, Foster's third chapter, a political history of the Latter-day Saints, provides a more complex account of the political and social conflicts that caused the tensions. Although early Mormons did not completely agree on all political matters, they were prone toward problematic bloc voting habits in the name of unity.

Chapter four, a biographical chapter, describes Mitt Romney's childhood and missionary service, as well as his Olympic and political involvement. Foster then moves to the main event, cleverly framing the political conflicts as a boxing match. The chapter titled “Left Hook” describes the punches Democrats delivered. The “Right Cross” addresses attacks from conservatives and the religious right. The “Low Blow” chapter covers more pointedly anti-Mormon accusations, some of those being downright bizarre. The combined onslaught finally led Romney to deliver his “Faith in America” speech on 6 December 2007.

According to Foster, Romney's strategy of discussing his religion shifted over time. Romney initially contended that “most Americans couldn't care less what religion I am” (121) and refused even to discuss it. As he realized his assumption was wrong, he became much more guarded. He finally attempted to “translate [his Mormonism] into terms acceptable to evangelicals.” Overall, Foster believes Romney's loss rests largely on his own shoulders. He “did not present himself well and thus came across as smug, artificial, and calculating.” He tried to pose as a “Reagan conservative” despite being a “moderate with a dash of New England conventionality.” But Foster admits that Romney was not totally to blame for his reputation because “the media not only ignores blatant examples of anti-evangelical bias but sometimes seems to encourage it” (34). Further, he asserts that the “almost-automatic liberal reflexes of the media” are a “given” (123). The very placement of the “Media Bias” section within the “Left Hook” chapter is symptomatic of the common conservative assumption that the “mainstream media” is out to get them (123–137).

There are several problems with this usage of the term “the media.” First is that Foster seems to view “the media” as a monolithic entity. The inaccuracy of this view increases as media outlets multiply and diversify. Undoubtedly, some reporters, editors, networks, and news organizations are more prone to appeal to certain political perspectives. Far from simply reporting happenings, journalists are always at least indirectly involved in them. But consider this sentence: “The media is prejudiced against Mitt Romney.” Taken literally, this sentence asserts that “the media” does not represent reality. Instead, journalists may represent a distorted reality, which is itself suspect. But Foster claims that the “media” includes much more. “Mainstream” media includes the “almost-automatic liberal reflexes of the media.” Foster includes many key news and editorial sources, but his overall treatment would profit from a more rigorous frame of analysis.

THE MORMON QUESTION

As Romney's faith received frequent treatment among journalists, LDS Public Affairs took on a growing role in helping to respond to questions about belief and practice. Foster mentions some of the issues that frequently arose, including polygamy, racism, and personal revelation. But this collection of concerns leaves me wondering what Foster thinks is the most important “Mormon question” is—or whether it is a single question or a collection of several related concerns. How does the Mormon question revolve around the doctrinal differences between Mormons and evangelical Christianity? Fundamentalists such as televangelist Bill Keller worry about electing a member of a “cult” to the presidency (153) while secularists such as historian Timothy Garton Ash simply ask how an educated man such as Romney could possibly believe “such a wacky collection of man-made Moronical codswallop?” As is found in Mormonism (132).

Ironically, the usually boorish journalist Christopher Hitchens most concisely captured what I see as the most enduring aspect of the Mormon question, perhaps the main concern of the widest number of American voters:

The Mormons claim that their leadership is prophetic and inspired and that its rulings take precedence over any human law. The constitutional implications of this are too obvious to need spelling out, but it would be good to see Romney spell them out anyway (132).
Foster recognizes this as the same question Reed Smoot faced in 1904—and more recently, John F. Kennedy. Would Kennedy, as a Catholic president, bow to the dictates of the Pope? “I believe in an America where the separation of church and state is absolute,” Kennedy declared in his landmark speech on religion and politics, “where no Catholic prelate would tell the President (should he be Catholic) how to act, and no Protestant minister would tell his parishioners for whom to vote” (A).

In Romney’s similarly themed speech, “Faith in America,” delivered in December 2007, he pointedly stated: “Let me assure you that no authorities of my church, or of any other church for that matter, will ever exert influence on presidential decisions. Their authority is theirs, within the province of church affairs, and it ends where the affairs of the nation begin” (226). There are at least two problems with Romney’s statement.

First, Romney has been more ambiguous about the question on other occasions. Less than a week after the “Faith in America” speech, he was asked directly how he would handle personal revelation or prophetic guidance from his leaders regarding presidential decisions. Fumbling, he said, “I don’t recall God speaking to me. I don’t know if he’s spoken to anyone since Moses in the bush . . . or perhaps some others” (129–130). Romney had already been perceived as evasive and labeled a “flip-flopper” (a rather unfortunate label: why shouldn’t a politician change positions upon learning more about an issue?). Romney’s uncomfortable equivocations likely didn’t help him overcome such concerns.

Second, LDS Church leaders do not seem to view their province as ending where national affairs begin. While LDS leaders may not advocate for any particular candidate, Foster acknowledges several “moral issues” Church leadership has publicly addressed. He notes LDS involvement against the Equal Rights Amendment, legalization of same-sex marriage, and several other issues. Missing from Foster’s examples is the MX missile incident. The Church’s more recent statements on illegal immigration raise another issue which could impact how Romney is received by certain constituencies in 2012 (32–33).

Speaking to different electorates, Romney and Kennedy seem to have had different views on the role of religion in politics when it comes to such moral issues. Kennedy envisioned an America where “no religious body seeks to impose its will directly or indirectly upon the general populace or the public acts of its officials” (195). Romney emphasized what he evidently understands to be the religious underpinnings of American liberty in general. “We separate church and state affairs in this country, and for good reason. No religion should dictate to the state nor should the state interfere with the free practice of religion. But in recent years, the notion of the separation of church and state has been taken by some well beyond its original meaning…The founders proscribed the establishment of a state religion, but they did not countenance the elimination of religion from the public square” (228).

That being the case, it seems that voters could rightfully consider how pronouncements on moral issues from LDS leaders might affect the decisions of a Latter-day Saint president, one who appears more devoted to his faith than Kennedy was to his. A second edition of this book could elaborate much more on this aspect of the Mormon question.

A second edition could also take more regard for the voices of non-Republican Latter-day Saint politicians, which this edition minimized. Foster notes incidents when Romney ruffled some Latter-day Saint feathers—one blogger criticized Romney for saying he “can’t imagine anything more awful than polygamy,” for instance (128, see also 188). But there are virtually no Mormon Democrat, Independent, or strictly politically disinterested LDS voices in the book; its intended audience seems to be Republicans. Certainly non-Republican perspectives on Romney’s campaigns and their effect on the Church are needed—especially if Romney decides to run for president again, and even more so if he actually receives the Republican nomination. Foster could also compare Romney’s treatment with that of current Senate majority leader Harry Reid’s, as well as other prominent LDS politicians. Such examinations could shed light on how sectors of the religious right and others view a conservative Mormon candidate in comparison to how they view other LDS politicians.

Overall, Foster encapsulates an impressive amount of Romney coverage, which makes the book worth reading for anyone interested in public and media perceptions of Mormonism during Romney’s run. His account also gives readers an idea of what they might expect from pundits, politicians, and journalists in the coming election should Romney announce his candidacy. The last election certainly did not answer the Mormon questions. It may have simply multiplied them.

NOTES

1. I approached reviewing this book with some trepidation because Craig Foster is a friend. Our friendship persists, despite some fundamental political disagreements. I hope he finds this review fair. For instance, at the Republican National Convention he stated: “Did you hear any Democrats talk last week about the threat from radical, violent jihad? Republicans believe that there is good and evil in the world . . . And at Saddleback, after Barack Obama dodged and ducked every direct question, John McCain hit the mark. Radical violent Islam is evil, and he will defeat it!” He added, “Republicans prefer straight talk to politically correct talk!” (“Transcript: Mitt Romney At The RNC,” NPR.org, 3 September 2008, http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=94254589, accessed 14 May 2010.) Romney may believe that adding the adjectives “radical” and “violent” clarifies he is not speaking of all Muslims. However, he reinforces stereotypes about Islam when he addresses a general audience this way. In a second edition, Foster could analyze Romney’s speeches and interviews regarding Islam, as well as Romney’s new book No Apology: The Case for American Greatness (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2010).

2. For example, Foster spends a few pages describing Romney’s campaigning for John McCain and speculates about McCain’s possible running mates. Sarah Palin is not listed among them.


4. News coverage studies about newer religious movements suggest that such groups are often “subject to different treatment” than more established religions are. Labels such as “cult” are more likely to be used, for instance. See Harvey Hill, John Hickman, Joel McLendon, “Cults and Sects and Doomsday Groups, Oh My: Media Treatment of Religion on the Eve of the Millennium,” Review of Religious Research 43, no. 1 (September 2001), pp. 24–30.

5. For more about the Danish cartoon controversy, see John L. Esposito and Dalia Mogahed, Who Speaks for Islam? What a Billion Muslims Really Think (New York: Gallup, 2007), 142–152. At times, Romney has made statements about Islam which do not show sensitivity for Muslims. For instance, at the Republican National Convention he stated: “Did you hear any Democrats talk last week about the threat from radical, violent jihad? Republicans believe that there is good and evil in the world . . . And at Saddleback, after Barack Obama dodged and ducked every direct question, John McCain hit the mark. Radical violent Islam is evil, and he will defeat it!” He added, “Republicans prefer straight talk to politically correct talk!” (“Transcript: Mitt Romney At The RNC,” NPR.org, 3 September 2008, http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=94254589, accessed 14 May 2010.) Romney may believe that adding the adjectives “radical” and “violent” clarifies he is not speaking of all Muslims. However, he reinforces stereotypes about Islam when he addresses a general audience this way. In a second edition, Foster could analyze Romney’s speeches and interviews regarding Islam, as well as Romney’s new book No Apology: The Case for American Greatness (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2010).

6. The title of the book, A Different God, seems to place concern about theological differences about God at the center, although that actually receives little treatment. A second edition could include a full chapter on doctrinal differences and similarities between Mormon thought and evangelical Christianity.

7. Foster includes the full text of the speech in Appendix A, pp. 225–331.

8. A fuller discussion of Romney’s and Kennedy’s respective audiences, political climate, voting records, and political positions could improve the discussion on how religion may have impacted candidate claims and voter decisions.

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AUTHOR LINDA SILLITOE, 61, DIED OF A HEART ATTACK on 7 April 2010. Well-known to Mormon audiences for her poem “Song of Creation,” her journalistic coverage of the Sonia Johnson excommunication, and her co-authored account of the Mark Hofmann forgeries and murders, Sillitoe wrote prolifically in many genres, from fiction and poetry to history and journalism, to literary criticism and personal essay.

Sillitoe was a staff writer for the Deseret News and a news feature editor for Utah Holiday magazine. A long-time SUNSTONE contributor, Sillitoe also published in the New York Times, the Philadelphia Inquirer, Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought, and Exponent II, for which she was poetry editor. She also wrote for many Utah venues, including Utah Business, City Weekly, and the Salt Lake City Observer.

Sillitoe’s much-acclaimed “Song of Creation” was published in Dialogue in 1979. “Through a difficult growing up and all the years of trying to figure out how to be me and be a Mormon woman, this poem has sustained me, been vision enough of the destination to encourage me along the path,” Dialogue editor Kristine Haglund commented recently on the blog By Common Consent. “And [this piece] is at the very root of my conviction that poetry matters . . . May her voice have long echoes.”

Lavina Fielding Anderson called Sillitoe “one of the strongest and earliest voices for Mormon feminists.” “I loved the suppleness and subtleties of her style,” Anderson told the Salt Lake Tribune on 9 April 2010. “Her poems, written as a young mother balancing child-rearing needs with the passion to write, articulated those dilemmas, discovered afresh every generation, as well as they’ve ever been done. Her novel, Sideways to the Sun, made her the voice of a sisterhood taking both Mormonism and motherhood seriously.”

An editorial in the Salt Lake Tribune, 12 April 2010, asserted that Sillitoe will be best remembered for Salamander: The Story of the Mormon Forgery Murders, the exhaustive account of Mark Hofman’s crimes that she co-wrote with Allen Roberts. “The strength of Salamander is that it lines up all the complex details and how detectives and forensics experts came to unravel them,” the editorial said. “Unlike some of the other books, this account also is remarkably balanced in its understanding of the facts, the people and their culture . . . Linda Sillitoe will long be remembered for helping to explain the inexplicable.”

“In becoming a journalist, I learned skills I still have to practice,” Sillitoe wrote in a SUNSTONE essay in 1990: “to look straight on, to ask questions, to speak up, to confront in ways that poetry and fiction don’t necessarily do. But then neither does journalism necessarily, certainly not in Utah where many questions are never asked, many powerful people are never interviewed by people they do not employ, and certain stories can find no home” (SUNSTONE, December 1990: 14).

Sillitoe is survived by her husband, John, who recently retired as curator of special collections at Weber State University, and by children Melissa, Rob, and Cynthia. Sillitoe did not wish to be eulogized at a public funeral, but family, colleagues, and friends gathered on June 12 for a memorial sponsored by friends of the Marriott Library, which houses her papers.

With this issue in advanced preparation at the time of her passing SUNSTONE is planning to publish a more fitting tribute in a future issue.

MORMON DOCTRINE DISCONTINUED

DESERET BOOK HAS DECIDED TO STOP PRODUCING one of the most influential—and controversial—books of Mormonism: Bruce R. McConkie’s Mormon Doctrine. McConkie was a member of the First Council of the Seventy—and son-in-law of apostle and scriptorian Joseph Fielding Smith—when in 1958, he published a doctrinal exposition of Mormonism organized into alphabetical entries. In addition to defending LDS doctrine, the book condemned many mainstream Christian doctrines, which McConkie dubbed “apostate” and “sectarian.”

The publication of Mormon Doctrine caused immediate
consternation. Mark E. Petersen, one of two apostles commissioned to review the first edition, recommended 1,067 corrections. Apostle Marion G. Romney objected to the “repeated use of the word ‘apostate’ and related terms in a way which to many seems discourteous and to others gives offense.” One of the most controversial passages of the first edition identified the Roman Catholic Church as “the mother of harlots.”

Unwilling to embarrass McConkie, then-President David O. McKay decided that, instead of being revised, the book would simply not be republished. This incident prompted a new policy requiring the Quorum of the Twelve to approve before publication any book written by a General Authority.

However, some years later, McConkie obtained grudging permission from McKay to republish the book. The second edition included important revisions in content and tone. Privately, McConkie insisted that changes had been made not because the original had been wrong but because some of its statements had generated negative publicity.

The second edition retained McConkie’s assertion that people of African descent would never be allowed to hold the priesthood during mortal life. That statement was changed after the 1978 revelation lifting the priesthood ban, but a statement was left to the effect that black Africans are descended from Cain.

Deseret Book spokesperson Gail Halladay told the Salt Lake Tribune on 21 May 2010 that Mormon Doctrine has been discontinued due to “low sales”—a claim that some book-sellers and bloggers contest. Mormon Doctrine’s bestseller ranking at Amazon.com is higher than Spencer W. Kimball’s The Miracle of Forgiveness and LeGrand Richards’s A Marvelous Work and a Wonder. At Amazon.com, Mormon Doctrine now sells, used, for $45 (paperback) and $80 (hardcover). The rare first edition sells for about $300.

The Encyclopedia of Mormonism lists Mormon Doctrine among 29 books “that have made significant contributions to the understanding of doctrine.” Despite being revered by many Mormons, some Latter-day Saints disparagingly called it “Mostly Mormon Doctrine” or “McConkie Doctrine.”

Sociologist Armand Mauss told the Salt Lake Tribune on 21 May 2010 that Mormon Doctrine is going out of print “none too soon, especially given the current public relations preoccupation of the LDS Church.” LDS author Gregory Prince, who has written about Mormon-Catholic relations during the McKay administration, said he is “delighted” with the news, and added that the book “has done some serious damage.”

“It is a travesty for the Church, and particularly for its black members, Catholics, and others, that [McConkie’s] opinion stood as doctrine for 50 years,” wrote LDS author Linda King Newell in a letter to the editor published in the Salt Lake Tribune, 28 May 2010. “Now, LDS Church leaders should follow up with a comprehensive publication (perhaps called Mormon Doctrine Revisited) that corrects all of the 1,067 errors for its membership and the world.”

On a lighter note, Salt Lake Tribune columnist Robert Kirby wrote on 27 May 2010 about his experience as a young missionary in Uruguay reading the first ten pages of Mormon Doctrine before putting the book down. “I’m far too independent when it comes to overly legalistic treatments of stuff I love,” he confessed. “Faith for me is more art than bureaucracy, and Mormon Doctrine read like a history of rock ‘n’ roll penned by Joseph Stalin.”

MORMONS SPEAK UP TO SUPPORT, CONDEMN ARIZONA IMMIGRATION LAW

SINCE ARIZONA PASSED SB1070, A CONTROVERSIAL immigration law making it a state crime not to carry proof of citizenship, LDS missionaries serving in Spanish-speaking areas of the Grand Canyon State have had many doors slammed in their faces. The reason: The man behind the new law is a Mormon.

“Invaders, that’s what they are,” senator Russell Pearce (R-Mesa) told National Public Radio two years ago, referring to undocumented immigrants. “Invaders on the American sovereignty, and it can’t be tolerated.”

Pearce, who admits to feeling uncomfortable with the way illegal immigrants are changing America, says he may next introduce legislation challenging the 14th Amendment which declares any child born in the U.S. a citizen.
Kenneth Patrick Smith, a Mesa lawyer who serves as president of a Spanish-speaking LDS branch in Mesa, believes Pearce’s law has tarnished the LDS Church’s image among Latinos.

“It’s a great disconnect,” he told the Arizona Republic on 18 May 2010, “because on the one hand, the missionaries are out there preaching brotherly love, kindness, charity, tolerance, faith, hope, etc., and then they see on TV a quote-unquote Mormon pushing this legislation that makes them not only . . . terrified but also terrorized.”

Smith’s sentiment was echoed on 29 April 2010 by fellow Spanish-language branch president and lawyer, William R. Richardson. “I can tell you that there are many in this area (including much of the Anglo population) who truly abhor the things that Russell Pearce is doing and saying to this most vulnerable people,” Richardson wrote in a letter to the Texas Civil Rights Review. “Pearce and his acolytes give the Church unwelcome attention.”

Other Mormons have come to Pierce’s defense both in Arizona and in Utah, where state representative Stephen Eric Sandstrom (R-Orem) would like to pass a similar law. LDS supporters of tougher immigration laws often quote the 12th Article of Faith: (“We believe in . . . obeying, honoring, and sustaining the law”) to bolster their position.

“Utah is seen as a state that welcomes illegal immigrants,” complained Sandstrom on 20 April 2010 to the Salt Lake Tribune. “We almost encourage it with driving privilege cards and in-state tuition for illegals. With Arizona making the first step in this direction, Utah needs to pass a similar law or we will see a huge influx of illegals. The real issue is just establishing a rule of law in our state.” Sandstrom served an LDS mission to Venezuela.

Pearce and Sandstrom have an ally in LDS TV and radio talk show host Glenn Beck, who has been lambasting illegal immigration for years. “Let me get something straight here for those illegal aliens that might be watching the program,” Beck said in 2007. “If you break into my country . . . I’m going to take your DNA, and I’m going to put you on a plane and I’m going to send you the hell back to your freaking country.”

While Catholic and Episcopal bishops have criticized the new Arizona law, the LDS Church has declined to take a position on the issue, which, according to LDS spokesperson Kim Farah, is “clearly the province of the government.”

“However, Church leaders have urged compassion and careful reflection when addressing immigration issues affecting millions of people,” she told the Arizona Republic on 21 May 2010.

Sandstrom says he has never been told by Church leaders to “cease and desist” in his efforts to pass tougher immigration laws. “I’ve been told to do what I feel is right for the state and my constituents,” he told the Salt Lake Tribune on 30 April 2010.

Deseret News columnist Jerry Johnston believes laws such as Arizona’s SB1070 are unlikely to be passed in Utah because “Utah has thousands of active LDS members and members of other faiths who are here illegally,” he wrote on 30 April 2010. “Many have children who were born here and are therefore U.S. citizens. The thought of one group of tithe-paying Mormons going after another group of tithe-paying Mormons is too unsavory. It flies in the face of Christian ideals.”

LDS columnist and blogger McKay Coppins opines that even though immigration issues are complex, racist attitudes are always un-Christian. “As long as there are immigrants living in our ward boundaries, we should be bound by our conscience, our religion, and our covenants to treat them with the utmost respect and compassion,” he wrote last year in Mormon Times. “Should it really matter where these Saints are living, or what documentation they have?”

Tony Yapias, of Utah’s advocacy group Proyecto Latino, told the Salt Lake Tribune on 27 May 2010 that he would like to see the LDS Church break its silence and speak up on the issue. Until that happens, he warns, “You’re going to have these Mormon legislators introduce all types of laws, racist laws, in the state [of Utah], like what happened in Arizona.”
Apostle M. Russell Ballard lamented “the confusion and distortion of womanhood in contemporary society,” and denounced “popular culture today [which] often makes women look silly, inconsequential, mindless, and powerless.”

Boyd K. Packer, President of the Quorum of the Twelve—who, due to frail health, spoke from his seat—said that Satan is “persistent in attacking the home and the family.” “The ultimate end of all activity in the Church is that a man and his wife and their children might be happy at home,” he added, “protected by the principles and laws of the gospel, sealed safely in the covenants of the everlasting priesthood.”

In a different vein, President Dieter F. Uchtdorf urged Church members not to judge new converts but “to welcome and love all of God’s children, including those who might dress, look, speak, or just do things differently.” In previous talks, he has joked about the difficulties he’d had learning to speak English years ago during pilot training in the U.S. “It is not good to make others feel as though they are deficient,” he added. “Let us bestow upon our brothers and sisters in the Church a special measure of humanity, compassion, and charity so that they feel, at long last, they have finally found home.”

Defeated. LDS Senator BOB BENNETT, 76, after the Utah Republican Convention gave him only 27 percent of votes in his bid for reelection despite endorsement from former Republican Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney. Though he is still popular with voters, Utah delegates charged that Bennett is not conservative enough. In August 2009, when Bennett published Leap of Faith, reaffirming his faith in the Book of Mormon, the Salt Lake Tribune ran a story questioning the timing of the book, which had been released the same day Bennett was attacked for co-sponsoring a bipartisan health care reform bill.

Disinvited. LDS Senate Majority leader HARRY REID, 70, D-Nevada, days before he was supposed to speak at a “Why I Believe” fireside in Las Vegas. The Tule Springs Stake cancelled the fireside after receiving emails and phone messages from Mormons who threatened to disrupt the event. According to a blog entry posted at MILLENIALLSTAR.ORG on 31 March 2010, a stake member called Reid “the most evil man on the earth.” Another said, “If I see Harry Reid in the temple, I am going to hit him.” Reid, a moderate Democrat, is a lighting rod for conservative anger because of his support for health care reform and other Democrat-led initiatives.

Protested. Former Massachusetts governor and once presidential hopeful MITT ROMNEY, 63, at a book-signing event at a Mormon bookstore in La Jolla, California. The protesters, who stood outside the store, said Romney should apologize for Mormon involvement in California’s Proposition 8, which banned same-sex marriage in that state. The title of Romney’s book is No Apology: The Case for American Greatness.

Awarded. KATE HOLBROOK, a fellowship in Mormon studies from the University of Utah’s Tanner Humanities Center. A doctoral student at Boston University, Holbrook chose the dissertation topic, “Radical Food: Mormon Foodways and the American Mainstream.” Holbrook told The Salt Lake Tribune on 10 May 2010 that the ubiquitous Mormon Jell-O shows “Mormons value celebrations” and that so-called “funeral potatoes,” a potato and cheese casserole, are prepared by people who “have put aside their egos” and are “trying to please the general palate.”

Published. The “authorized and official” biography of JOSEPH SMITH. According to a press release, the new book was written under the direction of the resurrected Joseph
Smith himself. The author, Christopher, who “uses no last name,” is believed to be CHRISTOPHER MARC NEMELKA, author of *The Sealed Portion of the Book of Mormon* (2004) and other publications about topics such as polygamy, the reality of resurrected beings, and the temple endowment. Nemelka has been disciplined by the LDS Church (apparently more than once) and no longer considers himself a member of the Church.

**Married.** LDS author TY MANSFIELD, 32, on 22 May 2010 in the Salt Lake City Temple, six years after co-authoring the faith-promoting memoir *In Quiet Desperation*, in which he identified himself as homosexual and likely to remain unmarried. Bloggers have both criticized and defended Mansfield’s decision to marry a woman. An open letter posted at DANIELLEDONTDOIT.COM asked Mansfield’s fiancée DANIELLE PALMER to reconsider her decision in light of the experience of LDS women whose marriages to homosexual men ended up in divorce.

**Separated—and Reconciled.** LDS singer SHAWN SOUTHWICK, 50, and her husband, CNN anchor LARRY KING, 76, after Southwick accused King of having an affair with her younger sister SHANNON ENGEMANN, 45. Tabloids had a field day when Little League coach HECTOR PENATE, 31, then claimed to have had an affair with Southwick—an allegation Southwick denies. Shortly after filing for divorce, Southwick and King reconciled. “We love our children, we love each other, we love being a family,” King and Southwick said in a statement. This is Southwick’s second marriage. King has been married eight times.

**Arrested.** BYU sophomore STETSON HALLAM, 20, on charges of assaulting and attempting to kidnap a 19-year-old coed whom he was home teaching and pursuing romantically. According to a police affidavit, on 6 April 2010, Hallam offered the woman a “gift” which turned out to be a bin with a lockable lid and handles. When the coed opened the lid, Hallam allegedly incapacitated her with a taser and attempted to handcuff her. Hallam later apologized to the woman, saying his actions were an April Fool’s joke.

**Settling.** DENNIS LEE KEATING II, after obtaining $17 million by fraud, mostly from fellow Mormons in the Temecula, California, area. A former counselor in a bishopric in nearby Corona, Keating is one of several con artists who have been in the news for using their Mormon connections to prey on LDS investors—a technique called “affinity fraud.” Government agencies and community leaders held a free “Fraud College” conference in Utah on 1 June 2010 to call attention to the problem. The LDS Church declined to participate in the event, saying that Church leaders have been warning members about this type of fraud for years.

**Awarded.** KERRY LEWIS, 38, $1.4 million in damages by a jury who found the Boy Scouts of America and the LDS Church liable for sexual abuse he endured in the 1980s. On 13 April 2010, the court ruled the LDS Church responsible for 25% of the damages, but the Church will not have to pay because it settled with Lewis and seven other victims more than a year ago. In 1983, TIMUR DYKES told an LDS bishop that he had molested 17 Boy Scouts, including Lewis. Dykes was eventually convicted on various abuse charges and jailed.

**Extradited.** From Honduras, JACQUELINE TARTSA LEBARON, 44, daughter of the late polygamist leader of the Church of the Lamb of God, ERVIL LEBARON. She is accused of helping to orchestrate the 1988 shooting deaths of three former sect members and an 8-year-old child. Ervil died in 1981 in Utah State Prison, where he’d been serving a life sentence for masterminding the 1977 murder of RULON ALLRED, the leader of another polygamist group.

**Appointed.** WENDELL NIELSEN, 69, president of the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. On 21 January 2010, Nielsen succeeded Warren S. Jeffs, who is serving 10 years to life on two counts of acting as an accomplice to rape for his role in arranging a 2002 marriage between a 14-year-old girl and her 19-year-old first cousin. Despite Jeff’s incarceration and his own assertions that he is no longer a prophet, some adherents still regard Jeffs as the spiritual leader of the secretive church.

**Sentenced.** MERRILL LEROY JESSOP, 35, to 75 years in prison for the sexual assault of a 15-year-old girl while living at the Yearning for Zion compound the FLDS Church owns in Texas. Jessop is the fourth FLDS member convicted on sexual assault charges since the United States government raided the compound in April 2008.
The Complete Discourses of Brigham Young

"I could jump up and holl[er]. My blood was as clear as West India rum, and my flesh was clear."*

A new, five-volume collection, *The Complete Discourses of Brigham Young*, makes available every known published and previously unpublished sermon (discourse, speech, or public teaching) of the second president of the Church from April 1832 until Young’s death in 1877.

The texts of Young’s unpublished sermons are taken from various manuscript collections at LDS Church Archives: the Brigham Young Addresses, Brigham Young Minutes, Brigham Young Office and Secretary Journals, and the Thomas Bullock Minutes, as well as from the diaries of Brigham Young, Willard Richards, John D. Lee, and Heber C. Kimball. Some of the homilies come from the “History of Brigham Young” and “Journal History of the Church.”

These five volumes, including a preface and twenty-six-page index, are limited to 325 sets. They are printed on archival-quality paper, Smythe-sewn, and cased in linen with a bound-in satin ribbon. Oversized at 8½ x 11 inches, they occupy about ten inches of horizontal shelf space.

Even those who are familiar with Young’s life and teachings will find surprises in his sermons, such as his verdict that God allowed Parley P. Pratt to be murdered for having committed adultery (“his blood was spilt for adultery”) and that Latter-day Saints should abstain from meat (“the use of beef, mutton, and pork should be dispensed with entirely”). “All Indians on this continent are of Israel,” he declared, while preaching that the sun and moon are inhabited celestial spheres.

Believing the earth to be a living soul, the LDS president said the ocean tides reflected the “breathing of the earth.” Young further taught that God was at one time human: “As he was, so are we now. As he is now, so we shall become.”

Young owned African slaves and so he sympathized with the secessionist South, saying he was “pleased with the news” of Southern hostilities. He derisively called the nation’s president “King Abraham Lincoln.”

Young also denied that he was a prophet, saying Joseph Smith alone deserved that honor. The second Church president was comfortable in his role as “caretaker,” rather than prophet, until one of Joseph’s sons became old enough to take the lead—or until Jesus Christ returned. In the interim, and believing himself to be one of the “best financiers on earth,” Young considered himself as capable an administrator as anyone in overseeing all aspects of Utah life, including church, state, and business.

Richard S. Van Wagoner says of the project: “As I worked on these transcripts, my esteem for President Young grew. His facility with language and ability to address complex issues on the fly rank him among the most able preachers and, as Utah’s governor, most talented politicians of the day—just as capable, I think, as any U.S. president of his time.”

*Brigham Young, Feb. 16, 1849, on his reaction to being introduced to polygamy, from the Manuscript History of Brigham Young.

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