SUNSTONE
MORMON EXPERIENCE, SCHOLARSHIP, ISSUES, AND ART

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MorMon confeSSional MeMoirS
by Phyllis Barber (p.31)

o. S. card aS MythMaker
by Christopher C. Smith (p.38)

the ProPhet
Claude
Fiction by Jack Harrell (p.57)

March 2011—$7.50

Borderlands
A NEW PLAY BY ERIC SAMUELSSEN

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"SucceSS" and THE BODY OF CHRIST
by Bob Mesle (p.66)

MORMON CONFESSIONAL MEMOIRS
by Phyllis Barber (p.37)

O. S. CARD AS MYTHMAKER
by Christopher C. Smith (p.52)

"SUCCESS" AND THE BODY OF CHRIST
by Bob Mesle (p.66)

THE PROPHET CLAUDE
Fiction by Jack Harrell (p.57)

LOW LOW MILES!!!
Incomplete proposals or proposals submitted after the deadline will be considered on a time/space-available basis. Sessions will be accepted according to standards of excellence in scholarship, thought, and expression.

SUBMIT PROPOSALS TO:
Symposium Director
Mary Ellen Robertson
MARY.ELLEN@SUNSTONEMAg AzINE.com
To submit proposals by mail, please send to:
SUNSTONE
2011 SALT LAKE SYMPOSIUM
343 North Third West
Salt Lake City, Utah 84103-1215

We especially encourage proposals that focus on this year’s theme. This symposium plans an in-depth exploration of the artifacts Mormons construct to signify their faith, beliefs, history, and culture. We will examine a wide variety of creations: Mormon art, architecture, blogs and web sites, apps, books, comics, crafts, cookbooks, games, films, jewelry and apparel, magazines, message boards and online communities, statues and figurines, textiles, YouTube videos, and the near-ubiquitous resin grapes. We will also examine the role that parody, satire, and kitsch play in Mormon material culture.

What do these many creations say about Mormonism or about the Mormons who created them? How does Mormonism find expressions in the material items its members create to identify themselves as Mormon, express their faith, or show their membership in the “tribe” (or for others, their exit from the tribe).

SUBMITTING PROPOSALS: In order to receive first-round consideration, proposals should be received by 1 May 2011.

ALL PROPOSALS MUST INCLUDE:
• Session title
• One-hundred-word abstract
• Name, brief bio or vita, and contact information for all proposed presenters
• A list of any audio/visual equipment needs (or specify no AV needed)
• A brief summary of the topic’s relevance and importance to Mormon studies
• If possible, please include a preliminary draft

Proposal Deadline: 1 May 2011 for first-round consideration
SUBSCRIPTIONS

Subscriptions are $58 for 6 issues; $100 for 12 issues; $138 for 18 issues about Mormons and the LDS Church, and short reflections on cancelations. All subscription prices subject to change without notice.

Bona fide student and missionary subscriptions are $10 less than the above rates. A $10 service charge will be deducted from the refund amount on cancelations. All subscription prices subject to change without notice.

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UPDATE

Who likes Mormons?, Missionary visa woes, Provo Tabernacle burns, Massacre site may go national, Hairy and not-so-hairy Mormons, more . . .

IF THERE BE FAULTS, THEY BE THE FAULTS OF THE PRINTER

Some readers may have noticed that the pages of issue 161 were all off by one, the table of contents appearing on the second page and page 80 appearing on the back inside cover. This was due to a printing error. Since the error didn’t impair the readability of the issue, we decided against reprinting. We appreciate K and K Printing’s professionalism in addressing this situation.

Front cover art by Jeanette Atwood
Back cover art by Galen Smith
ON GLENN

IN HER LETTER to the editor (SUNSTONE 161, December 2011) about our article “Glenn Beck: Rough Stone Roaring” (SUNSTONE 159, June 2010), Kathryn Hemingway says that I ignore the fact that Beck apologized for calling President Obama a racist. In truth, confronted with his words the next day, Beck said, “Well, I stand by that. And I—I deem him a racist based on really his own standard of racism—the standard of the left.” When asked by Katie Couric of CBS if he regretted having called Obama a racist who had “a deep-seated hatred for white people or the white culture,” he apologized not for the sentiment, but “for the way it was phrased.”

Just this week (20 January 2011) when asked once more if he regretted making such remarks (and similar ones), Beck tried to brush them all off as a joke. Comparing himself to Jon Stewart and The Simpsons, he responded, “Anything I said in jokes, no [I don't regret] . . . . Comedy is comedy.” But reviewing the context of the original statement, shows that Beck's intention was anything but comedic. Beck's is the age-old rhetorical trick of accusing someone and then saying you were just joking, thus criticizing the victim anew for not having a sense of humor.

Hemingway defends Beck against charges of racism by saying, “Beck has gone out of his way to laud the civil rights movement.” However, Beck's appropriation of the imagery and language of the Civil Rights Movement in general and Martin Luther King in particular seems particularly cynical and manipulative. A good example is Beck asking his viewers (10 December 2010) to sign a pledge to follow King's Pledge of Non-Violence while nearly every day he violates three key elements of that pledge: “Walk and talk in the manner of love; for God is love”; “observe with friend and foe the ordinary rules of courtesy”; and “refrain from violence of fist, tongue, and heart.”

A perusal of Beck's books and an analysis of his radio and television programs reveals an underscenario of racial attitudes, images, and rhetoric, not only about blacks but also Latinos, Asians, Jews, and Muslims. An example of Beck's anti-black, anti-Muslim (and anti-Progressive) sentiment can be seen in his suggestion (on his 8 June 2010 radio program) that Obama's use of his given name “Barack” was “To identify, not with America—you don't take the name Barack to identify with America. You take the name Barack to identify with . . . the heritage, maybe, of your father in Kenya, who is a radical.”

Hemingway asserts that my calling Beck a “Latter-day Joe McCarthy” is not justified because “Rees should have cited an example of Beck's attacking someone who did not identify as a Communist.” But Beck's many attempts to link Obama with Communism, Marxism, fascism, radical Islam, Black Nationalism, and radical Christianity is exactly the kind of thing McCarthy honed to a dark art. Beck's drumbeat of criticism of Obama seems directed at delegitimizing the President, calling into question his patriotism, his integrity, and even his Christianity.

In his own letter in the same issue, Michael Paulos states that “it appears that Beck is not steeped in Mormon culture,” nor, apparently, I add, in Mormon history, doctrine, or ethics. That is a point I was trying to make in my article: Beck does not seem to reflect basic Mormon principles of civility, honesty, and fair play. My article highlights his tendency not simply to disagree with, but to demonize, liberal and progressives. As my article suggests, that tendency would target many Latter-day Saints—even some general authorities. The gospel of Christ asks us to resist the temptation to dehumanize others, even if we consider them evil.

Paulos states that Beck has been criticized “for his staunch opposition to President Obama's agenda, not for his LDS membership.” But commentators and the general public are increasingly and unfavorably connecting Beck with the Mormon Church. A Google search of “Glenn Beck Mormon” and “Glenn Beck Latter-day Saint” brings up more than 554,000 hits—as compared, for example, with 107,000 for Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, 279,000 for President Monson, and 231,000 for Senator Reid. Beck is linked more and more with the LDS Church, much, I feel, to the detriment of the Church's image—and its mission. Beck takes such extreme positions, uses such inflammatory rhetoric, and evokes so much controversy, it is difficult to understand how he can represent the message of the Restoration and the three-part message of faith, hope, and charity of the Christian gospel.

ROBERT A. REES
Santa Cruz Mountains
A CALL FOR READERS

In 1986, Levi Peterson introduced us to the Cowboy Jesus in THE BACKSLIDER. Readers will remember how the world seemed to stand still as Frank Windham, against a backdrop of rural life in the western Rockies, was given an unexpected audience with the divine.

Prepare yourself for another transformative literary moment as Jack Harrell takes you to Wal-Mart with the LDS prophet, to a Metallica concert with a hitch-hiking Jesus, and to a secret rendezvous with the devil prior to making a calling and election made sure.

Harrell is chair of the Department of English at BYU-Idaho and is responsible for some of the most intense contemporary LDS fiction ever written.

A Sense of Order and Other Stories
Jack Harrell | 220 pages | $26.95 | hardback

"Written with candor, these poems transform ordinary experiences into extraordinary glimpses into a woman's personal life. Bushman-Carlton recalls such things as grade school immunizations, a fire drill during gym class showers, and a teacher demonstrating how to put on a brassiere. She writes lovingly of her son dancing in his room, her daughter learning about death at medical school, her concerns for a grandson. With delicacy, humor, and discretion, she tells what women know and what men ought to know about a woman's side of things." —Susan Elizabeth Howe

Her Side of It: Poems | Marilyn Bushman-Carlton | 120 pages | $16.95 | paperback

Signature Books
CORNUCOPIA

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

Scripture notes

In this regular column, Michael Vinson, a master’s graduate of the Divinity School of the University of Cambridge and a frequent devotional speaker at Sunstone symposiums, delves into personal and scholarly aspects of scripture.

JESUS AND MORMONS AND ZOMBIES

For ye are like unto whited sepulchers, which indeed appear beautiful outward but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness.

—MATTHEW 23:27

THIS YEAR THE CHURCH READING PLAN FOR Sunday School is the New Testament, but instead I have been wondering more about our current cultural zeitgeist that is fascinated with zombies, vampires, and the undead. This enthralment is reflected in bestselling books such as Pride and Prejudice and Zombies, Abraham Lincoln—Vampire Hunter, the Twilight series, of course, and even a spoof of a children’s reader, Dick and Jane and Vampires. “The new man is not a friend. Run, Dick! Run, Jane!”

Perhaps you have also wondered why, in the past few years, the popular media has been obsessed with zombies and the undead. Is it just a temporary fad, or does it reflect something deeper about our culture? If you think about it, the undead and zombies, are by definition, consumers of the living. They take your life, soul or blood, leaving you an empty shell.

Perhaps the reason we are obsessed with the eaters of the living is because so many of us are leading soulless lives. Perhaps something about having our life—our purpose—sucked from us resonates with us on a cultural level. So what does a soulless life look like?

I imagine that for each person, the soulless life would be somewhat different, but it might have in common some of the following: a lack of purpose; an inability to self-direct our lives; a vague feeling of not being satisfied; and a feeling of incompleteness. There are probably many more I am not listing.

While popular media portrayals of the undead might be a current cultural reflection, the lack of soul in our lives—the emptiness that we feel—is actually something that some intellectual historians have written about. T.J. Jackson Lears, a professor at Rutgers, has written in his book, No Place of Grace, about the worries that beset turn-of-the-twentieth-century Americans: “Late Victorians felt hemmed in by busyness, clutter, propriety; they were beset by religious anxieties and by debilitating worries about financial security.” How familiar do these words seem to Mormons today? Part of Lear’s thesis is that Americans turned to consumption—material consumerism—to try to satisfy an inner, spiritual hunger. It proved to be a vain effort—or given the current vampire vogue, should we say “vein” effort?

AT FIRST THERE doesn’t seem to be much to relate Zombies to the New Testament, though perhaps there is a future bestseller lurking there—Peter and Paul and the Undead? But Jesus may have spoken more directly about zombies—the undead—than we realize.

Consider what Jesus might be referring to when he speaks about “whited sepulchers.” Some New Testament scholars think he is referring to the practice of erecting monuments over tombs—in effect, dressing the dead, for whom...
no dress is now needed. Jesus’ phrase might apply to the vanity with which we dress ourselves, diet ourselves, exercise ourselves, outfit ourselves with new cars and homes—all to appear beautiful to others, but all the while living empty—even dead—lives.

What does the “whited sepulchers” analogy mean for Mormons today? Could our inner spiritual life be empty, even though to outward appearances, our life appears complete?

Let me start by clarifying that by “spiritual,” I do not necessarily mean religious or Church practice, which is largely composed of activities easily seen by others. For example, we may have ward callings, attend church and the temple, do our home or visiting teaching and yet still might feel we have fairly empty spiritual lives. Can Church activities become just another form of “consumerism” that can be used to adorn and fill up (but not truly “fill”) our lives?

HAT IS THE answer? Jesus does not list the solutions to the problems of soullessness in this verse in Matthew; he is identifying the problem so that his audience can completely understand. He is also giving them a bit of a double entendre in this analogy—not only are their spiritual lives as empty as tombs, but they are also as unclean as a tomb would be to a Jew (because of their beliefs about corpse impurity).

I wish I had an application or answer that you could plug into your life, but your solution will ultimately be unique to your circumstances and individual temperament. Yet what your unique answer to an empty life will have in common with others will be an inner feeling of completeness, of following your destiny, of directing your own life.

Instead of an answer, I have a question that might help motivate us all to find our inner life and meaning. Is Jesus suggesting in the analogy of the dead and impure tomb that an empty life is also a sinful one?

MICHAEL VINSON
Star Valley, Wyoming

Adventures of a Mormon bookseller

CRITICAL CONDITION

In this new Cornucopia column, Curt Bench, owner and operator of Benchmark Books (www.benchmarkbooks.com), a specialty bookstore in Salt Lake City that focuses primarily on used and rare Mormon books, will tell stories—both humorous and appalling—from his 35-plus years in the LDS book business.

I N THE USED AND RARE BOOK BUSINESS, WE SEE books in about every condition you can imagine, looking like they’ve been used mainly as doorstops or coasters for coffee cups (and by “coffee,” we LDS booksellers assume Postum, of course!) to seeming as pristine as the day they were bound at the press. Some books have obviously been read in the bathtub (a close friend of mine continues this barbaric habit despite my vehement protests) or at the kitchen table. Some book owners freely underline, highlight, and annotate their books while others would die before they’d put a mark in their precious possessions.

I thought I had just about seen it all until I bought an 1876 copy of the bound Skandinaviens Stjerne (Scandinavian Star), the official publication for the Scandinavian Mission in the nineteenth century. About a third of the way up from the bottom, dead center in the book’s back strip, is a neat little hole—courtesy of a small-caliber bullet, which penetrated well into the book. Part of the fun of finding a book in this condition is speculating on how the bullet found its way into this bound mission newspaper—in the spine, no less. Was the shooter a disgruntled Oslo missionary who had had one too many doors slammed in his face? Was this volume the victim of random target-practicing at a dump? Or perhaps something more faith-promoting had happened: A missionary under attack by a violent, anti-Mormon mob clutches the book to his breast and bravely faces his armed assailants. An attacker fires, and the bullet enters the book, stopping just inches from the missionary’s heart. The mob gasps in awe at the miracle and instantly converts.

Some years ago, we bought a used paperback copy of The Measure of Our Hearts by Marvin J. Ashton, priced it, and put it out for sale. The customer who bought it soon returned the book, saying that it wasn’t the book he’d expected. Puzzled, we opened the cover and looked at the title page which read: You Don’t Have to be Gay: Hope and Freedom for Males Struggling with Homosexuality or for Those Who Know of Someone Who Is. A previous owner had taken the book block of the Ashton title out of the cover and glued the block of this book in its place. I suspect that the previous owner perpetrated this radical re-binding so he could read about his same-sex attraction without anyone around him knowing about it. On two levels, this story confirms the wisdom never to judge a book by its cover!
All-seeing eye

THE FRUITS OF BOREDOM

Matt Page is no slacker. He’s motivated. Instead of being just a “Good Samaritan,” he is striving to become a “Great Samaritan.” Whereas “most people know all the words to a few select hymns, [he knows] the first line of many different hymns.” He confesses that he is “white but not delightful.” He will testify “The Church is true. But I’m still not going to stake conference.”

In August 2008, Page, a Utah-based graphic designer and illustrator, began My Religious Blog, subtitled “The Substandard Works of a Utah-Mormon” as an outlet for posting random thoughts and Mormon cultural musings that arise as his mind wanders occasionally (read that as “frequently”) during church meetings. The blog has been steadily gaining fans from all points on the Mormon spectrum. They groan at terrible puns—he’s thinking about “writing a movie about a werewolf who joins the Church after reading the Book of Mormon. It’s called Lycan the Scriptures. They consider his ideas—presented complete with sample images—for new video games. For example, his version of PacMan has the eponymous character following Joseph Smith’s instruction in D&C 129 to extend a hand toward the brightly colored ghosts he encounters in the maze in order to test what kind of spirit beings they are. They knowingly sigh at admissions such as: “I know we are not supposed to go against the teachings of the Church or voice our dissenting opinions, but I have a confession: I personally do not hope to endure all things,” and, “I guess I would have to say my favorite stage of the Pride Cycle is the stage where I am rich and prosperous.”

Putting his design skills to good use, Page often creates illustrations to enhance his observations. For instance, a recent spoof of the Church’s “I’m a Mormon” ad campaign features a man’s fist bearing brass knuckles that have “CTR” emblazoned over each hump. Its caption: “I’m a thug, a bully, a street fighter . . . and I’m a Mormon!” Another shows a “Facsimile from the Book of Waldo” with the lament that “Some things were a lot easier back then.”

My Religious Blog has recently spawned two spin-offs. Inspired by the wild success of PostSecret, Page has launched its natural successor for Mormons who have been conditioned to balk at any charge of “secrecy”: PostSacred. Begun in October 2010, this new site features postcard images containing such confessions as “Sometimes I call the Ensign the ‘Nsun,’” or (written on top of a picture of Glenn Beck), “I Used to Get Excited when there were Mormons on TV. Now I want nothing more than for Mormons to never be on TV.” Page has also just added an online store, E Pluribus Mormon, where Latter-day Saints who share his sense of humor can order shirts and merchandise with images and slogans sprung from his creative (read that as: “wandering”) mind.

To find My Religious Blog and its spinoff sites, visit www.myregis.blog. (Yes, the website's name has “regis” instead of “religious”—but that's a story explained in the blog's first post).
HAPPY BIRTHDAY, KJV

T HIS YEAR, THE KING JAMES VERSION OF THE Holy Bible turns 400 years old. Reflecting on this quadricentennial reminds me of something literary critic Edmund Wilson once wrote:

Here it is, that old tongue, with its clang and its flavor, sometimes rank, sometimes sweet, sometimes bitter; here it is in its concise solid stamp. Other cultures have felt its impact and none—in the West, at least—seems quite as accommodating to it. Yet we find we have been living with it all our lives. (From A Piece of My Mind, p. 88.)

If it is true that we in the West have been living all these years with the KJV; it is especially true of Latter-day Saints, where the "concise solid stamp" of the KJV is not only accommodated by mainstream Mormon life but so thoroughly integrated that we often speak in Elizabethan English with little thought of this linguistic inheritance. Even so, some among our ranks resist the KJV, looking upon it more like an archaic corpse from a less-enlightened dispensation. Despite the KJV's being the official translation of the Church, many members point out its numerous errors, idiosyncrasies, and outdated vocabulary, hoping that one day the Church might replace it with a "more accurate" translation. Heck, even Joseph Smith mucked around with it. But this view often obscures the KJV's deep influence in Western culture and particularly the English language, of which several recent books offer rich perspectives.

We probably hear the KJV more often than we actually read it. This is due to the tremendous influence certain idioms exert on our vernacular. "At their wits' end," "skin of my teeth," "fought the good fight," "how the mighty have fallen," or "thorn in the flesh," are among the hundreds of KJV phrases linguist David Crystal traces in *Begat: The King James Bible and the English Language*. He recounts how the language of the Bible has become part of our common culture, from the sober and serious to the bizarre and humorous.

Crystal reports that his search through the KJV turned up some 257 idioms widely used today. Unexpectedly, he found that many of them had existed in previous English translations, such as the Tyndale, Geneva, and Bishop's Bibles. This situation is not surprising, as one of His Royal Majesty's mandates to the KJV translators was to attempt a consensus among the various Bibles in use at the time, "with the former translations diligently compared and revised." From there, Crystal follows how KJV phrases appear in many forms, such as in Lincoln's presidential speeches and the episode of The Brady Bunch titled "My Brother's Keeper."

In his *Pen of Iron: American Prose and the King James Bible*, Berkeley Hebrew professor Robert Alter elaborates on the KJV's aesthetic influence in fiction. Discussing works by Herman Melville, Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, Saul Bellow, Marilynne Robinson, and Cormac McCarthy, he writes that these authors "were often impelled to argue with the canonical text, or to tease out dissident views within the biblical corpus, or to sometimes to reaffirm its conception of things, or to place biblical terms in new contexts that could be surprising or even unsettling." Alter demonstrates how writers were informed by the KJV where "style is not merely a constellation of aesthetic properties but is the vehicle of a particular vision of reality," implemented by such forms as parataxis and parallelism. Alter clearly demonstrates that American fiction has been and continues to be in a challenging dialogue with the KJV's "vision of reality," a dialogue that ultimately enriches the country's storytelling impulse to create new worlds.

While Crystal and Alter have drawn the outlines of influence, Renaissance historian Gordon Campbell recounts the origins of the KJV in a lavishly illustrated history that sheds light on the people who are rarely remembered: the translators. *Bible: The Story of the King James Version, 1611–2011* reveals the complex history of how the translation was commissioned, who the translators were, and how it all come together in the end.

Of the translators, Gordon claims: "The learning embodied in the men . . . is daunting. It is sometimes assumed that people in the Twenty-first Century know more than the benighted people of the Seventeenth Century, but in many ways the opposite is true. The population from which scholars can now be drawn is much larger than that of the Seventeenth Century, but it would be difficult now to bring together a group of more than fifty scholars with the range of languages and knowledge of other disciplines that characterized the KJV translators." Campbell's admiration for the translators is evident, and he includes an appendix with a short biography of each.

Campbell also recounts the printing history of the KJV, providing plenty of amusing accidents. One infamous occasion is when a 1631 edition left out "not" from Exodus 20:14, thereby rendering God's command to the children of Israel as "Thou shalt commit adultery." The printer was fined. Even with the looming possibility of penalties,
print the onset of World War II, his journals have only a few brief entries related to it, though he did seem to take notice of some events that would eventually prove to be important precursors to that war. One of the most prescient entries of this sort is what he wrote on Wednesday, 10 May 1933, about trends he was noticing in Germany.

Conditions in Germany are greatly disturbed and widely disturbing. Under the dictatorship of Adolph Hitler an edict of repression directed against the Jews appears to have been ruthlessly carried into effect. Anti-Semitic activities have been characteristic of the Hitler regime, and many eminent Jews have been ousted from positions of honor and trust, and their places in the learned professions made almost if not entirely unbearable. Jewish judges and barristers have been excluded from court practice and Jewish professors and instructors have been removed from the faculties of universities. Einstein, the world-famed physicist and mathematician, whose latest visit to the United States dates but a few months back, has taken up his residence in Holland, being virtually barred from his native country, Germany. Now comes word that night before last great bonfires were made of books by Jewish writers and many other volumes by foreigners. Unlike the destruction of the great Alexandrian library and that of Mayan literature by fanatical Spanish priests, this wanton and barbarous burning of books in Germany cannot destroy these records of knowledge, as, thanks to the printing press, copies of all the important works are to be found in other countries. If the regrettable act is expressive of the German mind and spirit—which is to be greatly doubted—it is an evidence of decline suggestive of an impending fall of the German nation.

Talmage passed away before he could see the true excesses of the Third Reich—the War itself, concentration camps, and the horrific and inhuman crimes we now refer to as the Holocaust. Given his careful watch of the world stage, the question can rightfully be asked: If Talmage had lived longer, would this apostle and keen observer of his times have used his various platforms within Mormonism to raise awareness of Nazi atrocities, possibly influencing Latter-day Saints to take a more pro-active stance against such evils? We will never know.

We do know, however, that if we are to answer the Savior’s call for us to be peacemakers, we as Latter-day Saint leaders and individual members must follow Elder Talmage’s example and pay close attention, as D&C 88—the section Joseph Smith called “The Olive Leaf”—says, to “things which are at home, things which are abroad; the wars and the perplexities of the nations, and the judgments which are on the land; and a knowledge also of countries and of kingdoms” (v. 79).
LEHI: Wow, crazy dream last night. Midnight pickles or revelation?

LAMAN: Great. Dad's got that look in his eye, again. Grab the nearest heresy, and hang on!

My result: The Kind of Prophet Who Needs an Entire Flippin' Continent to Himself.

Sheesh, have you no people skills? Even if your whole city is going to be destroyed because of wickedness, surely you could sugarcoat the message a little. You should really go live somewhere without people. Preferably on the other side of the planet.

SARAI: is wishing U-Haul operated out of Jerusalem.

Nephi's Facebook

LEHI: took the “What Kind of Prophet Are You?” quiz.

LAMAN: kind of likes it in the desert. The bugs, the heat, the cold, the lack of food. Yeah, I could get used to this.

LAMAN: WTFLIP? Dad wants me to be like unto a river????

LEMUEL: Dad wants me to be like unto a valley.

LAMAN: Rivers are better than valleys.

LEMUEL: Nuh uh! Rivers are dumb!

LAMAN: Rivers MAKE valleys, stupid. Without me, you’d be NOTHING!

LEMUEL: My valley caves in on your river, and you DIE!

LAMAN: Jerk.

LEMUEL: Loser.

SARAI: Forgot the plates. Now what will we eat on?

LEHI: Forgot the plates. Now what will I read?

LAMAN, LEMUEL, and SAM joined NEPHI'S Robbers. They are looking for:

Plates of Brass Laban
LABAN: The dogs seemed to enjoy their exercise more than usual today. I think they like it when their prey scream like little girls.

LEMUEL: Write this in your diary! LOL!

Kicking the Socks Offa Priss Boy
Source: www.jeru-tube.com

LEMOUEL: DOBERMANS!!!!!!!

sent via Facebook for iNePhone

LAMAN: How very prudent and foresightful of my dear brothers to choose their strongest and most experienced sibling to DO THEIR DIRTY WORK!

LABAN: Just beat Laman at a game of WORDTWIST.

Nephi: OK, gang, here’s the plan. Daphne, Velma, and I will check out the old warehouse. Scooby and Shaggy, you two go to the spooky old mansion on the hill.

Nephi: Stay the heck outta my account, Laman!
LAMAN: Zoinks! It’s the Preacher! Run for it, Scoob!
Lemuel: ROTFL! Preacherrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr
A MISSION—REALLY?!

As THE CHAOS of the remodel drew to a close and the last of the carpet was laid, our two oldest children settled into their new basement bedrooms. We soon noticed, however, that the new screen on our son’s window was missing. Turns out he wasn’t up to anything sinister; it was just easier for him to get out of the house by climbing through the window than by winding his way through the hallways and stairs to the distant front door. But we still ordered a large, noisy metal grating. When it arrived and we slipped it over the top of the window well, his temptation to use the “bat cave exit” dissipated. There were too many things to slide, lift, and replace. Besides, it wasn’t worth losing his phone over. After all, his cell phone was his true gateway to the world, giving him unfettered access to friends and the occasional girl.

The oldest of five, our son is almost eighteen, and he is really a good kid despite being the son we continue to make our own mistakes on. He’s also at a significant crossroad—he still wants us to solve his problems, but he has had a brief, alluring taste of freedom and I can hear it calling to him. The oldest, and by telling them, I managed to make something that I know many fathers and mothers have no doubt about: the fact that your son is now a happy, successful, and openly gay man, do you wish you would have pushed on with college rather than serve a mission? “I learned another language on the mission experience? “No, it was an important part of my personal development.”

My son wants to go on a mission? Really?! I’m not sure what to do. Should I discourage him? Should I encourage him? Or should I step back and let him make his own decision?

In an attempt to figure out a healthy approach to this dilemma, I began questioning my assortment of friends who, like me, are all returned missionaries but who also have complex views of Mormonism. Knowing what you know now, would you still have gone on a mission? “Of course,” comes the chorus. I ask further: Despite the fact that you are no longer a believer, would you still have gone on a mission? “Yes, I would still have gone.” Despite the fact that you are now a happy, successful, and openly gay man, do you wish you would have pushed on with college rather than serve a mission? “I learned another language on my mission, and my experience there is a large part of who I am. I’m glad I went.” Despite the fact that you are presently an atheist, would you go back and change your mission experience? “No, it was an important part of my personal development.” Despite the fact that you are bitter toward the Church now, do you wish you had done something else? “No, I don’t suppose I’d change that experience.”

Really? “YES!”

My son will soon be his own man. Regardless of my feelings or arguments, he may well choose to climb through that mission window. I guess what worries me is that on a mission, he may find the God I once believed in. If he does, will it change his view of me? Will I become less ‘Dad’ and more ‘apostate’? Will he pity me instead of love me? Will the Church gain a son while I lose mine?

TOM KIMBALL
American Fork, Utah

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

To submit a reflection by email, send it to Touchstones editor Dan Wotherspoon at: DANWOTHERSPOON@ME.COM. If submitting by mail, send it to Sunstone, 343 N. Third West, Salt Lake City, Utah 84103. Submissions should be kept somewhere under 500 words, but we are willing to make exceptions for exceptional pieces.

Please submit something right away for these upcoming topics!

Upcoming Topics: { PROMISED LAND HOPE
EVEN IF IT IS CHILLY

WHEN WE THINK of “opening a window,” most of us think of viewing some aspect of the outside world we know little about. We glimpse what it is like to be an American Muslim or how an itinerant fruit-picking family lives. We peek in on a Mormon in Nigeria or a highly paid fashion model in Manhattan. We seldom think about opening a window into our own lives. But years after my father died, a window flew up, and I gazed at a central quality of his that I had seen, yet not seen, all my life.

My father, I now believe, could be best understood by what he didn’t do. Here’s what he did do: He brought home a paycheck every week and worked hard at his job, whether selling hardware in Montgomery Ward or assembling airplanes at Eastern Aircraft. He was a loving and faithful husband and an okay father who sometimes told stories and even sang songs, and sometimes gave your face the back of his hand.

Here’s what he didn’t do: he didn’t go to any church, belong to any club like Rotary, Lions, or Masons; he didn’t have a group of friends with whom he played poker or pinochle or pool; he never went fishing, hunting, hiking, boating. He didn’t visit people. He didn’t invite people to the house; in fact, he didn’t like people to come to the house. If a car drew up to our curb, Dad would peer out the window and say, “Who the hell is that?” Of course, if people came into our house, Dad was pleasant and jolly, like the effective salesman he was. He never actually seemed relaxed with any callers, however.

Dad had no hobbies. He didn’t collect anything or make anything. He read two or three books a year, if they happened to be lying around, though he spoke with pleasure of books he had read as a boy. He didn’t go to concerts or to hear the German bands that abounded in our area. He never took Mom to the movies. He occasionally daydreamed about being an artist though he never painted or drew anything. If my mother encouraged him to take an art course at the nearby university, he would scoff and dismiss the idea. “Those guys are just full of hot air; I couldn’t learn nothing from them!” Dad was a great scoffer. Of course he had no interest in politics; he wasn’t just a skeptic; he was a cynic.

He did not like to travel. Once, in Arizona, Mother insisted he take a trip on his own to California, to see the sights and visit a chum he had worked with. He made it as far as the Arizona border, then turned around and came back, scoffing and insisting there was nothing out there to interest him. He was very healthy, if not exactly fit. He struck me as a contented man. Now I wonder how deep the contentment ran.

The window flew open after he had been dead a dozen years. I had been reading and also learning firsthand about anxiety, panic attacks, and in particular, the recently labeled agoraphobia. One and one started to add up. Of course, I was free to theorize, since dad was gone and nothing could be proved or disproved. But as I thought about his many early losses, especially of his beloved mother when he was nineteen (“That nearly killed me,” he’d say), and about the frightening effects of the Great Depression that had swept the country just two months after he married, I began to see a possible explanation for his great reluctance to try anything new, to go out into the world and take his chances with what he found, to risk, even in fairly simple social situations. Dad wasn’t lazy, as I’d always thought. He was a victim of panic disorder.

I could be wrong, of course—or, as Dad would say, “All wet!” But the opening of this window has given me a perspective to understand this nay-saying, insecure man, and his journey, as well as my own and that of my brothers. There is that about opening windows—it always lets in fresh air, even if it is chilly.

ELOUISE BELL
Edmond, Oklahoma

THE TRUTH INSIDE

THIS TIME LAST year, I lost my lovely mother. While this event caused a very big door in my life to close, it also opened a window.

I come from a very strong LDS family. Every discussion at every meal was about something Church-related. Everything I did or thought in my life was processed through a religious filter. Religion was a great motivator for some of the harder things I have accomplished in my life, getting my Eagle Scout award, going on a mission, and starting a family.

As I reflect on the first four decades of my life, I would like to think that I did all of these things because I had a great testimony and was a valiant soldier in the Lord’s army. The reality was that I was doing what my mother had taught me. The
faith I had was hers.

A few years ago, as I was wrestling to know with some certainty that the Church was true, I started to augment my studies with Internet searches about various topics. Some of the information I found troubled me. I continued to live the way my parents had brought me up, but I was starting to get angry about the things that were bothering me.

Once my mother passed away and I was no longer trying to please her, a window opened into a new world. For the first time, I felt free to consider everything I had been taught as a child and decide whether or not I really believed it. I was 40 years old. It’s about time I figure all this out, I thought.

What happened was wonderful. I realized that I could believe with my heart and that I didn’t have to believe anything that didn’t feel right to me. Jesus said that the truth will set you free, and it did. As I began to explore and trust what my heart was telling me, I was able to let go of all the anger and frustration I had been feeling.

I no longer care about Book of Mormon historicity, priesthood authority, DNA findings, and many other issues. There are many beautiful things about God and the LDS religion. I can love the Book of Mormon, hate polygamy, thank God for a prophet, and yet believe sexual orientation isn’t a switch people can turn off or on. I am no longer consumed by a quest for the truth. The truth was inside me the whole time.

My mother passed away early in the morning. My sister had called to tell me that our mother was fading fast and that I should get over there if I wanted to see her before she won’t awaken. I wish she could have stayed to live—afraid to fall asleep for fear of death rather than hoping to live until the Kingdom of God is within you.

As a Hindu, Chopra sees Jesus as an enlightened person, one who lives in God-consciousness rather than as a divine Savior. From this perspective, Chopra interprets Jesus’s statement, “I am the Light of the world” to mean Jesus was existing in a state of God-consciousness or total unity with God—a unity available to all. Likewise, Jesus’s claim that “the Kingdom of God is within you” is much like the Eastern idea of God residing within each person.

In support of this view, Chopra moves beyond the Bible’s four Gospels and includes quotations from the Gospel of Thomas, an early Christian text discovered at the Nag Hammadi site. Many verses from Thomas support the idea of the light of God residing within each person—a thought close to Mormon beliefs about the “light of Christ.”

Mormons tend to interpret the injunction, “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father in Heaven is perfect” to mean that we should keep every commandment scrupulously. Chopra interprets that scripture as a call to substitute karma—the law that gives us back what we deserve—with grace. With unconditional love, God gives us better than we deserve. In Matthew, Christ tells us that God “maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.”

Chopra believes Jesus is telling his followers that no one can be reconciled herself to the inevitability of death rather than hoping to live until the Second Coming when people will be changed to an immortal state in the twinkle of an eye.

The point of reading the New Testament isn’t to prove or disprove the literalness of its content. The point is to find a message to help us better understand ourselves and our relationship to God. Chopra writes, “Spirit, like water, remains fresh only if it flows.” Scripture moves us only when we allow it to speak to us with new insights—and sometimes another person’s point of view stimulates these insights. Chopra has moved my image of Jesus from white-robed perfection to a human being. One I can relate to.

ANN MOULTON JOHNSON
Bountiful, Utah

FOR SOME REASON, I always seem to come in on the end of a trend, so I had never read anything by Deepak Chopra until his 2008 book, The Third Jesus. As a lifelong Mormon, I’ve endured many Gospel Doctrine classes where time was spent speculating on how a few fish and a couple of loaves of bread could feed thousands or how water could be changed into wine. Accustomed to such tedium, I felt wonderfully liberated to read Chopra’s non-Christian take on the four Gospels—one that emphasizes message over miracles. Scriptures, like poetry, have nuanced layers of meaning. Seeing the Gospels through Hindu eyes takes me beyond familiar LDS interpretation to discover new meanings relevant to my spiritual growth.

Like Mormons, Chopra believes the early Church changed the character of a number of Jesus’s teachings, with many of the changes emphasizing “worship over self-transformation, prayer over meditation, and faith over inner-growth.”

As a Hindu, Chopra sees Jesus as an enlightened person, one who lives in God-consciousness rather than as a divine Savior. From this perspective, Chopra interprets Jesus’s statement, “I am the Light of the world” to mean Jesus was existing in a state of God-consciousness or total unity with God—a unity available to all. Likewise, Jesus’s claim that “the Kingdom of God is within you” is much like the Eastern idea of God residing within each person.

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BORDERLANDS
A PLAY

By Eric Samuelsen

CHARACTERS

DAVE MCGRégor . . . a salesman
GAIL LEWIS . . . an independent business owner
PHYLLIS WELLS . . . an office manager
BRIAN ROENICKE . . . a mechanic

CAST

Borderlands will be first presented by Plan-B Theatre Company 31 March–10 April 2011, funded in part by an “Access to Artistic Excellence” grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, and directed by Jerry Rapier. The original cast was:

DAVE MCGRégor . . . Kirt Bateman
GAIL LEWIS . . . Stephanie Howell
PHYLLIS WELLS . . . Teri Cowan
BRIAN ROENICKE . . . Topher Rasmussen

AUTHOR’S NOTE

BORDERLANDS MARKS A PLACE OF INTERSECTION, a liminal space where roads end but new paths begin, where no horizons reveal themselves but also where collisions do us harm. I’m a believing, practicing Mormon, and Mormonism is at its most essential a religion that preaches literally endless human possibilities, eternal progression, and growth. But we Mormons face tremendous pressure to conform, to fit in, to obey, to define ourselves in certain quite limited ways. It is, for many, a religious culture of public orthodoxy and quietly whispered rebellion. And so we carve out spaces for ourselves, and we meet in those spaces, and we come out to each other. We come out. SUNSTONE Magazine is one such space, where we brave the borderlands—this play came in part from reading back issues of SUNSTONE.

But where to set it? And then I thought of a used car lot, the one commercial space in American culture where prices are contingent; the one place we still bargain. The very act of car buying is also liminal, but also sort of sleazy: the game of salesmanship, the give and take, the creating of quickly disposable narratives strikes me as quintessentially and disreputably American. Cars represent the transcendent open road, Kerouac and Hunter Thompson and Tom Wolfe. And Dale Earnhardt: go to any Christian bookstore in the South or Midwest, and see the two big displays on competing tables: the vulgar eschatology of Left Behind, and Dale Earnhardt—prints of him being raptured out of his wrecked #3 car. Cars represent mobility and portability and of course the possibility of instant death. And freedom, and life.

So I wrote a play about coming out, about cars and salesmanship, about death and God and sexual desire. And a space, perhaps in a mini-van, where we dare to tell ourselves the truth, and where we are appalled to find how little it sets us free.

—ERIC SAMUELSEN

ERIC SAMUELSEN, Ph.D., teaches playwriting at BYU, and until recently served as president of the Association for Mormon Letters. Others of his plays have been published in SUNSTONE, including Accommodations, Gadianton, Peculiarties, and The Plan which will be produced at the Covey Center for the Arts 18 March–2 April 2011. He is married, with four children.
DAVE: It's got some things. You can't really see, but . . . just take a look.

GAIL: What?

DAVE: Underneath. (She leans down awkwardly.)

GAIL: I'm sorry, I don't even know what I'm looking . . . Is that a . . . ?

DAVE: A towel. Big ol' beach towel. Duct taped under the drive train. (She stares uncomprehendingly.) Oil leak. Big one. And you know, you can patch anything with silicon, get a few hundred extra miles out of it. But this guy, he couldn't be bothered, not even a crappy half-assed fix. Just a towel so it won't leak on your driveway.

GAIL: So, you're gonna fix it?

DAVE: What I figured, if you wanted to take it to a mechanic, I'd tell you about the towel. I'd say something like "Hey, we just got the car today. We're fixing the leak tomorrow."

GAIL: But if I didn't? If I just made you an offer?

DAVE: Caveat emptor.

GAIL: That's disgusting.

DAVE: Just the world of car sales.

GAIL: But you're what? Warning me off?

DAVE: Like I said, the truth. You ready?

GAIL: Who are you?

DAVE: An honest salesman. (A pause.)

GAIL: Okay, okay, I get it now. Seriously, I came this close to falling for it. (She starts to leave.)

DAVE: What?

GAIL: You've got this car, the towel car, you've got it priced...
around what I can afford. So you tell me all these things that are wrong with it, but, but, there’s this other place where you’ve got all the other cars, the good ones, but more expensive. The idea is I’ll be all, “He’s so honest, he’s someone I can trust,” and I end up getting something that’s not really any better, only I paid a lot more.

DAVE: Hey, that’s good. Talk down one car to sell another one for more.

GAIL: I’m in no mood for it, tricks and—. (She gathers herself to go.)

DAVE: I’d do it, too. Except. I don’t have a better car to sell you.

GAIL: You don’t?

DAVE: When you walked on the lot, I thought “Hey, I bet I can sell her that Achieva.” You were interested.

GAIL: Maybe.

DAVE: Under eighty thousand miles, and the price was right. But then I couldn’t.

GAIL: Why not?

DAVE: Don’t know. (Pause.)

GAIL: My son’s going on a mission.

DAVE: Good for him.

GAIL: Yeah.

DAVE: Seems to me that you’d be selling—,

GAIL: No, we are, we’re selling his car. My daughter, she’s going to college, and she needs a car. So she gets my Subaru, and I need a new car.

DAVE: Sounds good.

GAIL: (After a pause.) It’s just . . . it’s a stressful . . .

DAVE: And you’re dealing with things alone.

GAIL: What?

DAVE: You’re single? Divorced, widowed maybe?

GAIL: Excuse me?

DAVE: Buying a car for a daughter’s usually a guy thing, so . . .

GAIL: That is absolutely none of your business!

DAVE: True enough.

GAIL: I’m leaving. You don’t have a car for me anyway, so . . .

DAVE: Just thought I could help, maybe recommend a couple places . . .

GAIL: Why?

DAVE: Guys I know. Honest salesmen.

GAIL: Like you. I’ve told you.

DAVE: Not really. You want some pointers?

GAIL: No, look, I’m just going to—.

DAVE: When a salesman sees a female customer shopping alone, it’s Christmas in July. It’s Mardi Gras. Commission plus maybe a sale over sticker.

GAIL: I said I don’t need your help. (But she doesn’t leave.)

DAVE: Don’t ever say you don’t know much about cars. Nod, deflect, make him do the talking. And when it comes to price, he’s gonna wanna talk sticker, you want out-the-door.

GAIL: Meaning?

DAVE: Sticker on this car here, I’m asking forty-eight hundred. Now, that’s just where we start dickering. But say, forty-five, right? You add sales tax, dealer prep, licensing, you’ll end up paying something around five grand. So just keep asking, “How much out the door?” Salesmen HATE that. You’re LDS, right?

GAIL: In this valley, that’s not much of a—.

DAVE: I felt like it.

GAIL: Why are you doing this?

DAVE: You don’t want any names?

DAVE: Why are you doing this?

DAVE: ‘Cause you really don’t want that Achieva.

GAIL: Why are you doing this?

DAVE: I felt like it.

GAIL: Felt like what?

DAVE: Being honest.

GAIL: I can’t trust anyone—that’s what you’re saying.

DAVE: Well, you really can’t trust used car salesmen. Anyway. I’ll get you a coupla names. (Walks away.)

GAIL: Why are you doing this?

DAVE: You don’t want any names?

DAVE: Why are you doing this?

DAVE: ‘Cause you really don’t want that Achieva.

GAIL: Why are you doing this?

DAVE: That didn’t take long.

DAVE: Nope.

PHYLIS: You showed her the Achieva?

DAVE: It’s not what she’s looking for. Good thing too.

PHYLIS: We didn’t put that towel there.

DAVE: Nope. Anyways, it was out of her price range.

PHYLIS: That didn’t take long.

DAVE: Why are you doing this?

DAVE: ‘Cause you really don’t want that Achieva.

PHYLIS: Why are you doing this?

DAVE: I felt like it.

PHYLIS: I can’t trust anyone—that’s what you’re saying.

DAVE: Well, you really can’t trust used car salesmen. Anyway.

SCENE TWO

(The office. PHYLLIS, mid-50s though she looks older, is working on paperwork. DAVE enters, sits.)

PHYLIS: That didn’t take long.

DAVE: No.

PHYLIS: You showed her the Achieva?

DAVE: It’s not what she’s looking for. Good thing too.

PHYLIS: We didn’t put that towel there.

DAVE: No. Anyways, it was out of her price range.

PHYLIS: What are we asking?

DAVE: Four eight.

PHYLIS: It should move at that price.

DAVE: Long as they don’t show it to a mechanic. We got any more Diet Coke?

PHYLIS: I’ve told you, I don’t want that car on my lot. (PHYLIS glares. He gets a Diet Coke. She works on the paperwork, grimaces in pain.) Listen. You need me to finish that up for you?

PHYLIS: I’m fine.
DAVE: Isn't it Homemaking tonight?
PHYLLIS: Home, Family, and Personal Enrichment.
DAVE: When did that happen?
PHYLLIS: A few years ago.
DAVE: That's a mouthful. Anyway, it's tonight.
PHYLLIS: Not that you'd know. Not that you'd know anything about what's going on in the Church.
DAVE: I'm just offering to finish the paperwork for you.
PHYLLIS: I'm fine. Twenty minutes, then I'm going. (She looks out.) Why aren't you out there? There's a customer on the lot.

SCENE THREE

(GAIL looks around, a little anxiously. DAVE strolls out to her)

GAIL: Hey.
DAVE: Hey. It's Gail, right?
GAIL: Yeah. That's one of your tricks, isn't it? Remembering names.
DAVE: I'm actually terrible at names.
GAIL: And that's another trick. Self-deprecating . . . that's not why I'm here. I want that Achieva.
DAVE: With the towel?
GAIL: But you told me about the towel. So you're gonna have to fix that, the oil leak or—.
DAVE: Okay . . .
GAIL: And you warned me; you said it was a bad car. So you'll have to drop the price. A lot.
DAVE: Okay.
GAIL: And that's why I came back. I can't afford something nicer. I can afford that Achieva.

DAVE: Makes sense.
GAIL: And you're going to have to sell it to me for way less than that sticker price. You already told me about its problems, so if you try anything funny at all, at all, I'll report you to the Better Business Bureau.
DAVE: I expect we can come to terms.
GAIL: I don't trust you, and I don't know what you were up to, telling me things like you told me, but it's got to be some kind of . . . ploy. I know that. And I'm not really adept at this kind of . . . never mind. I'll give you five hundred dollars for it, and for that I fix the oil leak, or fifteen hundred and you fix it, and that's it, that's all.
DAVE: Okay.
GAIL: And that's it, that's as high as I can—.
DAVE: I said fine. Come into the office with me, we'll deal with the paperwork.
GAIL: And that's it?
DAVE: I don't want it on my lot; you're offering to take it off my hands. What I'm gambling: can I fix the oil leak for less than a thousand dollars.
GAIL: Well, I don't care.
DAVE: Oh, no, this is where it gets interesting. See, maybe I have to rebuild the entire engine. Could run two or three grand or more. But maybe it's just a gasket, and I make seven, eight hundred more than I was thinking. We're both gamblin' here, is what I'm saying.
GAIL: I didn't come here to gamble.
DAVE: Well, you don't live on a car lot. Got to have something to keep my blood pumpin'. (They go into the office. PHYLLIS is gone.) Nice job, by the way. (She stares at him uncomprehending.) The way you took charge of the sale.
GAIL: Fine, thanks, whatever. So we have a deal, what deal?
DAVE: So I take the gamble. Fifteen hundred. And I fix the oil leak.
GAIL: Okay then.
DAVE: Let's say delivery the end of this week. If it's gonna take longer, I'll give you a call. (Pulls out paperwork.)
GAIL: I still don't trust you, you know.
DAVE: Fair enough. (Rummaging through paperwork.)
GAIL: I hate this. Sorry, I just hate it. Cars.
DAVE: Hmm?
GAIL: Why do people give 'em female names?
DAVE: What do you mean?
GAIL: People who name their cars. It's always old lady names, Gladys or Florence, or . . . female names. Cars are men.
DAVE: Why's that?
GAIL: Temperamental, unreliable, maddening. That's why cars get girl names. Hah! Men, on the other hand . . .
DAVE: I get it. (PHYLLIS enters. Furious.)
PHYLLIS: Dave.
DAVE: Just a sec.
PHYLLIS: I need to talk to you.
DAVE: I'm with a customer, Phyllis.
PHYLLIS: I need to talk to you right now.
DAVE: (To GAIL) I'm sorry. Excuse me. (Crosses a little away
from her.) What?

PHYLLIS: You’re selling that Achieva? With the towel?

DAVE: She knows about the towel. Fifteen hundred—.

PHYLLIS: Fifteen hundred—!

DAVE: Plus we fix the leak.

PHYLLIS: I knew it! We assume all the risk, all of it, plus, plus, sell it for three hundred less than we paid for it!

DAVE: And get a lemon off our lot.

PHYLLIS: You want to ask her out!

DAVE: Will you keep your voice down!

PHYLLIS: That’s the only explanation; you’re giving that car away!

DAVE: I’m in charge of sales, Phyllis. I’m getting rid of a car I don’t want.

PHYLLIS: This is my lot! You’re my employee!

DAVE: Partner.

PHYLLIS: I know what this is; you’re trying to impress her, telling her about the towel, offering to fix the car, accepting a deal like this!

DAVE: You pay me commission; I’m the one taking the loss here.

PHYLLIS: I’m keeping an eye on you. (She exits.)

DAVE: (Back to GAIL.) Sorry about that.

GAIL: (Tight lipped, angry.) Are you?

DAVE: Am I what?

GAIL: Going to ask me out?

DAVE: Overheard that, did you?

GAIL: I’m out of here, I’m here to buy a car, not get all caught up in some kind of—.

DAVE: What if I did ask you out?

GAIL: What?

DAVE: Will you go out with me?

GAIL: No!!!

DAVE: So okay. Good, we put that behind us. I’ve got your check, the paperwork’s in front of me. Do we make a deal?

GAIL: Who is that woman? Why would she say that about you, about me, if—.

DAVE: Pain pills, she doesn’t like to take ‘em, so she lashes out. I’m sorry you overheard that. But it’s got nothing to do with this transaction.

GAIL: I don’t know.

DAVE: So okay. You want, here’s your check back.

GAIL: (She stares at the check for a long time. Finally shakes her head, hands it back.) No. I still want the car.

DAVE: And I still want to sell it to you. (Goes back to paperwork.)

GAIL: I just . . . don’t—.

DAVE: You need a car, you found one you like that you think you can afford.

GAIL: Which I can afford because you told me about the towel. But why?

DAVE: I told you because I was, actually, hitting on you.

GAIL: Wait a minute, wait a minute . . . !

DAVE: I don’t usually tell customers my cars suck. I had to have some reason for it.

GAIL: I am not, I’m NEVER—.

DAVE: Okay. So that’s out. I lose. No biggie, I’ve lost before.

GAIL: Give me my check back.

DAVE: Sure. (Hands it over.)

GAIL: (Gets up to leave.) This is the most infuriating—.

DAVE: I started off being honest with you. So I figure I’ll keep on.

GAIL: I just . . . this isn’t about . . . Just finish the paperwork and let me go.

DAVE: Almost done. (Writes, she’s fuming.)

GAIL: Listen, I don’t know what qualifies as professional, or unprofessional conduct in your line of work, but when a woman comes to your car lot, she is there to do business, end of story, and for you to use her presence there to harbor some sordid little fantasy—.

DAVE: Sticker price on that Achieva is forty-eight hundred.

GAIL: I saw the sticker.

DAVE: I was honest with you. I’ve been honest with you the whole time. It’s cost me three thousand dollars minimum and may cost me a lot more.

GAIL: But because you had ulterior motives, and that’s—.

DAVE: Which I also told you about, straight up.

GAIL: That you wanted to date me.

DAVE: And by saying that, I lost any possibility of it ever happening. I’ve been honest from the start, to my detriment.

GAIL: Why?

DAVE: Because you walked on to my lot, and all the sudden, I couldn’t lie anymore. Not to you.

GAIL: (Pause.) What are you doing, what are you doing now?

DAVE: I don’t know.

GAIL: That’s a . . . a shitty answer.

DAVE: It’s the truth. (Another pause.) Can we start over, maybe?

GAIL: Why?

DAVE: I don’t know.

GAIL: WHY?

DAVE: I just don’t want this to be . . .

GAIL: What?

DAVE: Ordinary. A salesman slash customer thing. (Pause.)

GAIL: I’m gonna go now, okay?

DAVE: Your car will be ready on Friday.

GAIL: Okay.

DAVE: I’ll see you then.

GAIL: I don’t know.

DAVE: Please.

GAIL: I don’t know. (Pause.)

DAVE: Okay.

SCENE FOUR

DAVE: Hey. Your car’s done.

GAIL: Okay.

DAVE: So I lost.

GAIL: Excuse me?

DAVE: I gambled and I lost. You’ve got a rebuilt engine in there. Should be good for a couple hundred thousand miles.
GAIL: Oh.
DAVE: Win some, you lose some.
GAIL: Look, we've got a contract; this was your gamble.
DAVE: I'm not complaining. Just get you the key.
GAIL: Listen, about . . . license, registration.
DAVE: Took care of it. New plates should show up in a couple of weeks.
GAIL: Oh. Great. Look, last time, I said some things—.
DAVE: Don't worry about it. We were both sort of . . . off balance.
GAIL: Yeah.
DAVE: Keys. (Heads for the office.)
GAIL: So, you're out some money on this. Your boss okay with it?
DAVE: My boss? Oh, my sister . . .
GAIL: You work for your sister?
DAVE: Yeah. I kinda crashed and burned a few years ago, ended up here.
GAIL: So you weren't always a used car salesman.
DAVE: No.
GAIL: What were you before? If you don't mind me asking.
DAVE: Attorney.
GAIL: Seriously?
DAVE: Yep. (Gets her the keys.)
GAIL: Thanks.
DAVE: It's no trouble.
GAIL: So. Attorney to used car sales. What happened?
DAVE: Long story, don't worry about it.
GAIL: I've got time.
DAVE: Really?
GAIL: Oh, there's something you should be—?
DAVE: No. There's nobody on the lot.
GAIL: So. Tell me.
DAVE: Why?
GAIL: I don't know. The last time I was here, I wanted to hit you. I wanted to smash every car window on the lot.
DAVE: Sorry about that.
GAIL: It's okay. I got to thinking. How it's better to feel something than nothing.
DAVE: Sure.
GAIL: So I want to make you a deal.
DAVE: Okay.
GAIL: I sell Amway.
DAVE: No kidding. An Amway distributor.
GAIL: I have a wide range of products available. Household items, computers and software . . .
DAVE: Yeah. See, the thing about me is, I don't—.
GAIL: Look, you were honest before . . .
DAVE: Okay. I hate Amway.
GAIL: Good.
DAVE: I think it's a scam. And I sell used cars, I know scams, and Amway's a scam.
GAIL: Sure. You're dead wrong, but okay. Anyway. I want to see you again.
DAVE: You do.
GAIL: I want to ask you about men. I don't get men, and I need to and I've found something rare: a guy who tells the truth. So I'll stop by, once, maybe twice, maybe three times, and I'll ask you questions, and I'll try to sell you detergent or something, and you won't buy it, but that way I can feel okay about seeing you.
DAVE: Fair enough.
GAIL: I will never go out with you and I will certainly never sleep with you.
DAVE: So what's in it for me?
GAIL: Nothing. You were honest with me once, and maybe that was good for you, for once. So . . .
DAVE: So, okay. It's a deal.
GAIL: That fast?
DAVE: Sure.
GAIL: Okay.
DAVE: Amway, huh?
GAIL: Yep.
DAVE: You good at it?
DAVE: Look, about the not-going-out part.
GAIL: That's really non-negotiable.
DAVE: Once, that's all I'm asking. One date. June 8th.
GAIL: June 8th?
DAVE: I get on your calendar; we can both spend two months anticipating.
GAIL: June 8th. You're serious?
DAVE: You gotta give me something to look forward to. Pleasssssee.
GAIL: I know you probably think that was charming, but really it wasn't.
DAVE: So, Amway. How'd you get into that?
GAIL: Well, it's sort of a natural isn't it? For a Mormon?
DAVE: I've heard a lot of Mormons are into it.
GAIL: It makes sense. I mean, that's the difference between Mormons and non-Mormons, right? Non-Mormons have

So, Amway. How'd you get into that?

Well, it's sort of a natural isn't it? For a Mormon?

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friends with benefits, which I think means friends you have sex with.

DAVE: But Mormons don’t have sex.

GAIL: Never. Tons of children, but no sex, ever. No, what we have are friends with agendas. I mean, you can’t just have friends, you know. Just friends don’t get you anywhere.

DAVE: I’m Mormon, I have friends.

GAIL: People you home teach, am I right? Where you’re friends, but you also have to get your numbers?

DAVE: Okay.

GAIL: The member missionary thing is perfect. You’re supposed to find some family, just people you pick who aren’t Mormons, and you’re supposed to make friends with them, so you can invite the missionaries over. They’re friends, sort of, but you’ve got an agenda. So we have

those sorts of friendships: Amway’s perfect for us. (Pause.) I can’t believe I just said all that.

DAVE: It’s okay.

GAIL: I’ve never said any of that to anyone. In my life. I’ve thought it, but I’ve never said any of it, ever.

DAVE: I’ve never told anyone the truth about the cars I sell.

GAIL: Isn’t that illegal?

DAVE: Beats me.

GAIL: (Pause.) I’ve met you twice before, we talked for ten minutes.

DAVE: I know.

GAIL: June 8th?

DAVE: It’s a Friday. I bet it’s a nice day, not too hot, not too cold—.

GAIL: And see, right there, you’re flirting again, and that’s who you are, I get that, but if we’re going to be friends . . . Or whatever . . . I’m sorry, I’ll just . . . goodbye.

DAVE: It’s just nice sometimes.

GAIL: What is?

DAVE: A little . . . honesty vacation.

GAIL: Not from, toward. It is. It’s nice. (Pause.) You said “ostentatious.”

DAVE: I don’t remember that.

GAIL: You did. You were talking about dishonest salesmen, and you said some guys wear shirts where you can see their garments. And you said it was “ostentatious.”

DAVE: Itself a pretty ostentatious use of vocabulary.

GAIL: Maybe that’s why I came back today. (Pause.) Listen, your sister’s gonna be back out here.

DAVE: I think she took her pills.

GAIL: What’s wrong with her?

DAVE: Cancer.

GAIL: I’m so terrible. I was making fun of her, thinking, boy, does he have the boss from hell.

DAVE: It’s okay.

GAIL: I feel awful. Is she in treatment, is she in remission, or . . . ?

DAVE: They don’t think there’s much more they can do.

GAIL: I am so sorry.

DAVE: It’s okay. So. June 8th?

GAIL: I don’t know.

DAVE: (Pause.) I’ll settle for that.

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SCENE FIVE

(GAIL and DAVE sit in a car together.)

DAVE: See, this is perfect. I’m showing the car to you. And I can see the rest of the lot; anyone comes in, I can get right up.

GAIL: How’s she doing? Your sister slash boss.

DAVE: Today’s not one of the good days.

GAIL: That must be tough.

DAVE: She’s tough. (Pause.) Funny, I was about to say, “She’s tough. She’ll pull through.” But it’s not gonna happen.

GAIL: So, you crashed and burned. She took you in.

DAVE: She did. She didn’t have to; nobody else would.

GAIL: So?

DAVE: It was . . . a whole series of things.

GAIL: Well, like what? You were an attorney; were you ever married?

DAVE: Eighteen years.

GAIL: See, I knew that. Something about you just told me you’d been married.

DAVE: But you’re divorced?

GAIL: We’re separated. He’s been dragging his heels on the divorce the last year or so.

DAVE: I never wanted to do that. She deserved better: quick and painless.

GAIL: Not painless. It’s never painless.

DAVE: No.

GAIL: It’s the worst thing in the world. It’s horrible.

DAVE: It is.

GAIL: It’s horrible. (Pause.) So what happened?
DAVE: Well, it pissed her off that I cheated on her.
GAIL: Oh. (Pause, as she digests this.) So you were the bastard.
DAVE: I was the bastard.
GAIL: I really don't get that. (Insistent.) I mean it: explain that to me.
DAVE: What? I met someone, we had an affair, I got caught.
GAIL: No, no, no. This is the honesty car. You tell me everything.
DAVE: Maybe I don't want to.
GAIL: Mark did the same thing to me. My soon-to-be ex. He cheated on me, too, and I don't understand it.
DAVE: I don't know what there is to understand. I met someone; we went to a hotel together—.
GAIL: It was about sex.
DAVE: Well, yeah.
GAIL: No way. No way. The one thing I know is that it wasn't about sex.
DAVE: So what was it about—?
GAIL: Every time he asked, every time he wanted to, even when I was exhausted, even when I really really wasn't in the mood, I said yes. Every single time. Four days after childbirth I said yes. And maybe I'm not, you know, a swimsuit model or something. But I've kept myself in pretty good shape, three kids and all. And I've met the other woman, and she's no movie star. So you explain this, you explain how you could do this, how you could think it's okay for you to just—.
DAVE: I never thought it was okay. I even knew I'd get caught. In a way, I was looking forward to it.
GAIL: Why?
DAVE: The whole thing's embarrassing. It's . . . tawdry. Tawdry.
GAIL: Do you understand why? How?
DAVE: In my case, I needed to, because she knew about the embezzling. (GAIL stares at him.) She worked at the law firm, case management, billing. And . . . turned out she was better at her job than she looked like she'd be.
GAIL: She caught you.
DAVE: I was skimming money off some trusts we were managing. She wasn't even supposed to do trusts.
GAIL: So you slept with her? To keep her mouth shut?
DAVE: I gave her half the money to keep her mouth shut. I slept with her . . . I don't know; we were partners in felony. Seemed like the next step.
GAIL: And you got caught.
DAVE: It was just a matter of time. I mean, sneaking around, someone would see me, they'd tell my wife. Or the IRS, an audit. I was a stupid criminal, you know, a stupid adulterer.
GAIL: Which one was it? Did your wife catch you, or was it the money?
DAVE: IRS. Not that it matters.
GAIL: No. (A pause.) You really did crash and burn, didn't you?
DAVE: I stayed out of jail. I destroyed two marriages, and I was excommunicated from the Church—did I mention I was in the bishopric?
GAIL: You didn't, no.
DAVE:; I was disbarred. Check out my ankle, my right ankle.
GAIL: I can't see anything.
DAVE: I wear these pants just a little baggy. Ankle bracelet.
GAIL: When do you get it off? No, wait. June 8th?
DAVE: Well. Yeah.
GAIL: So you're still on probation.
DAVE: I got five years, just two months left. Plus, I had to pay back the money, with penalties. That was all part of my plea bargain. See that shed over back behind the lot? That's where I sleep. I can't leave this lot. Well, to see my kids . . .
GAIL: Test drives?
DAVE: I can go on test drives. I can call. Look, it's not so bad. I stayed out of prison.
GAIL: Why?
DAVE: That's what you wanted to know, isn't it?
GAIL: Yeah.
DAVE: Because everything was perfect. Settled, and set and perfect. And it started to get a little boring. So . . .
GAIL: What a stupid, stupid answer.
DAVE: No arguments there. (Pause.)
GAIL: You must have had a good lawyer.
DAVE: An attorney friend took my case pro bono. That still amazes me.
GAIL: Why?
DAVE: For friendship, he said. When we finally signed the plea bargain, he shook my hand, and I haven't seen him since.
GAIL: So you had this great life. Good job, good money, good marriage? And you just got bored?
DAVE: Just one too many sacrament meetings.
GAIL: Okay. I'm done. (She starts to get out of the car.)
DAVE: Come on, Gail.
GAIL: I don't deserve flip. You can bob and weave, but if you want this, me, don't you dare be flip.
DAVE: Okay. You're right. I'm sorry.
GAIL: No! Don't do that either: don't give me that hang-dog look, don't tell me you're sorry.
DAVE: I won't say it again.
GAIL: Filthy cheating bastard. I should leave right this second.
DAVE: Please. Don't. You're right, completely right. But don't. (Pause as she considers.) Damn. A customer.
DAVE: I see him.
GAIL: Deal with him. It's okay, I'll still be here when you're finished.
DAVE: Okay. (He gets up.) Sorry. I mean—.
GAIL: Shut up. Go sell a car. (She watches him go. PHYLLIS comes over.)
PHYLLIS: You're here again.
GAIL: I am.
PHYLLIS: You're not in the market for a car, are you?
GAIL: I bought a car.
PHYLLIS: I can make you leave if I want to. I can call the police.
GAIL: This is a used car lot. How often do you want the police to come by?
PHYLLIS: You're distracting him. He's my salesman.
GAIL: He's with a customer right now.
PHYLLIS: What's your name?
GAIL: Gail. And you're Phyllis.
PHYLLIS: I'm going to tell you the truth about Dave.
GAIL: I know the truth about Dave.
PHYLLIS: You can't trust him. You can't believe anything he tells you.
GAIL: I know that.
PHYLLIS: He's a liar and a thief.
GAIL: I know that too.
PHYLLIS: He's a good salesman. He doesn't have a conscience, or even a soul, so he can sell anything. But you, you're a woman, he's a tragic figure. He's told you his story?
GAIL: He has.
PHYLLIS: And so you can reform him, you think. Bring him back to humanity.
GAIL: You don't know what I want from him.
PHYLLIS: You're here. That tells me a lot. About you.
   (Mocking.) "The poor man. The poor self-destructive wretch. He has a good soul. He can still be saved." You're wrong, you're wrong, I know better.
GAIL: Why did you take him in? (PHYLLIS glares at her.)
PHYLLIS: Flesh and blood and pity. And you trust him. Stupid fool. (She exits.)
GAIL: Maybe I am.

SCENE SIX

(GAIL sits in a car. DAVE comes up.)

DAVE: Hey.
GAIL: He bought it, didn't he?
DAVE: That kid? Yeah.
GAIL: Such a teenage car. Grand Am.
DAVE: You're getting to know your cars.
GAIL: Can he afford it?
DAVE: That kid? Doubt it.
GAIL: So why'd you sell it to him?
DAVE: It's what I do. Nah, he has no credit; his dad co-signed the loan. He's got some shitty fast food job; he'll start asking for extra shifts. His grades will start to slide. College, it's already a distant dream.
GAIL: And you're aiding and abetting. All that.
DAVE: It's what I do. And, by the way, tell me again what great detergent Amway sells.
GAIL: So that's how the honesty car works. We sit and tell the truth about what crooks we are.
DAVE: That's what we do. (A pause.)
GAIL: My son's going on a mission.
DAVE: Yeah, I remember.
GAIL: He's wondering if he should or not. He doesn't want to, doesn't even know if he believes in it. He's twenty now, and he finally got into this electrical engineering program he likes. But he gets all this pressure, you know, my parents, his father, the ward, his girlfriend.
DAVE: So she's supportive.
GAIL: Oh, like a rock. So I talked to him about it. You'da been proud of me, I was great.
DAVE: I had the same conversation with my son.
GAIL: Was that before or after you were excommunicated?
DAVE: After.
GAIL: 'Cause I'm sure whatever you said had a real ring of authenticity.
DAVE: I served a mission.
GAIL: Well, I haven't. But boy can I ever talk a mission up.
DAVE: So he's going. That's great.
GAIL: It's not great! It's not great at all!
DAVE: Wasn't that what you wanted?
GAIL: No. It's not. I lied about all of it. (Pause.) I felt so guilty, and I'd think, "That's weird, I just talked my son into going on a mission. What's with the guilt?" But I don't want him to go.
DAVE: He'll spend two years serving other people. Learning to deal with, you know, adversity.
GAIL: It's two years of his life! Two years doing something he doesn't even believe in, something I'm not even sure I believe in! I mean, if he were going to Africa to work with AIDS orphans or whatever, I'd be freaked out, but I'd be proud of him. He'd be doing something, you know, good. But a mission? You're not helping people, you're not serving anyone. You're trying to talk them into leaving their church and joining ours. You're bothering people in their homes to tell them that their beliefs aren't good enough.
DAVE: Wow.
GAIL: I never admit that to anyone.
DAVE: Why don't you tell him?
GAIL: I can't. I'm his mom, I'm active Mormon lady. His dad, he's the human cockroach; I'm the victim here, I'm the one that's strong. I can't tell him . . .
DAVE: So you'd rather . . . stay in hiding.
GAIL: Like you're hiding here? Anyway, what good would it do? To come out? My kids, they're already freaked out . . . their father . . . their father . . . Their father . . . What good would it do to tell them: "Oh, by the way, I've been living a lie all these years, I really don't believe . . ." Besides, I really really can't afford it. Financially. I sell Amway, remember——.
DAVE: Amway has a thing about you telling the truth about your religious——?
GAIL: No, look, the way Amway works is, you sell the stuff, but you also build your business. You have other people who you got into it, who also sell the stuff. You get a cut from their sales, and you send a cut to the guy above you.
DAVE: It's a pyramid scam.
GAIL: No, it's not! I hate that; it's not a pyramid. There've been . . . court cases. It's not. But you do have people under you.
DAVE: On the pyramid.

GAIL: Stop that! People who you got into it. Look, my ward members know how badly Mark treated me. They're kind, good people and they want to help, and sure it's a good deal for them too, but still. Without my ward, I wouldn't have a business. I have to stay active; I have to look active, anyway. I don't have a choice.

DAVE: You always have a choice.

GAIL: Yeah, and you told me the truth about that car. But not for that kid with the Grand Am?

DAVE: I'm just saying that the best thing I ever did was crash and burn.

GAIL: I know, it put you in touch with your real self; you were just going through the motions, now you're finally free. Such bullshit.

DAVE: I guess today would be a bad day for me to ask you out again.

GAIL: I know, I'm a total bitch today. I'm sorry. It's just, he had his bishop's interview yesterday, and I was thinking about it, watching that kid... buy that... it all came out.

DAVE: It's okay. We're in the honesty car. We can say anything.

GAIL: The thing is, I was going to ask you a favor and then I go off on this tangent, which for some reason ends up being about what a slimeball Mark is, which rubs off on you, too, you slimeball.

DAVE: So ask.

GAIL: I just called you a slimeball.

DAVE: A convicted felon turned used-car salesman? If the shoe fits...
and accessibility. I wish I were her.

DAVE: I didn't cheat on you, Gail. That was another guy.

GAIL: And you're a model of fidelity and ... never mind, I'll stop by tomorrow. Your guy left.

DAVE: Damn.

GAIL: Look, I'm sorry about that, too. I'm just a bitch today, I got this call from my sister, and she just makes me nuts.

DAVE: My sister makes me nuts too.

GAIL: (With a little laugh.) Yeah. Look, I gotta run, see you tomorrow. (And she leans up toward him and gives him a very quick kiss. And she's off.)

SCENE SEVEN

(BRIAN and PHYLLIS sit in the office, waiting.)

PHYLLIS: I don't know why we're doing this. We don't need you.

BRIAN: Whatever.

PHYLLIS: I run this car lot. I decide who works here and who doesn't.

BRIAN: I was told to wait here for Dave. Is that Dave?

PHYLLIS: He's with a customer. He's our sales manager.

BRIAN: So is that what I'm supposed to do? Sell cars.

PHYLLIS: Oh, no. No, I don't want you selling cars. I want to be very clear about that. You're not to talk to anyone while you're here. On the clock.

BRIAN: There's a clock?

PHYLLIS: We don't really have a clock. No. While you're on the time . . . card, while you're working for us. No, we have a very careful image we want to cultivate, and a teenage salesman is is is just not, not——.

BRIAN: Good. I don't particularly want to sell cars. I don't like sales.

PHYLLIS: Well, then. What can you do? What skills do you have?

BRIAN: Look, I was dropped off here, told to wait until I could talk to Dave.

PHYLLIS: Well, what would you like to do?

BRIAN: Get the hell back to South Carolina. Get the hell out of . . .

PHYLLIS: We don't use that kind of language!

BRIAN: Sorry.

PHYLLIS: This is a place of business!

BRIAN: I said I was sorry. Geez. (Looks out the window.) Okay, that guy's taking a test drive, it looks to me.

PHYLLIS: Yes. Yes, he is. That's a very good sign. Very few people buy cars they haven't test driven.

BRIAN: No kidding. (Enter DAVE.)

PHYLLIS: So is he interested?

DAVE: Middling. (Offers his hand.) You must be Brian. Dave McGregor.

BRIAN: Hi.

DAVE: I hope Phyllis has been making you feel welcome.

PHYLLIS: I don't know why you want to hire this boy; we don't know him and we don't need help.

DAVE: Looks like she has. Phyllis, I'm gonna show Brian around a little; if that guy comes back, call me. I shouldn't miss him, but just in case.

PHYLLIS: If we lose a sale because you're showing this boy around, then——.

DAVE: Just call me, okay? (Leads BRIAN away from PHYLLIS.) Sorry about that.

BRIAN: No, it's cool. You had to talk to the guy.

DAVE: So whaddya think?

BRIAN: Of this lot?

DAVE: Sure.

BRIAN: Look. Like I told my aunt Gail, I'm not in town for long. Just until my parents stop freaking out. I'm just waiting out my time, like any good prisoner. Meanwhile, I like cars.

DAVE: Fair enough. So?

BRIAN: What do I think of your cars?

DAVE: You can be honest.

BRIAN: Well. I think you've got some seriously shitty iron.

DAVE: True enough.

BRIAN: Beater heaven, man. It's almost funny. That LeSabre: does it even have shocks? Not one but three Ford Explorers. And the piece-of-shit Chevys . . .

DAVE: Look, I'm doing your aunt a favor here.

BRIAN: And don't think I don't appreciate it.

DAVE: Okay . . .

BRIAN: It's a job around cars.

DAVE: Which you're on the verge of losing.

BRIAN: And which I'd rather keep.

DAVE: So show some respect.

BRIAN: Yes sir!
DAVE: Okay, is there some point at which you stop being an immature asshole?
BRIAN: I thought we didn’t use that kind of language. This is a place of business.
DAVE: I’m still not amused.
BRIAN: Look. What if I start there?
DAVE: What, that old Blazer?
BRIAN: Just needs a little body work.
DAVE: Look, that car really is a beater. We’re selling it as is, twelve hundred, which we won’t get.
BRIAN: It’s worth more than that. Put me on it.
DAVE: You serious?
BRIAN: You have a stud welder?
DAVE: I can get you one.
BRIAN: A sander, some twenty-four grit paper, some eighty grit for finishing, some filler. I’ll give it three coats of primer, a paint job, and I’ll feather it so you’ll never notice the difference.
DAVE: Too much sun damage, you’ll never match the paint.
BRIAN: Wanna bet?
DAVE: Gail didn’t tell me you had body shop experience.
BRIAN: Totally self taught. Okay, I’m restoring a car.
DAVE: Seriously?
BRIAN: ’57 T-Bird.
DAVE: No kidding! Roadster?
BRIAN: A Baby Bird.
DAVE: That’s a beautiful car. With the 292?
BRIAN: It was shot. I pulled it, put in a 312. All new chrome, all new undercarriage. It’s cherry.
DAVE: The two-tone?
BRIAN: Red and white, with sidewalls. It’s street legal now, but I still want to do some things.
DAVE: Don’t tell me. Headers, a spoiler . . .
BRIAN: Fender skirts; they weren’t on the original, but I think they’re bitchin’. And I’m cheating a little, putting in ABS. With the extra muscle I want the stopping power.
DAVE: No, that makes sense.
BRIAN: Look, put me to work on that Blazer. That dent’s no big deal; I can pull it out and smooth it over. You can add eight hundred easy to the sticker. And all you’ll be out is whatever you’re gonna pay me.
DAVE: Yeah, what am I gonna pay you? Ten an hour?
BRIAN: Can you talk the boss lady into that?
DAVE: I’ll deal with her.
BRIAN: I don’t think she likes me very much.
DAVE: She doesn’t like anyone right now.
BRIAN: Yeah, I got that.
DAVE: Stay out of her way, she’ll be fine.
BRIAN: Okay.
DAVE: Listen, your aunt, she told me, well, a few things about you.
BRIAN: She told me she told you.
DAVE: You’re here because your parents are worried that you’re gay.
BRIAN: Could be.
DAVE: Look, I don’t care, I really don’t.

SCENE EIGHT

(GAIL and DAVE in a car.)

GAIL: We bought his suits. The big shopping trip.
DAVE: Mr. Mac’s? Boy, does that store have a racket.
GAIL: Hey, they’ve found their niche market, I take my hat off. You could stand to wear a suit once in awhile, you know.
DAVE: I’m a used car salesman. Sports coat, short sleeve colored shirt—that’s the uniform.
GAIL: It makes you look cheap.
DAVE: That’s the idea.
GAIL: You’re supposed to look cheap?
DAVE: Sports coat says he’s trying to look professional, but he can’t afford a suit. My profit margins are so low, I’m barely making ends meet. Which means, you, the consumer, are paying my rock bottom price.
GAIL: I had no idea.
DAVE: Buy a jacket, first thing I do, I take a steel brush to the elbows, wear ‘em down a little.
GAIL: But. I wouldn’t want to do that, would I?
DAVE: No, not for Amway. You’re trying to get people to join your pyramid. You have to look successful, like you have money to burn.
GAIL: It’s not a pyramid.
DAVE: Okay.
GAIL: Is that guy gonna stop?
DAVE: They do that sometimes. Park in front of the lot, check the cars out without getting out.
GAIL: When you have to go, you just go.
DAVE: I'm keeping an eye out.
GAIL: Where's Phyllis?
DAVE: DMV.
GAIL: Where are we, Dave? What are we?
DAVE: Sitting in one of my cars.
GAIL: Every time we try to define it . . . coming out to each other: "I'm lying to my family," "I'm an adulterer and felon."
DAVE: That seems to be our relationship. Okay, he's getting out.
GAIL: Go.
DAVE: So far.
GAIL: Go!
DAVE: That's our relationship so far. It could grow, it could change.
GAIL: Go! (He goes. She waits, checks her watch, waits some more. He comes back.) Fifty-eight minutes you were gone.
DAVE: Sorry about that.
GAIL: No, it's great; he must have really been interested.
DAVE: Couldn't quite close it. Said he's price comparing.
GAIL: It's still a possible.
DAVE: I don't know. Something's off. I'm usually a good closer.
GAIL: See, what I think is, we have one of those situations where one of the people likes the other person more than the other person likes the other person—oh never mind. You like me more than I like you, is what I'm saying.
DAVE: Oh, that's nice.
GAIL: Where?
DAVE: Over by that little Geo. Looks like a father/daughter.
GAIL: Could be. That's a cute little car for a college girl.
DAVE: Exactly what I'm thinking. (He goes. Leans in.)
GAIL: We'd know.
DAVE: We'd know what?
GAIL: If we liked each other the same. That was the last thing you asked me before—.
DAVE: Sorry. I think I got that sale.
GAIL: They seemed interested.
DAVE: The daughter loves the car. He's gotta talk to his bank.
GAIL: Anyway. We'd know.
DAVE: I don't think we would. Off balance like this, our reactions off?
DAVE: I just think we should date.
DAVE: Starting June 8th, right? Look, I've been sitting in this car for two and a half hours—.
GAIL: We should go out, see where we are. I could get permission to leave the lot. Before the 8th.
GAIL: I'm sitting in this car.
DAVE: I know. And what do we do with that, these days, you sitting there, me jumping up every five minutes to deal with—.
GAIL: This is what I'm up for. There's a guy.
DAVE: Will you go out with me?
GAIL: There's a guy. Over by the SUVs.
DAVE: Can we go out?
GAIL: When you're finished, come back to the car. I'll still be here.
DAVE: (Pause.) Okay. (He exits. She sits in the car.)

SCENE NINE

(BRIAN stands back, admiring his work. DAVE ambles up to him.)
DAVE: Looks great.
BRIAN: Not too bad. (Points.) Those bubbles are driving me batty. Door frames are tough.
DAVE: Hey, Phyllis! Check this out!
BRIAN: That side panel was a little trickier than I thought. But I was finally able to pull it out.
DAVE: I think it looks great.
PHYLIS: (Enters.) I was dealing with that loan app; I can't just come at your beck and call, Dave.
DAVE: Look what Brian did with that Blazer.
PHYLIS: I can't see anything.
DAVE: Exactly.
PHYLIS: You called me out here to see a perfectly normal Chevy—.
DAVE: This is the one with that dent in, remember?
PHYLIS: I don't see a dent.
DAVE: That's what I'm saying.
PHYLIS: Well. You pulled that dent out?
BRIAN: Yes, ma'am.
PHYLIS: Well. We'll have to adjust the sticker price.
DAVE: I think so, too.
PHYLIS: Well. More work for me. (She exits.)
DAVE: See. She loves it as much as I do.
BRIAN: I can tell.
DAVE: So what do you want to work on next?
BRIAN: I was thinking maybe that Tercel.
DAVE: Good luck. I was gonna junk it.
BRIAN: I think maybe it's just a suspension problem.
DAVE: I don't know. It's gonna need a lot more than new shocks.
BRIAN: Well, I'll take a look. I've got some ideas.
DAVE: Go wild. Listen, I gotta ask you something.
BRIAN: I know what you're going to say.
DAVE: That Civic.
BRIAN: It's not a good car, Dave. Whoever owned it—.
DAVE: It's a Honda Civic, it's on my lot, and I hope to sell it.
BRIAN: Okay.
DAVE: That kid yesterday, the college kid. He was ready to buy it. Test drive, I had my fingers crossed, but he said it
handled just fine.
BRIAN: It's a bad car.
DAVE: That kid liked it. Right up to the point I'm putting away the key, my one employee is having this nice chat with the kid.
BRIAN: I did talk to him.
DAVE: You told him not to buy the car!
BRIAN: I suggested—.
DAVE: We're a car lot! We sell cars.
BRIAN: That car's a piece of shit.
DAVE: Don't do it again, okay?
BRIAN: I'm never ever to tell a customer not to buy a car. I'm never to warn someone—.
DAVE: I can't believe I'm having this conversation.
BRIAN: He's a nice guy. I like him.
DAVE: I like lots of people. I still sell to 'em. And the Gail situation isn't any kind of precedent. Don't do it again.
BRIAN: Fine.
DAVE: Look. Okay. Your Aunt Gail, she, I don't know. I don't know what that's about. She's important. Somehow. And . . . it's a one-time thing is all I'm saying.
BRIAN: What if I had some of the same feelings, though?
DAVE: Please, the way I feel about Gail is not the same thing as you —!
BRIAN: Actually, Dave, I like that kid, as you call him, in pretty much the same identical way that you like Aunt Gail. Pretty much exactly the same way.
DAVE: Come on, you can't possibly have . . . (Stops himself.) You serious?
BRIAN: Exactly the same feelings. His name's Jake; he's not “that kid.”
DAVE: I had no idea. I sat with him on that test drive; I got no weird vibes at all.
BRIAN: Then I'd say your gay-dar kinda sucks.
DAVE: You're just gonna freak out about this now, aren't you?
BRIAN: No, of course not.
DAVE: If it was a girl, and I got her phone number, you'd be all cool with it, probably teasing me about whatever. Am I gonna get some action? Little sump'in sump'in?
DAVE: Okay.
BRIAN: But this is a gay thing, so you're freaked out. Right?
DAVE: Not at all. I'm happy for you. I hope it works out.
BRIAN: Yeah, okay.
DAVE: I am. I'm glad you met someone.
BRIAN: Okay.
DAVE: Okay. (Leaves, a little unsettled, despite his protestations. PHYLLIS watches them.)

SCENE TEN

(GAIL and DAVE sit in a car. BRIAN is in the office, on the computer. GAIL and DAVE sit for moment in a companionable silence.)

GAIL: I love a good storm.
DAVE: Sure.
GAIL: I'm sorry. A rainstorm like this? Bad for your business, right?

If it ends and there's nothing, then it ended and there was nothing. But if there's a forever, then I will do what I need to so I can spend it with them. Restore what God took from me. And so I go, every Sunday.
DAVE: While it's raining, sure. But the cars sure look great when it clears up.
GAIL: I can imagine.
DAVE: And when it quits, we get a lot of customers. I don't know, maybe they're restless, in the back of their mind: "Hey, I've been wanting to look for a new car."
GAIL: So what's this? That we're sitting in.
DAVE: Pontiac Montana.
GAIL: Seriously? They named a car after a state?
DAVE: That or the 49ers quarterback.
GAIL: I love car names. All those fake, made up names: Acura, Previa, Accord.
DAVE: Or the number/letter combinations: S-10, A-4, TSX.
GAIL: Prius.
DAVE: Beats me.
GAIL: (Jokingly.) It's not another word for penis?
DAVE: I don't think so.
GAIL: I saw one the other day, and I remembered this . . .
Okay, Mark, he had this thing, he had a . . . sorry, this is embarrassing.
DAVE: It's okay.
GAIL: An erection. Like permanent.
DAVE: Seriously?
GAIL: Yeah, it lasted like three days. I had to take him to the doctor. They called it priapism. So priapic, prius? It could be.
DAVE: You can get that, seriously?
GAIL: Oh, now you're worried. He'd gotten this stuff off the internet, not Viagra or Cialis, he was too cheap for the good stuff, but . . .
DAVE: There's things you could do to help him with that.
GAIL: Oh, believe me. But no, we'd finish, and there it'd still be. Poking out. He said it was really painful. Not to mention embarrassing.
DAVE: What'd they do?
GAIL: They gave him some other drugs.
DAVE: Well, I'll never look at a Prius the same way again.
GAIL: I know what you're thinking. I'm talking about penises, must be a good sign.
DAVE: Not really.
GAIL: And we could go out. I guess. June 8th. But why? What would the point be?
DAVE: Get to know each other better.
GAIL: We know each other. The thing is, we have nothing in common.
DAVE: Well, I think we do.
GAIL: A mutual penchant for dishonesty?
DAVE: It's a starting point. (Pause.)
GAIL: How's Brian working out for you?
DAVE: He's great. I like him.
GAIL: I know you like him. How is he as an employee?
DAVE: Great. He really knows his stuff.
GAIL: Where is he?
DAVE: He can't work in this rain. Phyllis is out, so I said he could use the office computer. I promise you cannot access porn on that computer.
GAIL: Okay. (Pause.) See, though, that's what I mean, that's what I'm talking about.
DAVE: What?
GAIL: You're not saying it, but you don't actually think it's a big deal if Brian looks at porn. You think it's a normal, healthy—
DAVE: Well, what I've seen of it, it's boring as hell, but—
GAIL: You've gone to those sites, then, you look at porn.
DAVE: Not on that computer, I don't.
GAIL: But you don't think it's bad for him? You don't think it's damaging, porn addiction?
DAVE: Gail, I don't even know what that means.
GAIL: See. We have nothing in common.
DAVE: And you're jumping to conclusions.
GAIL: Am I? You just said you didn't like it. You didn't say you're against it.
DAVE: Okay. I am.
GAIL: This is a real basic kind of issue, Dave, this is important, how we feel about pornography.
DAVE: And I told you. I'm against it.
GAIL: I don't believe you. I bet it was even a factor, your fall from grace.
DAVE: No, come on, that's silly. (We see PHYLLIS coming toward the office. BRIAN unhurriedly closes his computer files, exits. He sees the rain, looks around, covers his head and heads out to the van. A moment later, PHYLLIS sits at her desk.)
BRIAN: You mind if I join you guys?
DAVE: Not at all.
BRIAN: Thought I'd let Phyllis have her computer back. (He
S U N S T O N E

gets in.) That's one thing about this piece-of-shit mini-van. Plenty of room.

GAIL: I wish you wouldn't use language like that, Brian.

BRIAN: Sorry.

DAVE: I'm glad you joined us, Brian. Your aunt's being ridiculous.

BRIAN: Oh?

GAIL: I wish you wouldn't use language like that, Brian.

BRIAN: Sorry.

DAVE: I'm glad you joined us, Brian. Your aunt's being ridiculous.

BRIAN: Oh?

GAIL: (Awkward now that BRIAN's there.) I don't want to talk about it. Hey, you guys mind if I invite Phyllis to join us?

DAVE: We could go in the office.

GAIL: No, I like this car.

BRIAN: Aunt Gail, you serious? Have you actually talked to Phyllis?

GAIL: I know she's difficult.

BRIAN: She's practically psychotic.

DAVE: You know she was married once?

GAIL: Really?

BRIAN: Hard to believe.

DAVE: Oh, yeah. For about five years. They had two kids.

GAIL: So she has children.

DAVE: Not anymore. They were killed in a head-on, all three. Some old geezer fell asleep at the wheel, crossed the median, wham.

GAIL: Oh my gosh.

DAVE: Yeah. It must have been twenty-five years ago. Phyllis never talks about it, never.

GAIL: Was she in the car?

DAVE: No. She was working, here. She was my father's bookkeeper. This was his lot.

GAIL: That's awful.

DAVE: Yeah.

GAIL: What was his name? Her husband?

DAVE: His name was Harlan. The kids were Emily and Amanda.

GAIL: Two little girls.

BRIAN: So she's had it rough.

DAVE: Rough, and no fault of hers. You should have known her before, her sense of humor.

GAIL: Phyllis, funny?

DAVE: I remember the three of us were driving this one time, sort of out in the country, and we saw this sign up, "compost for sale." And she saw it first, and all she said was "Hey!" Like, wow, what a deal. I laughed 'til it hurt.

GAIL: Do you ever still see, you know, that side of her?

DAVE: No. Never.

GAIL: Okay, I'm inviting her in. (She gets out, runs to the office.)

DAVE: Bad idea.

BRIAN: She just took her meds. She'll probably just be all loopy and weird.

DAVE: Hope so. She hates those pills, but they do cut the pain. (They wait. GAIL and PHYLLIS run in from the office in the rain.)

PHYLLIS: I don't know what I'm doing here. I have so much paperwork. (But it's clear the drugs have kicked in.)

GAIL: We're just having a nice conversation, and we thought we'd like you to join us.

PHYLLIS: Foolish and unnecessary.

GAIL: I just hated the thought of you in there alone.

PHYLLIS: I'm perfectly fine alone.

GAIL: Just a little break.

PHYLLIS: Well. It's not like we're going to be selling any cars in this weather.

DAVE: That's what I was saying.

GAIL: So. This is nice, what were we talking about? Where were we?

DAVE: We're all Mormons.

BRIAN: What?

DAVE: Before you came in. Your Aunt Gail thinks she and I have nothing in common.

GAIL: And we don't.

DAVE: And I'm saying we're both Mormons. Everyone in this car's Mormon. We have that.

PHYLLIS: Not you.

DAVE: I'm a Mormon.

PHYLLIS: Ex Mormon. Excommunicated Mor—.

DAVE: Okay. Technically—.

PHYLLIS: You're not actually Mormon at all. You might as well be Catholic, or . . . Shinto.

BRIAN: Shinto?

GAIL: She's right, Dave. You're not really Mormon.

DAVE: My attitudes, my beliefs, my whole way of looking at the world, at God—.

PHYLLIS: But none of that matters; you're not a member of the Church.

GAIL: She's right.

DAVE: Okay. (Pause.) Your son leaves when?

GAIL: That's a cheap shot.

DAVE: You're Mormon, okay. So how excited are you about your son's mission?

GAIL: Okay. Not very.

BRIAN: Seriously?

DAVE: Not at all. You don't even believe in the missionary program of the Church.

BRIAN: Wait, you don't want Andy to go?

GAIL: Thanks a lot, Dave, now everyone in my family's gonna know.

DAVE: And that would be a bad thing?

BRIAN: We've talked about it; he isn't all that excited either. He's mostly going because he thinks you want him to.

GAIL: No, I do want him to. I do. I just—.

DAVE: That's not what you told me.

GAIL: Will you shut up?

DAVE: We're just bothering people, telling them their beliefs aren't good enough. That's what you told me.

PHYLLIS: And that's true. (They stare at her, amazed.)

GAIL: You think so?

PHYLLIS: They believe in false doctrines, don't they? People in the world. Worldly people.

BRIAN: If he doesn't want to go, and you don't want him to go—.

PHYLLIS: All manner of falsehood.
GAIL: It'll be good for him to go; I'm not against him going.
PHYLLIS: Falsehood and wickedness! (They stare at her.) So
that's why we need missionaries!
DAVE: Well put, sis. (Phyllis nods, satisfied.)
GAIL: Brian, you can't tell Andy any of this, okay?
BRIAN: He's my cousin, he's my friend. This is two years of
his life we're talking about. If you really don't want him to
go—
GAIL: I want to talk to him myself about it, okay? Will you
just let me do that?
BRIAN: I guess.
GAIL: Brother.
PHYLLIS: You should be ashamed of yourself, you know.
GAIL: I am.
PHYLLIS: Not supporting your missionary. You're as bad as
Dave, and he's a criminal.
DAVE: More things in common, see.
GAIL: I support him! I'm the one who basically talked him
into going.
BRIAN: Lied him into going.
GAIL: Mind your own business.
BRIAN: You need to tell him the truth.

So I can stay Mormon as long as I
stay lonely. And a second-class
citizen. As long as I give up on, what,
everything: meeting someone, being
with someone. Sex—no, not just
sex—holding hands, hugging, any
kind of closeness. That's all out.
Even hoping for it: out.
GAIL: There are lots of young people who suffer from same-sex attraction, and they—.
BRIAN: First of all, I’m not suffering from anything.
GAIL: You could serve a mission, you could serve—.
BRIAN: They’d let me go on a mission?
PHYLLIS: Lots of young men who are struggling with feelings of—.
BRIAN: I’m not really struggling either. I’m just gay.
PHYLLIS: And damned.
BRIAN: Could be. (Pause.) The thing is, I probably believe in more of it than either of you two. But there’s no room for me in Mormonism and we all know it.
DAVE: You have a . . . a testimony?
BRIAN: We have learned by sad experience that it is the nature and disposition of almost all men, as soon as they get a little authority, as they suppose, they will immediately practice unrighteous dominion.
GAIL: I love that scripture.
BRIAN: Welcome to the life of every gay man in America. Unrighteous dominion, right? Homophobia? Joseph knew it. His sex life, it was way out there.
PHYLLIS: Joseph Smith wasn’t gay!
BRIAN: No. But how many wives were there, thirty, forty? Daughters of his best friends, women who were already married to someone else even. And they shot him for it. For having a weird sex life. Which probably felt perfectly normal to him.
GAIL: Brian. Honey. There’s nothing really all that different from your situation and the situation of single straight guys in the Church. The law of chastity applies to everyone, just the same.
BRIAN: You’re kidding, right?
GAIL: The requirements—.
BRIAN: Single straight guys, they can date, right? Go out, hold hands, kiss. And that’s not even . . . Straight guys are allowed to hope!
GAIL: But many terrific people never marry, live celibate lives, and serve in the Church and they’re wonderful people.
DAVE: And Orthodox Girl is back.
GAIL: Shut up.
BRIAN: Straight singles, they have all kinds of activities, chances to meet people, right?
DAVE: And some of them never do.
BRIAN: But they’re supposed to keep trying. And there are callings they’ll never get. Like bishop?
DAVE: That’s true.
BRIAN: So I can stay Mormon as long as I stay lonely. And a second-class citizen. As long as I give up on, what, everything: meeting someone, being with someone. Sex—no, not just sex—holding hands, hugging, any kind of closeness. That’s all out. Even hoping for it: out.
GAIL: I’m afraid—.
BRIAN: Well, screw that. I’m sorry, Aunt Gail, Phyllis, I want to meet someone. I want to be with someone. I don’t see why that should be denied me.
GAIL: Brian, honey . . .
BRIAN: In fact, what if I were to tell you that I’ve met someone wonderful? And it’s like I said to you, Dave, the other day, “You’re not happy for me, and you would be if it was a girl.” Right?
GAIL: I’m happy for you.
BRIAN: Are you really?
GAIL: I’m . . . (Pause.)
BRIAN: His name is Jake, he’s taller than I am, he’s a year older, he’s a great kisser, he’s got a great singing voice and a wonderful sense of humor, he’s—.
PHYLLIS: Like I said. Damned for all eternity!
GAIL: You’ve made your point!
BRIAN: Just so we’re clear.
GAIL: Brian, I’m sorry.
BRIAN: I love you, you’re my favorite aunt, and . . . and . . . that’s not right. You not accepting me.
GAIL: If God commands us to do something, even something hard, even something that looks impossible, shouldn’t we at least try—.
BRIAN: My folks found gay porn on my computer.
GAIL: We heard that.
BRIAN: They were old files. I quit. I hadn’t gone to any of those websites for months.
DAVE: Why?
BRIAN: Because having those thoughts in my mind made it harder for me to pray. I couldn’t get through. It was making me . . . think of people as things.
PHYLLIS: Good for you, young man.
BRIAN: Jesus loves me fine. I feel it when I pray.
PHYLLIS: So all you have to do now is fight those feelings. Sing a hymn when you start to feel attracted to someone. Works wonders.
BRIAN: Aunt Gail. Three years ago, I guess it was, Dad took me to a car show. And I couldn’t get enough of it, especially this one ’32 Ford.
DAVE: A Deuce.
BRIAN: They’d loaded it up, Dave, it was cherry. They’d messed with it, but in good ways: a-beam front axle, hairpins instead of a four-link up front, headers, a five-speed, and a big-block Chevy under the hood. I spent an hour talking to the guy. I was totally hooked.
GAIL: Your Mom told me.
BRIAN: Some people, they fall in love with baseball, or bass fishing, or musical theatre. Me, I love cars. That’s my thing. I don’t know why. That car show grabbed me, that’s all I know.
GAIL: Sure.
BRIAN: You don’t understand at all. Being gay isn’t like that, not even a little bit. It isn’t what I’m into. It’s who I am. I could still fight it? Fight what?
GAIL: Again, Brian. I’m sorry.
DAVE: So there we are. Three Mormons in this car. And, maybe, none.
GAIL: Either way, you and I don’t have anything in common.
BRIAN: What about, you, Phyllis?
PHYLLIS: What about me?
BRIAN: Do you count? As a Mormon?
PHYLLIS: I attend all my meetings; I fulfill all my callings; I go to the temple weekly. I read my scriptures and I pray. I am certainly a Mormon. In nearly every way that matters.
BRIAN: So okay.
PHYLLIS: But I never have forgiven him. I'm sorry, this rain seems to have gotten to me, I don't usually talk like this. But he took them all. I did not deserve that.
DAVE: You took me in.
PHYLLIS: You needed a job and I needed a salesman.
BRIAN: So you're like us too. A sort-of Mormon.
DAVE: Welcome to the sort-of Mormon car.
GAIL: Our honesty car.
BRIAN: It goes both ways! (DAVE manhandles BRIAN out of the office.)
PHYLLIS: I'm calling the police!
BRIAN: Interfering bitch!
DAVE: Will you just . . . (He flings BRIAN to the ground. BRIAN lies there, his head in his hands.) What the hell is this?
BRIAN: She told his bishop.
DAVE: What?
BRIAN: She got into my Hotmail account. She found my emails to Jake.
DAVE: Calm down. Just tell me what happened.
BRIAN: She figured out who he is. She called his bishop, and she called his parents. (A cell phone goes off.)
DAVE: Great. (He answers.) Dave McGregor. Gail? (He listens.)
BRIAN: He isn't out.
DAVE: Yeah, he's here.
BRIAN: We talked about it. He was looking for the right moment, you know?
DAVE: Look, you're probably gonna need to come get him. Phyllis called the cops.
BRIAN: No one knew. Now everyone knows, and everything's wrong.
DAVE: (Hanging up.) That was your aunt.
BRIAN: Yeah, I left her a note.
DAVE: Scary note.
BRIAN: I wasn't really gonna do it.
DAVE: I'm glad.
BRIAN: We were friends!
PHYLLIS: Not from what I read!
BRIAN: You've wrecked his life.
DAVE: Brian has a point.
PHYLLIS: You're a homosexual predator, a vicious filthy . . .
BRIAN: We were friends!
PHYLLIS: Not from what I read!
BRIAN: You've wrecked his life.
DAVE: Brian has a point.
PHYLLIS: You're taking his side?
DAVE: Phyllis, I think you'd better go home.
PHYLLIS: I can't. I have an office to clean up. It's been vandalized.
DAVE: I'll take care of it.
PHYLLIS: We're not keeping him on the payroll!
BRIAN: Like I'd stay!
DAVE: We'll talk about it later.
BRIAN: You've, you've—I don't even know what you've done! For sure he's not allowed—.
PHYLLIS: Good! Good!
DAVE: Phyllis! Go home.
PHYLLIS: He goes first! He goes first!
DAVE: Phyllis, I will deal with this.
PHYLLIS: My office!
DAVE: I will clean everything up. You look terrible. Go home, let me deal with this.
PHYLLIS: I'm fine.
DAVE: You're not fine. And Brian's my responsibility.
PHYLLIS: Yes! You brought him here! You hired him. (She holds her side.)
DAVE: Phyllis?
PHYLLIS: I'm fine. I'll go. (Turns before she leaves.) I want him gone.
DAVE: You don't look well.
PHYLLIS: Need my pills.
DAVE: I'll get 'em. Brian get me some water. (BRIAN runs off.)
PHYLLIS: I heard what he called me, Dave.
DAVE: Well, you outed his friend.
PHYLLIS: I saved that boy!
DAVE: Not how he sees it.
PHYLLIS: He's a filthy pervert! I did the right thing!
DAVE: Phyllis, I'm worried about you, I'm gonna call in, drive you to the hospital. (Dialing his cell.)
BRIAN: (Brings a glass of water.) Dave. Customers.
DAVE: Talk to 'em.
PHYLLIS: No!
BRIAN: Do I even work here?
DAVE: (On phone.) Yeah, I need to leave the lot. My sister's sick. You bet.
BRIAN: I'm not a salesman.
PHYLLIS: You're certainly not!
DAVE: Can you both just calm down? (Pointing to each of them.) You're mad at her; you're mad at him. Meanwhile, Phyllis, you need to see a doctor. Can we deal with being pissed off later? (They both grudgingly shrug assent.)
PHYLLIS: The hospital's useless. They can't help me.
DAVE: We'll see. (On phone.) Yeah, thanks.
BRIAN: What do I do?
DAVE: Sell 'em a car. Phyllis, let's go. (He exits with PHYLLIS. BRIAN watches them go.)
BRIAN: Shit. Shit! (He straightens his shoulders, smiles.) Hi. Can I help you with something? (He exits.)

SCENE TWELVE

(DAVE, BRIAN and GAIL sit in a car. A pause.)
GAIL: Not to complain, Dave. But do we have to sit in this car?
DAVE: It's got the best view of the rest of the lot.
GAIL: What happened to that Montana?
DAVE: Sold it.
BRIAN: Poor suckers who bought that piece of . . . crap.
DAVE: It's not so bad.
GAIL: I'm sorry, Dave. A day like today, and I complain about the car we're sitting in.
DAVE: It's okay.
BRIAN: They can't do anything?
DAVE: They said something about chemo again. She was pretty adamant. No.
GAIL: Even if it saves her life?
DAVE: It won’t. And she hates it.
GAIL: Surely her cancer is worse than the chemo.
DAVE: It has to be.
BRIAN: I’m glad it’s painful.
GAIL: Don’t say that.
BRIAN: Interfering bitch.
GAIL: Don’t say that!
BRIAN: I thought this was the honesty car.
GAIL: Well, I’m tired of the honesty car. Can it not be the honesty car today?
BRIAN: Jake didn’t hurt her!
GAIL: Brian. Honey. She’s dying.
BRIAN: Good.
DAVE: If you can’t talk about my sister respectfully, I’d just as soon you left.
BRIAN: (After a pause.) Sorry.
GAIL: How’s Jake?
BRIAN: I got one email from him.
GAIL: What did it say?
BRIAN: “Can’t meet you, they’re watching me, shouldn’t even write, I’m sorry about the.”

GAIL: About the what?
BRIAN: That’s it. “About the.” I’m imagining he just had time to hit send.
DAVE: Well, I am sorry about that.
GAIL: Do you want to get out of here?
DAVE: In a bit.
GAIL: Did you get the office cleaned up?
DAVE: The thing is, Phyllis won’t let anyone near our files. She has her own system, she says. I did the best I could, but I have no idea where everything goes.
GAIL: (To BRIAN.) You freaked me out, you know.
BRIAN: I know. I really wouldn’t have, you know, killed her.
BRIAN: (Mutters.) Something like that. (Pause.)
GAIL: I just keeping thinking, you know, she gave you a job.
DAVE: Yeah, you keep going back to that.

So you’re like us, too.
A sort-of Mormon.
Welcome to the sort-of Mormon car.

Our honesty car.
Just another crappy GM minivan.
GAIL: It just seems so out of character.

DAVE: It was. I’ll never forget the phone call. I was living in a crummy little motel then. No money. Drinking—I’d never touched the stuff before, I was in the bishopric. But I thought, “Hey, when people hit rock bottom, they’re usually drunk, let’s try that.” And the phone rang. She said: “Dave, I have no use for someone who could do what you did. But I just lost a salesman. You can never touch my books, and I’ll watch you like a hawk when it comes to money. But I’m in a bind. You can sell cars for me if you want to.”

BRIAN: That sounds like her. World’s most amazing bitch.

(They laugh.)

DAVE: “We’ll have to change the sticker price. More work for me.” (They laugh again.)

GAIL: Well, we should go.

DAVE: Yeah.

GAIL: Can you come too?

DAVE: One phone call—it’ll be okay. Just let me lock up.

GAIL: Okay.

(trying for a light tone.)

But this doesn’t count as a date.

DAVE: Sure it does.

GAIL: Visiting a dying woman in the hospital? I don’t think so.

BRIAN: What am I gonna do?

DAVE: About what?

BRIAN: A job. This job.

DAVE: Brian, this really isn’t the time to talk about—.

BRIAN: I trashed your office, I know. But I was provoked.

DAVE: I’m not denying that.

BRIAN: Dave, is this really so impossible? She won’t be here.

DAVE: She’s so damn tough.

BRIAN: But they did say, Dave. This is it.

DAVE: I know. It’s just hard to think about.

BRIAN: So there’s a chance I could come back and work for you?

DAVE: We’ll cross that bridge when we come to it.


DAVE: Yeah.

BRIAN: I like this job. I don’t want to lose it.

DAVE: Brian, look. I know what this is about.

BRIAN: I like this job, and I think I’m pretty good at it, so—.

DAVE: This is the one place Jake might come back to.

BRIAN: (Pause.) Yeah.

DAVE: You can’t call him, and you can’t email him. But someday, he might stop by.

BRIAN: I think I’m in love with him.

GAIL: I know.

BRIAN: “I’m sorry about the . . . “ That’s the last thing I’m ever going to hear from him. I hate her. (Pause.)

DAVE: I don’t believe it.

GAIL: What?

DAVE: She’s back. (He points to the office. Phyllis is there, looking terrible. Dave sprints over. The others follow.)

Phyllis, what the hell—?

PHYLLIS: Where’s my checkbook?

DAVE: Phyllis, what are you doing here?

PHYLLIS: Those doctors. They don’t know me. They don’t know anything.

DAVE: You left the hospital?

PHYLLIS: I want my checkbook!

DAVE: Phyllis, how did you get here?

PHYLLIS: Pump me full of drugs, knock me half asleep. I need to go to work, I told ’em! Dave can’t manage. He’s useless; Dave, he’s a crook. Would they listen? Would they listen at all to me?

DAVE: How did you get here!

PHYLLIS: I had some money. You thought I didn’t have any money, but I had some—cab fare.

DAVE: I’m calling the hospital.

GAIL: Give me your cell, I’ll do it.

DAVE: Yeah, good. (Hands her his cell.)

PHYLLIS: (Finally sees Brian.) You!

DAVE: Phyllis.

PHYLLIS: (Pointing a shaking finger at Brian.) You’re the one! Filthy pervert came in here and stole my checkbook.

BRIAN: I did not!

PHYLLIS: I’ve called the police! You get away from that car! Phyllis, you need to calm down.

PHYLLIS: I work here! I am your boss!

GAIL: Dave, they say she left AMA.

BRIAN: What does that . . . ?

DAVE: Against medical advice. Great.

PHYLLIS: Don’t you lie to me. You took my checkbook; the police will be here any second!

BRIAN: Look, I didn’t touch—. (Suddenly Phyllis screams. Dave holds her.)

PHYLLIS: (Pointing.) You’re a crook, and you’re a whore, and you’re a filthy pervert!

GAIL: They’re sending an ambulance; it may be a few minutes.

PHYLLIS: Let go of me! Give me back my checkbook! Let me go!

GAIL: Phyllis, I have your checkbook. It’s okay. (A pause. Then Phyllis points at Gail.)

PHYLLIS: You filthy thieving whore!

DAVE: Phyllis! This is Dave.

PHYLLIS: I don’t know any Dave.

DAVE: I’m your brother. I work for you!

PHYLLIS: I work for my father! (She’s thrashing about wildly.)

GAIL: She’s hurting herself.

DAVE: Phyllis, please! Calm down. It’s okay, everything’s okay!

PHYLLIS: It’s not okay!

DAVE: Yes, Phyllis, everything’s going to be fine!

PHYLLIS: They’re dead! They’re dead they’re dead they’re dead they’re dead.

DAVE: Phyllis, it’s me.

PHYLLIS: It’s my fault and they’re all dead! (She’s weeping un-
controllably.)
GAIL: Dave, you've got to stop this.
DAVE: I don't know what to—.
BRIAN: Phyllis? Would you like a blessing? (A pause. PHYLLIS calms down a little.)
PHYLLIS: A blessing?
BRIAN: I have the priesthood, Phyllis. Can I give you a blessing? (A pause. PHYLLIS looks at him suspiciously.)
PHYLLIS: Do I know you?
BRIAN: I worked with you.
PHYLLIS: I don't remember.
BRIAN: Would you like a blessing?
DAVE: Maybe I should do this.
GAIL: He's not a member of the Church anymore.
DAVE: He's seventeen, he's got the Aaronic priesthood, that's all.
GAIL: That's more than you have.
DAVE: He can't give blessings.
GAIL: If it gives her some comfort, what does it matter?
PHYLLIS: I killed my babies! (She's weeping.)
BRIAN: You didn't kill them, Phyllis.
PHYLLIS: I did, I let them go with Harlan, I had to work.
BRIAN: God says you're not responsible.
PHYLLIS: I could have gone with them. I let them go alone.
BRIAN: God says it's okay.
PHYLLIS: You've talked to God?
BRIAN: I did.
PHYLLIS: Well, it can't just be you.
DAVE: No, it's okay. I'll help.
GAIL: Me too.
PHYLLIS: You're a woman.
GAIL: Sometimes women can help.
PHYLLIS: I never heard that before.
BRIAN: It's true. (Pause.)
PHYLLIS: Then I guess it's okay.
BRIAN: Okay, um. Let's lay our hands... on her head.
DAVE: I should be the mouthpiece.
BRIAN: She trusts me.
GAIL: It's okay Dave. (They gather around PHYLLIS. They lay their hands on her head.)
DAVE: You address the person, you use her full name. Phyllis Marjorie McGregor Wells.
BRIAN: Just let me do this, okay? (They bow their heads.)

Dear God. Heavenly Father. We're asking you to bring peace to the soul of our, um, of Phyllis, um, Wells. Heavenly Father. Some of us here don't have the most perfect feelings for this woman. Some of us... don't care for her much. Forgive us. And forgive her. And give her peace. She's had a lot of pain in her life. And we don't understand. But we know, through it all, that you're, you know, there for us: that you love us. And, Phyllis, you know? I think maybe you haven't had a lot of people love you in this life. Maybe only one man, plus two little girls. But God loves you. That's what He's telling me now. So please, Heavenly Father. Please. Give us peace. Bring peace to the soul of this woman, our... yeah... our sister. In Jesus' name. Amen.
GAIL and DAVE: Amen.
PHYLLIS: Amen. (She closes her eyes. They all stand. PHYLLIS lies quietly, a tiny smile on her face.)
GAIL: Okay.
DAVE: Yeah. Did the trick.
GAIL: Brian, honey, that was beautiful. (A pause. DAVE and GAIL hold hands. BRIAN strokes PHYLLIS' forehead.)
BRIAN: Aunt Gail.
GAIL: What?
BRIAN: He's never coming back here, is he? Jake?
DAVE: No, Brian. Probably not.
BRIAN: They'll never let him call or email again. They'll send him away.
GAIL: They might.
BRIAN: They'll turn him against me. They'll make me the villain. The cause. And there's nothing I can do about it.
GAIL: No.
BRIAN: And you, Aunt Gail. You still haven't talked to Andy.
GAIL: Not yet. I will.
DAVE: We'll talk with him together. (GAIL nods.)
BRIAN: (Nods. Crying a little, but calm.) And he'll go, or not go, and it'll be fine either way. And you, Gail and Dave, you guys are going to end up together. Aren't you? (GAIL nods a little, sadly. DAVE can't look at BRIAN.) And I'm the only one who doesn't get a happy ending. (They aren't sure what to say.) It's okay. That's just how things are.
GAIL: Brian...
BRIAN: I'm okay. Dave, if you'll let me have your sports coat. Let's see if we can make her a little more comfortable. (Slow final blackout as they gather around her again.)

END
THE PROS AND CONS OF WRITING CONFESSIONAL MEMOIR IN THE MORMON MILIEU

By Phyllis Barber

But this dictum raises a question. What work are you, the writer, to do? Do you write to serve your cultural tradition or to aspire to the highest level of artistry? Do you write to explore the unknown in both the self and in the mystery of life? Is the role of the writer that of adventurer into the mimetic ocean of language where a personal or even universal truth might be revealed? The very idea of creativity implies that the creator answers to his or her Muse (which could also be referred to as the “still small voice”), that the creator must listen carefully to this deepest voice within. You, the literary writer, want to be sensitive to the entire spectrum of what it means to be human. You have personal passions you want to follow and explore.

But LDS culture insists that the righteousness of a man or woman is more important than his or her creative gifts. The emphasis lies upon one’s worthiness, rather than on one’s talent.

For example, in the July 1977 Ensign article, “The Gospel Vision of the Arts,” President Spencer W. Kimball writes,

The full story of Mormonism has never yet been written nor painted nor sculpted nor spoken. It remains for inspired hearts and talented fingers yet to reveal themselves. They must be faithful, inspired, active Church members to give life and feeling and true perspective to a subject so worthy.

So it is not sufficient to be a great writer or artist in the Mormon milieu; it is more essential to be a good person, “clean and free from the vices, and thus entitled to revelations.”

At times, some Church authorities seem to have taken an
When we have access to Holy Writ, doesn't it seem presumptuous, even borderline blasphemous, to attempt to find “truth” through one's individual creativity?

almost adversarial position to artists. Boyd K. Packer once told an anecdote wherein a member of the Quorum of the Twelve pointed out during a meeting that musicians tend to be “temperamental,” to which one of the other apostles replied, “More temper than mental.”4 “Very frequently,” Packer once said, “when our musicians, particularly the more highly trained among them, are left to do what they want to do, they perform in such a way as to call attention to themselves and their ability. They do this rather than give prayerful attention to what will inspire. I do not mean ‘inspire’ as the music or art of the world can inspire. I mean inspire!”5

Mormon writers are not encouraged to dwell upon themselves, their gifts, or their problems, but are encouraged to get into stride and contribute to the larger whole. It would seem that a Mormon artist needs to be open to being instructed in the art of propriety so that something truly spiritual can transpire in his or her work. On the face of it, there-
fore, it would appear that the confessional memoir would have a hard time fitting into this mix. The genre implies that the author has something to confess. It implies that the author has possibly been a party to transgression.

So, how do living, breathing, sometimes flailing human beings—more specifically writers—fit into this context? Though no one has yet castigated me personally for being so candid about my less-than-perfect-according-to-Mormonism life, there is an underlying sense that such public confessions as I have written are not desirable or wise.

According to Webster, to confess means, “To admit or acknowledge something damaging or inconvenient to oneself; to unburden one’s sins or the state of one’s conscience to God or to a priest.” The word “confession” has implications and shades of shame, disgrace, and a sense of having fallen away from a particular belief community, whether it be secular or religious.

The idea of confession is not really a part of Mormon culture in the same way that it is in, for instance, a Baptist church where there is a “sinner’s chair.” There is no Mormon analogue of a Catholic priest sitting on the other side of a screen listening to confession with a non-judgmental ear. Mormonism is more inclined to talk about not dwelling on one’s problems or lives, not wasting time challenging doctrine or Church authorities. Rather, members should look to the heavens and prophets for guidance while working their heads off in service.

A BETTER WORD to describe what writers of memoir and personal essay are doing might be “candid,” rather than “confessional”—stories being presented because they reveal who a person is with less spin, less posing, fewer masks. Though there is an element of personal revelation in both words, the word “confession” more fully implies one’s wish to be forgiven or to make amends.

This brings us to our core concern, “What, if anything, can be gained from writing an intimate confession or from writing an unreserved, forthright account of your life?”

If you are a memoirist, religious or not, you will at some point in your writing ask yourself, “How will this affect my family and those closest to me? How much license can I take? Whom will I offend if I put this in writing? How ethical is it for me to write about someone else’s life and/or mistakes since a memoir inevitably includes people with whom I interact on a daily basis?”

If you write fiction, you can wear the mask and pretend your work has nothing to do with the people around you. But the truth is that all writers collect their material from the realm of the living, from the experience that has shaped their lives, and from the realm of what they know and have been taught to believe. But can you write about anything just because you are a writer?

Here are seven arguments against writing confessional memoir; some of them specifically informed by the Mormon milieu, some applicable to other contexts as well:

1. Doctrine & Covenants 42:88 admonishes: “And if thy brother or sister offend thee, thou shalt take him or her between him or her and thee alone.” In other words, keep your own counsel behind closed doors and with the proper Church authorities. Old school wisdom in many cultures says to keep the secrets in the family and settle matters in private. This model has had considerable influence on my thinking and led me to keep the Raw Edges manuscript shut away in a drawer for several years.

2. A Mormon artist should be free from impurity in order to write the kind of material that is truly inspiring, the kind that is worthy of revelation. If one has made mistakes, he or she should settle them with the proper authorities, make peace with the Savior, and then return to dedicated service, not dwelling in the past or wallowing in guilt or sin.

3. Writing one’s life takes time away from service to others. A good Latter-day Saint artist should be serving God at all times and helping to build the Kingdom of God here on earth. If that is not the artist’s primary task, then he or she needs to re-examine his or her intentions.

4. Why put on a public display of one’s shortcomings and challenges? Such is likely a subterfuge for gaining attention. It is selfish, self-absorbed, and narcissistic to wrangle with one’s life in print. An artist should not practice artistry in order to bring attention to one’s self, but to glorify God.

5. There are many sides to every story, and you, the memoirist, are telling only one side. A memoir invariably includes other players. Is it your right to tell others’ stories? Do you know the other peoples’ stories? Is it in accordance with the Gospel of Jesus Christ to speculate on others’ motives and show their conflicting sides? Shouldn’t that be something they do themselves?

6. What are the consequences of a varnished or an unvarnished story on future generations? Your writing may affect your family—your children, your grandchildren—in adverse ways when they realize that one of their predecessors was less than perfect, or—even worse—a bad example.

7. Could writing a memoir erase the writer who has disclosed all of who she is, creating the sense that there’s no more story to tell, that the end has been written, and that there is no more evolution? Is the memoir hardening the author into concrete, even though that person is still living and changing? Do Readers think they now know who the writer truly is? An additional hazard is that writers can become totally occupied with a particular version of their story, becoming imprisoned in their narrative, and finding themselves unable to escape that obsessive viewpoint.

These seven points are the thorns that prick the conscience of every memoirist, religiously driven or not.
WHEN A WRITER influenced by a religious perspective sets out to write a novel, a short story, a poem, or a memoir, the desire to be prayerful, to trust a Greater Intelligence, and to be in tune with what this Intelligence would have one do, is important. It has been important to me. But it is like balancing on a tightrope. A writer who wants to remain within any institution must walk a thin line. In the Mormon situation, the temptation is often to prove one's loyalty by writing stories with happy endings, illustrating the joy of living the Gospel. As essayist Holly Welker writes, “We are a church of autobiographers. But as a church, if not as individuals, we have particular expectations about what an autobiography or life story should do: promote faith.”

In a religious (or even political) context, people assume that all things of importance have already been outlined in Holy Writ and in the utterances of the leaders. Doesn’t it seem presumptuous, even borderline blasphemous, to attempt to find “truth” through one’s individual creativity? In such a context, writing “what you cannot know before you have written,” as Hélène Cisoux put it in Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing seems almost heretical.

But let’s be optimistic. Let’s say that you, the writer, are a good person, a religious person, someone who adheres to an ethical, temperate, moral lifestyle. But you’ve encountered difficulties along the way, places where your story seems to deviate from the norm, and you want to reconcile those places with Mormonism at large. You believe that you can do this by writing about those difficulties, by essaying them, by looking them straight in the eye. You want to tell your story as is, not as someone else would tell it. How do you proceed?

In Levi Peterson’s autobiography, A Rascal by Nature, A Christian by Yearning (which he considers a work of candor rather than confession), he writes openly about his experience with masturbation and his futile attempt at sexual intercourse with a girlfriend in the front seat of his car. In advance of publication, he knew that this openness would “make his likely readers . . . uncomfortable” with his revelations. To quote Peterson:

My impulse to make such facts known derives, in part, from a resentment I have felt since early childhood toward the mandatory silence polite society imposes upon matters of sex and personal hygiene. It has puzzled me that people can’t talk about instincts and behaviors known to be common to all of them. My impulse to reveal such facts also derives from my sense that, without a due portion of them, my life’s story is incomplete. I don’t want to present myself as something I am not . . . I do not present these facts for others either to emulate or to repudiate. I present them simply because they reveal the person I was, and that is the purpose of an autobiography.

His willingness to delve into the “seamier” side of life has gotten him into trouble with his relatives a number of times. His mother once wrote him to ask, “Are your stories wholesome? Do they uphold truth and honest principles? I hope no child of mine will write poor stories—or bad stories. There are so many good people in the world—so many true, honest-hearted people—surely we should portray the good side of this lovely world of ours.” A niece also wrote a tactful remonstrance to his stories: “What I object to is the picture I think they may be painting of you . . . which seems in variance with the great & good man you are in my eyes. The shocker is . . . that one I think so highly of should delve his mind in subjects which I am not sure are not reflective of his self in action.”

Works by contemporary Mormon writers whose writing could be classified “confessional” or “candid,” are Daughter of Zion by Rodello Hunter; What of the Night? a book of personal essays by Stephen Carter; Secret Ceremonies by Deborah Laake; Grace Notes by Heidi Hart; The New York Regional, Mormon Singles Halloween Dance by Elna Baker (a memoir exploring the challenge of abstaining from pre-marital sex); the essays of Holly Welker; and the classic memoir written in 1941, A Mormon Mother: An Autobiography by Annie Clark Tanner, among others. These works come mostly from those who have felt a deep commitment and a reverence for their religion but who also felt at odds with it. These are writers who have encountered their Mormon heritage as something more idealistic than realistic. As Lavina Fielding Anderson, a well-known Mormon writer, historian, editor, and activist in the cause of candid Mormonism, said in a recent email to me, “These writers were writing less to confirm their Mormonism, than, like you, to describe a sometimes uneasy negotiation with institutional Mormonism that includes both moments of reconciliation and also fairly serious estrangement.”

However, despite these conflicts, Mormonism also provides the very seeds that can motivate a writer to write candidly.

• The Mormon culture has taught you to strive to be perfect “even as your Father in Heaven is perfect.” And if you’re willing to entertain the thought, there’s room to ask just what “perfection” is and who can define it.

• You’ve been encouraged by Church leaders to keep a personal journal in which you tell your own story and record your family history. In this way, writing and self-revelation are encouraged.

• You’ve been told that the “truth shall make you free.” (John 8: 32). But, again, the thought arises, “What is the truth, and how much do I tell in order to be free?” Truth feels ubiquitous, but you wonder about the differences and the shadings between The Capital “T” Truth and the small “t” truth.

• The Church has encouraged you to follow the teachings of Jesus Christ, but you have realized that these teachings
are harder to live than you at first imagined. It not only takes a lifetime to learn to live as the Savior taught, it also takes a lifetime to figure out what it was the Savior was teaching in the first place.

- Church leaders have taught you to have love, compassion, and charity for others. This compassion enables you to see others as children of God on the road of eternal progression. You are hopefully slower to judge others, and even yourself when you find yourself wandering out in the cold, wondering if there really is any redemption or forgiveness through Christ’s atonement.

Using these Church-given tools, can confessional or candid writing about one’s personal life have value outside the office of your bishop or even outside the walls of your own home?

Levi Peterson answered this question in a recent email to me: “Yes, the confessional memoir has a place in Mormonism. Absolutely. However, I am quite sure that the typical active Mormon (one who believes and goes to church) would want an autobiography that characterizes its subject in ideal terms (as) Medieval hagiography depicted Catholic saints in ideal terms.”

During my twenty years’ teaching both creative nonfiction and fiction at the Vermont College of Fine Arts, and while I was writing my own decidedly non-hagiographic memoir about the dissolution of my thirty-three-year Mormon temple marriage, my falling apart, and my pulling myself together, I have been nagged by the questions we have been contemplating here: What is the value of keeping the details of my personal life private and behind closed doors? What can be gained from being candid about my personal life on a broader scale?

I finally chose to write a no-holds-barred memoir. To me, the word confession ultimately meant to unburden, unload, relieve, depressurize, clean the barnacles off the hull of the ship. I was also drawn to an obsolete definition of the word writing: “The writer is an exorcist of his own darkness, his own demons.”

So how do I put the pieces together to make a whole that is distinct, credible, and worthy of being read? During my twenty years of teaching, I have been struck by the following words of wisdom from writers such as Maria Vargas Llosa who’d been quoted ever I wanted because I didn’t have to let anyone else read my words. I found validation in the direction I had chosen to W. Craibe Angus, who wrote, “Macerate your subject, let it boil slow, then take the lid off and look in—and there your stuff is, good or bad.” I also took note from Mormon writer, Stephen Carter, who writes in his essay, “The Departed,” “What if I could give myself enough authority to start my own story? I mean really delve into my life, really probe my own story? I mean really probe my own story? I mean really delve into my life, really probe my thoughts, really lay out what my experience seemed to present to me instead of letting the Mormon story take over the interpretation.”

Writing can help you literally see what you think. As you write draft after draft, you can ask, “Is this right? Is this the way it happened?” The anger and hurt inside—where does it really come from, and what does it mean? The truth may not be so easy to discern. It can be as slippery as mercury which pulls...
away every time you try to touch it. As Oscar Wilde expressed it in a greeting card quotation, “The truth is rarely pure and never simple.”

SO NOW, WHAT are the reasons for writing a candid or confessional memoir in a Mormon context, or in any other milieu?

1. You can retrace your steps through your labyrinth, essay your journey, understand it more fully, and thus find the magic key—the one usually kept in a secret box by the Wise One of fairy tales—to unlock something that may have been a puzzle or a stumbling block. Then you can write past what you think you know, discovering important, but until-now-hidden, things about yourself.

2. Your journey, if honestly documented, can help others start on their own journeys. When you write down your journey toward self-understanding, your reader can gain something essential from your struggle.

3. You will experience moments of transparency—a place of whiteness, brilliance, and unstained purity. You’ll escape the Emperor's New Clothes. You will be able to say, “What you see is what you get.” Maybe you aren’t as brilliant, talented, and good as you would like to be, but you are willing to own what and who you are, and you have found that you are still fluid and capable of change.

4. The truth you have made public will no longer be lying in wait to catch you by surprise or to be discovered and exposed by someone else. A demon personally exorcised leaves behind fewer scars than one extracted by someone else.

   This concept can be illustrated by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission created by Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu. In 1993, leaders in South Africa successfully completed a long series of negotiations that would end Apartheid and set in motion the institutions of majority democracy. But Apartheid had inflicted horrific events on the people of South Africa. Many deep psychological, emotional, and physical wounds marred them. The purpose of Truth and Reconciliation was to create an atmosphere where the victims and the perpetrators were brought together in a courtroom to tell their stories to each other. Their blind hatred changed during that time in court in full view of the press and the South African nation. When the participants finally left the courtroom, they took with them a greater understanding of the complexities of each other's story, knowing a little better why members of the police force, for example, had done what they had. Certainly one woman who faced the man who'd murdered her son did not leave with an about-face empathy or trust for the policeman, but the fact that she'd listened to his story gave her the ability to question her assumptions. Similarly, the police officer left with a deeper understanding of a woman whose life he had changed so irrevocably.

   This endeavor by Mandela and Tutu has served as a model for me to reconsider my own approach to truth-telling, giving me the possibility of moving intellectually and emotionally to a place beyond blame, beyond fault-finding, beyond self-pity. There I can hear the other side of the story.

5. In the writing process, you can arrive at a more mature understanding of your own story. The truth is relative depending on your angle of perception. Your account is, in actuality, only your perception of what has happened. Acknowledging that may be your most valuable achievement in the writing of your memoir.

   So much of today's confessional writing is of the kiss-and-tell, talk-show variety with not-so-subtle shades of kill-the-bastard, take-him-down. But in the process of writing one's story, it’s possible to go beyond whining, complaining, or seeking revenge by telling all. It’s possible to turn the tables and ask yourself if you’ve been drowning in self-pity because life didn’t turn out the way you thought it should and to ask if you’re being swallowed by your bitterness or self-righteousness. It’s possible to detach yourself from whatever perfect-life picture you had painted in your mind—the one you had set out to achieve at all costs. In my case, this picture was the smiling mother who never said an unkind word to anyone and never snapped at her children, the cooperative wife who held her family together at all costs.

   After I’d finished what seemed to be the 2,000th draft of Raw Edges, I asked David, my long-time first husband, whom much of my story was about, if he would read it. I was finally ready to know whether what I’d written rang true for him. After so much revision, I’d overcome my sense of having been wronged, and this helped me to tell as much of his side of the story as the book would allow. I was more willing to operate out of a place of forgiveness and to give him a wider berth. I had also shifted the focus of the book away from just me to a much larger playing field—a philosophical analysis of how people get mired down by the stories they insist on believing.

   When David had finished reading the manuscript, he telephoned me. “The book is good, even great,” he said. And then he paused. “There's love after all,” he finally said, softly. I was stunned by his words. He had not only heard my story for what seemed like the first time; he had received it. And in
his reception of my story, something in me was set free—the part of me that believed no one was listening. I was tremendously gratified by his response. It meant that I had transformed the torn pieces of what I’d once perceived to be a more-than-sad story, that I had written through the labyrinth, emerging with a new understanding that prepared me to shed the weighty, sorrowful narrative I’d carried for years.

I turn again to words from Stephen Carter in his essay, “The Departed.”

All of us want to have a community where we are heard, where we can hear other people, where our individual stories can cross-fertilize, making something new and beautiful. There are a lot of us, and we’re very different from each other . . . . [I wonder

A teacher once told me that universal truths are often found in those embarrassing, shameful, hurtful incidents and attitudes that hold so much power over an individual.
if, as a church, we need to follow Alma’s advice, to “mourn with those that mourn . . . and comfort those that stand in need of comfort.” To me, that sounds like a good way to say, “Let’s start listening to each other’s stories.”

6. By moving beyond easy dualities, beyond the obvious, you can make art of your experience. You can move into the realm of creating, dreaming, and shaping new thoughts and possibilities. If you choose to be an artist, your goal is “to write what you cannot know before you have written” just as a painter “paints what she cannot paint.”

A scribe records: an artist pierces the skin of the unknown, sets foot, as Kafka says, in the Holy of the Holies [where] you must take off your shoes . . . your travelling-garment and lay down your luggage; and under that you must shed your nakedness and everything that is under the nakedness and everything that hides beneath that, and then the core and the core of the core, then the remainder and then the residue and then even the Holy of the Holies and let yourself be absorbed by it.

In conclusion, I offer a few questions to all writers, be they memoirists, poets, short story writers, or novelists. Should a book be written to serve the expectations of its audience? Should it be written in a formulaic format with a happy ending and only for entertainment? Should it have good manners and wear Mary Janes? Should a book bear testimony to The Truth, or, by its very nature, can it explore only the tiny tendril roots of The Truth—the roots of personal experience? Should a book be something dangerous, edgy, something that serves as “the axe to break the frozen sea inside of us,” as Kafka has written? What should a book be? And why write a book at all if one does not explore unfamiliar territory, the places where one holds one’s breath because of what might wait around the next corner?

NOTES

3. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
10. Ibid., p. 273.
17. Ibid., 39.
18. Ibid., 17.

MARCH

Winter will finally drift, die.
Snow still upon the trees,
the basement windows blurred
by masks of white. Wind howls
inside the mind. Without a key
it crept inside and stayed.
But you and I—we are not done.
There’s still some meat
left, tender on our bone,
and we’ve not finished eating yet.
The daffodils are coming. Wind’s
banging the window panes.

—MARK KATRINAK

CONGRATULATIONS

Kathryn Pritchett
2009 Starstone Fiction Award Winner “Service Call”
THE PROPHET CLAUDE

By Jack Harrell

Claude Winn was in the garage changing the oil on his motorcycle when he heard the message on the radio. Claude was a big man with a gray and black beard and a sun-browned baldpate on the top of his head. The hair he had left was long and tucked behind his ears, growing past his collar in the back. A retired appliance repairman, he lived in a two-bedroom ranch house along the Kansas River, two miles outside of Eudora. When the message came on the radio, he was kneeling before his motorcycle with words from the Book of Acts spinning lazily in his head. Staring at his reflection in the pan of dirty oil, his baggy eyes emerging from the pink-and-blue detergent film, he heard a voice say, “A message from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.”

Once when Claude had attended a small-business convention in Salt Lake City, he had awakened one morning with the thought of visiting the Mormon temple a few blocks away. But he’d dismissed the idea and attended his meetings instead. Years later he spoke to two missionaries who rode their bicycles in the rain. Standing outside the hardware store in Eudora, soaking wet in their suits, the missionaries had told him they had a living prophet. It sounded too good to be true. But now, kneeling before his motorcycle, he sensed his last chance to find out for himself. He looked up from the oil pan, seeing everything anew. Tools hung neatly above the workbench. A box of Christmas things sat on a high shelf. His wife’s car, which hadn’t been moved since her death, sat mutely beside him. Nothing there could hold him. Only his motorcycle seemed alive, a vehicle to a new reality. He put the pan of dirty oil on the workbench, knowing it wouldn’t take long to lock up the house. In a matter of hours he could shut up his former life against the future.

He was ready to go by four o’clock the next day. He had gone to the post office and had the mail delivery stopped. He’d emptied the refrigerator and wheeled the garbage can to the street. He’d left a note for his son in Topeka, who had a key to the house. “I’m going to find your mother,” it said. Maybe his son would understand. Claude’s wife had been the daughter of the bookkeeper at the appliance store where he learned his trade back in 1960. When he got his own shop, she did the books. When she was tired at the end of a long day she would give him her hand and smile and close her eyes. He believed no woman in the world was more beautiful. They worked hard and got old, bought a motor home and made plans to fish in Alaska, to see the fall colors in Vermont, to run the Florida Keys. Then she died one afternoon while driving home from Lawrence with groceries in the car. Her heart stopped and she crashed into the only tree within a mile of the scene.

After that Claude became unmoored. He walked through the house and sometimes called to his wife, forgetting she wasn’t just in the next room. He began talking to God, who wasn’t there either. He stopped shaving, stopping cutting his hair. When it was light, he rode his motorcycle all over Kansas. He rode to Missouri and Arkansas, going nowhere. He rode and prayed, looking for signs. At night he stared at the TV, listening dumbly to its stories about the Loch Ness monster and the space aliens who built the great pyramids. He watched reality shows, gazing indifferently as the characters vied with one another. He watched politicians and preachers shout and wave their arms. He saw weapons of the future, he saw the factories where peanut butter was made, he saw microchips placed in the eyes of the blind. None of it made sense.

So he turned off the TV and got a Bible. Not knowing where to begin, he decided he may as well start at the beginning and read every word. It took him four days to read the whole Bible, day and night, hardly sleeping. But he still didn’t understand, so he read it again. For weeks he prayed and read all night and prayed and rode his motorcycle all day. His hair got long, his beard got long. Someone told him he looked like a sixty-year-old Jesus. But none of his searching had made sense until now. He left the note to his son on the kitchen table, beneath the keys to the motor home. He left another note for his daughter, Tracy. “Take

JACK HARRELL lives and teaches in Rexburg, Idaho. “The Prophet Claude” is half of a longer work, “A Prophet’s Story,” from his new book A Sense of Order and Other Stories (Signature Books).
Benson fishing,” it said. Benson was Tracy’s boyfriend from California. He wore suspenders and round wire-rimmed glasses and Claude had never liked him. That no longer mattered. Only one thing mattered. He was going to Salt Lake City to see a Mormon prophet.

He put on his leather riding chaps, tucked his graying hair behind his ears, and put on his helmet. He pressed the start button on his Honda Goldwing 1800 and rode the twelve miles from his home to the junction of Interstate 70. From there he headed west toward Salt Lake City, an eighteen-hour ride. The interstate lay before him like a concrete ribbon for hundreds of miles, and he imagined his past peeling away in layers as he rode. Crossing the flatlands of Kansas and eastern Colorado, he felt his childhood disappear. Next came the arrogance and godlessness of his young manhood. As he passed through Denver and into the Rocky Mountains, he felt the early years of his marriage sloughing off—when his children were small and feeding his family was the only thing that mattered. Soon he was riding the shoulder-less freeway through narrow canyon passes crowded by eighteen-wheelers and carloads of summer tourists. The north side of the freeway was walled by rocky cliffs that rose hundreds of feet into the sky, while the south side dropped down into the Colorado River. It was through this stretch that he lost the latter years of his working life, when he believed he was building a legacy. Every dozen miles or so, the old mining towns appeared, built up against the mountains like the ancient sandstone cities of the Hopi. Driving those last miles into Utah, he lost the only thing he had left to hold onto, the lonely miles he’d ridden since his wife’s death.

Except for food and fuel, he stopped once, sleeping for a few hours behind a rest stop outside of Denver. In his sleep he dreamed of the Mormon Temple floating above the Great Salt Lake in a pink, translucent glow, held in the air by hosts of wingless angels in white robes. Once he arrived in Utah, riding up through Price and Helper, Spanish Fork and Provo, he was completely empty. What was left inside him hummed with the roar of the motorcycle’s engine. As he rounded the Point of the Mountain and entered the Salt Lake Valley, a sign looming at the side of the freeway said This is the Place Monument, and he knew this was the place. Cruising the eight-lanes of I-15 into Salt Lake City, the freeway decorated with leftover images of the 2002 Olympics, Claude felt euphoric. He could see the temple in the center of the valley. “Go to the temple, to the center” the hum within him said.

The city had changed since he’d been there last. It was no longer the dusty Western cowboy town he remembered from
years before, his memory of it muddled with hoary images of John Wayne movies. State Street was a wide, direct shot through the valley floor, toward the capitol building, lined with the new government buildings, steel-and-glass high-rises, and expensive specialty shops. The traffic was heavy and pedestrians stepped on and off a new light-rail system. Near the city center were leather-clad, body-pierced punks; richly-dressed, urbane women; harried businessmen wearing cufflinks and shiny leather shoes. The whole city seemed a hub of worldliness, momentarily distracting Claude from the hum that had driven him a thousand miles. But then he saw the temple, walled in like a shrine. At the corner of Main and South Temple, traffic slowed to a crawl. Shoppers and tourists walked alongside the ten-foot concrete Temple Square walls; hundreds more milled around on the wide, curved sidewalks weaving among the fountains and pools in the plaza facing the temple. A great statue of Brigham Young stood at the gates of the plaza, his stern face set, his hand and arm gesturing to the ground.

Claude turned his big motorcycle onto South Temple where the traffic was halted. At a pedestrian stoplight in the middle of the block, a horse and carriage with a driver in a top hat waited to give carriage rides to tourists. But Claude’s eyes were drawn to another sight: a lanky, wild-eyed man in a dark three-piece suit standing on the sidewalk outside the gates of Temple Square. The man was shouting at the passing cars and sweating visibly in the dry summer heat. He had deeply tanned skin and a massive wave of white hair on his head. He held up a cardboard sign written in florescent orange that read ZION IS FLED! Claude knew the man was either a devil or a prophet, that this ground was a land of devils and prophets.

Claude turned north on West Temple and parked his motorcycle on the street. Coming around the corner on the sidewalk outside the wall that separated the city from the sacred inner grounds, he was sore from his ride through the night and still had on his big riding boots and leather chaps over his Levi’s. His denim shirt was rolled up at the sleeves. His beard was parted in the middle from the long ride, his long hair sprouting wildly from his head.

Up ahead the man with the cardboard sign was shouting at the cars, standing near the gates of Temple Square like some hound of hell. The preacher stood next to a three-wheeled bicycle that had a basket full of pamphlets and books. Propped against the bicycle was a tattered piece of plywood crowded with florescent orange letters. GO YE OUT FROM AMONG THEM! it said. In the midst of his shouting, the man took up a bundle of pamphlets, and waved them above his head. “Out prophet is fallen,” he railed at the passing cars. “The Church has become Babylon! Behold, the Corporation of the First Presidency has invested in the R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company!”

Claude turned his head to watch the man, sounding the hum of the spirit that had driven him.

“I know from whence I speak,” the man cried to the onlookers. “I was once an elder among you.” The preacher moved erratically between the street and the sidewalk, amidst shouts and honking horns, shoving his literature at the rolled-up windows of passing cars.

Standing a few feet away, Claude called out: “Are you a prophet?”

The man turned on Claude, seeing him for the first time. “No,” he shouted. “I am no prophet. Only God’s voice is holy!”

“I came to see a prophet,” Claude said.

The preacher looked up at Claude’s face with shifting eyes. “The burden of the Lord which Isaiah did see,” the man said, “was hot coals on his tongue and an ache in his belly.” Up close, the preacher’s brown face was almost gray, his eyes the eyes of a madman. “The children of Israel passed through on dry ground,” he cried, “and the chariots of Pharaoh were drowned in the sea!”

Looking over the man’s shoulder, Claude watched a Salt Lake City police car creep between the congested lanes of traffic, sounding a single blast of its siren. Two officers emerged from the car in crisp black uniforms, their silver badges shining in the sunlight. The preacher took hold of Claude, lifting himself to Claude’s ear. “The judgment of this generation is upon them,” he said in a bitter whisper, but Claude sloughed off the man’s grip. One of the officers took

They worked hard and got old, bought a motor home and made plans to fish in Alaska, to see the fall colors in Vermont, to run the Florida Keys. Then she died one afternoon while driving home from Lawrence with groceries in the car. Her heart stopped and she crashed into the only tree within a mile of the scene.
Crossing the flatlands of Kansas and eastern Colorado, he felt his childhood disappear. Next came the arrogance and godlessness of his young manhood. As he passed through Denver and into the Rocky Mountains, he felt the early years of his marriage sloughing off.

the man by the back of his neck and said, “Come on, Billy. Let's go.”

“I'm not on church property,” the preacher protested. “This is a public sidewalk.”

“You're creating a disturbance,” the officer said. “Let's call it a day for now.”

The preacher squirmed in the policemen's grasp as they carried him to the squad car. “Behold, the inhabitants of Zion are terrible!” he shouted. “Who can stand them?” But Claude wasn't listening. He was already headed toward the gates of Temple Square, his beard parted, searching for the true and living prophet.

Stepping inside Temple Square, Claude felt the hum of the Holy Spirit quivering within him like a gyroscope. The first thing he saw was the flowers, like a beautiful Edenic garden. There were flowers of every color in low-walled planters along the sidewalks, small blossoming trees, and perfectly manicured tracts of green grass. Claude took a deep breath, knowing he was on holy ground, the worldliness of the city behind him. The beautiful gray-and-white Assembly Hall, the famous rounded Tabernacle, and the temple itself with its gothic spires and mournful rounded windows—they stood tall among the trees like ornaments in a crown. He thought he should have cleaned his dirty boots. But then a young woman appeared before him, a beautiful angel like Eve in the garden. She wore a navy blue jumper over a white shirt. She had long blonde hair and a full, pleasant face, her teeth straight and white. “Hi,” she said. “Is this your first visit to Temple Square?”

Claude's spirit burned like a fire. “You have a prophet,” he asked.

“Yes,” the young woman said, “you mean like the Gallery of Prophets? Sister Hope is just starting a tour.” She directed Claude toward a squat, squarish building. “If we hurry we can just make it,” she said. Claude struggled to keep up in his leather chaps, his legs stiff from the long ride. “So where are you from?” she asked over her shoulder.

“Kansas,” Claude said. The Spirit was a spinning centripetal force, humming delicately, and Claude was afraid he might lose his balance.

“That's great,” the young woman said. “I know a sister missionary serving in Kansas.”

Claude didn't think he would ever be going back to Kansas.

Stepping through the doors of the Visitor’s Center, the young woman said, “Sister Hope, here's one more.” Claude took in the building's space, the high ceiling, the museum-like displays. A group of fifteen or twenty people was gathered around Sister Hope, a young woman with shoulder-length, curly brown hair and wearing a white blouse and black skirt. The group consisted of three or four families of various ages and sizes—parents, children, grandparents. “Hello,” Sister Hope said to Claude. “Please join us. We're about to tour the Gallery of Prophets.”

Claude felt the gyroscope tilt forward as he walked with the group toward the prophets, each one portrayed in a life-sized diorama running along the back of the curved, high wall of the building. “Adam was the first prophet,” Sister Hope said. “Prophets are men on earth who speak with God.” The next display showed the prophet Noah standing with a long beard in a long robe, preaching to the people, his arms outstretched to the sky. Behind him was a partially constructed ark; before him men and women laughed and pointed in derision. Sister Hope explained the story of Noah and his ark, saying that Noah preached for a hundred years to people who didn't listen to him. “Prophets give a voice of warning,” she concluded.

Looking at the next display, Moses parting the Red Sea, Claude knew his own life was being parted. Everything before this day was on one side of the divide, everything after that was on the other side. Sister Hope showed them the Old Testament prophets who testified of the need for obedience, men like Isaiah, Daniel, and Malachi. She explained that the New Testament had prophets, too, men like John the Baptist, the Apostle Peter, John the Revelator, men who preached mercy and redemption. Claude moved with the group, listening carefully to Sister Hope and lingering to read every word on every plaque. It was like a story he'd always known.
and had only forgotten for a moment.

When Sister Hope showed them the ancient American prophets with names like Nephi, Abinadi, and Mormon, Claude laughed out loud for joy, causing Sister Hope to clear her throat, displeased. As the group passed through a display featuring paintings of the modern-day prophets, from Joseph Smith to the present, Sister Hope said the Holy Ghost was a still small voice that quietly testified of truth. She explained things that the modern prophets had revealed, truths poured out on the earth as thick and sweet as cream, and Claude could barely contain himself. He wanted to leap into the air. “God is in the shape of a man!” he wanted to shout. “Baptism is offered to the dead! The priesthood is restored!”

This new knowledge moved through Claude like electricity, as real as the gyroscope sensation within him. Reaching out, he touched the shoulder of a woman standing beside him, a pear-shaped woman in a pea-green dress. He whispered in her ear, saying it was all true. The woman smiled pleasantly as she inched away from Claude. A few moments later she was speaking to Sister Hope, looking suspiciously back at Claude and gesturing as she spoke.

Then Sister Hope brought the group to a spiral, crimson-carpeted walkway that ascended to the Christus, a great white marble statue of Christ. She stood at the bottom of the walkway, inviting them to ascend to the statue, asking them to take a moment at the red velvet ropes to meditate on the loving kindness of the Savior. Moved by her request, Claude walked softly behind the group, his eyes fixed on the great statue of Christ enrobed in a cloth that came over his shoulders and covered his left breast. Christ’s arms and feet were bare, revealing wounds. His beard was parted, his long hair falling in curls upon his shoulders. Above and behind him, a rich blue field like outer space was adorned with glowing stars.

When Claude reached the red velvet rope, he knelt among the group in his leather riding chaps, causing the mothers to draw their children closer. Claude tucked his long hair behind his ears and then lifted his arms to the Christus. Shutting his eyes, he saw a vision of the spear being thrust into Jesus’ side, flooding the Savior’s body with water and blood. Claude began to weep aloud, unaware that the other members of the group were backing away, turning to descend the crimson walkway. When Claude’s cries turned
to shouts of praise that echoed through the building, Sister Hope moved to a nearby information desk where a gray-haired sister picked up a phone and began to whisper distressfully into the receiver.

The gyroscope lifted Claude to his feet, carrying him out to the brilliant sunlight where the flowers burst like flames along the sidewalk's edges. The trees blossomed like burning bushes testifying. In every direction he saw the children of God milling about sleepily, seeing or not seeing God's power in and through all things. When he saw a Polynesian missionary with a small, leather-bound book, he asked, “Is that the book that speaks from the dust?” She nodded, absently handing him the book. Claude leafed through the hundreds of pages that were as thin as onion skins. Standing on a low wall that enclosed a narrow garden of flowers, he lifted one arm to the vaulting blue sky and began to read in a loud voice, “Alma said unto him, believest thou there is a God?” The crowds of people stopped at the sight of this great preacher in leather and denim, his beard dried and curly in the arid Utah heat. “Will ye deny again that there is a God,” Claude read, “and also deny the Christ?” Laughing, Claude shouted the words to the gathering crowd: “I have all things as a testimony that these things are true.”

Standing on the low wall, Claude didn’t see Sister Hope. He didn’t see the two men in dark suits with tiny wires descending into their collars. As the two men emerged from the crowd, Claude bent his knees and lifted his arms before the faces of the people. With the exulting flowers and trees as witnesses, with the holy temple just a few yards away, he let out a wordless, joyful shout that mingled with his laughter and tears. One of the men spoke into his lapel as the two of them carefully approached Claude, taking his arms from the sky and holding them at his side, the book of scripture falling to the flowerbed. “This is private property,” one of the men said. “We’re going to have to remove you.”

A moment later, laughing, crying, stupidly tugging against the grasp of the men as they carried him away, Claude testified to the crowd: “I’ve seen the Christus,” he proclaimed, “and I have all things as a testimony.” Outside the gates of Temple Square, the same two Salt Lake City police officers emerged from their cruiser and put Claude in handcuffs. Claude called out to the people standing next to the horse and carriage, the people crossing the busy street, the people along the walls of Temple Square. “A voice speaks from the dust,” Claude shouted. “The Mormon book speaks from the dust,” he cried as the officers put him in the squad car.

In a Wal-Mart parking lot on the west side of the valley, the police car screeched to a halt. One of the officers got out and threw Claude’s door open. “Get out,” he said. “Come on, we’ve got another call.” The officer took off Claude’s handcuffs. “We’re going easy on you today, preacher,” he said, slapping Claude between the shoulder blades. The policeman got back in the car and the officers sped off, leaving Claude spinning in a sea of cars in every direction, stores all around, four-lanes of hyperactive traffic feeding into and out of the parking lot. For a moment, the worldliness of the city closed in on him, but then he felt something else, too, the Spirit driving him forward, the gyroscope within. “Testify,” the Spirit said, and Claude walked toward the crowds of people at the Wal-Mart entrance.

Stepping inside the store, not knowing what he would say or do, he went to an unoccupied check stand, climbed up onto it, and raised his hands above his head, just as he’d done a few minutes before on Temple Square—like Noah in the diorama. He stood there a moment, silent, unnoticed. “Testify,” the Spirit said in a voice like courage. “People,” Claude shouted, drawing the crowd’s attention, “there is a book,” he said. “The book speaks from the dust. God speaks in every direction he saw the children of God milling about sleepily, seeing or not seeing God’s power in and through all things.
through every particle of dust.”

The checkers stopped their work, the shoppers fell strangely silent. Claude looked out at all of them, taking in their beautiful faces, the faces of God's children. In the silence, he whispered to them. “I’ve seen the book,” he said, “in the hands of an angel near God’s temple.”

The silence lasted only a moment. Claude heard a roar like ten thousand motorcycles on ten thousand highways. He saw the flashes of fire like a dream of endless rows of brake lights on the highway at night. All the people before him were looking around, searching anxiously. A woman with platinum-colored hair wearing yellow jeans cried out, “What’s going on?”

“It’s motorcycles,” someone said, “lots of motorcycles.”

But Claude knew it wasn’t motorcycles. He knew it was the Spirit, coming like the roar of mighty winds. He saw tongues of fire lick the air. In the gathering crowd, some people murmured while others spoke truths they’d always known but had never given words to before.

“In the last days,” Claude said, “God will pour out his Spirit on all flesh. Your sons and daughters will prophesy; your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams.”

Some recognized the scripture from Acts, on the Day of Pentecost. “On my servants,” he said, “and on my handmaids I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.”

“What’s going on?” a woman in a postal uniform said.

“They’re drunk,” a hairy man in a black muscle shirt responded. He looked around at the people murmuring and testifying, then at the prophet Claude on the check stand. “All of you are drunk.”

Above the buzz of the crowd, above the roar of the Spirit, Claude spoke in a loud voice: “I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath.”

A security guard was moving toward Claude, a black woman in dark pants and a white shirt. As she bumped through the crowd, she jostled two Mormon missionaries in their suits and nametags. One of the missionaries was grinning. He had a digital camcorder trained on Claude. The other missionary, who'd been eating from a bag of peanuts, stood in shock, a sudden look of recognition on his face.

“The sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood,” Claude shouted.

Then the woman in the postal uniform spoke: “Before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.”

“You’re all drunk,” the man in the muscle shirt said.

The security guard took hold of Claude, pulling him down from the check stand, and led him toward the door.

The missionary stuffed the bag of peanuts in his pocket and followed, his companion trailing after, the camera still rolling. The woman in the postal worker's uniform followed them, as did a few from among the crowd.

Passing through door, still in the grasp of the security guard, the prophet Claude turned to those who followed him. He spoke in a loud voice, testifying: “Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord,” he shouted, “shall be saved.”

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IN MEMORY

The dark unwrapped itself,
as around the hawk that brush-painted the sky
when the trees were shaggy with dusk.
It cycled down;
its prey leapt from the grass to greet it,
a wild rabbit about as long as a girl’s arm
that became a flash of life;
and you covered your eyes,
as when you carried flowers in a vase
and, turning, saw the light displaced
by memory, and the beloved face
and self there and the words,
the exquisite gestures
all fell to the floor,
the dark crashing in
and the flowers and wet leaves splashed everywhere.

—BECKY KENNEDY
Almost every culture has traditional mythologies—usually stories set in a primordial time of gods and heroes. Although in popular discourse the term “myth” typically refers only to fiction, literary critics and theologians use it to refer to any “existential” story—even a historical one. Myths explain how the world came to be, why it is the way it is, and toward what end it is headed. They explore the meaning of life and provide role models for people to imitate. They express deep psychological archetypes and instill a sense of wonder. In short, they answer the Big Questions of life and teach us how to live.

Due to modernization in recent centuries, the world has undergone radical changes. A new, scientific way of thinking has challenged traditional religious mythologies, especially in the West. The result is a sort of mythic deficit that leaves many people feeling disconnected and unfulfilled. New technologies have also raised new ethical questions that old myths often are not equipped to address. Thus, some people have turned to reactionary religious fundamentalisms while other, more “liberal” religious thinkers have sought to update their religious mythologies for the modern world.1

Another response has been to construct entirely new myths, often in the form of fantasy and science fiction narratives. Fantasy is similar to fundamentalist religion in that it takes refuge from modernity in an idealized, “magical” past. Science fiction is similar to liberal religion in that it accepts the scientific worldview but infuses it with meaning, wonder, heroism, and sometimes even spirituality. These new myths are less vulnerable than the old mythologies because they make no claim to be literally, historically true. Their claim to truth is at a deeper, more visceral level.

Fantasy and science fiction can be used either to challenge and replace or to support and complement traditional religious mythologies. One author who has adopted the latter strategy is Mormon novelist Orson Scott Card. Literary critic Marek Oziewicz has found in Card’s fiction all the earmarks of a modern mythology. It has universal scope, creates continuity between past, present, and future, integrates emotion and morality with technology, and posits the interrelatedness of all existence.2 Indeed, few science fiction and fantasy authors’ narratives feel as mythic as Card’s. However, nearly all his fiction builds on the work of another modern mythmaker: Mormonism’s founder Joseph Smith. Card’s brand of mythmaking is deliberately and thoroughly Mormon in tone and tenor.

In some respects, Mormonism is a mythology well tailored for the Space and Information Age. Its deity is a man who progressed to godhood through the acquisition of knowledge and with the help of other advanced beings. This deity is said to live near a star called Kolob on one of what may be an infinite number of inhabited worlds. Smith taught a materialist ontology in which miracles obey the laws of nature and where spirit is a kind of matter.3 On the other hand, Mormonism also has spiritual and magical—one might even say fantastical—elements. Smith was a practitioner of folk magic, a believer in angels and devils, and a connoisseur of arcane rituals and artifacts.4 Card, an author of both science fiction and fantasy, has tapped into themes from both ends of the spectrum of Mormon thought. Indeed, almost all of Card’s fiction, whether specifically billed as “Mormon” or not, integrates concepts from Smith’s mythologies to create new myths and new stories that illustrate and explore the same principles.

Christopher C. Smith is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in religions in North America at Claremont Graduate University but somehow manages to fit a little science fiction into his reading schedule every now and then.
Although Thomas S. Monson is the institutional successor to Joseph's prophetic mantle, Card is undeniably Smith's mythmaking heir. Just as the stories of Nephi, Alma, and Moroni have firmly established themselves in the imaginations of millions, so have those of Ender, Alvin Maker, and Lanik Mueller. This article will explore how Card's works have established him not only as an expresser and defender of Mormonism but also as a reformer, pushing his faith community in new directions.

EXPRESSING MORMONISM

WHEN I SAY that Card expresses Mormonism, I am not talking about his penchant for dropping superficial Mormon references into his writings as inside jokes that only Mormon readers will get. Certainly those are there, but they are not at the heart of his writing. In fact, Card has written that Mormons sometimes make the worst readers of his fiction, "because, having caught a Mormon reference (and knowing that I'm a Mormon) they think they've 'got it.' Often what they catch is merely a wink, or a note passed in class, nothing substantive; they miss the substance because they think the wink is all; they think the note is the book."5

The Mormon themes that Card really wants his readers to absorb are much richer and more deeply embedded in the fabric of his narratives. And they are not the sorts of things that only a Mormon will notice and understand. Although Card claims that he never proselytizes in his fiction, he has also said he intends to give readers "an emotionally moving substance because they think the wink is all; they think they've 'got it.' Often what they catch is merely a wink, or a note passed in class, nothing substantive; they miss the substance because they think the wink is all; they think the note is the book."5

One of the most obvious and important recurring motifs in Card's work is sacrifice. Probably the majority of Card's works climax with the central character choosing to sacrifice for the greater good. Sometimes this sacrifice involves the physical death of the character, as in the short story "The Porcelain Salamander." Here a white salamander gives its life to save a girl who is in imminent danger. In so doing, it releases the girl from a curse that had paralyzed her from birth.7 Similarly, the protagonist of the novel Hart's Hope lifts the curse of the evil Queen beauty, but only at the cost of his son's life.8 These stories of course reflect the classic Chrstic pattern in which the curse of sin and death is defeated through the voluntary sacrifice of a sinless messiah. The pattern recurs in Lost Boys where a character named Stevie dies in order to contain the supernatural evil at work in his community. Whereas other characters in the book are unable to detect the evil because they have "good and evil mixed up" inside them, Stevie is able to sense it because he is completely innocent and pure.9

But not all of the sacrifice in Card's novels involves a character's physical death. More often, his works climax with what could be called a moral sacrifice. This is the case in Ender's Game. Here a child protagonist named Ender is manipulated by his adult teachers into annihilating an entire alien race that ostensibly threatens the survival of humankind. When Ender realizes what he has unwittingly done, he anonymously vilifies himself in a book called The Hive Queen so that humanity's collective guilt for this mass-murder will be imputed to him, allowing humanity to make a moral recovery. Through Ender's writings, humankind comes to understand that the aliens were simply misunderstood and did not really need to be destroyed. This understanding, however, requires Ender's voluntary alienation from his own species. For the rest of his life, Ender carries a terrible burden of guilt for humanity's crime.10

Something similar occurs in the novel Treason. Here the main character, Lanik Mueller, must betray the trust of a personified earth by using its power to kill an entire nation of powerful and evil people. The earth's anger is such that Lanik knows it might kill him, but he chooses to commit his crime anyway for the sake of the greater good. The earth's wrath turns out not to be fatal after all, but its agonized screams ring in his ears forever. Eventually Lanik comes to suspect that "the ultimate sacrifice isn't death after all; the ultimate sacrifice is willingly bearing the penalty for your own actions."11

In Card's worlds, moral sacrifice has more weight than physical sacrifice does, echoing the Mormon teaching that Christ's suffering in the garden of Gethsemane was more important than his death on the cross. As Card himself has summarized the doctrine,

Christ's real suffering was the anguish he felt as he bore the horror of complete spiritual separation from God—taking upon himself to an infinite degree the torment that is the natural spiritual consequence of sin. The remorse and despair we feel . . . because of our disobedience to or rejection of God, [Christ] felt so utterly that we cannot imagine it. In this context, what was done to his body was almost a distraction. Many people have borne as much.12

Although some non-Mormon Christians might consider such a view heretical, the phenomenal success of Ender's Game suggests that at the very least, the reading public finds moral sacrifice more compelling than the physical sacrifices depicted in some of Card's other novels. Card emphasizes sacrifice partly to make the point that communities are more important than individuals, and that for any civilization to survive, its members must be willing to make sacrifices for the community. A great many of Card's stories are designed to model this moral imperative for his readers.13 As Michael Collings has written, "perhaps more than any other, the image of community forms the heart of Card's fictions."14
In the Alvin Maker series, Card sets up a dualism between Making and Unmaking—Being and Nonbeing—and declares that it is more basic than all other dualisms. The series dramatizes how the good forces of Making overcome the evil forces of Unmaking, climaxing with Alvin's undertaking what Card considers to be the ultimate act of Making: the construction of an ideal community. Card has stated that one of his guiding moral and political principles is “to build and create against the entropy that has become the theme song of our society.” This imperative drives Card's much-criticized resistance to the legalization of gay marriage. Card has written that gay marriage and gay sexuality can lead only to the dissolution of American society, and that gays therefore have a sacred duty to sacrifice their own desires for the sake of civilization.

However, Card proves himself quite capable of sympathetically portraying homosexual life in his novel The Ships of Earth. He acknowledges that homosexuality has biological causes and that gays are often subject to humiliating and even violent discrimination. However, a gay character who believes his desires are unnatural follows Card's philosophy, marrying a woman and having children with her out of a sense of duty to propagate the community. The character discovers that becoming part of the web of life through reproduction gives him a sense of profound joy, even though the sexual act itself is not particularly pleasurable. Repeatedly throughout the Homecoming series, Card equates the Tree of Life with marriage and procreation. Presumably he believes that laws against homosexual activity will help gay people find true fulfillment and happiness through exercise of their reproductive powers.

The themes of sacrifice and community in Card's works are not isolated concepts. Quite frequently they are embedded in larger analogues of the LDS plan of salvation. Treason, for instance, is the story of the redemption and gradual deification of Lanik Mueller. At each stage of his journey, Lanik acquires new deific attributes while learning to use his powers responsibly. He completes his deification when he marries and decides to have children. The pattern is neater in Speaker for the Dead, where the males of the alien species called “piggies” have a three-stage life-cycle that quite clearly corresponds to pre-mortal, mortal, and post-mortal existence. In the final stage, they procreate more or less eternally. The sequel to Speaker for the Dead teaches something very similar to the LDS idea of eternal intelligences and even suggests a somewhat plausible physical basis for the doctrine by drawing on the insights of quantum physics.

Of course, the plan of salvation would not be possible without free will—a theme that pervades all of Card's works. In The Worthing Saga, the godlike protectors of humanity decide that they are compromising human free will and withdraw their protections. In the Homecoming series, both the godlike computer called the Oversoul and the godlike being called the Keeper of Earth restrict their interventions in human history so as never to interfere with human freedom or moral responsibility. Although Card's novels explore possible routes toward human deification and the perfection of society, they always make perfectly clear that humanity must choose its destiny freely without coercion or external manipulation of any kind.

When we put all of this together, we get an outline of Mormonism's major concepts: the work of the Savior, the importance of family and the faith community, and the origin and destiny of humankind. Likely these themes could be absorbed by any reader regardless of religious background. Thus, however much Card may claim not to be proselytizing his readers, his novels do compellingly express the plan of salvation in the language of myth and story.

DEFENDING MORMONISM

WHEN CARD STARTED his studies at BYU, he wanted to focus on Book of Mormon archaeology but abandoned this line of study when he discovered that it requires a lot of hard, hot, boring work. However, it seems that his interest in the subject has not flagged. His Homecoming series, a five-book science fiction Book of Mormon allegory, takes pains to make some sticky details in the Book of Mormon plausible.

For example, at one point in the first book of Nephi, an unnamed woman saves Nephi's life by pleading with Laman in the wilderness (1 Nephi 7:19–21). Card has noted that people often assume this woman is Nephi's wife-to-be, but Card believes that Laman would have been more likely to listen to his own betrothed. This interpretation finds its way into Card's allegory. In another episode from 1 Nephi (16:13–32), Lehi's family is traveling in the wilderness when their bows lose their spring and they run out of food. Lehi seems to doubt the wisdom of continuing, but Nephi takes the initiative and makes a new bow. He then goes to ask his father where to hunt. Card's novel shows that Volemak's (Lehi's corollary) claim to leadership of the party weakened when his faith faltered. Nafai's (Nephi's corollary) deference to Volemak in choosing a hunting ground helps reestablish Volemak's authority and preserve peace among the brothers. By constructing plausible motivations for Homecoming characters' actions, Card also lends plausibility to the Book of Mormon narrative.

In other passages, Card creates explanations for Book of Mormon anomalies. For example, when his Nephi character beheads the Laban character and then dons Laban's clothes (1 Nephi 4:18–19), Card explains that no blood soiled the clothes because of “the downhill slope of the street and the fact that the blood mostly poured upward out of the neck, away from the body.” In some cases he resolves difficulties with science fictional technology that obviously would not work from an apologetic perspective. For example, Card makes the Book of Mormon scene where Nephi tricks Laban's servant Zoram into believing that Nephi is Laban (1 Nephi 4:21) more plausible by having his Nephi character wear a holographic costume.
Card also defends the Book of Mormon by historically contextualizing its rather unegalitarian attitude toward gender. Card is feminist enough to be bothered by the fact that few women are mentioned in the Book of Mormon and only three are actually named. In the Homecoming Saga, Card enriches the Book of Mormon narrative by including many strong female characters but also seems to defend the male-centered worldview of the Book of Mormon by suggesting that the nomadic lifestyle his characters are living more or less necessitates male rule.

Card's apologetic intentions are perhaps most explicitly signaled in his treatment of Book of Mormon geography. Card has his voyagers from the planet Harmony land their spaceships in Central America, on the Tehuantepec Peninsula. The geography in Card’s novels follows all the major principles of the Tehuantepec Limited Geography Theory outlined by Book of Mormon apologist John Sorenson, even to the point of rotating the cardinal points ninety degrees so that the east and west seas are actually on the north and south. Card also includes a number of cultural Mayanisms in his novels, such as ball courts, the Mayan calendar, and the belief that the jaguar is a mischievous devil-figure. Similarly, his analogues of the Jaredites have a hieroglyphic written language with characteristics typical of Egyptian and Olmec writing. Presumably Card is signaling that he believes the historical Jaredites were Olmecs and the historical Nephites were Mayans.

Further, when Card’s Nephites arrive in the promised land, they assume that the land is uninhabited and only later learn they were mistaken. The land is inhabited by other sentient species as well as by a previous group of human colonists corresponding to the Book of Mormon’s Jaredites. Supporting Card’s belief that the Book of Mormon Mulekites were a native underclass who invented their supposed Hebrew ancestry for political reasons, the underclass of “Darakemba” in the Homecoming novels is similarly native to the region. The presence of non-Hebrew “others” in the land is of course a staple of the Limited Geography apologetic, even though the Book of Mormon text seems to indicate that the land was empty when Lehi and his family arrived (2 Nephi 1:5–9).

In addition to commenting on the text of the Book of Mormon, the Homecoming series has much to say about its translation. In the series, a godlike computer called the Oversoul communicates its will directly to the minds of gifted humans. Although this revelation is direct and objective, it comes as raw information and must be interpreted by the human brain as words and images. This creates a situation in which the content of revelation comes from “God,” but the precise shape and expression of it comes from the prophet to whom it is revealed. Card even suggests that sometimes it is difficult to tell which of our thoughts and impressions come from God and which come from ourselves. These ideas basically parallel Card’s view of Joseph Smith’s translation of the Book of Mormon, which contains anachronisms and grammatical deficiencies that Card attributes to Smith instead of to God.

Card’s apologetic efforts on other subjects are less elaborate than his sci-fi commentary on the Book of Mormon but perhaps no less significant. The Alvin Maker series, for example, is an allegory of the life of Joseph Smith set in an al-
ternate universe where folk magic really works. Here Alvin Maker, Card’s Joseph Smith analogue, has magical powers that he must choose to use for good instead of evil.42 On the surface, folk magic that really works seems to be merely a fictional device. However, the recent vogue in some apologetic circles is to suggest that using his magical seer stone, young Joseph Smith really could find treasures and lost objects and that Smith’s days of magical treasure digging served as a training ground for his activities as a prophet.43 It is at least possible, then, that part of Card’s motivation in constructing a universe where magic really works is to create openness to that possibility among inhabitants of our own universe.

In another book, The Worthing Saga, Card tackles the problem of suffering from a Mormon perspective. In this book the godlike inhabitants of the world of Worthing have taken on the role of humanity’s guardians by taking away everyone’s pain and suffering, erasing their memories of death, and preventing them from doing things that would harm themselves or others. Eventually the guardians decide that this sort of rigorous supervision takes all the meaning out of life, so they end their guardianship. Pain, they realize, makes joy richer and life better.44 This scenario reflects the Mormon principle of “opposition in all things”: without the bad things in life, we would never know how to appreciate the good.

For all the apologetics in his books, Card does not remain on the defensive. On several occasions, he actively polemizes against two groups critical of Mormonism: atheists and Protestant Christians. In the Homecoming series, for example, one character argues that neither theism nor atheism has a clear evidentiary advantage over the other. Given the choice between two equivalent options, the character says, we should choose the one we want to believe—the one that makes life worth living.45 Later books in the same series point out that even though atheists claim to be unbiased, they are actually just as biased as theists are. In fact, atheists are worse off, because they’re unaware of their biases.46 Toward the end of the last book in the series, the rhetoric becomes more virulent. The story implies that pantheists and religious liberals are really just smooth-talking atheists attempting to deceive others, and that atheists actually know in their hearts that there is a God but are too prideful to admit it (cp. Alma 30:52–53).47

Meanwhile, Protestants come in for harsh treatment in the first volume of the Alvin Maker series. Here the chief human villain is a prideful Presbyterian minister called Reverend Thrower. Periodically Thrower is visited by what he believes is an angel, but readers quickly recognize it as the devil in disguise—especially when Thrower attempts to shake the Visitor’s hand and encounters no substance (cp. D&C 129:4–9). The portrayal of a Protestant minister as being in league with the devil should come as no surprise to anyone who was endowed prior to 1990, but Card’s minister comes across as even more of a buffoon than the character in the old endowment ceremony.49 The minister is an arrogant, prideful, bigoted chauvinist who refuses to believe in miracles even when he sees one with his own eyes. He believes in a transcendent and immutable God but also in a devil with horns, claws, and hooves. When challenged by frontier folk wisdom, he is incapable of mounting any kind of defense of his views, and he readily agrees to kill Alvin when the devil asks him to. When Thrower fails to kill Alvin, the devil appears to him with characteristics of a cockroach and a worm, driving Thrower to attempt suicide. When his suicide is pre-
vented by a sincere parishioner, Thrower recruits the parishioner into the murder plot. In short, Card makes the orthodox Protestant ministry appear as despicable as possible, reinforcing the traditional Mormon antipathy to Christian orthodoxy.

**CHANGING MORMONISM**

While a proselytizer and defender of Mormonism, Card is also a reformer. His intentions in this direction are rarely made explicit, but they are a significant subtext in several stories. In *Folk of the Fringe*, Card envisions a post-apocalyptic United States in which Utah has become an independent Mormon nation. Much of the book reflects very positively on Mormon society, but in a few respects, it suggests that Mormons have failed to retain divine favor. In one chapter, the Salt Lake Temple is nearly submerged beneath a swollen Great Salt Lake—hardly the glorious future that most Mormons envision for the temple. In another chapter, a Mormon named Sam Monson is coerced by a divine power to impregnate a Native American woman with a new Indian messiah. According to the story, the Mormon covenant has been forfeited and is being handed over to the Lamanites. Sam muses,

It sounded so close to what the old prophets in the Book of Mormon said would happen to America; close, but dangerously different. As if there was no hope for the Europeans anymore. As if their chance had already been lost, as if no repentance would be allowed . . . . Someone else would inherit. It made him sick at heart, to realize what the white man had lost, had thrown away, had torn up and destroyed.

The possibility that Mormons could forfeit their covenant is not one often entertained in LDS culture, but apparently Card believes it is worth thinking about. Among the specific concepts Card may be trying to communicate to the Mormon community are gender egalitarianism, racial inclusivity, respect for the environment, and a critique of hypocrisy and false piety.

With respect to gender, Card seems to be a complementarian, meaning that he recognizes the differences between men and women and believes that each has complementary strengths and weaknesses. But Card does not use this view as an excuse to subjugate women. In several works, he advocates increased respect and dignity for women. In the *Homecoming* series, for example, the seers who hear from the Oversoul are almost all women. When advanced technology allows the protagonist Nafai to see into the hearts of others, he weeps as he realizes how much pain the women have felt when their husbands have treated them as something less than full friends and partners. Similarly, when in *Pastwatch*, a character from the future travels back in time to set himself up as a sort of high priest to the Mexican Indians, one of the very first things he does is make a slave girl his counselor—promptly laying the groundwork for egalitarian treatment of women. Clearly gender relations are an important subject for Card.

The same can be said of race. In the *Alvin Maker* series, a character named Cavil Planter invents an intricate theological justification for his doctrine that black blood is evil. In the words of Eugene England, “Card thus deconstructs for his Mormon readers the influential work of those few Mormon theologians who have provided a rationale for exclusion of blacks from the priesthood that would blame them rather than whites.” In contrast to Cavil Planter’s racism, Card’s protagonist Alvin Maker is a model of racial openness. He takes a black friend through a sort of endowment, after which the black man develops a prophetic gift. The deconstruction of racist Mormon folk doctrine continues when in a vision, Alvin is shown Adam, Eve, Cain, and Abel, and all of them—not only Cain—are black. In *Folk of the Fringe*, Card depicts the future Mormon community as much more multi-ethnic and accepting of blacks than are other religious groups, perhaps depicting the Mormon Church he hopes for.

One of the most common recurring motifs in Card’s fiction is humanity’s responsibility to care for the environment. In several stories and novels, he actually personifies the land and places it in the role of deity. In the *Alvin Maker* series, the earth is presented as a sort of superorganism that endows those who live harmoniously with it with magical powers while rejecting those who exploit it. Caucasians, in fact, are rejected because of their failure to live sustainably. “Hack and cut and chop and burn,” a Native American character says, “that was the White man’s way. Take from the forest, take from the land, take from the river, but put nothing back.” Likewise in *Folk of the Fringe*, we learn that the reason Europeans came to dominate the continent in the first place was the land’s displeasure with the Native Americans when they “cut down the forests of Utah and Arizona and turned them into red-rock deserts.” The new European overlords unfortunately fare no better in the land’s eyes, because now “the land is suffering from a thousand different poisons.”

In *Pastwatch*, the situation is even more desperate. Two hundred years in the future, the Earth is depleted and broken beyond recovery. The topsoil is all but gone, the cloud cover is nearly continuous, and the oceans are empty from overfishing. The only choice left to humanity is to travel back in time and change history so that centuries of environmental exploitation will be averted. Eugene England observed that “Card, echoing his mentor Hugh Nibley, radically challenges our . . . Mormon anti-environmentalism by letting a future scientist describe the world we seem hell-bent on producing.”

Card of course should not be mistaken for the kind of radical environmentalist one might find hugging trees or lobbying for the Kyoto Protocols. In his non-fiction writings, he has made his disdain for that sort of environment-
talism perfectly clear. He is rather an environmentally-conscious pragmatist—someone who believes that global warming is more a good thing than a bad thing, but who also recognizes that the earth's stores of natural resources are quickly running out and that if we continue to live as we are living now, there will be nothing left for future generations. While Card's environmentalism may be more muted than that found in some sectors of the political left, it is considerably more liberal than one might expect of the average American Mormon. One practical measure he has advocated is that the government adopt regulation to make most new housing developments “car-free, or at least pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly.”

A final respect in which Card seems to be calling for change in the LDS Church is in its legalism and self-righteousness. In his novelette A War of Gifts, Card creates a Puritanical, hypocritical Christian sect that the reader is meant to find highly disagreeable. Oddly enough, Card places some fairly enlightened and even Mormon doctrines on these cultists’ lips. They teach, for example, that women deserve respect because they suffer to bring souls into the world; that ministers should be unpaid and should work to earn their living; that discipline is important for children’s souls; and even that Genesis was simply the best Moses could do in explaining Darwinian evolution to a pre-scientific culture. Yet by placing these doctrines on hypocrites’ lips, Card is not polemizing against the content of the teaching. Rather, he approves the doctrines on these cultists’ lips. They teach, for example, that Puritans’ teachings may be intended to signal that Card wants Mormons to see themselves reflected in this fictional group—Puritans as an example of the community is that he learns to disdain Mormons and never to be open or vulnerable with them.65

In all of these respects, Card’s fiction functions as an indictment. Because this critique is embedded within fictional narratives, however, readers often are not aware of just how radically they are being challenged. They are entertained and called to repentance at the same time.

ADD A caveat in closing: I do not know that Card would accept the three roles in which I have cast him here—missionary, apologist, and reformer. Much less, I suspect, would he accept the larger role I have assigned him of prophetic mythmaker and successor to Joseph Smith. But then, Jonah denied his prophetic calling, too, and look what that got him. However much Card may deny it, and however much those who disapprove of his politics may dislike it, I am convinced that his fiction does function in the ways I have outlined. Certainly it has functioned in these ways for me. The focus on moral sacrifice in Ender’s Game and Treason has given me a deep appreciation for LDS teachings concerning the significance of Gethsemane. The powerful theodicy presented in The Worthing Saga was my first exposure to the philosophical power of LDS teaching. The exploration of Book of Mormon characters’ motives in the Homecoming series has impressed upon me the potential richness of the scriptural narrative. The pragmatic environmentalism of Pastwatch has moved me to take more seriously the imperative of sustainable living. In all these ways and others of which I’m not even aware, Card’s fiction has moved and shaped and changed me. Although I have never passed through the waters of baptism, as I participate in Card’s Mormon myths, I feel that I am in some small way a part of the Mormon community—and it is a part of me.

NOTES

6. Ibid.
16. The same opposition occurs in the earlier Worthing Saga, though making and unmaking there do not have the same moral connotations Card gives them in Alvin Maker. Capito’s unmaker Abner Doon is actually doing humanity a favor by destroying a dead and stagnant society in order to make way for new making. Orson Scott Card, *The Worthing Saga* (New York: Tor, 1990), 37.
24. Orson Scott Card, *Speaker for the Dead*, revised edition, (New York: Tor, 1991), 365–69. Collings, *In the Image of God*, 58. It may be significant that in order to enter the final stage of life, they must go through a crucifixion of sorts, which is reminiscent of the LDS folk-doctrine that before we are made gods, we give them in the endowment. Ibid., 208–10.
30. Ibid., 311–20.
35. Ibid., 138–40.
42. Card, *Seventh Son*, 64.
49. One passage in fact appears to be deliberately modeled on a scene from the endowment. Ibid., 208–10.
52. Ibid., 209.
64. Ibid., 13.

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“SUCCESS” AND THE BODY OF CHRIST

By Bob Mesle

The figure of the Crucified invalidates all thought which takes success for its standard.

DIETRICH BONHOEFFER, ETHICS

These are the parts of the work which it was possible to conceal in a place of safety before they could be seized by the police. They have been retrieved from their garden hiding-places in the same disorder in which they were put there. And then there are other parts which were already in the hands of the Gestapo before 5th April 1943, the day of Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s arrest.

EDITOR’S PREFACE, ETHICS

NOT MANY BOOKS HAVE A STORY LIKE THAT. These fragments now form Bonhoeffer’s book, Ethics, written when Hitler was the most successful man in the Western world and aiming to establish a Reich which would last 1,000 years. Who, at that time, could confidently say that he would not succeed? Certainly not Bonhoeffer, who was hanged in a Nazi prison camp in April of 1945.

My wife, Barbara, often remarks that we who were born after World War II cannot possibly feel what life was like for people living in the midst of it who could not know how it would turn out. Particularly we who live in the U.S., with our hindsight and vast national hubris, cannot feel in our deepest hearts the genuine fear, the real uncertainty about who would win. We can only listen to those who, like Bonhoeffer, lived then and rightly wondered if the Gestapo and the S.S. would last a millennium. After all, most of human history since the founding of civilization has been presided over by some form of tyranny. Biblical prophets such as Isaiah and Jeremiah had no trouble accepting Yahweh as punishing His chosen but sinful children by handing the world over to the conquering armies of Assyria and Babylon. Why not see Nazi Germany as also destined for success by the mighty hand of God?

One of Bonhoeffer’s brief fragments, probably written in September of 1940 when Hitler must have seemed invincible, is titled “The Successful Man.”

Success heals the wounds of guilt. There is no sense in reproaching the successful man for his unvirtuous behavior, for this would be to remain in the past while the successful man strides forward from one deed to the next, conquering the future and securing the irrevocability of what has been done. The successful man presents us with accomplished facts which can never again be reversed. What he destroys cannot be restored. What he constructs will acquire at least a prescriptive right in the next generation.1

As we know, victors write the history books to justify their actions. They paint themselves as enlightened heroes, perhaps fulfilling God’s manifest destiny of bringing light to the “natives,” or clearing away the “savages” to make way for “civilized people.” Their values become accepted as universal, eternal, and divine, those by which the conquered will be judged as lesser people. And the conquerors will be shown as justified even in their most brutal actions. Given enough time, and a total enough victory (as in the European invasion of the Americas), the victors may even look back and grieve over the admitted sins of the conquest, as if such confessions served to confirm their virtue.

Bonhoeffer knew how much we bow to success and shift our values in approval.

When a successful figure becomes especially prominent and conspicuous, the majority give way to the
idolization of success. They become blind to right and wrong, truth and untruth, fair play and foul play. They have eyes only for the deed, for the successful result. The moral and intellectual critical faculty is blunted. It is dazzled by the brilliance of the successful man and by the longing in some way to share in his success . . . . Success is simply identified with good.2

Standing in the shadow of the cross, Christians have, from the beginning, struggled with the meaning of success.

After every election, we hear the winners shout that this (51% to 49%) success proves the rightness of their cause and justifies the further conquests they plan. The Biblical equation of piety with prosperity compounds our tendency to identify success with good. In the modern West, where capitalism so invades every fiber of society that Christianity and capitalism seem inseparable, we easily nod our heads to affirm that victory at the polls, in the marketplace, or in the “sales” of a particular religion stands as the decisive proof of inherent superiority, just as surely as winning does in athletic competition. If life is competition, success is the sure measure of the good. Bonhoeffer’s critique of success is concise: “The figure of the Crucified invalidates all thought which takes success for its standard.”3

Standing in the shadow of the cross, Christians have, from the beginning, struggled with the meaning of success. By worldly standards, Jesus was a failure. Yet Paul found a way to preach Christ crucified so that the gospel succeeded among Gentiles. When the early disciples were unable to convert most Jews, Gentile converts began to condemn Jews altogether. Even the New Testament includes anti-Jewish propaganda. (See, for example, John 8:39–47.) One common Christian explanation of the failure of the mission to the Jews is that the Jews wanted a successful Messiah, a leader on a white horse who would march them to victory over their enemies. We Christians have prided ourselves on our willingness to accept the humble, suffering servant who hung on the cross. Yet, at the very same time, we’ve been saying something like, “Jesus may be humble now, but pretty soon he’s going to come back from the sky and slaughter our enemies. Then you’ll see success!” Just read the book of Revelation.

Alfred North Whitehead put his finger on the deep theological impact of the hunger for success in early Christianity.

When the Western world accepted Christianity, Caesar conquered; and the received text of Western theology was edited by his lawyers . . . . The brief Galilean vision of humility flickered throughout the ages, uncertainly. In the official formulation of the religion it has assumed the trivial form of the mere attribution to the Jews that they cherished a misconception about their Messiah. But the deeper idolatry, of the fashioning of God in the image of the Egyptian, Persian, and Roman imperial rulers, was retained. The Church gave unto God the attributes which belonged exclusively to Caesar.

There is, however, in the Galilean origin of Christianity yet another suggestion which does not . . . emphasize the ruling Caesar . . . It dwells upon the tender elements in the world, which slowly and in quietness operate by love.4

Those tender elements of love which work quietly do not display the neon signs which signal success to the world, so
we Christians have rarely been satisfied with them. We want something grander and more visible.

Latter Day Saint movements have struggled with conflicting models of success. In our earliest years, we shared a dream whose essence was recently captured in the *Harry Potter* stories. We were orphans, nobodies, the poor and oppressed of the land. Then, we believed. God revealed that we had a great destiny and secret powers. We were the true children of the ancient heroes, given marvelous powers to speak forgotten languages and to perform great and marvelous works in the land.

On the one hand, as with the crucified Christ, the proof of our success is our rejection by those around us. Rejection proved that we were the pure ones, the righteous remnant. At the very same time, especially in Nauvoo, our success was proved by the contrasting fact that so many had converted so rapidly.

I GREW UP IN the Community of Christ (then the RLDS Church) with this deeply conflicted vision of success. We were then, as now, a small church, so we turned to that fact as proof of our spiritual truth. Like Harry Potter at home for the summer, we were forced to live in a world that did not appreciate our royal ancestry and glorious destiny. We watched the rapid growth of our Utah cousins—our sibling rivals—and sometimes told ourselves that they must have achieved such success by abandoning the true path. At the same time, envying their membership increase and material wealth as a church, we challenged ourselves to more vigorous missionary work that would bring about our own more visible success.

This inner struggle is almost inescapable within Christianity. We are torn between the redemptive failure of a man hung as a criminal on a cross and the great commission that we go into the world and make disciples of all nations. Clearly we continue to struggle with this paradoxical vision of success. We look at the rapid growth of conservative religions such as Southern Baptists, and wonder what to make of it.

On the one hand, I want to strongly warn all of us to resist the temptation to reduce evangelism to the model of the capitalist marketplace where the bottom line is profit and the path to profit is successful marketing. In capitalism, people achieve success partly by finding out what other people want and selling it to them—whatever it is. Like pornography, advertising usually sells by appealing to people's desires, fears, and hopes with little regard for deeper moral values. That is a model we must reject. After all, look at the many world religions which do not seek converts and yet survive for centuries, even millennia. My Amish neighbors do not seek to convert me.

We are torn between the redemptive failure of a man hung as a criminal on a cross and the great commission that we go into the world and make disciples of all nations.
Neither do Buddhists, Quakers, most Hindus, or Jews. Indeed, orthodox Jews make converting extremely difficult. For these communities, success does not mean numerical growth.

Still, we cannot deny that one legitimate measure of the real value of a message to the world is its ability to speak to the hearts of many people. If our preaching is not heard as good news, what good is it? So surely there is some legitimate sense in which success can, even must, be measured by whether those around us find value in our message. So, if no one seems interested in our gospel, we cannot simply pat ourselves on the back for our righteousness.

We reflect on Bonhoeffer and his own struggles with working as a Christian theologian under Hitler's rule. “The figure of the Crucified invalidates all thought which takes success for its standard.” “Christ confronts all thinking in terms of success and failure with the man who is under God's sentence, no matter whether he be successful or unsuccessful. It is out of pure love that God is willing to let that man stand before Him.”

For Bonhoeffer, Christ was not just Jesus of Nazareth nor a Christ in heaven. Building on the Apostle Paul's proclamation that the church is the body of Christ, Bonhoeffer identified Christ in his time and place with that portion of the German Lutheran church which opposed Hitler's anti-Jewish policies. It was partly this identification which, years after Bonhoeffer's death, was to galvanize Western Christians reeling in shock from a half-century of war, groaning in awareness of Christianity's own deep, anti-Semitism as a cause of the Nazi “final solution,” and the deep racism expressed in so much Christian opposition to the civil rights movement. In the midst of that pain, we heard Bonhoeffer's vision:

The church is not a religious community of worshippers of Christ but is Christ Himself who has taken form among men.

In Christ we are offered the possibility of partaking in the reality of God and the reality of the world, but not in the one without the other.

These words succeeded because they spoke directly to the hearts of millions of Christians who could no longer interpret Christian discipleship in terms of a passive piety that simply threw a few alms to the needy. I know how powerfully they changed my own life when I first read them. I know many church leaders whose vision of the church was transformed by Bonhoeffer and voices like his.

Success for the church cannot just mean figuring out how to market ourselves so that people buy our religious product. No community standing in the shadow of the cross can define success like that without losing its soul. But neither can we simply take worldly failure as the proof of our spiritual success, of our secret election by God to be a righteous remnant. Surely, as Bonhoeffer says, success for Christians must somehow be tied up with loving involve-

The RLDS church became the Community of Christ partly because we grew into the mature realization that we were not the one true church—that Christ's truth and love could be found in the larger Christian tradition which we decided to join. Now we face the great challenge that we have joined that larger Christian community just as so many Christians are growing into the mature realization that Christianity is not the one true religion—that truth and love can also be found in other religious communities. Has our recent spiritual growth prepared us to make that next transition, or will it prove to be too much too soon? What will the Great Commission to make disciples of all nations mean for spiritual communities who come to see the diverse wisdoms of Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Jews, Humanists, and others as vital and cherished sources of spiritual growth for us all? What does an evangelistic community committed to peace do when peace means coming to value, rather than convert, people of other religions? What, then, is the meaning of successful evangelism? This is just one challenge we face today. I am very interested in hearing how thoughtful LDS people struggle with these issues.

This I'm sure of: Love is always wanted, always longed for, always needed in this world. If we can see and feel how to embody that love so that people clutch it joyously to their hearts, then perhaps we can continue to find new life, new success, without selling our souls. Personally, I believe that our current vision of building communities of joy, hope, love, and peace is exactly right. But we must face the fact that there is no final point at which we can stop and say “Success is ours.” Love must go on because life goes on, even after you and I have passed the torch to others. Success in any final sense lies beyond the grasp of finite creatures like us. Like Bonhoeffer, we must be faithful to ourselves, living in hope and in love, doing our best to work for peace, joy, and liberation here and now, handing on to those who come afterward the best church and world we can. Our spiritual children will have to make their own successes out of their own faithful vision.

NOTES

2. Ibid., 76.
3. Ibid., 77.
5. Bonhoeffer, Ethics, 77.
6. Ibid., 83.
7. Ibid., 195.
PROTECTING AND STRENGTHENING YOUR MARRIAGE

by D. Jeff Burton

During the past month, I have exchanged emails with “Will” (not his real name), a professional with a young family, concerning his movement into the Borderlands and the troubles he has confronted. While reading his responses to my standard questionnaire, I saw that Will’s marriage was suffering the stresses common to Borderlanders. Maintaining one’s marriage is a difficult but absolutely essential thing to do while traversing the Borderlands. Here is Will’s story (some details changed) interspersed with my comments.

Will’s Answers to the Standard Questionnaire

WILL’S ANSWERS TO THE STANDARD QUESTIONNAIRE

How would you describe your upbringing in the Church?

I come from a very active family. My mother was Relief Society president; my father was a bishop and served in a stake presidency. I was a little wayward sometimes but never wandered too far. Mostly I was just curious. I served a faithful mission, went to BYU, and married in the temple. Three of my four siblings are local church leaders.

What is your current status in the Church?

I recently let my temple recommend expire and attend church about 50% of the time. But I am still an elders’ quorum teacher and an on-call ward financial advisor.

What issues / events / actions / concerns caused you to move into the “Borderlands”?

About five years ago, one of my siblings left the Church. I was appalled at my family’s inability to entertain the idea that someone could leave the Church and still be a good person. These events caused me to begin addressing the questions I’d been suppressing for years; my studies had led me to see Church history and doctrine in ways very different from those of many mainstream members. Multiple moves associated with my job and ongoing schooling relieved the social pressures of full church activity for a time, but my cognitive dissonance grew until I finally had to come out to my wife about a year ago. It turned out to be a huge relief for me—not so much for her.

Why did you stay in the “Borderlands” instead of moving into inactivity or leaving the Church?

The undesirable social consequences were the major reason. My birth family had proved to me that they have difficulty separating personal morality from Church activity and testimony. And I’ve been too busy in professional life to deal with the inevitable fallout associated with telling them. Also, the fact is I don’t resent the Church. I’m grateful for its influence in my upbringing, and I’m not sure I know a better way to guide my own children (7 and 4 years old). I still gain some benefit from service opportunities and the helpful maintenance of my moral compass that some Church activities provide.

How does this situation affect you (emotionally / spiritually / physically)?

I cope by engaging in personal study and getting into discussions with those who know my situation.

How open and honest are you with others about your situation?

I speak openly with my wife, the brother who has left the Church, and an ex-Mormon friend. Everyone else gets a very watered-down version. I try to judge how much each person can tolerate and tailor my self-exposure accordingly.

What would it take for you to be honest and open with others?

I would be open if I were specifically questioned by a family member or friend. Otherwise I have decided I won’t announce anything until I have more time, energy, and desire to deal with it—or until I am forced to (e.g., when my son gets baptized).

How has your Borderlands experience affected your spouse and others?

My wife tries hard to be supportive but at times grows weary of my questioning, criticisms, and inactivity. In many ways, how-
ever, we've become closer as we have discussed, studied, and worked through these issues. We've been forced to consciously consider how we want to raise our children and what is important. The rest of my family is largely ignorant of my status despite my wife's frequent hint dropping. I think they would be very hurt to find out about me.

**What will you do in the future?**

At the moment, I am happy with where I am. If my work life allows more free time, I could foresee an increased level of Church activity; but reseeding my testimony would require a convincing supernatural manifestation. If I could continue perpetually in my current state, I probably would. But I imagine that in time, my family will become aware of my beliefs, and I'll be forced to take a more definitive stance in or out of the Church.

**E-MAILS EXCHANGED AFTER THE QUESTIONNAIRE**

**JEFF:** Since you let your temple recommend lapse, have there been some concern/questions from ward leaders? How are you dealing with that?

**WILL:** The lapse occurred about two months ago, and the bishop hasn't mentioned it. Perhaps it just hasn't crossed his radar. I haven't dealt with this yet.

**JEFF:** Why did your brother leave? Is he out of the Church or out of the church? Is he also out of your family? Did his own family leave with him?

**WILL:** Being a university professor, my brother has always had questions. He told me that after his years of honest inquiry and study, the chips kept falling on the side of skepticism and disbelief until the discrepancy became too great. It has been a tough trail for him to blaze considering my family's reaction, but he is out of the Church completely. His wife is a returned missionary and still mostly active, so his status has absolutely led to strained relationships within his own family.

**JEFF:** What happened when you confessed to your wife that gave you that “huge relief”? How did she handle it? What did the two of you do together to make a continued relationship possible?

**WILL:** She had been aware that something was going on for a long time but never pushed me on it. One day the bishop called us in to ask me to be youth leader. I knew I would enjoy working with the youth but felt that it would have been disingenuous to not disclose my testimony struggles. So, with her there, I started laying out a few of my concerns. She was as taken aback as he. At the end of our relatively brief conversation, he expressed his gratitude for my honesty but extended the calling anyway. I accepted it. However, it has been difficult to play my role while still being honest even though I'm amazed at how easy it is to slip back in to “true believer speak” when participating at church.

**JEFF:** Regarding your brother who left the Church: Do you have a sense of how he and his wife have dealt with that issue?

**WILL:** Though until now they've been able to talk through it, I know it has been and continues to be more difficult for them than it has been for us. As I mentioned before, his wife is active and continues to take their three kids to church, but my brother has become increasingly displeased with the Church and is starting to oppose their attendance. Their bishop was involved at first and initially advised her to leave him—which she didn't. She understands my brother's issues but chooses to stay true to her faith.

**JEFF:** Do you think that the fact that your wife was an adult convert made a difference in how she responded? My guess is that a true-believer from birth might have reacted differently.

**WILL:** The fact that my wife was an adult convert absolutely facilitated the processing of this issue. But she is also a very level-headed person in general. The mindset I was raised in—to believe completely in every detail of every truth claim of the Church—is vastly different than the testimony she gained of the practicality of the Church as a social instrument, a good-as-any belief set, and a way for her to show her devotion to me when we were dating. But she also struggles to sympathize with some of my hang-ups. She thinks I should disregard the bad and embrace the good.

**JEFF:** Do you think that the experience of raising your children in the Church has made a difference in your wife’s participation and feelings about the Church?

**WILL:** Though the discussions and decisions we've made about our children have been a rewarding experience, I think she still struggles to figure some stuff out before I had to explain myself. I knew that I was changing the groundwork of our marriage and felt guilty; I also knew that I couldn't keep it a secret forever. I'm pretty sure that she was vaguely aware of my struggles, and to say the least, felt betrayed by my secrecy. However, she has been open-minded which has made re-establishing an ongoing religious discussion between us an enjoyable process. I have seen others who have had great struggles due to difficult-to-reconcile differences with their spouses.
for many of its members, but all of us have a personal religion and a personal relationship with Deity. Develop a model that works for you and your family situation. It will likely incorporate involvement with the Church.

One last thought. Even if right now you feel resentful, angry, or competitive with the Church, these feelings and their importance to you will likely subside as time passes. Let that time go by before making any big decisions.

STRENGTHENING YOUR MARITAL RELATIONSHIP

In the 1980s, I was a lay-counselor working with LDS Social Services (now LDS Family Services). I developed about seventy couple-relationship-strengthening exercises and activities. These were eventually gathered into a workbook, “How to Do I Love You.” I compiled the book to help couples establish strong and loving methods of dealing with the challenges, conflicts, and changes that inevitably visit every couple. An example is when one partner wants to modify his or her religious activities because his or her outlook on the couple’s previously shared religious beliefs changes. Unless good techniques are available for handling such challenges, even strong and stable couples can stumble badly. If you would like to strengthen your relationship with your spouse or make it easier to be open with each other, you might find it helpful.

Below is a quick checklist from the workbook of desirable couple behaviors and attitudes. How does your relationship check out?

Checklist for Maintaining a Loving Relationship

• Commitments and Responsibilities. We have made specific and positive loving commitments to each other (“I will care for you”); we avoid conditional and negative commitments (“I will care for you if you live up to my expectations,” or “If you don’t care, I won’t care.”); and we don’t use threats. We accept responsibility for that for which we are accountable.

• Care and Concern. We work at being caring towards each other. We have developed a Caring Contract between us. Everything that we do or say is first passed through the filter, “Does this show that I care?” We try to use Jesus’s teachings about loving others as our guide.

• Emotions and Feelings. We work to tune into and understand each other’s feelings and emotions. We recognize that little can be done to avoid negative or unwanted emotions but that they can be managed. We work together to create emotions that we both enjoy.

• Expectations and Wanting. We work to understand the expectations and wants of each other. We know that unknown, unspoken, assumed, and unreasonable expectations and wants cannot easily be met and can lead to misunderstandings, disappointment, and anger.

• Affection. Our relationship carries a constant feeling of affection for each other.

• Kindness and Patience. We try to treat each other with kindness and patience, but because these are not natural reactions to stressful and hurtful situations, we know that we must plan in advance and commit to behaving constructively. We have agreed that we will choose to respond in a kind, patient, and caring way when problems arise.

• Forgiveness and Forgetting. Because we all err, we know that on occasion, our loving relationship requires us to forgive. We follow the principles of repentance and recompense. We avoid retribution and revenge. We recognize that “forgetting” is a symbolic act which means not letting an unfortunate incident interfere with our loving relationship.

• Communications. We know the importance of understanding each other. We tell each other what needs to be understood. We are tactfully honest with each other. We listen to each other actively but without judgment or criticism unless we are invited to. And then we respond only in a caring manner. We have learned the fundamentals of good couple communications.

• Understanding and Empathy. We try to place ourselves in the other’s shoes; we try to see an issue from the other’s point of view. We become “one in understanding” before making important decisions. We tune into each other’s non-verbal communications and ask about them.

• Respect and Goodwill. We respect each other’s judgments, opinions, needs, wants, and expectations. (Not that we always agree.) We know that we can share our fears, shortcomings, and faults with each other because we know that we respect each other.

• Equality and Sharing. We treat each other with equality. We take each other into account in all of our activities and decisions. We are as important to the other as we are to ourselves.

• Problem Solving. We work together to find solutions to our problems and issues. If we cannot agree on a problem solution, we find acceptable ways to “agree to disagree.”

• Friendship and Nurturing. We are each other’s “best friend.” We are friendly with each other.

• Trust and Faith. We trust each other. We trust that the other will not knowingly hurt us.

• Compromise and Sacrifice. We compromise. We accommodate each other’s needs and wants. We make sacrifices for each other as warranted and reasonable.

• Fun and Humor. We do fun things together. We appreciate the humor in each other. We laugh together.

NOTES

1. In our model, we have defined a “Borderlander” member (Group 2) as “a Church member who maintains ties to the Church but who may have a different understanding of faith and belief, lack of a standard LDS ‘testimony,’ a different view of LDS history, open questions about some aspect of the Church, reduced or modified Church activity, feelings of not meeting traditional Group 1 norms or acceptability criteria.”

2. If you would like a copy of the questionnaire, please contact me at jeff@eburton.com. It is a great way to organize your thinking and start a conversation with me.


Please send me your experiences from life in the Borderlands.

D. Jeff Burton
djeffburton@gmail.com
THE FAMILY FORUM

PASSING ON THE SHAME

by Michael Farnsworth Ed.D.

The term “abuse” doesn’t apply only to events of physical, sexual, or emotional punishment but also to processes that most of us probably consider part and parcel of normal everyday life in our Western culture—namely shaming. A look, a tone, a name, a tease, a rebuke, a challenge, or a question that subtly implies: What is wrong with you?

W E CAN BE active in the Church, attend the temple, pay our tithing, read the scriptures, have Family Home Evening, pray, and teach our children the doctrines of the Kingdom but, without knowing it, we can still be mean-spirited, petty, manipulative, demeaning, and hostile when disciplining our children.

Take me for example: despite my young children being very well behaved generally, I could have been the poster boy for Bad Dad. My early parenting years reeked of immaturity and manipulation. I unwittingly subjected my children to emotional, psychological, and spiritual bullying that wounded their vulnerable souls. I made them strangers in their own lives as they bartered parts of themselves trying to please me. I passed my own childhood shame on to them. I was devasted when I finally awoke from my cultural trance and realized what I had been doing. But despite my multiple apologies, the damage I did to them was irretrievable. I could not erase the numerous times I had made them feel wrong so that the fear of not being good enough, of being unworthy to be embraced and loved by others. It is a sense of being unworthy to be embraced and loved by others. It is a sense of being unworthy to be embraced and loved by others. It is a sense of being unworthy to be embraced and loved by others.

The term “abuse” doesn’t apply only to events of physical, sexual, or emotional punishment but also to processes that most of us probably consider part and parcel of normal everyday life in our Western culture—namely shaming. A look, a tone, a name, a tease, a rebuke, a challenge, or a question that subtly implies: What is wrong with you? Shaming incubates the fear of not being good enough, of being unworthy to be embraced and loved by others. It is a sense of being flawed and inwardly broken.

We parents regularly use shame, threats, and fear to win skirmishes with our children. Even if our parenting arsenals don’t include spanking, hitting, or slapping, we often unwittingly resort to humiliating, belittling, or dominating our children in order to enforce their obedience. Even our size can be frightening to a child. I imagine what it would feel like to be confronted by a ten-foot giant who is displeased with us? Further, what parent hasn’t threatened abandonment or bodily harm just to get his or her way?

Though we may like to consider ourselves well intentioned, we use these degrading discipline techniques because they are condoned by our Western culture of obedience. Besides, who could blame us for wanting well-behaved children? Subconsciously we believe that the end justifies the means.

As a parent, it was easy for me to justify my shaming or threatening behaviors because our culture teaches that discipline is the means to exact obedience, and that disciplined children are worth any price. I didn’t realize it at the time, but clearly I felt that my worth as a parent was tied directly to my children’s behavior. If they acted well, I was a good parent. If they didn’t—well, that just wasn’t an option. My own need to be seen as a good parent trumped all because my subconscious was laced with a sense of unworthiness and that feeling made me want to hide—and I did so . . . behind my children. The façade of perfect children protected my own façade of perfect parent.

M y childhood could be considered a normal one: I was raised by active, loving LDS parents and regularly received spankings, head thumps, ear pulls, and slaps; I was routinely yelled at, labeled, teased, threatened, and on one occasion, whipped. It was normal at the time, and even now, my treatment doesn’t seem like a big deal, just the stuff of a then-normal childhood. I didn’t consider myself abused or traumatized by these experiences. I have since learned that, considering my robust denial capabilities, I am a poor judge of how my own history has affected me.

For example, I felt a sense of recognition when reading another person’s description of the philosophy of discipline from his childhood home. 1. His parents “had set up home regulations. 2. Any child who broke a regulation deserved and would receive punishment. 3. One regulation was that the children were to obey every order of the parents. 4. A child who refused to obey a particular request when ordered to was disobeying an order and thus breaking a home regulation. Thus when a child refused to do as directed, he was punished until he repented.”

Does that philosophy sound familiar and logical to you, too? I confess. I have misled you. That passage actually comes from a book published in 1973 by Bookcraft called Seven Years in Hanoi: A POW Tells His Story by Larry Chesley. I simply respectively replaced the words prisoners, torture, guards, and prison camp with child, punishment, parents, and home. Being dependent on their parents for life, food, and shelter, the position of children at home is structurally much like that of a prisoner. They have little to no power to provide for themselves. They must take...
what they are given because there are no other viable options.

But prisoners have one advantage children do not: prisoners can remember what life is like on the outside and can hate their captors. Children are aware of mostly their own home life and usually can't do anything but love the masters of the house. As far as they know, their parents' behavior and expectations are normal. If the children don't meet the parents' expectations, they may naturally assume that they don't meet anyone's. Therefore, any punishment directed at them must be just, even if they fight it. In such a situation, where children have so little power and their parents so much, children are likely to develop something akin to what psychologists have termed Stockholm syndrome.

Briefly stated, when a hostage develops a compassionate bond and even adulation for his or her captor, he or she has developed Stockholm syndrome. Psychologists see the syndrome as a coping mechanism—a way to survive the hostage situation. Interestingly, the more intense the hostage threat becomes, the stronger the potential bond the captive feels. The hostage understands that the captor is in control of his or her survival and basic needs, so it is best to align him or herself with the captor. If the captor shows any kindness, the hostage will submerge the anger and terror he or she feels and focus on the captor's "good side"—thus hoping to ensure survival while the hostage blames him or herself if the captor becomes upset or angry.

This seeming contradiction of sympathizing and protecting one's abusers is exactly what children tend to do. Even when parents are extremely abusive, their children will still love and defend them. The behavior is even more pronounced in the case of "normal" childhoods when children usually receive both loving and punishing gestures: they idealize and defend their parents. If in order to survive, independent, resourceful adults fall prey to the idealization of their captors, imagine how dependent, vulnerable children would react in structurally similar situations.

Research has shown that during infancy and young childhood, the brain is developing synaptic connections faster than it ever will again. Abusive, shaming events coupled with prolonged stress and trauma can therefore have a lasting impact on how a person's brain functions. According to Daniel Siegel, author of The Developing Mind, Patterns of neurological responses to fear and threat are laid down in early childhood and provide the unconscious pathways for later adult relationships and behaviors. If people retain no conscious memories of the stressful events, their nervous system imprints the pathways and operates according to them.

In 1920, John B. Watson and his assistant Rosalie Rayner performed an experiment that would now be considered unethical with a child they called "Little Albert." After establishing that Little Albert wasn't predisposed to be afraid of white mice—or indeed of anything fuzzy—the researchers would strike a hanging bar of metal while Little Albert played with a white mouse, frightening the child with the loud noise. After several of these events, Little Albert began to show distress when presented with a white mouse and eventually even when presented with something merely fuzzy such as a dog, a sealskin coat, or a Santa Claus mask. His distress continued even after the loud noise was removed from the events.

So it is in our lives. When young, we're exposed to events we don't understand. But our brains set up neural pathways in response to those events, and soon we become adults who are perplexed at the anger or fear we feel at a seemingly ordinary event. We likely have few conscious memories of early childhood trauma and stress, but our strings are still being jerked around by environmental triggers we don't consciously recognize. All we may know is that when a person acts a certain way, or uses a certain tone of voice, or when a particular situation arises, we suddenly find ourselves in the thrall of a reflexive, destructive behavior over which we have little control. To illustrate, I know of many women who, when stopped by a police officer for a traffic infraction, end up in tears. They never plan to cry, but being confronted by an authority figure for bad behavior triggers that response—possibly because of a neurological survival pathway laid down during childhood.

What about the children on the other end of an adult's reflexive behavior? In the face of a threat, most of us go into flight-flight mode. But children have neither option. They can't successfully fight their parents, and even though some run away from home, it usually doesn't last. Children eventually learn that their best survival option is to freeze in hopes that the threatening person will lose interest or focus their wrath on someone else. Adults do this as well. When the boss storms into the room, we try to keep a low profile so that we don't attract his/her attention. Children also learn to survive threats and trauma by dissociating from the situation; by becoming numb, passive, and compliant; or by pretending that things aren't as bad as they seem. Learning to be a well-behaved boy or girl, the one who doesn't require attention, the family peacemaker, the good student, the humorist, the tireless worker, the surrogate parent, the surrogate spouse, the loner, the sports, music, or art star are all personas children take on in order to cope with family shame, threat, and trauma.

The Apostle Paul compares us to the temple of God (1 Corinthians 3:16–17), implying that we have sacred places within us. I believe children's hearts and minds are those sacred places. When parents invade those hallowed places, regardless of how well-intended they are, children become disconnected from their sense of sacred self. When parents use shame, threat, fear, and bullying, trauma results. As a child, I believed I wasn't good enough for my mom and dad and that I therefore deserved their punishments. My shame eventually gave birth to self-contempt, a sure sign that I had disconnected from myself spiritually. Even though I became the family hero by excelling in sports, church duties, and school politics, I carried that self-contempt into my adulthood where it continued fueling my life as a young father, husband, and professional. I tried so hard to be good but in all the ways that really didn't matter. My dress, my behavior, my professional demeanor, my church service were all performed for a public audience while privately I continued leaking shame onto the people I loved.

In The Drama of the Gifted Child, Alice Miller writes, “Contempt is . . . a defense against one’s own despised and unwanted feelings. And the fountainhead of all contempt, all discrimination, is the more or less conscious, uncontrolled, and secret exercise of power over the child by the adult, which is tolerated by society.” I can see how the truth of her conclusion played out in my own life. My self-contempt manifested itself while I was in elementary school. Trying to bolster my sense of worth, I made fun of kids I thought were inferior to me. Despite not generally being a violent person, I even got into fights in the third and fourth grades trying to establish a sense of worth. When my parents' punishments seemed especially onerous or
unfair, I would envision a time when I
would be big enough to gain some power of
my own. I wasn’t sure who was going to be-
come the victim of my power. All I knew
was that I badly wanted revenge—some-
body was going to pay. What would I have
thought then had I known my own chil-
dren would be the ones feeling the brunt of
my repressed anger?

I remember how frighteningly infuriated
I became when, as a young parent, my chil-
dren didn’t obey my discipline attempts.
“Where is all this rage coming from?” I
wondered. I now understand that it was
simply waiting for a familiar time to burst
out after years of circulating within my
soul. It was as if my suppressed emotions
were screaming, “I may not have been re-
spected as a child, but I will be respected as
an adult! You will not get away with this!
You will obey me!” Sadly, I was big enough
then to administer my ill-rooted fears and
punishments, passing my pain on to my
children. I regret these encounters and have
sought my children’s forgiveness. But I fear
it was too little, too late. I remained in
slumber too long.

IN a parenting class, I once assigned stu-
dents to illustrate various parenting dy-
namics by devising short plays. Most of the
plays were marginal at best, but one really
stood out. It portrayed a young mother fix-
ing dinner while holding a baby; two
younger children ran around being obnox-
ious, the mother periodically yelling at
them. The phone rang, the doorbell
buzzed, the food burned on the stove, the
kids screamed, the baby cried. None of us
knew where the group was going with this
scenario. In the discussion afterward, the
group revealed that their role-play was cre-
tated to showcase the unintended conse-
quences the pandemonium had on the
infant. All of us were caught by surprise.
We had never considered the infant. This
short role-play is a microcosm of what is
going on in our own society as we remain
blinded to the plight of infants and chil-
dren. Most of us just don’t get it yet.

Perhaps our egos would have us believe
that our childhood traumas are all safely in
our past, or that they don’t even exist and
have no effect on our lives. But despite our
intellectual protests, our unconscious neu-
rological pathways are running the show.
All our childhood fears, hang-ups, defense
mechanisms, neuroses, addictions, and se-
crets stand in silent testimony of the fetid
catacombs hiding behind our respectable,
controlled public façades.

My dress, my behavior, my professional demeanor, my church
service were all performed for a public audience while privately I
continued leaking shame onto the people I loved.

Again, Miller asserts, “Until we become
sensitized to the small child’s suffering,
this wielding of power by adults will con-
tinue to be a normal aspect of the human
condition, for no one pays attention to or
takes seriously what is regarded as trivial,
since the victims are only children.”
Indeed, if we remain asleep, shut down
and hardened towards our own childhood
experiences of shame, we won’t be able to
understand the magnitude of what we put
our own children through. We will persist
in contemptuous behavior towards our-
selves and unknowingly pass that con-
tempt on to our children. Only by awak-
ening to genuine compassion for our
childhood selves can we start the healing
that we can then extend to our own chil-
dren. It takes only one enlightened parent
to impact the next generation of children
for good.

In the next column, I will analyze the
Walt Disney film The Kid, which, despite
starring Bruce Willis, can act as a roadmap
for the stages of our own personal awak-
ening from contempt and shame.
MORMONS: FRIENDLY BUT FRIENDLESS


“The bottom line for Mormons, the authors say, [is that] ‘Mormons like everyone else, while almost everyone else dislikes Mormons,’” LDS author Jana Riess explains on her blog Flunking Sainthood. “The only fellow religious group to give Mormons a ‘net positive’ rating was the Jews.”

Riess underscores three key findings from the study for Mormons: “(1) evangelicals don’t like us, (2) secular Americans don’t like us, and (3) we really, really like ourselves. “Mormons ranked highest in ‘in-group attachment,’” Riess explains, “a finding the researchers felt was surprising, especially since three of the other groups that made the top five—Jews, Catholics, and Black Protestants—have their bonds cemented by a shared ethnicity. About 85% of Mormons say they feel a great warmth toward their own tribe.”

In an interview posted at the online forum Times and Seasons, co-author of the study David E. Campbell, who is LDS, suggests that the reason Mormons are viewed so negatively is that they have ‘‘cocooned’’ themselves into religiously homogeneous social networks.”

“By being so insular, Mormons do not often build bridges to people of other religions, and thus do not benefit from the good feelings that accompany such personal relationships,” Campbell says. “If there is a message for Mormons in American Grace, it is that Latter-day Saints ought to stop being so insular and instead develop inclusive social networks.”

Riess opines that the reason Mormons are universally disliked is “partly about theology; evangelicals are still upset about some Mormon teachings. But it’s also likely about conservative politics and same-sex marriage, two issues where the religiously unaffiliated come down on the opposite side of most Latter-day Saints.”

WHY DON’T LDS WOMEN WANT THE PRIESTHOOD?

AMERICAN GRACE REVEALS another surprising finding: While a solid 48% of LDS men favor female clergy, only 10% of LDS women feel the same way. Writing at Flunking Sainthood, Grant Hardy, an LDS professor of history and religious studies at the University of North Carolina at Asheville, proposes several explanations for the significant gender split, including the idea that “women see an exclusively male priesthood as part of the inheritance of the Restoration” and that “many believe that motherhood is the equivalent of the priesthood.”

Asked about the same finding, David Campbell told Times and Seasons that “Mormon women are more likely to be religious traditionalists than men.” He added, “I also suspect that those women who truly object to a male-only priesthood have left the LDS Church and would not report their religious identification as Mormon.”

“Deborah,” an educator who blogs at The-Exponent.com, proposes another reason: It is more dangerous and heretical for a Mormon woman to support female ordination than such support would be for a Mormon man. “The feeling among many of my ‘faithful Mormon feminist’ friends is that once you publicly state that you think women should hold the priesthood, you’ve lost some leverage for working from within; you’ve aroused suspicion. It’s a dividing line.”

BOTTLENECK TO BRAZIL

HUNDREDS OF MISSIONARIES BOUND FOR BRAZIL have been temporarily reassigned to missions in the U.S. after Brazilian authorities mandated a new system of background checks for American citizens, retaliation for a similar procedure the U.S. uses to grant visas to Brazilians. The new system has created a bottleneck of visa applications to the Brazilian Consulate in Los Angeles, which handles applications from Utah.

Brazil has a total of 27 missions and some 5,000 missionaries—10 percent of the Church’s total missionary force. To try to make up for the deficit in its Brazilian missionary force, the LDS Church recently reduced the minimum required age for native Brazilians from 19 to 18.

In Switzerland, the LDS Church and other U.S.-based re-
igious groups could soon face a major setback. Because of changes in Swiss immigration and labor laws, missionaries are now considered “gainfully employed” and therefore subject to Swiss employment laws, which favor European workers over those of other nations. The number of American missionaries allowed to operate in the country will therefore be restricted.

A transitional agreement provided visas for 80 LDS American missionaries in 2010 and for 50 in 2011. The LDS Church issued a statement saying Mormons have “a long history in Switzerland dating back to 1850. We hope a solution can be found that allows missionaries, regardless of their country of origin to serve the Swiss people.”

MORMONS MULL MEDIA MATTERS

SCHOLARS AND BLOGGERS GATHERED NOVEMBER 11–12 at BYU for the Mormon Media Studies Symposium, exploring issues relating to mass media and Mormonism.

The two-day event was organized by Sherry Baker, a BYU professor of communications who noted how much media attention Mormons have recently received—from presidential hopeful Mitt Romney to political commentator Glenn Beck, to the 2007 PBS documentary *The Mormons*.

“It was time for scholars that are looking at this from a scholarly perspective to have a forum to get together and discuss their work and interest,” Baker said.

Professor Terryl Givens, whose 1997 *The Viper on the Hearth* explores how nineteenth-century popular fiction constructed an image of the Mormons as a violent and peculiar people, noted that from the days of Joseph Smith, the LDS Church has been more invested in appearing mainstream Christian than in proclaiming its theological distinctiveness.

Givens also argued that Mormons have allowed detractors to frame the issues and happily assumed the role of victims. “Mormons were perfectly happy to play by the rules that had been inaugurated by their detractors and opponents,” Givens said. “They have played defense.”

Kathryn Lynard Soper, founding editor of *Segullah*, a blog and magazine for LDS women, discussed how cyberspace exposes bloggers to a diversity of perspectives, conflicts, and confrontation.

“The challenges of blogging with charity, or at least with basic human decency, are what make it a valuable tool for spiritual refinement,” Soper said. “For me, one reward of blogging is an expanded mind from butting heads with people I’d like to write off as just plain stupid, but who (I begrudgingly admit) actually have a point. Another is an expanded heart from realizing the legitimacy of differing points of view and the basic human respect deserved by all individuals, including that one woman who called me apostate (and that other woman I called apostate).”

The symposium included a screening of one of the rarest of Mormon films: *Corianton, A Story of Unholy Love* (1931), adapted from a stage play inspired by B.H. Roberts’s *Corianton: An Aztec Romance* (1889). Produced lavishly in the style of 1920s biblical epics, with music by the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, the film had been presumed lost until 2005, when a copy had been donated to BYU.

PROVO TABERNACLE BURNS

THE HISTORIC PROVO TABERNACLE BURNED DOWN 17 December 2010, the result of what has been deemed an unintentional fire. At that time, the building was being prepared for the taping of Lex de Azevedo’s dramatic musical composition *Gloria*.

Completed in 1898 at a cost of $100,000, the Provo Tabernacle was the venue of two “underground” general conferences (1886 and 1887, during the federal government’s anti-polygamy campaign), a speech by U.S. President William Howard Taft (1909), and the site of countless religious, social, and cultural events.

Designed to meet the congregational needs of a stake, tabernacles flourished in the nineteenth century in Utah, but in the twentieth century, the aging edifices became symbols of a bygone era. The LDS Church was forced to make difficult decisions—sale, demolition, renovation, or restoration. The 1971 demolition of the Coalville Tabernacle produced a public outcry and brought attention to the fading legacy of these historic buildings. The tabernacle in Vernal, Utah, though having been closed to the public for more than a decade, was restored as a temple in 1997.

As of press time, the Church had not yet decided if it would restore the Provo Tabernacle.

A 17 December 2010 fire guts the historic Provo Tabernacle.
People

Resigning. JON HUNTSMAN, Jr., 50, after serving one year as U.S. ambassador to China. The son of billionaire businessman and philanthropist JON HUNTSMAN and grandson of LDS Apostle DAVID B. HAIGHT, Huntsman is reportedly exploring a 2012 Republican presidential bid.

Excised. FRED HUNTING, who played the part of the apostle John in the 1991 temple film. Bloggers report that Hunting’s image has been carefully edited out of the film and replaced with that of a different actor. A Fred Hunting signed the Reconciliation Petition Request at ldsapology.org asking that Church leaders reexamine the “ways in which official statements, rhetoric, policy and practice have been injurious to gays and lesbians,” but it has not been confirmed that this is the same Fred Hunting.


Convicted. Self-proclaimed prophet BRIAN DAVID MITCHELL, 57, for the 2002 kidnapping and rape of ELIZABETH SMART. After deliberating for five hours, the jury rejected the defense’s claim that Mitchell had been insane when he had abducted the 14-year-old girl from her Salt Lake City home and took her as a “plural wife.” Smart, now 23, temporarily returned from her LDS mission in Paris, France, to testify. In 2009, Mitchell's wife WANDA BARZEE was sentenced to 15 years for her role in the kidnapping.

Released. The FBI file of former LDS President and U.S. Secretary of Agriculture EZRA T.AFT BENSON (1899–1994), including confidential letters that President Benson sent to then-FBI director J. EDGAR HOOVER. In the letters, Benson, a firm believer in a worldwide Communist conspiracy, defends the work of the John Birch Society, condemns DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER for being soft on Communism, and asks Hoover to conduct background checks on Benson’s top aides in the Department of Agriculture. Last October the New Yorker magazine listed Benson as one of the Tea Party’s “confounding fathers”, noting that “Glenn Beck’s view of American history stems from the paranoid politics of the fifties.”

Too Hot. For Deseret Book, The Scorch Trials, the new young adult novel by best-selling author JAMES DASHNER. The book reportedly contains graphic scenes of violence and expressions such as “damn,” “this sucks,” and “shuck it.” Deseret Book’s managing director of marketing, GAIL HALLADAY, told the Salt Lake Tribune that the book “contains language that some of our customers would find offensive.” Dashner has published three books with Deseret Book’s imprint Shadow Mountain.

Debuting. TREY PARKER and MATT STONE’S The Book of Mormon, a Broadway musical which Vogue magazine is calling “the filthiest, most offensive, and—surprise—sweetest thing you’ll see on Broadway this year, and quite possibly the funniest musical ever.” Written in collaboration with Avenue Q composer ROBERT LOPEZ, and peppered with foul language and adult themes, the musical centers on two 19-year-old Mormon missionaries who are sent to Uganda.

Televised: On 23 January 2011, a fictional Sunstone Symposium session on HBO’s series Big Love. In it, Barb (the first wife of Bill Henrickson) played by JEANNE TRIPLEHORN participates with her mother on a panel session addressing the effects of excommunication on a family.

Hairy. Former BYU football player and current Steelers defensive end BRETT “DIESEL” KEISEL who grew an epic beard for luck in the 2011 Super Bowl. He suggested that if the Steelers won the game, BYU officials could “Maybe have a ‘Diesel Day’ or ‘Diesel Week’ where everybody [on BYU campus] can let their beard [grow] for a month or so.” However, the Steelers lost.
MASSACRE SITE MAY BECOME NATIONAL LANDMARK

THE SITE OF THE MOUNTAIN MEADOWS MASSACRE is on track to become a National Historic Landmark. Parks historian Lisa Wegman-French told the Associated Press that the National Parks Service Advisory Board supports giving the site landmark status though the U.S. Secretary of the Interior will make the final decision.

Located 30 miles north of St. George, Utah, Mountain Meadows is the site where, in 1857, a militia composed of Mormons and a few Native Americans killed 120 men, women, and all but 17 children bound for California. The slaughter has been called one of the darkest episodes in Mormon history, and competing interpretations of the massacre have dogged its memory for more than 150 years.

In recent years, representatives of three organizations generated from massacre survivors, along with the LDS Church, reached an agreement to support the national landmark designation. In 2007, the LDS Church, which owns much of the land at the site, authorized a statement expressing “regret” for the massacre.

“This [landmark designation] is something that we’ve wanted, some higher order of protection for our lost loved ones,” said Phil Bolinger, president of the Mountain Meadows Monument Foundation, which has worked for landmark designation for nearly a decade. “There’s not a lot you can do for people that were killed and buried 150-plus years ago, but you can honor and remember them in the highest possible way.”

“SISTER WIVES” LEAVES UTAH

MERI, JANELLE, CHRISTINE, AND ROBYN ARE PLURAL wives of Kody Brown—and the stars of Sister Wives, a reality TV show shot in Lehi, Utah, and carried since September 2010 on the TLC cable network. After months of public scrutiny in their Utah community, the family, consisting of 5 adults and 16 children, is moving to Nevada.

Though attorney Jonathan Turley says Kody Brown has moved his family “to pursue new opportunities,” Utah newspapers noted that the Lehi police launched an investigation into the family as soon as TLC announced the new show.

“There were no pending charges against them in Utah,” Turley stated. “I see no legal reason why their family cannot live and continue to thrive in Nevada as they have in Utah.”

However, since the show’s premiere, the family has faced difficulties such as Meri Brown’s being fired from her job in the mental health industry.

“I know the family so well, and they’re such fantastic people,” said Anne Wilde, cofounder of Principle Voices, a plural marriage advocacy group. “They’re not flaunting it at all. They’re trying to educate people that this is a viable lifestyle.”

TLC says that the move will not affect the series. The first 10 episodes of the second season have already been shot.

“We will continue to shoot no matter where they live,” announced Laurie Goldberg, TLC’s senior vice president of communications. “We’re interested in the family. That won’t change.”
“Sometimes I like to climb up in what I call my ‘spiritual helicopter’ and look down at life on the earth, my own life, the life of the human family. I like to see where we’ve been, imagine where we’re going, get a little perspective on today. The journey is one of consciousness, I’m very clear on that.

We can track consciousness from this high helicopter, you and I. We can look down at the landscape, watch history as it goes back and back and back. We can see the darkness of unconsciousness illuminated from time to time by the light of consciousness. Look! There—hard to believe—we thought the gods appreciated human sacrifice—we thought it just fine for one man to own another in slavery—we accepted the idea that women did not have souls—we were indifferent to the genocide of millions of Native Americans—large numbers of us accepted that Hitler’s ethnic cleansing was a fine idea.

Looking down at that slowly moving demarcation, that border of “now,” we see the ongoing birth of higher consciousness. It’s not a straight climb, but surely it’s three steps forward for every one back. Where, then, will our consciousness be ten years, thirty years, fifty years from now, assuming our world lasts? You have your list of hopes, I am sure. I have mine. I hope and believe there will be more consciousness of our human family being part of the larger creation, part of the environment. The feminine principle, both mortal and divine, will have established a stronger presence. We will be closer to a cease-fire over who owns God. Our religions will have remembered that each has deeply embedded in its platform a version of the Golden Rule. We will have stopped creating divisions and will instead celebrate our common humanity and divinity. We will be more reverent of the place and power of sexuality. Our heterosexual majority will have ceased reviling and persecuting our gay brothers and sisters, and we will look back and shake our heads and say, “Can you believe that in the name of religion we drove these people to suicide?”

Not an impossible dream, I think. I know the human family, and I say with Anne Frank, “I still believe, in spite of everything, that people are really good at heart.” I know the Mormon heart. It is a good and great heart. It is a heart that opens wide whenever a need is seen.

Today there is a despondent gay man somewhere who has checked to see if his father’s gun is still where it used to be. Tonight there is a lesbian who again cries herself to sleep over her awful alternatives, “You may choose between being gay or being a member of this family.” Today there are parents whose tears are for the pain of their loved gay child, for the lack of support they receive from their church, for the condemning rhetoric they continue to hear. Today there takes place a marriage ceremony for a young, gay man, anxious to please God and his church, and an eager starry-eyed young bride who believes her groom’s romantic restraint has come from his righteousness.

These people are still on the plains. I am asking you to load up the wagons. You can do it without fully understanding, even without fully “approving.” You have the supplies, parcels of love, compassion, encouragement, respect, good information, and humility in knowing that there is much we have yet to learn. You have the words of Jesus: “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these, ye have done it unto me.” And you have the words that still echo across a century and a half: Go and bring in these people now on the plains.
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