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FROM THE PULPIT

THE SIDNEY SPERRY/HEBER SNELL DEBATES: CRITICAL BIBLICAL SCHOLARSHIP AND MORMON TRADITION

Clyde D. Ford

In 2018, the Sunday School instructor of my Mormon congregation was assigned to teach the stories about Lot found in Genesis 19. The teacher confessed that he was very uncomfortable discussing these narratives. Instead, he chose to review several recent General Conference addresses. Not long after, another teacher was leading a discussion on the book of Numbers. One attendee noted that the passages portrayed a morally suspect deity,[1] inconsistent with the God of Mormon teaching.

Discomfort with conflicts between Old Testament teachings and contemporary beliefs has plagued Christians, including Mormons, from their respective beginnings.[2] Whether and how to approach such problems while best promoting faith has occasioned considerable debate. Some LDS Church leaders have favored attempts to resolve inconsistencies while others have advocated shielding their adherents

1. For example, see Numbers 11, 16, and 25.

2. These difficulties resulted in various solutions in early Christian factions. For example, Marcion of Sinope (d. c. 160 CE) rejected the Old Testament, the Christian Gnostics distinguished between the God of Moses and the God of Jesus, and early mainline Christians resorted to selective quotations and allegorical hermeneutics. See Margaret M. Mitchell and Frances M. Young, eds. *The Cambridge History of Christianity: Origins to Constantine* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 195–201, 249–51.

from controversies. The choice of the latter in recent decades has resulted in a generation of Mormons protected from difficult issues in biblical interpretation. Conversely, during the early twentieth century, Church leaders encouraged the production of educational materials that addressed scriptural problems. These were initially written by faithful scholars who had been formally educated in non-biblical fields. This effort was significantly advanced during the 1930s and 1940s when professionally trained biblical scholars became available.[3] The two most prominent scholars to come out of this period were Sidney Sperry (1895–1977) and Heber Snell (1899–1974).

Sperry and Snell were the first active Mormon scholars to obtain PhDs in biblical studies, both from the University of Chicago in 1931 and 1940, respectively.[4] Both were highly respected college instructors in the Church Educational System throughout most of their careers. Church leaders requested both to author an Old Testament textbook for use in the Church's institutes of higher education, works intended to exemplify the best scholarship adapted to a Mormon context.[5] Yet, Sperry and Snell disagreed over how such a project would be best accomplished. Their disputes exposed many important questions and

3. For a list of Mormons obtaining advanced degrees in religious studies during the period see Thomas W. Simpson, *American Universities and the Birth of Modern Mormonism, 1867–1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 162–64.

4. Sperry obtained a master of arts degree (1926) from the Divinity School with the thesis "The Text of Isaiah in the Book of Mormon" and a PhD (1931) from the Oriental Language and Literature Department with the dissertation "The Scholia of Bar Hebraeus to the Books of Kings." Snell worked intermittently on his PhD, starting in 1932 and completing it in 1940 at the Divinity School with the dissertation "The Background and Study of the Teaching-of-Jesus Literature in America."

5. The resulting works were Sidney B. Sperry, *The Spirit of the Old Testament* (Salt Lake City: LDS Department of Education, 1940); Heber Cyrus Snell, *Ancient Israel: Its Story and Meaning, A Brief History for Seminaries, Colleges, and for the General Reader* (Salt Lake City: Stevens & Wallis, Inc., 1948).

methodological issues that needed addressing for such a task to succeed. In this study, we will examine some of the disputes that Sperry and Snell chose to address, their suggested approaches, and how these fared. I argue that, although presenting significant challenges, the work of Sperry and Snell show us that the integration of critical biblical scholarship and Mormon tradition is possible and helpful, at least for some disputes, and that their pioneering efforts are worth continuing.

Mormons and Critical Biblical Scholarship in the Early Twentieth Century

In the decades surrounding the turn of the twentieth century, traditional Christian biblical interpretations were increasingly being challenged by liberal biblical scholars employing the modernist techniques of "higher criticism." As Harvard historian William R. Hutchison has noted, these ideas had infiltrated virtually all American denominations and "had attained a voice equal to those of the older and newer conservatisms that opposed it."[6] The liberal biblical literary critics were principally concerned with (1) authorship, date, and place of composition, (2) literary form, and (3) historical value.[7] As such, a primary aim was to discover the original meaning of the text, or, in other words, the literal meaning in historical context. As one scholar from the early twentieth century explained, such studies required the use of "scientific methods . . . without regard to authority of any kind."[8]

Disputes between conservative and liberal biblical scholars were often bitter and included personal attacks. Regarding the latter, New

6. William R. Hutchison, *The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University, 1992), 113.

7. Andrew C. Zenos, *The Elements of the Higher Criticism* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1895), 14–46.

8. Henry S. Nash, *The History of the Higher Criticism of the New Testament* (New York: Macmillan, 1906), 101, 47.

York liberal preacher Harry Emerson Fosdick pointed out in a famous 1922 sermon that liberal and conservative theologians tend to view each other in unflattering stereotyped ways. Conservatives accuse liberal thinkers of being "reckless radicals gifted with intellectual ingenuity but lacking spiritual depth" whereas liberals characterize conservatives as "illiberal and intolerant."[9] As we will see, some liberal and conservative Mormon scholars were also not above leveling such assaults on the character of their opponents.

At first, Mormon leaders found themselves challenged by the liberal biblical innovations.[10] Early in the twentieth century, there were high-profile sanctions and defections, most visibly three professors who were dismissed from Brigham Young Academy in 1911.[11] On one hand, this Mormon "modernism controversy" resulted in significant student support for the dismissed professors,[12] making it more difficult for Church leaders to completely reject the new biblical scholarship. On the other hand, Church leaders retained serious concern that this kind of scholarship eroded the faith of the young. As apostle James E. Talmage observed in 1914: "higher critics of the scriptures . . . [who] profess doubt as to the truth and plain meaning of the Holy Scriptures" were having "pernicious" effects on young Mormons, who "are impressed

9. Harry Emerson Fosdick, "Shall the Fundamentalists Win?" *Christian Work* 102 (June 10, 1922): 716–22.

10. Philip L. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible: The Place of the Latter-day Saints in American Religion* (New York: Oxford, 2013), 112–61; Thomas G. Alexander, *Mormonism in Transition: A History of the Latter-day Saints, 1890–1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1986), 171–79.

11. For differing perspectives on the controversy see Ralph V. Chamberlin, *Life and Philosophy of W. H. Chamberlin* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1925), 137–60; Ernest L. Wilkinson, ed., *Brigham Young University: The First One Hundred Years*, vol. 1 (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1975), 412–33; and Simpson, *Modern Mormonism*, 95–97.

12. Alexander, *Mormonism in Transition*, 172.

by those who instruct them."[13] For Church leaders like Talmage, it was evident that a clearer definition of boundaries for the Church's religion instructors was needed.

In response to the 1911 controversy at Brigham Young Academy, Church president Joseph F. Smith emphasized that the professors were dismissed not because they taught the new ideas but because they gave them inappropriate priority.[14] He attempted to create a middle position, acknowledging that "the higher criticism" might reveal "many truths."[15] In so doing, Smith laid the groundwork for a moderate approach that allowed toleration of the findings of critical biblical scholars as long as they did not challenge core Mormon doctrines. Smith's policy of moderation was soon reflected in official Church teaching manuals.[16] But

13. Report of the Semi-Annual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Apr. 1914 (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, semiannual), 94–95.

14. Joseph F. Smith, "Theory and Divine Revelation," *Improvement Era* 14, no. 6 (Apr. 1911): 548–51.

15. Joseph F. Smith, "Philosophy and the Church Schools," *Juvenile Instructor* 46, no. 4 (Apr. 1911): 209; and "Theory and Divine Revelation," 548.

16. Examples include James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ: A Study of the Messiah and His Mission According to Holy Scriptures both Ancient and Modern* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1915) and Joseph M. Tanner, *Old Testament Studies* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Sunday School Union, 1917). While these authors were clearly attempting to counter the liberal arguments, they also acknowledged some of the critics' conclusions. For example, Talmage conceded the overall similarity of and contradictions among the first three Gospels and admitted that the parables in Matthew 13 were probably not all uttered at the same time. Likewise, Tanner emphasized the message and deemphasized the historical questions regarding the book of Jonah and argued favorably for an exilic author of Isaiah 40–66. For a discussion of Talmage's work as a response to liberal Bible scholarship see Clyde D. Ford, "Modernism and Mormonism: James E. Talmage's *Jesus the Christ* and Early Twentieth-Century Mormon Responses to Biblical Criticism," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 41, no. 4 (Winter 2008): 96–120.

none of the Mormon scholars of this era had the mastery afforded by formal training in biblical scholarship.

The reasons for the subsequent integration of formally trained biblical scholars into the Church Educational System are complex and multifactorial. Historian Leonard Arrington observed that during the 1920s, "Scientists were taking over the study and interpretation of the Bible by means of the 'Higher Criticism.'"[17] This and other issues were challenging the traditional faith of the increasing number of young Mormons undergoing higher education. To address the problem, some Church leaders concluded that they needed more sophisticated college-level religious instruction in conjunction with the college curriculum. They organized the first Institute of Religion at the University of Idaho in 1926. Its first director, J. Wyley Sessions, wanted to include courses on "religious philosophy and Bible history" for college credit and successfully negotiated this with the university administration on the conditions that (1) the instructors had at least a master's degree and qualified for faculty appointments and (2) no course content could be "sectarian in religion or partisan in politics."[18] College credit was continuing at some institute programs twenty-five years later,[19] suggesting the ongoing significance of having trained teachers of institute classes while Sperry and Snell were doing their work.

Historian Casey Paul Griffiths has suggested other possible reasons underlying the impulse to upgrade the scholarly credentials of Church educators. One was the desire of Church leaders to pattern the new Mormon secondary school seminaries after the University of Idaho model. Another may have arisen from Church educators themselves, as

17. Leonard J. Arrington, "The Founding of the L.D.S. Institutes of Religion," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 2, no. 2 (Summer 1967): 139.

18. J. Wyley Sessions, "The Latter-day Saint Institutes," *Improvement Era* 38, no. 7 (July 1935): 412.

19. Albert L. Zobell Jr., "Progress in Church Institutes of Religion," *Improvement Era* 53, no. 11 (Nov. 1950): 882.

evidenced by their enthusiastic responses following exposure to critical biblical scholarship. In the mid-1920s, Sperry and Snell sought outside formal education in biblical studies at the University of Chicago and the Pacific School of Religion, respectively. Both conveyed their new knowledge to their peers in the Church Educational System, receiving rave reviews. These were reinforced after University of Chicago New Testament scholar Edgar J. Goodspeed visited the educators' annual Aspen Grove summer school in 1930.[20] Additionally, Church leaders noted that Sperry did not seem to suffer any negative consequences following his exposure to liberal ideas.[21] Thus resulted what Griffiths has dubbed "the Chicago experiment," in which, beginning in 1930, several Church religious educators were encouraged to seek formal education at the University of Chicago Divinity School. These students returned to the Church Educational System and introduced innovations that were then disseminated in Church-sponsored manuals,[22] in educational sessions for other Church instructors, and in the classroom. Yet Church leaders at the highest level remained split throughout this decade on some of the key issues in modernism. In 1934, Church president Heber J. Grant chose Joshua Reuben Clark Jr. as first counselor and David O.

20. Casey Paul Griffiths, "The Chicago Experiment: Finding the Voice and Charting the Course of Religious Education in the Church," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 49, no. 4 (2010): 93–95. See also Russel B. Swensen, "Mormons at the University of Chicago Divinity School: A Personal Reminiscence," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 7, no. 2 (Summer 1972), 37–47.

21. Swensen, "Mormons at the University of Chicago Divinity School," 99.

22. Examples include Russel B. Swensen, *New Testament Literature: A Study For College Students* (Salt Lake City: LDS Department of Education, 1940); Daryl Chase, *Christianity Through the Centuries* (Salt Lake City: LDS Department of Education, 1944); and Russel B. Swensen's three-year Gospel Doctrine New Testament study courses: *The Synoptic Gospels* (1945), *The Gospel of John* (1946), *The New Testament: The Acts and the Epistles* (1947), all published by the Deseret Sunday School Union out of Salt Lake City.

McKay as second in the First Presidency. McKay favored a moderate approach, while Clark opposed liberal biblical scholarship.[23]

In 1938, Clark instructed Church educators that "You are not to teach the philosophes of the world. . . .Your sole field is the gospel."[24] Ecclesiastical leaders who supported Clark's positions became known as "Clark men," most prominently senior apostle Joseph Fielding Smith Jr. Those favoring McKay's stance were "McKay men."[25] In 1940, Grant suffered a dominant hemisphere stroke, leaving him progressively disabled until his death in 1945. During this time, four new apostles were chosen, all Clark men, presumably due to Clark's influence. They would go on to figure prominently in the shift of Mormonism in a fundamentalist direction in the latter twentieth century, but that is another story.[26]

As illustrated by these examples, there was a spectrum of opinions among Church leadership regarding biblical criticism during the 1920s and 1930s and afterward. Mormon philosopher Sterling McMurrin identified three categories: "unbelievers" who prioritize biblical criticism, "believers . . . who attempt a reconciliation," and "believers . . . who reject knowledge and science and affirm faith and the revelation

23. D. Michael Quinn, *J. Reuben Clark: The Church Years* (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1983), 175–79.

24. J. Reuben Clark Jr., "The Charted Course of the Church in Education" (address to seminary and institute of religion leaders at the Brigham Young University summer school, Aspen Grove, Utah, Aug. 8, 1938).

25. For a list of the most prominent leaders on each side see Quinn, *J. Reuben Clark*, 300. McKay's dislike for Clark's and Joseph Fielding Smith's positions was manifest when he became Church president in 1951. He "demoted" Clark to Second Counselor in the First Presidency and declined to support Smith's magnum opus attack on liberal biblical criticism *Man, His Origin and Destiny* (1954). See Gregory A. Prince and William Robert Wright, *David O. McKay and the Rise of Modern Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah, 2005), 45–47.

26. See Armand L. Mauss, *The Angel and the Beehive: The Mormon Struggle with Assimilation* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

only."[27] McMurrin typified the first group, while Clark and Joseph Fielding Smith characterized the last. However, the ground between these two extremes was quite large. I suggest that Sperry and Snell represented the conservative- and liberal-leaning spectrums, respectively, of the middle group. By the 1960s, McMurrin noted: "For many years, Professors Snell and Sperry have been the undisputed leaders of the main wings of Bible scholarship in the LDS Church."[28] Not surprisingly, Sperry had the more amicable relationship with Smith and Snell with McMurrin.[29]

Sidney Sperry

By whatever combination of nature and nurture, Sperry came to his higher education with an inclination toward religious conservatism. In 1926, he received a master's degree in Old Testament from the University of Chicago Divinity School with the thesis "The Text of Isaiah in the Book of Mormon." But Sperry was not entirely comfortable with the liberal emphasis of the Divinity School instructors.[30] In 1931 he received a PhD from the Department of Oriental Languages and Literature. Sperry then participated in the American Schools of Oriental Research Jerusalem School in 1931 and 1932, gaining expertise in Palestinian archeology.

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27. Sterling M. McMurrin, *Lectures on Religion and Culture* (Salt Lake City: Tanner Humanities Center, 2004), 67.

28. Sterling M. McMurrin, "Letter to the Editor," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 2, no. 3 (Fall 1967): 10–11.

29. See the multiple friendly and mutually respectful correspondences between Smith and Sperry and McMurrin and Snell in Sidney B. Sperry papers in L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah (hereafter Sperry papers), and Heber Snell papers in the Utah State University Library, Logan, Utah (hereafter Snell papers).

30. Snell noted Sperry's "bias against University of Chicago scholars." Snell to Sperry, Sept. 20, 1949, Snell papers.

Sperry quickly became the Church's most respected formally educated Old Testament scholar, and his lectures on the Old Testament were enthusiastically received by his Church Educational System peers.[31] Franklin L. West, the Commissioner of Church Education (1936–1953), requested that Sperry write a text for the study of the Old Testament.[32] His finished work, *The Spirit of the Old Testament*, was published by the Church in 1940. The book reflected both a sympathy for Mormon tradition, including quotations from Mormon scripture, and a high level of scholarship. Sperry described his methodology: "Where questions of Biblical criticism have been dealt with, conservative views have generally been adopted."[33] Sperry's book was used by instructors in the Church Educational System for many years, including by Snell.[34] In 1970, at the urging of "friends and colleagues," Sperry published a second, expanded edition of his book.[35] Sperry's expertise in the Old Testament was also utilized in the composition of Church manuals for Sunday worship.[36] Sperry taught at Brigham Young University until his mid-seventies, retiring in 1971.

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31. Griffiths, "Chicago Experiment," 93–94. Sperry was consulted both by Church leaders and other Church scholars regarding issues related to ancient languages, scriptural interpretation, and other scholarly questions. For examples, see Sperry to J. Reuben Clark Jr., Oct. 22, 1948; Snell to Sperry, Feb. 9, 1939; Sperry to Snell, Feb. 10, 1939, Sperry papers.

32. Sperry noted a request from West for "lessons of the Old Testament" in early 1939. See Sperry to H. Grant Vest, January 31, 1939, Sperry papers.

33. Sperry, *Spirit of the Old Testament*, preface.

34. Snell to Sperry, Sept. 20, 1949, Snell papers.

35. Sidney B. Sperry, *The Spirit of the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1970), reissued by Deseret Book in 1980.

36. For example, Sperry's influence is evident in the text and non-Mormon scholarly references in the 1944 Gospel Doctrine Sunday School manual, "*Feed my Sheep*": *The Old Testament* (Salt Lake City: Desert Sunday School Union, 1943). See also the 1966 Gospel Doctrine course manual: Sidney B. Sperry, *The Old Testament Prophets* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Sunday School Union, 1965).

Heber Snell

Snell came to his higher education comfortable within a liberal environment. He had been a student of William Chamberlin, one of the professors who came under criticism in the 1911 controversy at Brigham Young Academy. James M. McLachlan has termed Chamberlin "Mormonism's first professionally trained philosopher and theologian."[37] Snell adopted Chamberlin's linear progressive development view of Old Testament theological beliefs, which beliefs, Chamberlin felt, gradually matured under intermittent divine interventions.[38] Snell received his PhD in New Testament studies in 1941 under the supervision of University of Chicago historian and liberal New Testament scholar Shirley Jackson Case. Under Case's sociohistorical method, a linear progressive view of Christian history was postulated in which early Christians progressed in their knowledge and understanding in stages.[39] Snell likely had some sympathies for this view, although he probably would have amended Case's model with a greater degree of divine guidance.

While Snell was writing a manual for Church instruction in the New Testament and early Christian history, Franklin West requested

37. James M. McLachlan, "W. H. Chamberlin and the Quest for a Mormon Theology," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 29, no. 4 (Winter 1996): 151–68; see also Ephraim E. Ericksen, "William H. Chamberlin: Pioneer Mormon Philosopher," *Western Humanities Review* 8, no. 4 (Autumn 1954): 275–85.

38. Chamberlin taught that "the ideas of God achieved by the people of Israel had their genesis in the lives of leaders of great insight [i.e., Old Testament prophets] who appeared among them at critical times and taught them ever newer and better ideas of God. These ideas they committed to writing, and the literature known as the Old Testament was the result." See W. H. Chamberlin, *The Study of Philosophy: An Outline* (Salt Lake City, 1919), 39.

39. For Case, "Christianity was understood as the product of the long continuous social history of believers working out their beliefs." See William J. Hynes, *Shirley Jackson Case and the Chicago School: The Socio-Historical Method* (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1981), ix–x.

that he produce a text for Old Testament study.[40] This may seem surprising since Snell was a New Testament scholar, and Sperry had already published a textbook. Several factors may have contributed to the request for another manual. First, as noted above, a few non-Church colleges were still granting college credit for some institute courses. College certification would require the use of a textbook that reflected adequate scholarship and, unlike Sperry's, that lacked denominational dogma.[41] Second, West was impressed with Snell's approaches to the Old Testament problems, which Snell had enumerated in enthusiastically received presentations to Mormon educators.[42] Snell had also delivered a popular series of lectures on the Bible, which West felt were "very fine." West expressed admiration for Snell's scholarship.[43] In addition, West was intrigued by Snell's emphasis on Old Testament history

40. "Heber C. Snell Ph.D., Logan, Utah: Interviews conducted by Frederick S. Buchanan, Lewis Max Rogers, and Dale C. LeCheminant," 8, Marriott Library Special Collections Department, University of Utah, available at https://collections.lib.utah.edu/details?id=790469. Snell noted that he was understandably surprised by the request.

41. Snell summarized his understanding of this objective: "I intended my book for use, primarily, as a text in colleges and seminaries on the college level, both within and outside the borders of the Church." Consistent with this goal, Snell solicited feedback from senior non-Mormon Old Testament scholar William A. Irwin, Snell's Hebrew and Old Testament professor at Chicago, who considered his work "conservative." Snell to the Executive Committee of the Church Board of Education, Mar. 8, 1949, Snell papers; Irwin to Snell, July 19, 1949, Snell papers.

42. Griffiths, "Chicago Experiment," 93–94. An example is Heber C. Snell, "Criteria for Interpreting the Old Testament to College Youth," in *Through the Years: Occasional Writings of Heber C. Snell* (Logan: Utah State University, 1969), 95–117.

43. West to Snell, May 7, 1938, Snell papers; McMurrin to Snell, Oct. 31, 1940, Snell papers.

and his progressive idealistic approach.[44] Referring to one purpose for his book, Snell noted that "It is worth everything to our youth, in these days of confusion, to accept the view that God was, and is, vitally at work in history."[45] Thus, Snell's task was more difficult than Sperry's; Snell was to write a text that would be compatible with Mormon teaching, help Mormon college-age young adults resolve intellectual and theological problems, and be acceptable to secular college administrators. Conflicts among these goals would prove problematic.

Despite his support of Snell's work, West ultimately declined to publish the book with the Church because, as Richard Sherlock has pointed out, "he knew that some of his superiors would not approve" of Snell's scholarship.[46] West's primary concern was Joseph Fielding Smith. Smith, a formidable conservative adversary, chaired the executive committee of the Church Board of Education and, more importantly, the Church Publications Committee, which approved "all literature of a religious nature to be used in texts for our schools, seminaries, and auxiliaries.[47] A key to the success of any work intended for Church

44. West suggested a discussion of the Mormon "philosophy of history" during a meeting of Mormon college institute teachers in the spring of 1948 and invited Snell to contribute. West was interested in discussion concerning "what is the soundest and wisest philosophy of Church history? How, and to what extent is God operating in the affairs of men, not particularly as individuals, but in larger social units, such as national and international relationships, and in political history in general." See West to Snell, Mar. 19, 1948, Snell papers.

45. Snell to Joseph F. Merrill, Mar. 26, 1949, Snell papers.

46. Richard Sherlock, "Faith and History: The Snell Controversy," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 12, no. 1 (Spring 1979): 29.

47. Francis M. Gibbons, *Joseph Fielding Smith: Gospel Scholar, Prophet of God* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992), 356–67. The members of the executive committee are listed in a memo, Oct. 1947, Snell papers.

education was avoiding the opposition of Smith.[48] We will encounter some examples of Smith's considerable influence below.

Snell privately published the resulting book, *Ancient Israel: Its Story and Meaning*, in 1948. West purchased 121 copies for the institute and seminary libraries as a reference work, where many copies remained several years later.[49] The book received positive reviews in non-Mormon venues and was used by Snell and a few other Mormon and non-Mormon instructors in institute and college courses, demonstrating its intended versatility.[50]

West was right not to try to get the book past Joseph Fielding Smith. After the book was published, Smith objected to Snell's acceptance of biblical historical criticism, the lack of references to Mormon biblical proof texts, and Snell's progressive view of history. Some other Church leaders disagreed. Levi Edgar Young characterized the book as "a fine piece of work" and John Widtsoe as doing "very well in retaining the Latter-day Saint interpretation of the Old Testament."[51] Former Commissioner of Church Education and apostle Joseph F. Merrill

48. Smith's defense of traditional Mormonism, as he interpreted it, was not limited to Snell's work. Smith disapproved of the potential contributions of any Mormon biblical scholar who tried to introduce liberal innovations contrary to Mormon belief and Church leaders' policies into Church curriculum. For example, see the extensive criticisms of New Testament scholar Russel B. Swensen's manuscripts for the Gospel Doctrine courses *The Significance of the New Testament* and *The Gospel of John*. See The Publication Committee (Smith was chair) to the Deseret Sunday School Union Board, Sept. 29, 1944 and Sept. 7, 1945, Sperry papers. Swensen seemed to understand better than Snell the practical value of not pushing too hard against Smith.

49. West to Snell, Oct. 27, 1948, Snell papers; Ernest L. Wilkinson to Snell, July 27, 1953, Snell papers.

50. Snell, "Interviews," 5.

51. Levi Edgar Young to Snell, Jan. 8, 1949 and June 21, 1949, Snell papers; Widtsoe to Snell, Mar. 29, 1949, Snell papers.

characterized the work as "scholarly" and "conservative," aptly suited for institute "credit courses."[52] Yet, Smith's influence proved decisive. Smith ultimately banned Snell's book for use in Mormon institute courses and crystalized his anti-liberal views, specifically unfavorably quoting Snell's book, in his *Man, His Origin and Destiny* (1954).[53] Snell appealed to Church presidents George Albert Smith and David O. McKay to reverse Smith's ban on his book with no resolution.[54] Despite continued vigor and desire to remain in his teaching position,[55] Snell's contract was not renewed in 1950,[56] and he retired at the age of sixty-seven. Snell's book was published in a revised second edition in 1957 and reprinted by the University of Utah Press in 1963.

Although Snell's text was officially rejected, some of his approaches lived on through West, who himself published a textbook for Old Testament study in Mormon secondary school seminaries in 1950.[57] Apparently designed for a high school accredited seminary course, West's text was also devoid of Mormon teachings, presented in a historical format, and even contained a final chapter entitled "God in History."

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52. Merrill to Snell, Mar. 29, 1949, Snell papers.

53. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Man, His Origin and Destiny* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1954), 492–94.

54. Widtsoe to Snell, Mar. 29, 1949, Snell papers; Joseph F. Merrill to Snell, Mar. 29, 1949, Snell papers; Snell to George Albert Smith, May 24, 1950, Snell papers; Smith to Snell, July 18, 1950, Snell papers; McKay to Snell; Mar. 17, 1952, Snell papers.

55. Snell to West, Jan. 25, 1950, Snell papers.

56. In his termination letter, West gave no clear reason but did note that Snell was two years beyond usual retirement age. West to Snell, Jan. 5, 1950, Snell papers.

57. Franklin L. West, *Discovering the Old Testament* (Salt Lake City: LDS Department of Education, 1950).

Some Thoughts on Addressing Difficult Scriptural Issues

A major challenge facing Sperry and Snell in writing their textbooks on the Old Testament was devising effective ways to handle the conflicts between liberal biblical scholarship and traditional Mormon teaching. The effort to reconcile these two perspectives entails a high level of intellectual command of both sides, the ability to compromise, a sincere belief in Mormonism, and considerable ingenuity. As apostle and scientist John A. Widtsoe, who had made his own attempts to address the conflicts between science and Mormonism,[58] cautioned Snell: "It is very difficult . . . to write a book on any subject that accepts the scholarship of the world and the revelations of these latter days."[59] In addressing individual conflicts, Sperry and Snell could choose among three approaches:

1. Defend the liberal or the traditional viewpoint.
   In this strategy, one side attempts to persuade the other that the former's methodology, evidence, and conclusions are decisive and should be accepted. We will call this a direct persuasion argument.
2. Propose a novel theory of accommodation.
   A theory of accommodation may take several forms. The following will be important in the analysis that follows. Morally or theologically objectionable material found in the scriptures themselves may be blamed on human author failings (an author bias theory) or universal human limitations (a fallible human theory). In a theory of expansion, seemingly anachronistic scriptural inclusions are explained as incorporation of later material. We will use a theory of synthesis as a more generalized description of an accommodation in which selected elements of both scholarly positions are combined into a new schema. A theorist may mount a counterargument, moving into the opponent's areas of

58. For a discussion of some of Widtsoe's accommodations see Clyde D. Ford, "Materialism and Mormonism: The Early Twentieth-Century Philosophy of Dr. John A. Widtsoe," *Journal of Mormon History* 36, no. 3 (Summer 2010): 1–26.

59. Widtsoe to Snell, Mar. 29, 1949, Snell papers.

presuppositions, methodology, and/or conclusions and showing that the theorist's positions are also the more reasonable on the opponent's turf.

In formulating their accommodation theories, Sperry and Snell also needed to be careful to avoid logical fallacies and to be mindful of the theoretical virtues. Logical fallacies include arguments from ignorance (a proposition is true because it has not been proved false), appeals to inappropriate authority, non sequitur arguments (the conclusions do not follow from the premises), and ad hominem arguments (attacking the opponent rather than the proposition).[60] It is also important to avoid offering pseudo-counterarguments, which appeals to selected, sympathetic, often outdated, and inappropriately praised "experts." The most important theoretical virtues for this study are empirical accuracy (Does the theory adequately explain the issue under consideration?) and external consistency (Is the theory consistent with accepted Mormon core doctrines?).[61]

3. Avoid addressing the issue.

   This may be done in several ways:

   a. Avoid bringing the issue up at all, a strategy of neglect.
   b. Adopt a strategy of non-commitment, in which both sides of the dispute are presented leaving the final adjudication to the reader.
   c. Present an argument for irrelevance, concluding that the issue is not of adequate importance for analysis.

Sperry and Snell Address Some Problems of the Old Testament

In what follows, we will examine five key issues, contrasting the approaches of Sperry and Snell, and explore how the ideas of each fared. The first three issues are derived from an address Snell gave to

60. Lists of logical fallacies are available in many textbooks and online. See, for example, "Logical Fallacies," Purdue Online Writing Lab, https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/academic_writing/logic_in_argumentative_writing/fallacies.html.

61. See Samuel Schindler, *Theoretical Virtues in Science: Uncovering Reality Through Theory* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

a convention of Church educators in 1937, issues that Snell felt were particularly important to his Old Testament institute students.[62] The last two are additional issues that Sperry and Snell, respectively, were particularly concerned with. I will refer to the scholarly biblical critical sources that Sperry and Snell themselves utilized.[63]

Issue 1. Old Testament literary unity: The problem of duplications and contradictions

Did Noah take seven pairs or one pair of clean beasts into the ark (Genesis 7:2, 9)? In order to account for duplications/contradictions and other problems in the Pentateuch, biblical critics had posited that three independent sources had been combined using a cut-and-paste technique to form the books Genesis through Numbers, to which Deuteronomy had been appended.[64] The sources were all dated well after Moses.[65] The theory is known as the Documentary Hypothesis

62. Snell, "Criteria for interpreting the Old Testament," 95–117.

63. S. R. Driver, *An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1928); Julius August Bewer, *The Literature of the Old Testament in Its Historical Development* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1922). Sperry used Driver as a source in his book and Snell used Bewer. Snell also used Bewer in his institute Bible classes and some more liberal Church authorities also valued its study. For example, Hugh B. Brown noted that his study group of four General Authorities made it a "regular practice to refer to Bewer's book," which they "regarded highly," but emphasized the need to prioritize Mormon prophetic interpretations when appropriate. See Snell to the Executive Committee of the Church Board of Education, Mar. 8, 1949, Snell papers; Brown to Snell, Oct. 11, 1956, Snell papers.

64. Driver, *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*, 86–87, 116–59; Bewer, *Literature of the Old Testament*, chaps. 5, 6, 9, 17.

65. In addition to a more recent variety of literary critical arguments, it was noted as early as medieval times that the Pentateuch describes Moses' death, speaks of him in the third person, lists individuals who lived after Moses, and other observations suggesting composition after Moses' time. See David Noel Freedman, ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 6:610–19.

and it conflicted with the traditional view of Mosaic authorship, which seemed to be supported, at least for the first chapters of Genesis, by Mormon scripture (Moses 2:1).[66]

Snell contended for the Documentary Hypothesis using a direct persuasion approach. He argued that only this solution satisfied the theoretical virtue of empirical adequacy. For Snell, the theory of Mosaic authorship failed to explain the duplications/contradictions. "How can such problems be best met?" he wrote. "By utilizing, I think, a theory which shows that the several conflicting reports come from different sources. Such a theory actually does resolve these problems and I know of no other explanation which does. Another helpful rule of interpretation in this connection is that *we ought to be governed in our judgments by internal evidence of the books themselves, and by such external evidence as may exist, rather than by mere tradition*."[67]

Conversely, Sperry, recognizing both the validity of the critical arguments and the entrenched position of Mosaic authorship in

66. As Old Testament literary scholar Konrad Schmid has recently noted, "There has been considerable disagreement among scholars from around the world on the question of the validity of the so-called Documentary Hypothesis." Some of the challenges include the suggestion that the compiler(s) actively shaped the tradition, disagreements over the methodology for identifying the sources, and the fact that, as Robert Alter argues, seeing the text as a "patchwork of frequently disparate documents" rather than "an intricately interconnected unity" causes the reader to miss the "small verbal signals of continuity" and the "significant lexical nuances." See Konrad Schmid, "The Neo-Documentarian Manifesto: A Critical Reading," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 140, no. 3 (2021): 461; and Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 11. For some differing perspectives, see Thomas B. Dozeman and Konrad Schmid, eds., *A Farewell to the Yahwist?: The Composition of the Pentateuch in Recent European Interpretation* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006); Rolf Rendtorff, *The Canonical Hebrew Bible: A Theology of the Old Testament* (Leiden: Deo Publishing, 2005); Joel S. Baden, *The Composition of the Pentateuch: Renewing the Documentary Hypothesis* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University, 2012).

67. Snell, "Criteria for Interpreting the Old Testament," 96, emphasis in the original.

Mormon tradition, resorted to a strategy of non-commitment: "If it be admitted that the Pentateuch (first five books of the Old Testament) was composed in the days of Moses—a fact denied by many—we could say that the Old Testament represents the writings of men over a period of about one thousand years." Sperry referred to the composer(s)/editor(s) of Genesis variously as the "writer," "author," "narrator," or "compiler," always in the singular, leaving room for the reader to decide on the author's identity and the sources.[68] That Sperry's stance of noncommitment is intentional here is shown by his identification of Moses as the author and compiler of Genesis in a prior Church publication.[69]

Snell's proposal failed to make much headway, primarily because of futile attempts to convince Joseph Fielding Smith. Smith insisted that Snell's defense of liberal scholarship failed on the basis of both faulty scholarship, evidenced by a pseudo-counterargument from Smith, and insufficient external consistency. Echoing Fosdick's description of conservatives' stereotype of liberals, Smith attacked Snell for lacking "knowledge" and "understanding" since "the things of God are not understood by the spirit of man."[70]

Sperry's work did not receive the same level of criticism from Smith and was adopted by some of his successors in their own Church publications. For example, ignoring the arguments for later dating, Sperry student Ellis T. Rasmussen posited: "Could other materials have been made available to Moses, from which he could 'compose Genesis'?"[71]

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68. Sperry, *Spirit of Old Testament*, 6, 32, 18–31.

69. Sidney B. Sperry, "Genesis 12:1–13, An Abridgment of the Book of Abraham," *Improvement Era* 2, no. 12 (Oct. 1932): 727–28. There Sperry had proposed that Moses had composed at least the first part of Genesis (see Moses 2:1) but probably compiled much of the remainder using written sources, which may have included the Mormon Book of Abraham.

70. Smith, *Man, His Origin and Destiny*, 493. See especially chapter 26, where Snell's *Ancient Israel* is repeatedly quoted and rejected.

71. Ellis T. Rasmussen, *Patriarchs of the Old Testament* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Sunday School Union, 1964), 3.

Issue 2. Problems with Old Testament ethics: The moral character of God

Are God's interventions in human affairs governed by jealousy and anger, as a number of Old Testament passages suggest? Given that we tend to associate these negative emotions with irrational and non-benevolent behavior, doesn't this undermine our confidence in deity? Do these apparently false characterizations of deity cast doubt on the integrity of the Old Testament and its authors?

Snell favored an author bias theory superimposed on his view of progressive history. He proposed that inaccurate descriptions of God are due to unavoidable intrusions into scripture of the personal and ancient cultural prejudices of the human authors. "The stories which make parts of the Old Testament unreadable (for some people) appear in a different light if they are considered as representing relatively low stages of culture out of which, largely by the preaching of the prophets, the Hebrews moved," he wrote. "But some bright student might ask, 'Is not God the same in all ages?' And we must agree at once that according to authentic Bible teaching He is. But this answer by no means carries with it the admission that *man's ideas of God* are the same in all ages. These have undergone change, even within the Old Testament period."[72]

Sperry, who was clearly interested in preserving scriptural and prophetic integrity, proposed a fallible human theory, postulating that because of their inherent conceptual limitations, humans are not able to comprehend an omni-being. For this reason, prophets were forced to portray God's attributes by employing understandable anthropomorphic features, which Sperry ingeniously recast in a favorable light. As he noted:

> Another [prophetic] function was to reveal God to man. Jehovah is so portrayed as to make him more comprehensible to the finite minds of His people. The Lord is represented as possessing attributes much

72. Snell, "Criteria for Interpreting the Old Testament," 97, emphasis in the original.

> in common with man, therefore. He spoke to the people according to their understanding and weaknesses. He was described as being jealous of the reverence paid to truth and righteousness and to Him who exemplified all good. As a result of sin and rebellion against Jehovah, He was angry with men since that which they rejected was designed for their welfare. . . . Jehovah was above all a God of love.[73]

Sperry's theory is based on Doctrine and Covenants 1:24, where God declares that "these commandments are of me, and were given unto my servants in their weakness, after the manner of their language, that they might come to understanding," demonstrating its external consistency.

Although Snell could potentially claim external consistency for his theory by citing the confessions of prophets such as Mormon, who admitted the possibility of error in his own writing (Mormon 8:17), his theory of progressive theology and his impugning of scriptural inspiration and integrity were resisted by conservative Mormons like Smith. Perhaps in response to Snell, Smith insisted that "The [correct] knowledge of God was known among the first inhabitants of this earth" and "Members of the Church . . . are under obligation to accept the Bible as the word of God as far as it is translated correctly."[74]

Conversely, Sperry's accommodation was reproduced in his 1966 Gospel Doctrine manual,[75] indicating official sanction by the Church. It also appeared unchanged in the second edition of his book, which was published and republished by the Church's Deseret Book Company.[76]

Issue 3. Problems with Old Testament historicity: The case of Jonah

Was Jonah really swallowed by a big fish, living in the fish's stomach for three days?

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73. Sperry, *Spirit of the Old Testament*, 119.

74. Smith, *Man, His Origin and Destiny*, 267–68.

75. Sperry, *Old Testament Prophets*, 8.

76. Sperry, *Spirit of the Old Testament*, 2nd ed., 122.

Conservative biblical scholars defended the historicity of the book of Jonah.[77] Conversely, liberal biblical critics concluded that the story cannot be reasonably defended as factual, and thus the book of Jonah is, as scholars from the time had claimed, "no narrative of historical facts but a prose poem with a purpose. . . . All must learn that Yahweh is not the God of the Jews only but the God of all men."[78]

Snell proposed the synthesis theory that the book of Jonah, although not completely historical, may contain historical elements (not specified). Nevertheless, the author/narrator clearly has in mind to convey a moral message: "The solution I shall use is the theory that the book of Jonah is not simon-pure history (I do not deny possible historical elements) but a story with a teaching aim."[79]

Sperry agreed with Snell that it is better to focus on the moral implications of the Jonah story but also recognized the problems inherent in accepting some aspects as fictional. Sperry felt that strategies of dismissal and non-commitment were best: "We are more concerned with the teachings of the Book of Jonah than with mere technicalities or problems of criticism." For those "who [still] wish to interpret it more technically," Sperry summarized the evidence supporting the "historical" view and the "allegorical" view. He then advised: "Before coming to definite conclusions respecting the interpretation of the Book of Jonah the careful student will, of course, give due weight to all of the considerations pointed out above." Sperry suggested several allegorical interpretations: "God's divine grace is universal", the importance of

77. For example, see Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1980), 10:379–89. Keil and Delitzsch's commentary was published in 1866 and has been a conservative standard with multiple reprints since.

78. Bewer, *Literature of the Old Testament,* 404–05. W. O. E. Oesterley, *A History of Israel*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1932), 123. Oesterley's *History* was used as a resource by both Sperry and Snell.

79. Snell, "Criteria for Interpreting the Old Testament," 95.

"obedience" to divine commands, the fulfillment of "prophecy is conditional" upon repentance, "higher patriotism."[80]

As expected, conservative Mormons such as Joseph Fielding Smith defended the historicity of the entire book of Jonah.[81] Sperry used this accommodation approach again in his 1966 Gospel Doctrine manual, noting: "The obvious intent of the book is to drive home a religious lesson, whether or not we agree that its details are historical."[82]

Issue 4: Proof texting: The case of Ezekiel 37:15–20

During the first few years of the Church, Mormon theologians suggested new biblical interpretations that predicted Mormon historical events and justified Mormon doctrines. Among these were passages that foretold the advent of the Book of Mormon. Some appeared in the Book of Mormon itself,[83] while others had been discovered by 1832.[84] The best known of the latter is Ezekiel 37:15–20, the famous passage describing the stick of Judah and the stick of Joseph and their joining. Based on literary context, especially the apparent explanation in Ezekiel 37:21–28, the sticks have been understood by scholars as representing the kingdoms of Judah and Israel and their reunification.[85] Early Mormons saw references to the Bible (stick of Judah) and the Book of Mormon (stick of Joseph). Who first suggested this interpretation has been a matter of dispute.[86]

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80. Sperry, *Spirit of the Old Testament*, 151–55.

81. Smith, *Man, His Origin and Destiny*, 11.

82. Sperry, *Old Testament Prophets*, 298.

83. For example, Isaiah 29 and John 10.

84. Several familiar Book of Mormon proof-texts (Genesis 49:22–26, Psalm 85:11, Ezekiel 37:15–20) appeared in the *Evening and the Morning Star* 1, no. 1 (Nov. 1832): 6 and no. 8 (Jan. 1833): 1.

85. Driver, *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*, 291; Bewer, *Literature of the Old Testament*, 178.

86. There have been several suggestions from persons in this study regarding the individual who first discovered the Mormon interpretation of Ezekiel

In his book, Snell appropriately chose a strategy of neglect of the Mormon interpretation so as not to threaten the possibility of college credit. However, privately Snell defended the scholarly interpretation as the only legitimate meaning, employing an argument of direct persuasion based on authorial intention. Snell's critique of the Mormon use of the Bible challenged what he considered to be inappropriate Mormon interpretations. Snell opposed "the dogmatic, or 'proof-text' method," which he described as "that use of scripture which finds in it confirmation or proof of certain teachings of the Church." Those putting forth proof-text meanings took "no thought of [historical] context" and, therefore, proof-texting "is not a study of scripture at all since its interest is to 'prove' certain presuppositions which may bear little or no real relation to texts cited"[87] and conveyed meanings never intended by the original author(s). For Snell, "the more one knows about the writer and his milieu the better one is prepared to uncover the meaning of his book."[88]

Sperry presented an interesting theory of synthesis incorporating the Mormon concept of continuing revelation with authorial intention. He agreed with Snell that scripture should be interpreted in the setting

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37:15–20, all without conclusive evidence. Sperry claimed to have found the meaning in the Book of Mormon itself (2 Nephi 29:14); Snell suggested that it was the Pratts (Parley and Orson); Joseph Fielding Smith argued that it was Joseph Smith. He based this on an entry in *Documentary History of the Church* 1:83–84 and Doctrine and Covenants 27:5b. However, Joseph Smith did not begin dictating his history for the *Documentary* until 1839, and verse 27:5b was not present in the original 1830 revelation but rather was added to the 1835 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants. Further, as many have pointed out, 27:5b does not equate the "stick" with a written record. See Heber C. Snell, Sidney B. Sperry, Kent Robson, "Roundtable: The Bible in the Church," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 2, no. 1 (Spring 1967): 83; Snell to Smith, May 27, 1949, Snell papers; *The Joseph Smith Papers: Revelations and Translations Manuscript Revelation Books* (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2009), 41.

87. Snell, Sperry, and Robson, "Roundtable," 58–61.

88. Snell, Sperry, and Robson, "Roundtable," 63.

of its historical milieu—"when one is attempting to interpret a given passage of scripture its context and historical background should be carefully explored"—and that improper use of the proof-text method "has led to a number of highly questionable interpretations."[89] But Sperry contended that the authorial intentions of ancient inspired prophets can sometimes be hidden to scholars and only discerned by other inspired prophets. This placed needed constraints on proof-texters since their meanings "can be checked and governed by living prophets and seers who, though reflection, and by the spirit of their calling, may be able to detect the truth or error." Sperry buttressed his approach with a counterargument based on textual criticism. He maintained that Ezekiel 37:21–28 is not an interpretation of Ezekiel 37:15–20. Rather, Ezekiel 37:21–28 should be read as a separate prophecy. (Although Sperry did not elucidate the reasons behind his exegesis here, the separation of the two passages is supportable by critical evidence.[90]) This freed up Ezekiel 37:15–20 from its "context," leaving scholars in an interpretative quandary, but not believing Mormons. Sperry concluded that what "the Lord is telling Ezekiel" is actually the Mormon interpretation.[91]

Not surprisingly, Snell again was met with criticism from Joseph Fielding Smith, who rejected his argument on the basis of external consistency. Snell related the encounter: "Why, of course it [Ezekiel 37:15–20] doesn't mean the *Bible* and *The Book of Mormon*. It means the two nations." Snell then read Ezekiel 37:21–28 and added: "It is as plain as day just reading the passage itself, that the prophet is referring to the nations of Israel and Judah, that he and other prophets wanted

89. Snell, Sperry, and Robson, "Roundtable," 83, 81.

90. For example, Old Testament scholar Walther Zimmerli's conclusion that verses 21 onward are a later added "interpretation" is based on the repetition of the "proclamation:" "thus saith the Lord God" (compare verse 19) and the lack of any mention of the sticks in the latter passage. Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 2: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel, Chapters 25–48* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 275.

91. Snell, Sperry, and Robson, "Roundtable," 81, 83.

reunited." Smith later responded: "From the beginning of our church, from Joseph Smith down, every president of the church has interpreted the passage as meaning the *Bible* and *The Book of Mormon*; therefore, that is what it means." Snell's belated evaluation of Smith's approach echoed Fosdick's liberal stereotype of conservatives: "what the devil kind of thing [reasoning] do you call that?"[92] It seems clear that Snell would have been better served by simply pointing out to Smith that including the Mormon interpretation would have been incompatible with the goal of college credit for institute classes. Despite Snell's rejection by official Mormondom, his work on Ezekiel 37 has been picked up and extended by others since then. For example, ancient Near East scholar Brian E. Keck echoed Snell in charging that Mormon prooftexting "ignores and obscures literary and structural aspects of the Hebrew Bible, aspects essential for understanding many theological and historical elements of Israelite religion and culture."[93]

It may seem surprising that neither Sperry nor Snell was willing to consider the possibility that a biblical passage might have more than one legitimate interpretation. This reflects their allegiance to the scholarly notion of authorial intention, an Enlightenment concept. But there are alternatives. For example, premodern theologians proposed textual theories of multiple interpretations as solutions to some scriptural problems.[94] Sperry and Snell might object that without the constraints

92. Snell, "Interviews," 20–21.

93. Brian E. Keck, "Ezekiel 37, Sticks, and Babylonian Writing Boards: A Critical Reappraisal" *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 23, no. 1 (Spring 1990): 126–27.

94. Among others, one is reminded of Philo of Alexandria's (d. c. 50 CE) outer and inner (allegorical) meanings, Origen's (d. c. 253 CE) literal, moral, and spiritual readings, and the four senses of medieval exegetes (literal, typological, moral, anagogical). Even in Snell's and Sperry's day Karl Barth (d. 1968) suggested three human stages of interpretation. For a more detailed recent discussion see Ineke Van 't Spijker, ed., *The Multiple Meaning of Scripture: The Role of Exegesis in Early-Christian and Medieval Culture* (Leiden: Brill, 2009).

of historical criticism there is nothing preventing the continual proliferation of illegitimate proof-texts. Here again, Sperry's proposal that interpretations should be confirmed by Church leaders, scripture, or personal inspiration may help to impose at least some limits.[95]

Issue 5. Problems with Old Testament dating and authorship: The "Isaiah problem"

Sperry took a special interest in the controversies surrounding the inclusion of Isaiah, especially chapters 48 through 54, in the Book of Mormon (found in 1 Nephi and 2 Nephi), which he termed the "Isaiah problem." A problem of authorship and date stems from the relative consensus among Old Testament literary critics that chapters 40 through 55 are to be dated no earlier than the fifth century BCE, decades after Lehi left Jerusalem with the brass plates.[96] A translation problem results not only from the marked similarity in wording of the Book of Mormon and the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible (since the latter was not available before 1611 and reflects the limitations of knowledge of the Hebrew language, available manuscripts, and English language usage of the seventeenth century) but also a number of differences between the Isaiah passages in the Book of Mormon and KJV.

95. Sperry's examples of Genesis 18:2–8 and Amos 8:11–12 show some problems with using his method of confirmation. Sperry rejected the use by missionaries of Genesis 18:2–8 as evidence that "God the Father has a glorified, resurrected body of flesh and bones." Sperry supported his contention that this is a false proof-text by relating a meeting with apostle James E. Talmage in which the latter confirmed Sperry's suspicion. But Sperry also felt that Amos 8:11–12 was a misused proof-text as a scriptural prediction of the Mormon doctrine of a "Great Apostasy" following the Savior's earthly sojourn. Yet Talmage uses Amos 8:11–12 for just this purpose in *Jesus the Christ*, a text accepted as doctrinal by the Church. See Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 753; Snell, Sperry, and Robson, "Roundtable," 81–82.

96. Driver, *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*, 229–30; Bewer, *Literature of the Old Testament*, 200.

Sperry was not the first to recognize these problems. They had been pointed out by Brigham H. Roberts in 1909.[97] But Sperry addressed them with some novel insights and greater scholarly competence.

Sperry, like Roberts, proposed a theory of expansion to deal with the translation problem: "We therefore freely admit that Joseph Smith used the King James Version when he came to the text of Isaiah on the gold plates. As long as the familiar version substantially agreed with the text on the gold plates record he let it pass; when it differed too much, he translated the Nephite version and dictated the necessary changes."[98] In this, Sperry was cleverly able to both resolve the problem and bolster Joseph Smith's reputation as a translator.

To deal with the chronological problems of dating and authorship of those chapters of Isaiah, Sperry put forward a novel counterargument based on textual criticism.[99] Sperry well recognized the problem of accumulating errors as ancient Hebrew manuscripts were copied and recopied, giving rise to many linguistic variants among the Hebrew manuscripts. Many of these textual corruptions were likely present in the Masoretic text, the main Hebrew source for the Old Testament of the King James Version (seventeenth century). Variant ancient Hebrew texts, no longer extant, also likely accounted for many of the differences among the ancient translations (Greek Septuagint [third to second century BCE], Syriac Peshitta [second century], Latin Vulgate [fourth century]) themselves and with the Masoretic text. And since,

97. B. H. Roberts, "An Objection to the Book of Mormon Answered," *Improvement Era* 12, no. 9 (July 1909): 682.

98. Sidney B. Sperry, "The 'Isaiah Problem' in the Book of Mormon, Part II," *Improvement Era* 42, no. 10 (Oct. 1939): 594.

99. Sperry was well acquainted with textual criticism, having gained experience with it in researching his master's thesis and PhD dissertation as well as attending a class in textual criticism at the University of Chicago in the autumn of 1928.

in Sperry's view, the Hebrew version underlying the Book of Mormon translations could be no younger than 600 BCE, the date Lehi's party left Jerusalem with the brass plates, the Book of Mormon version would be the least likely to contain corruptions. Therefore, Sperry reasoned, if the Book of Mormon Isaiah version differed from the KJV, then the Hebrew text of the latter had been corrupted. Moreover, "by the law of chance" one might be able to find at least some of the Book of Mormon differences supported by one or more of the other ancient translations whose Hebrew original had not been corrupted. After presenting what he felt were several supporting examples, Sperry concluded that he had shown "substantial evidence that the translator of the Book of Mormon had before him a version of Isaiah more ancient than any now in existence and that he actually translated."[100]

Several objections might be raised concerning Sperry's logic here. For example, he might be accused of begging the question or affirming the consequent. And Sperry does not clearly distinguish between problems of translation and transmission. For some other more specific objections, let's examine Sperry's best known and favorite example, Isaiah 2:16 (2 Nephi 12:16).

Book of Mormon	KJV	Septuagint[101]
And upon all the ships of the sea,		And upon every ship of the sea
and upon all the ships of Tarshish	And upon all the ships of Tarshish	
and upon all pleasant pictures	and upon all pleasant pictures	and upon every display of fine ships.

100. Sperry, "Isaiah Problem," 594–637.

101. Sperry lacked formal training in Greek and was using Sir Lancelot C.L. Brenton's nineteenth-century translation of the fourth-century CE *Codex Vaticanus*, supplemented where needed by the fifth-century *Codex Alexandrinus*.

Sperry proposed that the KJV and Septuagint had each lost a line of poetry and that the Book of Mormon preserves the original.

Isaiah 2:12–17 constitutes a poetic unit considered to originate with Isaiah himself, although it has undergone some subsequent modification. The poem has an apparent original structure consisting of consecutive bicola (sets of two short lines that are parallel to each other). In each bicola, one can readily discern all of Robert Alter's three major types of parallelism: syntactic (same order of grammatical elements), semantic (similar meanings of corresponding elements in the two lines), and metric (same number of stresses, not generally translatable).[102] Preservation of parallelism suggests the original, and disruption identifies subsequent corruption. These observations are helpful in evaluating the validity of Sperry's proposals.

1. The words "high and lifted up" (KJV Isaiah 2:13), which disrupt the meter and are considered to be an addition,[103] are reproduced in the Book of Mormon. In addition, the Book of Mormon version adds material to the KJV of Isaiah 2:12–17 that further disrupts the parallelism.
2. The Book of Mormon tricola of 2:16 disrupts the expected bicola pattern.[104]

102. Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry*, rev. and updated (New York: Basic Books, 2011).

103. Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 193.

104. Wesley P. Walters, "The Use of the Old Testament in the Book of Mormon" (master's thesis, Covenant Theological Seminary, 1981), 59; Dana M. Pike and David R. Seely, "'Upon all the Ships of the Sea, and Upon All the Ships of Tarshish': Revisiting 2 Nephi 12:16 and Isaiah 2:16," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 14, no. 2 (2005): 16.

3. The Septuagint "ship of the sea" is generally considered to be the Greek translator's interpretation of the Hebrew "ships of Tarshish," rather than a separate unit."[105,106]
4. The KJV translation "pleasant pictures" is parallel to "ships of Tarshish" and is expected to have a similar meaning. "Pleasant pictures" seems to be a mistranslation occasioned by a misunderstanding of the Hebrew by the KJV translators.[107] This translation had been abandoned by modern Bible translators but is reproduced in the Book of Mormon.

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105. Hans Wildberger, *Isaiah 1–12* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 101. Notably, the Greek is not listed as an alternative reading in critical Hebrew editions.

106. This had led to several alterative hypothesis to explain the Book of Mormon tricola. Royal Skousen suggests that "in some earlier transmission of the Hebrew text the phrase 'upon all ships of the sea' was a marginal note explaining the phrase 'upon all the ships of Tarshish' but that eventually this explanatory note was inserted directly into the text itself." The existence of marginal notes in the Great Isaiah Scroll (1QIsaa) from Qumran may lend some support to Skousen's hypothesis. Wesley Walters has pointed out that several Bibles and biblical commentaries of the early nineteenth century referenced the alternate Septuagint reading. Whether Joseph Smith had access to these is less clear since many of the Bibles of the day, including the one purchased by Joseph Smith in 1829 for use in his biblical revision, used John Canne's *Marginal Notes and References* (1647), which did not include the Septuagint reading. Alternatively, Ronald Huggins proposed that the extra line may have originated from Martin Luther's translation (through the Whitmer family) or from Methodist Adam Clarke's commentary. See Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part Two: 2 Nephi 11–Mosiah 16* (Provo: Brigham Young University, 2005), 660; *Scrolls from Qumran Cave I* (Jerusalem: Albright Institute of Archaeological Research, 1974); Walters, "Use of the Old Testament," 59; Ronald V. Huggins, "'Without a Cause' and 'Ships of Tarshish': A Possible Contemporary Source for Two Unexplained Readings from Joseph Smith," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 36, no. 1 (2003): 169, 173.

107. Wildberger explains the issue thus: "In earlier times, שׂכיות (luxury ships) was considered to have come from [the Hebrew root] שׂכה and understood to mean "object for viewing, thing to be looked at" . . . Since this does not fit in and balance with . . . ships of Tarshish . . . it seems that the source of the word שׂכיות is the Egyptian work *sk.tj* 'ship.'" Pike and Seely also suggest a possible cognate in Ugaritic. Wildberger, *Isaiah 1–12*, 101; Pike and Seely, "Revisiting 2 Nephi 12:16," 18.

In contrast to Sperry, Snell endorsed a liberal direct persuasion strategy in his book and again met with criticism from Joseph Fielding Smith. Snell recalled that even Franklin West had suggested the advisability of a strategy of neglect: "'Why in the devil, Snell, did you put that in about the 'Second Isaiah' in your book?" Snell replied that it was necessary to fulfill the book's purpose: "I was trying to write a story of the Hebrew people, and I couldn't write that truthfully without putting in what some scholars consider the greatest prophet of the *Old Testament*, the Second Isaiah.'"[108] Nevertheless, the issue put Snell on the defensive, and he pivoted to strategies of dismissal and non-commitment. He contended that the "[Isaiah] problem" is of "minor importance," "not one of the fundamentals of religion," and "matters little." He also argued that "Even if this view [Isaiah 40–55 is exilic] should come to general acceptance there could still be a question as to the date of the Isaiah sections quoted in the Book of Mormon." Snell also presented a challenge for further research by adding: "I can think of other possible solutions of the problem."[109]

Whereas Snell's proposal met with rejection, Sperry's analysis, especially of Isaiah 2:16, has persisted, despite the formidable scholarly objections. It was reproduced in his 1966 Gospel Doctrine Sunday School manual, and his textual analysis was added as a footnote to 2 Nephi 12:16 in the 1979 edition of the Latter-day Saint Book of Mormon, which "bestows a seemingly official status on it."[110] Sperry's theory and suggested approach were expanded by his student H. Grant Vest and

108. Snell, "Interviews," 7.

109. Snell to Executive Committee, Mar. 8, 1949, Snell papers.

110. Pike and Seely, "Revisiting 2 Nephi 12:16," 14. These authors document the wide influence of Sperry's theory.

later updated to include additional sources, such as the Qumran scrolls, by Sperry himself and conservative Mormon scholar John Tvedtnes.[111]

Conclusions

Scriptural problems are always with us, causing distress and needing resolution, as we saw in the examples at the beginning of this study. Because of their formal education and Mormon belief, Sperry and Snell were at the forefront of addressing these issues during the early twentieth century. They were aided by an atmosphere of support from Church leaders, such as Franklin West and others. Sperry's and Snell's work was also stimulated by rank-and-file Mormons when they were encouraged to show intellectual curiosity and questioning in their scriptural study, as Snell experienced with his students.

Among the possible approaches to conflicts, liberal direct persuasion arguments were the least effective. Conservatives tend to counter with their own direct persuasion arguments, and these disputes often degenerate into at least implicit accusations of Fosdick's stereotypes. We saw this in the dispute over the interpretation of Ezekiel 37:15–20 between Snell and Joseph Fielding Smith.

Novel accommodation theories are the most interesting approaches and the only alternatives that add real conceptual advances. However, these are also the most difficult and require considerable expertise and ingenuity since they must be comfortably received by Mormons with a

111. H. Grant Vest, "The Problem of Isaiah in The Book of Mormon" (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1938), https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd/5188. Sperry found the Great Isaiah Scroll from Qumran to be of "little use" as the differences did not support the Book of Mormon version. Sperry concluded that the scroll was "inferior to the conventional [Masoretic] Hebrew text" for textual analysis. See Sidney B. Sperry, *Knowledge is Power* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1958), 255–56; and John A. Tvedtnes, *The Isaiah Variants in the Book of Mormon* (Provo: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1981).

variety of views. As we saw in the follow-up conversations about Sperry's explanation of 2 Nephi 12:16 (Isaiah 2:16), accommodation theories are subject to modifications and even replacement as new information and alternative ideas become available. Thus, Sperry and Snell might be best viewed as pioneers who laid the groundwork for needed continuing intellectual encounters with scriptural issues by faithful scholars.[112]

Sperry's and Snell's work suggests to us that there are some scriptural issues that are difficult, if not impossible, to find a suitable accommodation theory for. Presenting both sides and letting the reader/listener draw their own conclusions, as Sperry did with the story of Jonah, seems a reasonable approach that tends not to draw heat from either side.

The enthusiasm that greeted Snell's and Sperry's presentations to their Church Educational System peers shows that open discussion and the search for acceptable approaches to scriptural problems can be of significant benefit. These allow believing Mormons to tolerate conflicts with less confusion and distress. They also encourage Mormons of differing views to discuss their differences in an atmosphere of greater comfort, openness, and tolerance. However, as Snell learned, success also requires respect for and responsiveness to the issues and objections raised by Church leaders.

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112. Significantly, the issues addressed here and others have been further advanced recently by three current Mormon scholars, all holding PhDs in ancient and/or biblical studies. Their resolutions seem to sometimes favor Sperry, or Snell, or elements of both. See Richard Neitzel Holzapfel, Dana M. Pike, and David Rolph Seely, *Jehovah and the World of the Old Testament* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2009), 144–55, 154, 178, 346, 295. The publication of their work by Deseret Book suggests that their points of view may have met with some acceptance in the twenty-first-century Church.

CLYDE D. FORD {clyde.ford100@gmail.com} is a physician living in Salt Lake City, Utah. He is an independent scholar whose work has been published in *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, the *Journal of Mormon History*, and elsewhere. He dedicates this study to his wife and best friend of fifty years, Cheryl, whom he misses every day.

"A Heart Full of Thanks,"
10" x 15", hand-cut magazine images
and Book of Mormon page on
fabric-wrapped art board,
2020, by Amber Lee Weiss

WAS JOSEPH SMITH A MONARCHOTHEIST? AN ENGAGEMENT WITH BLAKE OSTLER'S THEOLOGICAL POSITION ON THE NATURE OF GOD

Loren Pankratz

Many members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints hold a view of God in which "God became 'God' at some first moment through obedience to moral principles that were given by a prior god, the Father's Father."[1] This supposition follows the teaching of many erstwhile theologians and authorities of the Church who have understood Joseph Smith to teach that God became God at some moment in the past, having been exalted to his divine stature by another being due to his obedience to eternal laws.[2] Joseph Smith's teachings on God found in his preaching at the April 7, 1844 general conference, known as the King Follett Sermon, and Smith's Sermon in the Grove, given at a meeting held just east of the Nauvoo Temple on June 16, 1844, have appeared

1. Blake T. Ostler, *Exploring Mormon Thought: The Problems of Theism and the Love of God* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2006), 91.

2. Terryl Givens, *Wrestling the Angel: The Foundations of Mormon Thought: Cosmos, God, Humanity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 63. See also: Givens, *Wrestling the Angel*, 60; Parley P. Pratt, *Key to the Science of Theology*, 4th ed. (London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1877), 37; John Widtsoe, *A Rational Theology: As Taught by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: General Boards of the Mutual Improvement Association, 1932), 175.

to many to give strong support to this view. There, he taught that God was not always God but developed into God over time. Eschewing this traditional notion, Blake Ostler defends a view of God in which the head God (the Monarch) leads all other subordinate gods.[3] He argues that this kingship monotheistic view is the proper interpretation of Joseph Smith's teaching on God. Ostler seeks to harmonize this monarchotheist viewpoint with Smith's teaching both generally and, more specifically, in the King Follett Sermon and his Sermon in the Grove.[4] Ostler is not just making a theological argument but a historical one about what Joseph Smith's own views were. This paper demonstrates that Ostler's monarchotheist construal of Joseph Smith's teaching is not supported by the evidence.[5]

An 1840 Sermon of Joseph Smith

To be successful, the monarchotheist must reconcile this theological position with the teaching of Joseph Smith's Nauvoo period and the tradition that developed from it. One of the most important issues is reconciling the notion from classical theology that God is eternal and unchanging with Smith's idea that God was not always God. Ostler develops an important solution to this that allows him to hold both that God was always God and that God was at one point a human. He

3. Ostler, *Problems of Theism*, 442.

4. Portions of this article draw on research from the author's PhD dissertation. See Loren Pankratz, "Traditional Christian and Mormon Views of God and Their Compatibility with the Moral Theistic Argument: An Exercise in Ramified Natural Theology" (PhD diss., South African Theological Seminary, 2020).

5. This paper will use the phrases "traditional view" and "traditional thought" as representing the view expressed in the paper's opening sentence. As Samuel Brown has illustrated, there are a variety of ways Latter-day Saints may conceive of God from within this traditional viewpoint. See Samuel M. Brown, "Mormons Probably Aren't Materialists," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 50, no. 3 (Fall 2017): 39–72.

argues that Joseph Smith's teachings support the position that "There was an interval of time from T2 through T3 during which the Father was mortal and not fully divine, but the Father was fully divine eternally prior to T2 and forever after T3."[6] In this argument, T2 and T3 represent time markers in the life of God. His claim is that while God the Father may not have been fully divine in one period of time, namely that period we can symbolize as between T2 and T3, still he was fully divine both prior to T2 and after T3. In the argument, the time between T2 and T3 is to be thought of as a mortal sojourn of some sort. Thus, Ostler's contention is that Smith's teaching is consistent with the view that God the Father was fully divine prior to and following his mortal sojourn. It is Ostler's contention that this view is consistent with Smith's later teaching that God was not always God found in the 1844 King Follett Sermon.

Ostler begins his argument for a rereading of the King Follett Sermon that is consistent with the monarchotheist position by first seeking to add context to this position. He points to a sermon Smith preached on February 5, 1840. In this sermon, Smith was preaching in Washington DC, describing his religious beliefs to outsiders.[7] Here Smith taught, "I believe that God is Eternal. That he had no beginning and can have no End. Eternity means that which is without beginning or End."[8] Ostler admits that this seems to contradict what Smith says in the King Follett Sermon, in which he claims, "for I am going to tell you how God came to be God. We have imagined and supposed that God was God from all eternity. I will refute that idea, and will take away and

6. Ostler, *Problems of Theism*, 93.

7. "Discourse, 5 February 1840: Historical introduction," The Joseph Smith Papers, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-5-february-1840/1#historical-intro.

8. "Discourse, 5 February 1840." See also, Ostler, *Problems of Theism*, 433.

do away the vail, so that you may see."[9] There appears to be a contradiction between what Smith taught in 1840, in which God is said to be God eternally, and the 1844 teaching, in which the eternal divinity of God seems to be denied. Ostler's solution to this seeming contradiction is to argue that, in fact, both of these claims are in harmony with the monarchotheist position and that the 1840 sermon helps one interpret what Smith meant in 1844.

I agree that there is not necessarily a contradiction between Smith's two statements, but on different grounds from Ostler. Rather than supporting the monarchotheist position, the February 5, 1840 sermon appears to confirm the notion that God has not been fully divine from all eternity. In this 1840 discourse, Smith does not merely claim that God is eternal but also that souls in general are eternal and have no beginning. Just after claiming that God is eternal, having no beginning or end, he said, "I believe that the Soul is Eternal. It had no beginning; it can have no End."[10] Matthew Livingston Davis, the scribe of the February 5 sermon, understood Smith's point to be that neither God nor the human soul had a beginning, and they will not have an end.[11] Smith does not highlight an attribute of God in distinction to what is common to humanity; rather, he is claiming that the "soul of man" is as eternal as God is.[12] Thus, rather than setting up a seeming contradiction that needs to be resolved, the 1840 sermon supports the interpretation of Smith's teaching in which God is thought to have eternally existed (as have all souls) but was exalted to divinity at some point in the past. This sermon shows that Smith, in 1840, taught that humans share God's

9. "History, 1838–1856, volume E-1 [1 July 1843–30 April 1844]," 1970, The Joseph Smith Papers, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-e-1-1-july-1843-30-april-1844/327. See also, Ostler, *Exploring Mormon Thought*, 433.

10. "Discourse, 5 February 1840."

11. "Discourse, 5 February 1840."

12. "Discourse, 5 February 1840."

same trajectory, at least potentially. Contra Ostler, this sermon does not show that Smith taught that God was divine from all eternity. There appears to be no conflict between Smith's 1840 sermon and his later teaching on God as understood and espoused historically by Church theologians and authorities. Having addressed this preliminary matter, I now turn to Ostler's specific interpretations and revisions of Smith's King Follett Sermon.

The King Follett Sermon

At the April 1844 general conference, Joseph Smith delivered a funeral oration for a man named King Follet to a crowd of Latter-day Saints estimated to be around twenty thousand in number.[13] This sermon, known as the King Follet Sermon (KFS), has become one of his most important theological discussions. In that sermon, Smith preached,

> It is the first principle of the Gospel, to know for a certainty the character of God, and to know that we may converse with him as one man converses with another, and that he was once a man like us––yea, that God himself, the Father of us all, dwelt on an earth, the same as Jesus Christ himself did, and I will show it from the Bible . . . What did Jesus say? (Mark it Elder [Sidney] Rigdon;) the Scriptures inform us that Jesus said, 'as the Father hath power in himself, even so hath the Son power', to do what? Why what the Father did; the answer is obvious, in a manner to lay down his body and take it up again.[14]

It is not part of the historical teaching of the Church that each human was fully divine prior to our mortal life. Thus, when Joseph Smith taught that God was "once a man like us," he seemed to imply that God had not been fully divine prior to his mortal sojourn. Ostler acknowledges that passages from the KFS, like this one, can be interpreted to support the notion that "there was a time T2 at which the Father first became

13. "History, 1838–1856, volume E-1," 1968.

14. "History, 1838–1856, volume E-1," 1970.

fully divine, but that he was not fully divine prior to T2."[15] That is, this passage appears to be consistent with the belief that God, like humans generally, was not fully divine from all eternity, and that he was later exalted to his present fully divine stature after being resurrected from the dead. This interpretation is also consistent with the belief taught in 1840, that the Father, like all souls, has always existed without beginning and will always exist without end. However, Ostler moves the discussion of this passage in a different direction. He claims that "it is uniformly taught in Mormon scripture and by Joseph Smith that Christ was a fully divine person prior to mortality."[16] Ostler reads the KFS to support the view that the Father was fully divine prior to his mortality. He claims that "the Father's mortal experience was like Christ's, and thus it is more consistent to interpret Joseph Smith to assert that the Father, like Christ, was divine *before* his mortal sojourn."[17] Ostler's contention is that the above passage of the KFS only teaches that there was a time (i.e., during his mortal sojourn) when God was not fully divine, while remaining open to the possibility that God was fully divine prior to that time. He bases this on his understanding of Jesus as being in possession of all the essential properties of divinity prior to his mortal life.

This interpretation seems far from secure. First, Smith is claiming that there is something Jesus has in common with the Father, not something the Father has in common with the Son. He is pointing out specifically that just as the Father had the power to lay down his body and take it up again, so the Son has the power to lay down his body and take it up again. This comparison says nothing of God's ontological status prior to his mortal life. The KFS is aimed to give comfort to those grieving the loss of a beloved member of the community. This funeral sermon provides hope for those who have not been divine from

15. Ostler, *Problems of Theism*, 435.

16. Ostler, *Problems of Theism*, 438.

17. Ostler, *Problems of Theism*, 438, emphasis in the original.

all eternity by teaching that they can follow the example set by God and Jesus. Smith claims that both the Father and Jesus laid down their lives and were later exalted, and in this sermon he extends that hope to all humans generally. Ostler takes this quotation from the KFS to mean that if Jesus was divine prior to his mortal life then God was divine prior to his. However, logically speaking, Jesus' claim to follow the Father's example does not necessarily imply that the Father was fully divine before his mortal sojourn, even if Jesus was fully divine before his mortal existence. When predicating some distinctive attribute of person A to person B, one is not thereby committed to predicating some other feature of person B to person A. The passage does not say that what is true of Jesus is also true of the Father. Rather, it only claims that what is true of the Father is true of the Son. Thus, Ostler's contention that this passage implies that the Father was fully divine prior to his mortal life is not substantiated.

Secondly, Ostler's interpretation of this passage from the KFS, if correct, disproves his main point. While it may have been uniformly taught in Mormon scripture and by Joseph Smith that Christ was a fully divine person prior to mortality, it is also taught that there was a time when Jesus was first exalted. That is, Jesus was the firstborn spirit child of God in the premortal existence and progressed to divinity. For example, in the winter of 1834–35, lectures were given in Kirtland, Ohio that served as an early attempt to "formulate a systematic Latter-day Saint theology."[18] These lectures were published in the Church's newspaper in May of 1835, and "All seven lectures were published together later that year in the first edition of the Doctrine and Covenants, the

18. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Church History Topics, "Lectures on Theology ("Lectures on Faith"), https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/topics/lectures-on-faith/. Robert Millet calls the *Lectures on Faith* a "systematic study of faith." See, Robert L. Millet, *Precept Upon Precept: Joseph Smith and the Restoration of Doctrine* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2016), 217.

lectures constituting the 'doctrine,' and Joseph Smith's revelations, the 'covenants.'"[19] While it is debated whether or not Joseph Smith personally delivered all of the lectures, the "inclusion of the lectures in the Doctrine and Covenants in 1835 strongly suggests that Joseph Smith approved of the content of the lectures."[20] These lectures have been said to represent the "breadth and depth of the mind of Joseph Smith."[21] "Lecture Fifth" of the *Lectures on Faith* teaches that Jesus, having overcome, "received a fullness of the glory of the Father."[22] Later, in "Lecture Seventh" of the *Lectures on Faith*, it is taught that Jesus Christ is the prototype of a saved and glorified person. He is the example for us to follow, a person who, through faith, "has become perfect enough to lay hold upon eternal life."[23] This early summary of the theology Joseph Smith developed depicts Jesus advancing from having a non-deified status to being one who takes hold of eternal life, having received a fullness of glory. Thus, even if Christ becomes the archetype of pre- and post-mortal divinity, his trajectory also includes an initial progression to divinity. There was a time, call it time T, when Jesus was not fully divine. Then at T1 he was exalted, then at T2 he was mortal (and not

19. "Lectures on Theology."

20. "Lectures on Theology." See also Charles R. Harrell, *"This Is My Doctrine": The Development of Mormon Theology* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2011), 121. Harrell claims that the consensus concerning authorship of the *Lectures on Faith* is that Joseph Smith "ultimately endorsed their contents and sanctioned their publication." Joseph Fielding Smith reminds the reader that the *Lectures* "were not taken out of the Doctrine and Covenants because they contained false doctrine," and that "the Prophet himself revised and prepared these Lectures on Faith for publication; and they were studied in the School of the Prophets." See Joseph Fielding Smith, *Seek Ye Earnestly* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1970), 194.

21. Millet, *Precept Upon Precept*, 236.

22. Joseph Smith Jr., *Lectures on Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1985), 60.

23. Smith, *Lectures on Faith*, 75.

glorified), and then at T3 he was full of glory once more. Ostler has argued that the KFS passage above is consistent with monarchotheism because Smith claimed that Jesus did only what he had seen the Father do before him, and since we know that Jesus was fully divine prior to his mortal sojourn, then God must have been fully divine prior to his subsequent exaltation as well. However, the trajectory of Jesus represented in the KFS and in the *Lectures of Faith* appears to be one of a being who was exalted at some time after he was born of heavenly parents. If Ostler is correct in his interpretation and Jesus follows the Father's path, then this would imply that God the Father was once a mere organized being who was later exalted, after which he became mortal and then, finally, was glorified again. Thus, if Ostler is correct, God the Father still has not been God from all eternity. Ostler's treatment of the passage from the King Follett Sermon does not work to effectively undermine the understanding of many members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints who hold that "God became 'God' at some first moment through obedience to moral principles that were given by a prior god, the Father's Father."[24]

There is a second key passage in the King Follet Sermon that seems to establish the notion of a progression toward deity. Smith preached,

> Here, then is eternal life—to know the only wise and true God; and you have got to learn how to be Gods yourselves, and to be Kings and Priests to God, the same as all Gods have done before you, namely, by going from one small degree to another, and from a small capacity to a great one; from grace to grace, from exaltation to exaltation until you attain to the resurrection of the dead, and are able to dwell in everlasting burnings, and to sit in glory as do those who sit enthroned in everlasting power.[25]

Ostler concedes that this passage may indicate that persons "learn how to advance to become Gods by becoming a 'god' at some first time *T*1

24. Ostler, *Problems of Theism*, 91.

25. "History, 1838–1856, volume E-1," 1971.

by advancing from one capacity to another until they reach the status of gods."[26] However, Ostler seeks to reconcile this with his own view of a static and unchanging divine status. He argues that readers should not assume "that those engaged in the process of learning to be gods cannot already be gods."[27] Ostler claims this passage should be taken to mean only that "God the Father has been in a process of eternal progression from one exaltation to another for all eternity, and humans can commence to progress toward godhood by engaging in the same activity of progression."[28]

Contrary to Ostler's interpretation, this passage is aimed at communicating to mortal humans, who have (presumably) never been gods, how they may progress to "be Gods yourselves." Humans, who at present have never been fully divine, may become so by following the same process "as all the Gods have done before" them. Smith taught humans to take as their model for exaltation other beings who have learned little by little how to progress from a small capacity to a great one. He is not talking about a separate class of eternally divine beings. Even "the only wise and true God," in Joseph Smith's theology, does not appear to be exempted from this mimicable process. "All Gods," Joseph Smith explains, have followed this trajectory. The above passage is all the more remarkable because in the sermon, just prior to the quoted passage, Smith led the congregation to consider what God is like. He petitioned his listeners, "I want to ask this congregation, every man, woman and child, to answer the question in their own heart, what kind of a being God is,"[29] and Smith takes it as his "first object" to "find out the character of the only wise and true God; and what kind of

26. Ostler, *Problems of Theism*, 440.

27. Ostler, *Problems of Theism*, 440.

28. Ostler, *Problems of Theism*, 440.

29. "History, 1838–1856, volume E-1," 1969.

being he is."[30] The portion of the KFS quoted above is Smith's answer to this question. What sort of being is the only wise and true God? He is a being who has learned to be God, advancing from one capacity to another, as all gods have done. Ostler's contention does not fully consider the context and aim of the sermon.

There is a third passage in the KFS that Ostler has opened for reinterpretation. In the most well-known version of the King Follett Sermon produced by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Joseph Smith states:

> It is necessary we should understand the character and being of God and how He came to be so; for I am going to tell you how God came to be God. We have imagined and supposed that God was God from all eternity. I will refute that idea, and take away the veil, so that you may see.[31]

In this passage, Smith reportedly refutes the idea that God "has always been God or always had divine status."[32] Here again, he put forward the idea that God "came to be" at a certain point, indicating that divinity occurred at a particular time.

Ostler's strategy with this passage is to argue for a revision of the text that will allow for a different interpretation. There exists no stenographic record of this sermon. Instead, what we have are a number of individuals' notes of the sermon. Several of these accounts were scribes from Smith's presidential office and other authorities of the Church, making this the best recorded of Smith's discourses.[33] Ostler's primary

30. "History, 1838–1856, volume E-1," 1969.

31. Joseph Smith Jr., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 2nd rev. ed., edited by B. H. Roberts (Deseret Book: Salt Lake City, 1980), 6:305. See also Ostler, *Exploring Mormon Thought*, 441.

32. Ostler, *Problems of Theism*, 441.

33. "Accounts of the 'King Follett Sermon,'" The Joseph Smith Papers, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/site/accounts-of-the-king-follett-sermon#josephsmithpapers.

argument maintains that the above statement, while supported by Willard Richards's and Wilford Woodruff's recollection of the sermon, is not in harmony with Thomas Bullock's report of the discourse.[34] Ostler also points out that another observer of the address, William Clayton, omits the statement "about a refutation altogether."

However, one should accept the traditional text as published by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints for three reasons. First, William Clayton's report does convey that Smith claimed to "tell you how God came to be God."[35] While he does not reproduce the exact phrase as Willard Richards and Wilford Woodruff, he does produce the same teaching. Presumably, for Smith to tell us how "God came to be God," he will have to refute the idea that God has been God for all eternity.

Secondly, there is actually another version of the sermon that reports the same idea. Samuel W. Richards's record is brief but remarkably records Smith's refutation that God has been God from all eternity. It states, "to have eternal life, God: a man like one of us, even like Adam. Not God from all Eternity."[36] Richards's account provides another witness to Smith's refutation of the notion that God has been God from all eternity, making it difficult to maintain, as Ostler does, that Smith did not teach this.

Thirdly, Bullock's account is not out of harmony with Willard Richards's, and Wilford Woodruff's account as Ostler claims. Bullock's report records, "I am going to tell you what sort of a being of God. for

34. "Accounts of the 'King Follett Sermon.'"

35. "Discourse, 7 April 1844, as Reported by William Clayton," 13, The Joseph Smith Papers, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-7-april-1844-as-reported-by-william-clayton/3.

36. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph* (Provo: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University), 361.

he was God from the begin of all Eternity & if I do not refute it."[37] Ostler claims that Bullock's report states that Smith does not intend to refute the idea that God has been God from all eternity. However, Bullock's report is ambiguous, as he reports Smith to have said only, "if I do not refute it." He does not say "I do not refute it." The statement as recorded by Bullock could well be understood as shorthand for something like, "& [see] if I do not refute it." Supporting this notion, Bullock notes that just after this statement, Smith went on to claim that "God himself the father of us all dwelt on a Earth same as J C himself did."[38] This seems to refute the idea that God has been God from all eternity. God dwelt on an Earth, and during that time God was not fully divine. Bullock's notes continue that humans have this capacity to dwell on an Earth and be exalted to divine status as well, claiming "you have got to learn how to be a God yourself & be K[ing] & Priest to God same as all have done by going from a small cap[acit]y to an[othe]r. from grace to grace until the res[urrectio]n. & sit in everlasting power as they who have gone before & God."[39] The theology Bullock records, that God and all humans share a trajectory of progress, is entirely in line with the one reported by Richards, Woodruff, and Clayton. Ostler's interpretation of this passage from Bullock's report would set it against not only the other records of the discourse but against Bullock's own account.

The idea that there is a disagreement between Bullock and the other witnesses on this point is weak. Bullock himself was responsible for preparing the minutes of the conference based on his and William Clayton's notes.[40] These minutes were then published in *Times*

37. "Discourse, 7 April 1844, as Reported by Thomas Bullock," 16, The Joseph Smith Papers, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-7-april-1844-as-reported-by-thomas-bullock/3.

38. "Discourse, 7 April 1844, as Reported by Thomas Bullock."

39. "Discourse, 7 April 1844, as Reported by Thomas Bullock."

40. Kevin L. Barney, "Joseph Smith's Emendation of Hebrew Genesis 1:1." *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 30, no. 4 (Winter 1997): 107.

and Seasons. In Bullock's published minutes, Smith claimed, "We have imagined that God was God from all eternity," but that it is necessary to "understand the character and being of God, for I am going to tell you how God came to be God."[41] The preponderance of the reporting seems to point in one direction: namely, the interpretation Ostler seeks to avoid.[42]

As a final consideration regarding the view of God found in the King Follett Sermon, Ostler points to Smith's reconstruction of Genesis 1:1 as proof of his monarchotheistic leanings. Smith claimed that Genesis 1:1 should be read to say, "The head one of the Gods brought forth the Gods."[43] Ostler claims that Smith's revision of Genesis 1:1 "entailed that there is a single God who is the head of all other gods." As has been argued elsewhere, Smith used Hebrew "as he chose, as an artist . . . in accordance with his taste, according to the effect he wanted to produce, as a foundation for the theological innovations."[44] In Kevin Barney's study of Smith's emendation of the Hebrew behind Genesis 1:1, he admits that it is difficult to piece together Smith's exact logic in his reconstruction. Rather than attempting to follow Smith's interpretation of the text of Genesis 1:1, Barney concludes that it seems more fruitful

41. "Discourse, 7 April 1844, as Reported by Times and Seasons," 614, The Joseph Smith Papers, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-7-april-1844-as-reported-by-times-and-seasons/3.

42. Stan Larson's amalgamated text of the King Follett Sermon is in harmony with the traditional published version of the discourse. It reads, "For we have imagined that God was God from the beginning of all eternity. I will refute that idea and take away the veil so you may see." Larson's modern amalgamation preserves Smith refuting the idea that God was God from the beginning. See Stan Larson, "The King Follett Discourse: A Newly Amalgamated Text," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (1978): 201. See also B. H. Roberts, *The Mormon Doctrine of Deity* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1903), 227.

43. "History, 1838–1856, volume E-1," 1972.

44. Zucker L. "Joseph Smith as a Student of Hebrew." *Dialogue* 3 (Summer 1968): 53.

to interpret Smith as conjecturing that the original Hebrew of Genesis 1:1 had been altered and that his reading was the original.[45] While it may be difficult to ascertain how Smith arrived at his reconstruction of Genesis 1:1, Barney claims that the basic thrust of Smith's argument is not as uncertain. Joseph Smith appears to make the claim that Genesis 1:1 is describing the council witnessed to in the book of Abraham 3:23, in which God called other gods to council in order to create our world. This certainly does not necessitate God's being fully divine from all eternity, as God could have been fully divine at this point in his existence and could be the head God of this creative event. This is fully consistent with the belief that God was not fully divine from all eternity. Ostler contends that Smith "believed that the text of Genesis 1:1 had been corrupted and that it originally indicated that the head God brought forth the other gods in a council of gods."[46] This claim will be revisited in the next section while reviewing Ostler's claim regarding Smith's use of Genesis 1:1 in the Sermon in the Grove.

Sermon in the Grove

Joseph preached his final sermon in a grove east of the Nauvoo Temple.[47] He began the sermon by quoting Revelation 1:6, "And hath made us kings and priests unto God and His father."[48] The King James Version of the Bible places "and His father" after "God," which Joseph Smith took to mean that the verse was stating that Jesus makes Christians to be kings and priests under God the Father and God the Father's father. This understanding seems to have been seized upon by Joseph Smith and used as a proof text from which to proclaim that "the Father had a

45. Barney, "Joseph Smith's Emendation," 128.

46. Ostler, *Exploring Mormon Thought*, 442.

47. Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 378.

48. Ostler, *Problems of Theism*, 442.

father and that there is another 'Father above the Father of Christ."[49] In this view, God the Father of Jesus Christ also has a father.

Ostler believes that the Father of God here refers only to his earthly existence. He explains, "when the Father condescended from a fullness of his divine state to become mortal, he was born into a world and had a father *as a mortal*."[50] Ostler begins his defense of this interpretation by noting that Smith continues to stress that Jesus does "precisely" what the Father did before him.[51] As we saw above, this strategy fails to suit Ostler's purposes because, if the analogy holds, it proves too much. If Jesus truly follows the Father's precise example, then the example is that of a person of divine parentage who became divine, entered into mortality, and exercised power to take his life up again after death. If Jesus' divine Father was the trailblazer of this precise path, then he too would have both a spiritual and mortal father.

Ostler puts forward other evidence for his reading of this sermon in support of monarchotheism. He points to George Laub's journal notes from this sermon. Ostler quotes Laub as reporting that "the Holy Ghost is yet a Spiritual body and waiting to take upon himself a body, as the Savior did or as god did."[52] Ostler concludes from this that "Joseph Smith taught that already divine persons, including the Son and the Holy Ghost, take upon themselves bodies."[53] The major problem with this use of George Laub's journal is that Ostler's quotation of this portion of the journal is incomplete. Laub's sentence continues on where Ostler provides a period. Laub's record reads, "But the holy ghost is yet a spiritual Body. and waiting to take to himself a body as the savior did

49. Ostler, *Problems of Theism*, 444.

50. Ostler, *Problems of Theism*, 444, emphasis in the original.

51. Ostler, *Problems of Theism*, 445.

52. Ostler, *Problems of Theism*, 445.

53. Ostler, *Problems of Theism*, 445.

or as god did or the gods before them took bodies."[54] This indicates that Smith taught that all gods follow this path, with Jesus, Jesus' Father, and the Holy Ghost as exemplars of the pattern. Laub's notes go on to further extend the analogy: "the scripture says those who will obey the commandments Shall be heirs of god and joint heirs with Jesus Christ. we then also took Bodies to lay them down and take them up again."[55] Laub's understanding is that we do just what Jesus did, which is just what the Father did before him, and other gods before him. Laub's journal provides deeper evidence that Smith's thinking about God is that the Father, the Son, and we humans are but three links in an eternal chain of gods.

William McIntire's and Thomas Bullock's record of Smith's Sermon in the Grove relates that in this sermon Smith returned again to his modification of Genesis 1:1.[56] Ostler contends that Smith's understanding of Genesis 1:1 is that a monarchotheistic head God presides over a council of gods.[57] However, in Thomas Bullock's account of this sermon, Smith understands the term "Eloiheam" from Genesis 1:1 to be translated "in the plural all the way thro––Gods––the heads of the Gods appointed one God for us."[58] Rather than there being a head God who organizes a council, there is instead an insistence that in the beginning there were heads of the gods who appointed one God for us. Smith

54. "Discourse, 16 June 1844–A, as Reported by George Laub," 30, The Joseph Smith Papers, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-16-june-1844-a-as-reported-by-george-laub/2, emphasis added.

55. "Discourse, 16 June 1844–A, as Reported by George Laub," 31.

56. "Discourse, 16 June 1844–A, as Reported by William McIntire," 21, The Joseph Smith Papers, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-16-june-1844-a-as-reported-by-william-mcintire/1.

57. Blake T. Ostler, *Exploring Mormon Thought: Of God and Gods* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2008), 20. See also Ostler, *Problems of Theism*, 443.

58. "Discourse, 16 June 1844–A, as Reported by Thomas Bullock," 2, The Joseph Smith Papers, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-16-june-1844-a-as-reported-by-thomas-bullock/2.

proclaims, "Intelligences exist one above anotr. that there is no end to it."[59] That there is "no end to it" suggests that Smith sees no one head God at the end of the line. He states, "in the very beginning there is a plurality of Gods—beyond the power of refutation."[60] From Thomas Bullock's record, Smith is clear, there are a plurality of head gods who appointed one God to preside over the earth. Ostler's contention that Smith taught there to be one head God does not hold up.

William McIntire's report of the sermon, though brief, shares Bullock's understanding of Smith's use of Genesis 1:1 in the Sermon in the Grove. McIntire claims that in this sermon, Smith "proceeded to show the plurality of Gods" with his explanation of the "origanel [*sic*] Hebrew" of Genesis 1:1.[61] McIntire claims that Smith shared with the gathered crowd in the grove that the "Head Gods organized the Earth & the heavens."[62] McIntire's witness claims Joseph Smith spoke of the "Head Gods" (plural), rather than a singular "head God," as Ostler would have it. Thus, the reports of Smith's teaching in the Sermon in the Grove does not support Ostler's contention that Smith taught there to be a monarchotheist Head God who presides over a council of gods. Smith teaches a plurality all the way through.

Conclusion

Ostler's interpretation of Joseph Smith's teaching rests on three principal arguments. First, he claims that Smith's teaching in the KFS implies that the Father was divine prior to becoming mortal just as Jesus was divine prior to mortality. Yet the KFS was shown to be better interpreted as claiming that God was elevated to his status as God at some time in the past. Further, if we press the analogy between the Father

59. "Discourse, 16 June 1844–A, as Reported by Thomas Bullock," 3.

60. "Discourse, 16 June 1844–A, as Reported by Thomas Bullock," 3.

61. "Discourse, 16 June 1844–A, as Reported by William McIntire," 21.

62. "Discourse, 16 June 1844–A, as Reported by William McIntire," 21.

and the Son as Ostler does, the conclusion runs contrary to Ostler's contention and God the Father is still elevated to divinity from some state of non-divinity at some point prior to his mortal life. Second, Ostler claims that Smith's teaching that the Father had a father from Smith's Sermon in the Grove should be interpreted as God the Father's having a father in mortality, and not that there was a God prior to the Father. After reviewing Ostler's arguments, it seems clear that Smith's point in that sermon was indeed to claim that God the Father of Jesus himself had a spiritual progenitor. Third, Ostler argues that Smith's use of Genesis 1:1 shows that Smith believed in a monarch God who rules over a heavenly council of gods. This is a novel thesis, but as a historical argument it does not hold. The great lesson Smith stresses from his emendation of Genesis 1:1 is that there is a plurality of gods at play from the very beginning. The heads of gods appointed the God of this world to his station. This is a process Smith appears to envision having no end.

Ostler's contention that the best interpretation of Joseph Smith's teachings about God is to suppose God to be the head God (the Monarch) who leads all other subordinate gods has not been persuasive. Ostler's kingship monotheism does not appear to be represented in the two key discourses of Joseph Smith that have been examined in this paper. Instead, the best interpretation of Smith's teaching on God in those discourses is that God the Father himself had a premortal father and came to be exalted to divinity at some first moment, that Jesus followed God the Father's example, and that humans may follow Jesus' example in turn.

LOREN PANKRATZ {Loren@thebridgeutah.org} holds a MDiv from Princeton Theological Seminary, a DMin from Talbot School of Theology, and a PhD in theology from the South African Theological Seminary. His academic work has focused primarily on philosophical and theological matters pertaining to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Loren and his family live along the Wasatch Front in Utah, where Loren leads The Bridge Community, a non-denominational Christian church.

"Emma in the Sky,"
15" x 10", hand-cut magazine images
on fabric-wrapped art board, 2021,
by Amber Lee Weiss

MISSING AND RESTORING MEANING

Jill Mulvay Derr[1]

Fifty years ago I was living in Cambridge, Massachusetts in a shotgun apartment just off Mass. Ave. at Central Square: 22 Magazine Street, Apt. 3. Spring 1971 marked the last months of my master of arts in teaching program at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. I was still taking a few classes in English literature and completing a round of student teaching in a lively seventh-grade class at the Martin Luther King Jr. Middle School in Dorchester, bordering Roxbury's all-Black neighborhood. My four roommates all worked in Cambridge or Boston. My bedroom fronted Magazine Street. I could see from my window the historic red brick Gothic revival First Baptist Church at Central Square, and I often listened for its chime striking the hour. Some events from that time are recorded in my erratic journal, but one event that never found its way into my journal has remained in mind: the sight of women marching down the street one chilly grey day, determined and enthusiastic. The group captured my attention. At the time, I may have read about them in the paper, but the purpose of their march did not lodge in my memory. My focus was on my teaching, my studies, my roommates, and my ward.

Only later did I realize I'd had a great view of feminism on the rise. It's possible that I witnessed the historic international women's day march of March 6, 1971, when throngs of women strode down Mass. Ave. en route to Memorial Drive in Cambridge to take over and occupy an old Harvard-owned building and establish the first women's center in the United States. A recent film entitled *Left on Pearl* documents

1. This essay was originally delivered as a Dialogue Fireside on February 21, 2021.

their march. It's possible that some women deliberately marched one street beyond Pearl to turn left on Magazine Street. I'm still trying to unearth exactly what I witnessed that cold spring day in 1971.

It seems, as one becomes older, wrote T. S. Eliot in one of his *Four Quartets*, from which I will draw from throughout my remarks,

> It seems, as one becomes older,
> That the past has another pattern, and ceases to be a mere sequence—
> Or even development: . . . . but the sudden illumination—
> We had the experience but missed the meaning,
> And approach to the meaning restores the experience
> In a different form beyond any meaning
> We can assign to happiness.

Granted, some ellipses there, but I think the intent is intact: *[I] had the experience but missed the meaning, and approach to the meaning restores the experience*.[2]

PAST, EXPERIENCE, MEANING, RESTORING—I'm not certain how all of these fit together, but I know they have significance for me. Experience and meaning are layered. Our comprehension of language, for example, is layered. I learn to read or repeat a few foreign words or phrases that I then can identify when I hear them. Gradually, more words come together and I can understand the meaning of what someone is saying. More gradually, for me, as I speak, I can be understood. My acquaintance with and understanding of women's history has also been layered. It, too, relates to my years spent in the Boston area.

Formidable Latter-day Saint women in Boston began researching Mormon women past and present and brought forth the iconic summer 1971 "Pink *Dialogue*."[3] In spring 1973, the issue's editor, Claudia Bushman, and her cohorts held a gathering in her home, featuring Maureen Ursenbach as a guest speaker. Maureen had recently joined

2. T. S. Eliot, "The Dry Salvages," II, *Four Quartets*, from *T. S. Eliot, Collected Poems, 1909–1962* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1963), 194.

3. *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 6, no. 2 (Summer 1971).

Leonard Arrington, the new Church Historian, as part of his research and writing team known as the History Division within the newly organized Church Historical Department, which replaced the old Church Historian's Office.[4]

I heard Maureen speak and was fascinated that she had so much to say about Eliza R. Snow, whom I knew only as a writer of hymns. After returning to Utah that fall, I stumbled my way into an internship under Maureen's direction in Arrington's History Division. A total novice, I started cataloguing the poetry of Eliza R. Snow, a task that plunged me into various newspapers, including the *Woman's Exponent*, and into women's diaries, journals, letters, and autobiographies—the rich trove of women's personal writings at the archives.

I was excited as I excavated the experience of Latter-day Saint women. They were not my ancestors, but I felt a kinship with these sisters—single women (as I was), schoolteachers (as I had recently been), wives, stepmothers and mothers (as I soon became). I found what Claudia and others had already discovered: "Their stories help us to see possibilities for our own lives."[5] The experiences of other women's lives gave meaning to my own—meaning I had missed in my own experience

4. Leonard J. Arrington was appointed Church Historian in January 1972. Subsequently, what was formerly the Church Historian's Office became the Historical Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, with Arrington as head of research and writing in the department's History Division. See Leonard J. Arrington, "The Founding of the LDS Church Historical Department," chap. 5 in *Adventures of a Church Historian* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998); Gregory A. Prince, "Church Historian," chap. 14 in *Leonard J. Arrington and the Writing of Mormon History* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2016). The same department is now titled Church History Department.

5. Claudia Bushman, ed., *Mormon Sisters* (Cambridge, Mass.: Emmeline Press Ltd., 1976), preface, xii. Bushman's preface and introduction describe how the book emerged from the pioneering studies of the early Boston group. A new edition appeared in 1997: Claudia Bushman, ed., *Mormon Sisters: Women in Early Utah* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1997).

until I began examining and gaining respect for their experiences. I found nobility, dignity and worth in each woman's life—no matter how different or difficult or simple or obscure. I valued every woman I came to know. I saw strength in their engagement with conflict and disappointment. I witnessed their personal inspiration, revelation, and access to the powers of heaven. I discovered the importance of making one's voice heard and the significance of unity and collective action.[6]

Wrote Eliot:

> The past experience revived in the meaning
> Is not the experience of one life only
> But of many generations—[7]

For Latter-day women, the collective experience of many generations is found partly in Relief Society stories, histories, and documents. Seeking to understand that experience became a large part of my life's work as a historian. I was introduced to the nineteenth-century Relief Society through assisting Maureen Ursenbach (Beecher by then) with her study of Eliza R. Snow, secretary of the Female Relief Society of Nauvoo and the society's second general president. I was introduced to twentieth-century Relief Society through preparing for oral history interviews with Belle Smith Spafford immediately following her 1974 release as the society's ninth president, a position she had held for nearly thirty years.[8]

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6. Greater familiarity with women and their writings came from working on *Women's Voices: An Untold History of the Latter-day Saints, 1830–1900*, edited by Kenneth W. Godfrey, Audrey M. Godfrey, and Jill Mulvay Derr (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1982, 1991, 2000).

7. Eliot, "The Dry Salvages," 194.

8. Belle S. Spafford interview, Salt Lake City, Utah, 1975–1976, OH 344, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah, cited hereafter Church History Library.

Under the leadership of President Spafford, the Relief Society general board published a history of Relief Society in 1966.[9] But the scholarly approach to history that came with Arrington's appointment as Church Historian precipitated new questions, new possibilities, and a new dive into the treasure trove of documents in the Church Archives (now referred to as the Church History Library). Among the most significant of those documents is the volume containing minutes of the Female Relief Society of Nauvoo—a record of some thirty-three meetings held between 1842 and 1844.[10] Joseph Smith addressed six of the women's meetings, and these sermons constitute the only contemporaneous record of teachings that Joseph Smith directed specifically to women as a group.

The precious record that left Nauvoo in the care of Eliza Snow remained with her and eventually found its way—via succeeding Relief Society presidents Zina D. H. Young and Bathsheba W. Smith—into the Church Historian's Office.[11] Actually, in 1855 Eliza herself had lent the book to the Church Historian's Office so that some of Joseph Smith's addresses could be incorporated into the history of the Church being compiled at the time. The editors of this new Manuscript History

9. *History of Relief Society, 1842–1966* (Salt Lake City: General Board of Relief Society, 1966). This was an updated edition of *Centenary of Relief Society, 1842–1942* (Salt Lake City: General Board of Relief Society, 1942).

10. "A Book of Records Containing the proceedings of the Female Relief Society of Nauvoo," or Nauvoo Relief Society Minute Book, 1842–1844, Church History Library.

11. A physical description of the Nauvoo Relief Society Minute Book and its provenance appear in *The First Fifty Years of Relief Society: Key Documents in Latter-day Saint Women's History* edited by Jill Mulvay Derr, Carol Cornwall Madsen, Kate Holbrook, and Matthew J. Grow (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2016), document 1.2, Relief Society Minute Book, 23–24. Emmeline B. Wells made a manuscript copy of the minutes, and Susa Young Gates a typewritten copy. See Jill Mulvay Derr and Carol Cornwall Madsen, "Preserving the Record and Memory of the Female Relief Society of Nauvoo, 1842–92," *Journal of Mormon History* 35, no. 3 (Summer 2009): 88–117.

selected excerpts from two of Joseph's most memorable sermons to include in their compilation but redacted them—that is, changed some wording in ways they believed clarified what Joseph was teaching. Revisions of diary entries and minutes were commonplace in producing what is known as the Manuscript History, later published by B. H. Roberts as *History of the Church* by Joseph Smith.[12] The Joseph Smith Papers website overviews source documents for that compiled history.[13] Selected excerpts from the Nauvoo minutes, particularly from the March 17 founding meeting and Joseph's remarkable April 28 address (both in 1842) appeared in the *Woman's Exponent* and later in the *Relief Society Magazine*, as well as the 1942 and 1966 general board histories of the Relief Society. In most cases, however, the excerpts quoted or published were taken from the widely available *History of the Church* and not from the minute book itself.

Naturally, Maureen Ursenbach Beecher's study of Eliza R. Snow led her to the original minutes inscribed mostly in Eliza's own handwriting. Likewise, Linda King Newell and Valeen Tippetts Avery were beginning their biography of Emma Hale Smith, the society's first president, and planned to review all of the minutes, not just those included in *History of the Church*.[14] The minute book could be accessed at the Church

12. The full title of this work is *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Period I, History of Joseph Smith, the Prophet by Himself; An introduction and notes by B.H. Roberts*, 7 vols., 2nd ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1974).

13. "Introduction to History, 1838–1856 (Manuscript History of the Church)," The Joseph Smith Papers, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/intro/introduction-to-history-1838-1856-manuscript-history-of-the-church/.

14. Linda King Newell and Valeen Tippetts Avery, *Mormon Enigma: Emma Hale Smith, Prophet's Wife, "Elect Lady," Polygamy's Foe, 1804–1897* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, 1984).

Archives on microfilm, and as I recall, Linda made her own transcription of much of the record from that microfilm. Maureen was able to call upon the History Division's inimitable volunteer typist Edyth Jenkins Romney, who skillfully transcribed many original documents for the team. And this was the 1970s, when transcriptions were made on an IBM Selectric typewriter. The transcription in its entirety was completed by 1979.

What became clear as the transcription emerged was that the redactions made in the 1850s by Church Historians and approved by Brigham Young and the Twelve were significant. This came to light at a moment when the field of women's history was emerging and scholars were reassessing women's status in and contributions to politics, economics, the arts, and religion. Since Joseph had proclaimed the minutes to be the society's constitution and law, what did this constitution say about the religious authority of Latter-day Saint women?

> Was Emma Smith's ordination as Relief Society president ordination to a priesthood office?
> Why was she ordained to serve for life?
> When Joseph turned the key to women, was he giving them a priesthood key or keys?
> What does it mean to be organized "in the order of the priesthood" or "according to the order of God connected with the priesthood"?
> Why did Joseph encourage women to exercise the gifts of the spirit: to speak in tongues, prophesy, and heal the sick?
> What did he mean when Joseph "told the women he intended "to make of this Society a kingdom of priests an [as] in Enoch's day—as in Paul's day"?
> Why did a member of the Nauvoo temple committee tell the women that their Relief Society "was raisd by the Lord to prepare us for the great blessings which are for us in the House of the Lord in the Temple"?
> What did Newel K. Whitney mean when, after receiving the endowment in May 1842, he told Relief Society women: "In the beginning God created man male and female and bestow'd upon man certain blessings peculiar to a man of God, of which woman partook, so that

> without the female all things cannot be restor'd to the earth it takes all to restore the Priesthood."[15]

These solemn and weighty questions have now been churning for decades. Since the 1970s, the religious authority of Latter-day Saint women has been a matter of intense discussion, even debate. Lectures, conference presentations, newspaper and journal articles, and books aplenty have taken on these and other questions raised by the intersection of feminist consciousness and the Nauvoo Relief Society minutes and other women's documents. These represent a small fragment of a complex past—a past that, as we have increasingly recognized, has long been oversimplified. In restoring fragments of the experiences of our first-generation sisters, we have been searching for answers and understanding—meanings missing or lost.

I feel as Eliot expressed:

> There is only the fight to recover what has been lost
> And found and lost again and again: and now under conditions
> That seem unpropitious. But perhaps neither gain nor loss,
> For us, there is only the trying. The rest is not our business.[16]

For decades now, I along with other women and men have been engaged in "the trying," that is, the effort to not only restore a record but revive experience and meaning that have been missing. I will share just a fragment or two from my own trying within the context of my work at the Church History Department and Brigham Young University.

Around 1976, as Maureen and I examined the original minutes, we discovered that Joseph Smith had not announced to women, as was

15. Nauvoo Relief Society Minute Book (Doc. 1.2), entries for 17 and 30 [31] March, 28 April, 27 May 1842, 13 August 1843; Sarah M. Kimball, Reminiscence, March 17, 1882 (Doc. 4.10); Sarah M. Kimball, "The Relief Society," Report of Relief Society Jubilee, March 17, 1892 (Doc. 4.28), all in *The First Fifty Years of Relief Society*, 43, 54–55, 59, 75–76, 115–16, 495, 597.

16. T. S. Eliot, "East Coker," V, *Four Quartets*, from *T. S. Eliot, Collected Poems, 1909–1962*, 189.

commonly celebrated at March 17 Relief Society birthday parties, "I now turn the key in your behalf" (as recorded in the *History of the Church*), but rather "I now turn the key to you" (as recorded in Eliza Snow's minutes).[17] To us, at the time, the difference in the two wordings seemed so significant that we felt that the Relief Society general board should be made aware of this and other mentions of priesthood in the Nauvoo minutes. So we approached members of the general board of Barbara Bradshaw Smith, tenth general president of the Relief Society. Some board members reacted as we had and decided to make a presentation to their General Authority advisers. They did, and their report was not well received.

Hmm—this was not as simple as we thought it would be. The words in the minutes did not speak for themselves. The new historical information being published by members of Arrington's History Division team had already raised some hackles among certain Church leaders.[18] The surging movement for women's rights and equality seemed threatening to some. While stories of women's faith were always welcomed, questions about precedents for Latter-day Saint women's religious authority were not.

The History Division, which by now included Carol Cornwall Madsen, was not the only women's history game in town. Interest, research, and publications regarding the history of Latter-day Saint women was mounting.[19] Eager and able women began honing their

17. See Joseph Smith Discourses to the Nauvoo Female Relief Society, March 31 and April 28, 1842, as Revised for "History of Joseph Smith," September 5 and 19, 1855 (Doc. 2.2) in *The First Fifty Years of Relief Society*, 207.

18. See Gregory A. Prince, "Storm Clouds," chap. 20 in *Leonard J. Arrington and the Writing of Mormon History*.

19. An excellent contemporaneous overview of 1970s women's history scholarship is Carol Cornwall Madsen and David J. Whittaker, "History's Sequel: A Source Essay on Women in Mormon History," *Journal of Mormon History* 6 (1979): 123–45.

undergraduate and graduate skills to write biographical essays or explore women's historical engagement in polygamy, suffrage, social services, and the arts. Some enrolled in graduate programs. A diversity of experiences was being revived by a great diversity of women. At the end of 1979, the year Edyth Jenkins Romney completed her transcription of the Nauvoo Relief Society Minute Book, President Barbara Smith advanced the idea that Relief Society needed a fuller account of its history, one that was both globally conscious and included new scholarship. Deseret Book, with the support of Elder G. Homer Durham, then executive director of the History Division, invited Janath Russell Cannon and me to co-author that history. With my family responsibilities expanding, I had just left the History Division. Janath—intelligent, energetic, and gracious, and formerly a counselor to Barbara Smith—had recently served with her husband among the first missionaries to go to Ghana and Nigeria. Now she and I would work together on the semi-official project. Meanwhile, Maureen would transfer with other History Division colleagues to the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Church History at Brigham Young University and proceed with careful analysis of the Nauvoo Relief Society minutes. She presented her discoveries at both professional history conferences and early BYU women's conferences, though her hopes for annotating and publishing the Nauvoo Minute Book were not realized. However, Edyth Jenkins Romney's transcript received some covert circulation and Eliza's record of Joseph Smith's six sermons to the women were published in 1980 in *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph*, edited by Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook.[20]

The decade of the 1980s witnessed expanding publications in a variety of venues that addressed the questions of women's religious authority, particularly their relationship to priesthood and their

20. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980).

exercise of spiritual gifts, especially the gift of healing. All of this was part of the effort to recover women's experiences and make meaning for a new generation.[21]

As I worked in connection with the Relief Society general presidency and board and Deseret Book, I was working on the inside, which presented me with a particular perspective, as well as certain privileges and limitations. Janath and I had a little room on the second floor of the Relief Society Building where we did our work and kept some files. This was before the building was remodeled to include offices for the leaders of all three women's organizations.[22]

At the April 1984 conference of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, now Community of Christ, Church President Wallace B. Smith read an "inspired document" authorizing the ordination of women. The document, which also looked to the future building of a temple, was accepted by the conference and became RLDS Doctrine and Covenants section 156. The Mormon History Association was scheduled to meet in Provo that year, and the program committee decided sometime after the announcement that there should be a panel added to the program that would provide several perspectives on this "inspired document." I was asked to participate on the panel along with Paul M. Edwards and L. Madelon Brunson, both of whom are RLDS. Since MHA at that time was usually held in mid-May, the invitation gave me just two or maybe three weeks to put together a response from the Latter-day Saint perspective. I felt totally inadequate and unsure of

21. Todd Compton provides a significant historiographical overview in "The New Mormon Women's History," in *Excavating Mormon Pasts: The New Historiography of the Last Half Century*, edited by Newell G. Bringhurst and Lavina Fielding Anderson (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2004), chap. 12, 273–302.

22. 76 North Main Street, Salt Lake City, Utah. Remodeling of the building was completed in 1986. Jill Mulvay Derr, Janath Russell Cannon, and Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, *Women of Covenant: The Story of Relief Society* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1992), 387–88.

what to say, especially given the tensions regarding women's authority that were so present at that time. I'm sure Carol Madsen's extraordinary essay on Mormon women and the temple was at least drafted, and I know I drew from that as well as from the Nauvoo minutes.[23] The little miracle for me came when one morning I walked into the second-floor room I shared with Janath. She had not yet arrived, so I was alone. On the table lay a stack of bound copies of the *Relief Society Magazine*, several years' worth. This was curious because they had not been there before. I picked up the volume on top—number 46 (1959). As I was thumbing through it, the October 1958 Relief Society conference talk by Joseph Fielding Smith caught my eye: "Relief Society—An Aid to the Priesthood." I'm not sure this talk would seem remarkable by today's standards, but for me it was the official voice I needed. It gave me permission to say what I wanted to say—to be true to the scholarship as I understood it while speaking "within the bounds" that would keep me from contradicting what General Authorities had taught. Here are a couple of quotations from the Joseph Fielding Smith talk. His words combined with the Nauvoo Relief Society minutes really became the backbone of my MHA panel remarks, later published in *Dialogue*.[24]

> You sisters who labor in the House of the Lord can lay your hands upon your sisters, and with divine authority, because the Lord recognizes positions which you occupy. A person may have authority given to him, or a sister to her, to do certain things in the Church that are binding and absolutely necessary for our salvation, such as the work that our sisters do in the House of the Lord. They have authority given unto

23. Carol Cornwall Madsen, "Mormon Women and the Temple: Toward a New Understanding," in *Sisters in Spirit: Mormon Women in Historical and Cultural Perspective*, edited by Maureen Ursenbach Beecher and Lavina Fielding Anderson (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 80–110.

24. Jill Mulvay Derr, "An Endowment of Power: The LDS Tradition," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 17, no. 3 (Fall 1984): 17–21. The same issue includes comments by the other panelists: Paul M. Edwards, "RLDS Priesthood: Structure and Process" and L. Madelon Brunson, "Stranger in a Strange Land: 'A Personal Response to the 1984 Document.'"

> them to do some great and wonderful things, sacred to the Lord, and binding just as thoroughly are the blessings that are given by the men who hold the Priesthood.
>
> You [sisters], through your faithfulness and your obedience, will find your place in the kingdom of God when it is established in its fulness and righteousness. . . . It is within the privilege of the sisters of this Church to receive exaltation in the kingdom of God and receive authority and power as queens and priestesses, and I am sure if they have that power they have some power to rule and reign. Else why would they be priestesses?[25]

I believe President Oaks has in recent years quoted this talk, but in 1984 it wasn't out there.[26] Not that my remarks at the MHA conference were of any lasting importance to anyone but me, but they undergirded my hopes and framed my perspective in writing the history of Relief Society and the work that I've done in subsequent years.

Barbara Smith's successor, Barbara Woodhead Winder, eleventh general president of the Relief Society, also lent her support to the writing of the history, which took many more years than we ever imagined. Janath and I agreed that I would write the history up to 1921, and she would write later-twentieth-century chapters. There was no way I could deal with the nineteenth-century Relief Society without featuring women speaking in tongues, prophesying, and healing. Linda King Newell's study of women's gifts of the spirit—"A Gift Given, a Gift Taken"—had appeared in 1981 and precipitated widespread discussion and concern, along with a profound sense of loss.[27] One day I went to talk to Barbara Winder about the fact that I would be including

25. Joseph Fielding Smith, "Relief Society—An Aid to the Priesthood," *Relief Society Magazine* 46 (Jan. 1959): 4–6.

26. Dallin H. Oaks, "The Keys and Authority of the Priesthood," Apr. 2014, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2014/04/the-keys-and-authority-of-the-priesthood?lang=eng.

27. Linda King Newell, "A Gift Given, A Gift Taken: Washing, Anointing, and Blessing the Sick among Mormon Women," *Sunstone* 6, no. 4 (Sept./Oct. 1981): 16–25; revised as "Gifts of the Spirit: Women's Share," in *Sisters in Spirit*, 110–50.

examples of some difficult subjects including plural marriage and women's healing. She spoke of the concern expressed by male Church leaders because they simply did not have the information to answer the questions then being raised by women. She counseled me to craft a narrative that helped everyone understand both the practice of women's healing and the end of the practice. She was gracious and understanding and invited me to kneel with her in prayer. Janath and I got along splendidly, but we did not always agree on how or how much to feature such questions, so I felt encouraged by Barbara Winder's support. I likewise received remarkable encouragement from President Winder's successor, Elaine Low Jack, who, with her counselors Aileen Clyde and Chieko Okazaki, was eager to familiarize herself with the minutes and the history as her presidency and board looked forward to 1992 and the sesquicentennial Relief Society celebration. They made extensive use of the minutes. *Women of Covenant: The Story of Relief Society* was published toward the end of the sesquicentennial year.[28] That would not have been possible if Maureen Ursenbach Beecher had not agreed to become a third author in 1988 just before my husband Brooke and I took our family away for two years to Switzerland, where he taught at an international business school. Incidentally, Janath and her husband Ted were then serving as president and matron of the Frankfurt Temple, so we connected in Germany and continued some work on the history there while Maureen pressed forward in Utah.

I want to emphasize the support of women leaders such as Presidents Smith, Winder, and Jack, as well as their successors. Some may consider them to be unaware or unable to understand the questions that trouble their sisters. My experience leads me to believe that they are concerned and searching and pushing forward, often more forcefully than some of us realize.

Women of Covenant received mixed reviews. *A nice book. A reference book. Reminds me of homemaking meeting. I know all the early history. Only the twentieth-century information was new to me.* Some

28. Derr, Cannon, and Beecher, *Women of Covenant*.

saw the history as a record of significant achievements by dedicated women across decades. Some as an accurate representation of Latter-day Saint women's lives. Others as, one scholar noted, "a litany of loss."[29]

This pervasive sense of loss was hard to counter. Nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Relief Society women were engaged in significant collective action economically and politically. For a time, they stored grain, they ran a hospital and a newspaper, and for fifty years they directed the Church's social services. Their vivacity, creativity, intelligence, spirituality, and confidence shine through in the pages of the *Woman's Exponent* and the *Relief Society Magazine*. Committed to their families, they maintained a public presence. Still, over time some of the patterns of organization and practice outlined in the Nauvoo Relief Society minutes were tempered, or, like women's healing, terminated. The correlation movement of the 1960s and 1970s centralized, standardized, and simplified in ways that diminished local autonomy and collective responsibility and visibility while at the same time making possible the Church's international growth. I recall talking with Maureen in her Smith Institute office at BYU. We discussed how to frame a history filled with considerable disappointments for women, the vast majority of whom still carried on and moved forward. We decided that only their faith must have allowed them to endure what might have been just as difficult, if not more, than wet and wintry trekking and devastating death. They had determined to maintain the covenants they had made to God and to one another. That discussion spawned our title: *Women of Covenant*. This was one part of the "trying" that Eliot wrote about: the fight to recover what has been lost—both the experience and the meaning.

Writing a Relief Society history that quoted the minutes and acknowledged changes over time was one part of the recovery effort. Maureen moved to Canada and left further labor on publishing those

29. Reviews centered on loss include Cheryl May, "A Diminished Thing?" and Peggy Pascoe, "A History of Two Stories," both in *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 27, no. 2 (Summer 1994): 235–45.

seminal Nauvoo minutes to Carol Cornwall Madsen and me. With encouragement from Richard E. Turley Jr. at the Church History Department, we began to work on Eliza's record as part of a larger collection of Relief Society documents covering the society's first fifty years, from its 1842 founding to its Jubilee Year in 1892. With this approach, we could carefully document how ideas, policies, and practices developed over time. This iteration of the work began at BYU's Smith Institute with an initial team of women that included Carol and me, along with Jennifer Reeder, Cherry Bushman Silver, and Sheree Maxwell Bench. Then in 2005, when the Smith Institute was disbanded and a large number of the faculty moved to the Church History Department in Salt Lake City to continue work on the Joseph Smith Papers, I moved with them and took the Relief Society project with me. The groundwork had been laid for a new kind of department with the new Church Historian's Press set to publish the Joseph Smith Papers and other essential Church documents and, further, to have a strong online presence with digital offerings, as well as an expanded international outreach. Elder Marlin K. Jensen had been called as Church Historian and demonstrated his commitment to accuracy, transparency, and accessibility. As I took on new administrative responsibilities at the department, my work on our collection of Relief Society documents was put on the back burner. When happily and blessedly relieved of administrative duties three years later, I returned to the half-finished project. Then, there was a different kind of miracle, a blessing that most historians do not receive—an expanded team of experts. Kate Holbrook and Matthew J. Grow joined Carol and me as co-editors, and extraordinarily competent research assistants provided not just the Nauvoo minutes but additional documents the annotation and cross references so greatly needed. Specialists at the Joseph Smith Papers published the Nauvoo Relief Society Minute Book online as part of their online documents in the JSP administrative records series. Superb editors tightened an unwieldy manuscript. Church Historian Marlin K. Jensen and his assistants furnished counsel, encouragement, and essential advocacy.

All of this made possible the 2016 publication of the Nauvoo Relief Society Minute Book as the central document in *The First Fifty Years of Relief Society: Key Documents in Latter-day Saint Women's History*.[30] For me, this fulfilled many years of hoping and searching and trying. Not that the Nauvoo minutes hadn't been out there before, but now they were widely and accurately available to Church members and leaders around the world and accessible to outside scholars. The new tome placed them in context. It was cause for celebration. Did this publication have a meaningful impact? It did, but not the Nauvoo minutes or the *First Fifty Years* alone. I witnessed the institutional cooperation and support across many years that made publication possible. But other lectures, articles, books, blogs, and podcasts from those working outside the institution also had a great effect. My husband, a longtime teacher of organization development, assures me that lasting change comes as a result of both internal and external forces. I respect those who have labored independently without the kind of institutional support I have had across the years, nor the institutional restrictions. Their freedom has allowed them to raise and explore significant questions regarding women's religious authority, and their commitment prompted them to do so most often at their own time and expense. External and internal forces make change happen.

And changes have happened. Church leaders' mentions of and comments regarding of women's connection to women's priesthood power and authority through callings and temple ordinances have increased in recent years.[31] I loved the comment of the Primary general president Joy D. Jones at the April 2020 general conference: "My

30. Derr, Madsen, Holbrook, and Grow, *The First Fifty Years of Relief Society*.

31. See, for example, Oaks, "Keys and Authority of the Priesthood"; Linda K. Burton, "Priesthood Power—Available to All," *Ensign*, June 2014, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2014/06/priesthood-power-available-to-all?lang=eng; Russell M. Nelson, "Spiritual Treasures," Oct. 2019, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2019/10/36nelson?lang=eng.

personal admission today is that as a woman I didn't realize, earlier in my life, that *I* had access, through my covenants, to the power of the priesthood. Sisters, I pray that we will recognize and cherish priesthood power."[32] I am grateful to have witnessed a lot of progress over the past fifty years, but particularly over the past ten years. I acknowledge that this isn't enough or soon enough or fast enough for some.

Let me turn back to my view from a Magazine Street window in 1971. I was aware of the march, but I did not grasp its meaning. In some ways, across the years, I have relived that same unwitting view from inside the window—a kind of obliviousness. Sometimes the meaning that is missing is simple acknowledgement of our own unawareness of others, of their perspective, of their effort, or of their pain. To the extent that I can claim that unawareness, I hope to repent and to be, as Eliot wrote, "restored by that refining fire" and "renewed, transfigured in another pattern."[33] That refinement to a higher, nobler pattern is possible only through Jesus Christ. For all of us, "there is only the trying." Ultimately, as we come to him, as promised in 2 Nephi 27:35: "They also that erred in spirit shall come to understanding, and they that murmured shall learn doctrine." Jesus Christ is the Holy One who brings us to wholeness, line upon line, grace for grace. John's testimony of Christ as recorded in Doctrine and Covenants 93 has always had a particular resonance for me.

> And he received not of the fulness at first, but continued from grace to grace, until he received a fulness;
> And thus he was called the Son of God, because he received not of the fulness at the first. . . .
> I give unto you these sayings that you may understand and know how to worship, and know what you worship, that you may come unto the Father in my name, and in due time receive of his fulness.

32. Joy D. Jones, "An Especially Noble Calling," Apr. 2020, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2020/04/14jones?lang=eng.

33. T. S. Eliot, "Little Gidding," II, III, *Four Quartets*, from *T. S. Eliot, Collected Poems, 1909–1962*, 205.

> For if you keep my commandments you shall receive of his fulness, and be glorified in me as I am in the Father; therefore, I say unto you, you shall receive grace for grace.[34]

The meaning that God restores to us individually or collectively is always beyond our imagining. As Eliot expressed it:

> And what you thought you came for
> Is only a shell, a husk of meaning
> From which the purpose breaks only when it is fulfilled
> If at all. Either you had no purpose
> Or the purpose is beyond the end you figured
> And is altered in fulfillment.[35]

I've experienced and celebrated that altered fulfillment on more than one occasion.

Some of Eliot's most well-known lines move me toward my conclusion:

> In my beginning is my end. . . .
> What we call the beginning is often the end. . . .
> We shall not cease from exploration
> And the end of all our exploring
> Will be to arrive where we started
> And know the place for the first time.[36]

On Sunday, April 28, 2019, my husband Brooke and I were sitting in a sacrament meeting in Torrey, Utah, listening to two penetrating talks on prayer. Bursting into my mind came the memory of me as a girl kneeling in prayer atop my bed, gazing at the set of six or seven small dolls attached to the wall above my head. They represented some of the First Ladies of the United States dressed in the fashions of their day. For several nights, I prayed that that wall would open up and let me

34. Doctrine and Covenants 93:13–14, 19–20.

35. Eliot, "Little Gidding," 201.

36. Eliot, "East Coker," I, and "Little Gidding," V, *T. S. Eliot, Collected Poems, 1909–1962*, 182, 207, 208.

enter their world. As I sat in that Torrey sacrament meeting, I had the "sudden illumination" that across decades, I had actually entered the world of the remarkable women of the past. Finding meaning in their experience had become my life's work.

God answers our prayers. His promise is sure. Jesus Christ brings us to wholeness and to holiness. Human progress, even within the Church is not undeterred, but I know that "the eternal purposes of the Lord shall roll on, until all his promises shall be fulfilled."[37]

37. Mormon 8:22.

JILL MULVAY DERR {jillmderr@gmail.com}, now an independent historian, formerly worked in the Church History Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and at the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Church History at Brigham Young University. Her published studies of Latter-day Saint women span four decades and include her longtime and ongoing work on Eliza R. Snow. She and her husband, C. Brooklyn Derr, are the parents of four children and eleven grandchildren.

MT. RAINIER SANCTIFICATION

Heather J. Longhurst

For nearly three hours, I'd been trying unsuccessfully to sleep. It was definitely not the most comfortable bed I'd ever had—only a thin yellow and silver accordion-style pad separated my sleeping bag from the particleboard platform bunk. I had no pillow; a pillow was too much of an extravagance to haul up to ten thousand feet. But I was glad I opted for the warmer, albeit slightly heavier, sleeping bag. Even though my bed was hard, it was warm as I cuddled a hot water bottle like a teddy bear.

The room rattled with the snores of three men, my climbing partners. I was the only woman. We were lucky to get a spot in the stone shelter at Camp Muir, the climbing basecamp of Mt. Rainier. We would be waking at 1:00 a.m. to begin our summit attempt, a climb of nearly 4,500 feet that would take six to nine hours. The sun had finally gone down, the hazy glow of the small, dirty windows extinguished at last. But it wasn't the light in the room that kept me awake. Or the snoring. Or the lack of a pillow. It was panic, silent and extreme.

Today had been harder than I'd expected. We climbed about 4,800 feet from the trailhead at Paradise with me struggling the last one thousand feet. Although I'd completed hikes with weighted packs in preparation for this climb, my pack felt too heavy. I didn't layer up and allowed myself to get too cold in the snow and wind. I was depleted, and we hadn't even started the hard part yet.

What in the world was I thinking? Rainier is a serious mountain—14,411 feet of massive rock and ice. I was tortured with possibilities—me, hauled off the mountain by a Chinook helicopter, dangling above the trees in a rescue basket or falling in a crevasse, pulling the entire team after me, where we'd all suffocate and freeze to death.

More than violent death, I feared revealing that I wasn't strong enough or brave enough. That I simply didn't have enough stamina and grit. Tomorrow I knew I would be asking things of myself I'd never asked before and discovering things I'd never known. More than anything, I was scared I wouldn't like what I found.

At some point, counting fears must have worked like counting sheep because I fell asleep.

~

A few unrested hours later, I stepped into the frigid air. At elevation, June feels like January. Looking up, I saw an indigo and purple sky filled with the most glorious display of stars I'd ever seen. The Milky Way looked as though God had spilled a bottle of glitter across the universe. I breathed in the magic of it all.

Despite my fears, it felt right that I had come.

We finished the morning tasks—boiling water for freeze-dried breakfasts, gathering ropes and carbineers, and lacing up crampons—and it was time to rope in. From here on out the four of us would be tethered together by a long purple rope.

Mike, the most experienced climber by far, took the lead. A kind and jovial fiftysomething with a gap-tooth grin, Mike was the quintessential Boy Scout. He would be attempting his twentieth summit today, the cap to an intimidating and perfect record of nineteen attempts, nineteen summits. Mike was incredibly encouraging and patient and never made any of us feel the least bit small.

Second on the rope was John, one of my most cherished friends but also someone I had barely spoken with in three years, not since the day I fired his wife Lara, shattered our friendship, and triggered his divorce. When my husband Matt and I picked him up from the airport two days ago, he greeted us with warm hugs and smiles, saying, "I'm really here and it's really you guys!" That's what you say to people you don't see or

talk with often but think about a lot. For the sake of the climb and our previous friendship, we were both pretending things were fine.

Third on the rope was me, the weakest link, a newbie climber and forty-one-year-old mother of three, carrying more than my share of emotional baggage.

Sterling, a twenty-two-year-old student and part-time lifeguard, filled the fourth and final position. I called him Strapping Sterling, partly because he was tall and muscular but mostly because of his handshake. He had a very firm handshake that I found incredibly reassuring. It boded well for his ability to rescue.

~

We began, the four of us linked together by a long purple rope. It felt surreal. There was the tiniest hint of light on the horizon. We were traversing the upper portion of the Cowlitz Glacier, the incline relatively gentle. Concentrating on my pace so that the rope wasn't too taut or too loose, I carried my ice axe in my left hand. Combined with the crampons on my feet, I felt very spikey.

I'm such a badass right now, I thought, trying to convince myself this was possible.

The last time John walked this path, he'd been on a mission: propose. None of us could imagine a more epic location for a marriage proposal. On that trip, he'd climbed with his girlfriend Lara, my husband Matt, and another buddy, Brent.

Back then, Lara was my friend and fellow dancer. We all had big expectations for John and Lara, me included. After all, I'd engineered their meeting in the first place.

I couldn't wait for them to become our married besties, to create the quintessential Mormon life together where they would sit in the pews every Sunday with their perfectly styled and adorably curious children. Waiting below as they climbed, I dreamed of the weekends we would

all hang out and roast s'mores and go on hikes, of Lara and me baking cakes and being in book clubs together. I was so excited and invested in their relationship, I even helped John choose the ring—a beautiful green emerald in a diamond halo on a gold band that I knew would perfectly complement Lara's fiery auburn hair. He carried the ring to the top of this mountain, she said yes, and he put it on her finger.

Perfect. Until it wasn't.

~

A last-minute purchase, my hydration pack arrived the afternoon before our departure. On the mountain, in the dark and wearing bulky gloves, I fumbled with the unfamiliar nozzle. The mouthpiece came off completely, squirting water everywhere. I couldn't get it to stop.

"Hey guys? Could we stop for just a second?" I called.

"This isn't a good place to stop," Mike called back over his shoulder, his headlamp bobbing. "It's prone to rock fall."

"Okay," I said, as water leaked. Embarrassed and not wanting to inconvenience anyone, I kept fumbling, trying to reattach the mouthpiece as we hiked. By the time I got it under control, I'd lost a fair amount of water, my clothes and gloves were wet, and I still hadn't had anything to drink.

But this wasn't the first time I'd put myself and others in a precarious position because I didn't insist that we address a problem.

After John and Lara married, we worked together at a ballroom dance studio. They were instructors and I was the executive director. Problems arose between John and Lara that bled into the classroom. Parents and students complained. Not wanting to strain my friends' new marriage, I ignored issues or tried to take care of them myself.

But, just like my tube, things were leaking.

~

When we finally got to the top of the Gap, we were greeted by an incredible view of Little Tahoma, a black pyramid peak silhouetted against the rainbow of the early morning horizon.

"It is so beautiful," Sterling said. "So, so beautiful."

I smiled. I like people who appreciate a good view. Mike let us enjoy our wonder for a few moments before encouraging us on. As we reached Ingraham Flats, another climbing basecamp, the sun crested the horizon, bathing the snow in golden light.

As we walked past the camp, John unexpectedly turned around and asked, "How are you doing, Heather?"

I was surprised and touched. When things started going badly, there were many days when John arrived at work looking as though the weight of the world was on his shoulders. I'd ask, "How are you doing, John?" There was rarely any talk about how I might be doing. It didn't seem odd at the time. I'd taken on the role of fixer and rescuer—not just for John but for Lara too. This unevenness in our friendship made me feel needed and important, at least for a while. It was important to me to be important to them. John's inquiry into my well-being was a nice change of pace for both of us. We'd come a long way.

Looking at the magnificent setting—the towering rock walls on three sides and the glorious view of the misty valley below—I was overcome with emotion. I couldn't believe I was actually here doing this.

"I am deeply happy right now," I said.

He nodded, and I could tell he was happy too.

Soon we were at the bottom of Disappointment Cleaver. A cleaver is a rock ridge that separates, or cleaves, two glaciers. It's one of the most physically demanding parts of the climb, requiring us to boulder scramble for the better part of an hour to gain one thousand feet in elevation. Disappointment Cleaver breaks people. At this point, many realize they have underestimated climbing this mountain. They give up and turn around. I worried that I would be one of the quitters.

I decided that this was probably a good time to fess up about my water situation.

"Guys? My tube is completely frozen. I haven't been able to get any water out."

"Well, that won't do!" Mike said, quickly coming over to inspect and help.

"Heather, put your tube in your coat for a little while. That will melt the ice. Here. Take my water bottle," John said.

"I can't take your water bottle, John. What will you drink?"

"I'll be fine. Have you had anything to drink since we left?" he asked.

"Not really."

"Heather, get the water."

He turned his pack to me so I could unzip the pocket and pull his water out. It was really wedged in there, and I started to make a joke about how pulling it out was like birthing a baby when it suddenly popped free and hit me full force in the nose.

"Ahhhh!"

"No!"

"Oh, man! Heather, are you okay?"

I held my nose and closed my eyes to let the stinging subside while I considered whether I had broken it or not. After a few moments, I decided I was fine. I opened my eyes to see three helmeted heads gathered round, peering down at me.

"I'm fine. I'll be fine." I said, embarrassed at the attention.

"Why don't you sit down for a minute?" Mike suggested. I found a rock and sat. Sterling noticed one of my crampons was a little twisted off the end of my boot and silently readjusted it for me.

I let him.

~

We'd been moving up the cleaver for about thirty minutes. Our purple rope was coiled so that we wouldn't knock loose rocks down on other climbers, which created a tight seven feet between us. It was important that I keep the pace Mike and John set for the team, so I kept pushing, even though my heart rate was too high. It's best to climb with a low heart rate to avoid sweating. Sweat freezes and makes you cold.

Each step up was the equivalent of at least three or four steps on a staircase. Everything was jagged and uneven.

As I climbed, my mind drifted to the day in the library—the dark day when everything broke.

The situation between John and Lara had been going downhill for months, often exploding into arguments at the dance studio in front of the students. An imbalance of power existed between them. He was older, more experienced, a former star and champion, and male. She was younger, with lots of new, untested ideas, fewer trophies, and female.

It was obvious what needed to change. Lara needed to stop. She needed to fall in line with expectations of how a woman should act with a partner, not just in ballroom dance but in our LDS culture generally. I believed it was Lara's duty to lift John up to achieve his vision, not challenge his authority or process. The studio gave lip service to the idea that they were equal partners with their matching co-director titles, but in reality, her job was to facilitate his success. I wanted her to recognize when she should be quiet and let John lead. She also needed to do a better job of hiding her anger and distress while at the studio.

Meanwhile, John wasn't making enough of an effort to build up his dancers and manage the dance moms' expectations. Parents and students were angry. As the executive director, I expected him to put the studio's needs (which were really my needs) ahead of his wife's. I wanted him to figure out how to handle Lara so they could focus on the kind of coaching everyone wanted them to do. He needed to take the lead with his partner and convince her to submissively follow.

With the pressure of a national competition upon us, parents were frenzied. I'd fielded meeting after meeting, trying to bridge the gap between coaches, students, and parents. I was exhausted from trying to soften harsh words that were launched like missiles between opposing parties while still endeavoring to honor the gravity of people's feelings. The parents demanded action. A bold move was necessary, and it was my job to execute it.

Lara was breaking unspoken rules. She craved an equal voice with her husband, but no one wanted to give it to her—not John, not the parents, not the students, and least of all me. In demanding it, she was making trouble. I knew only one way to handle problem women who demanded too much power; I had seen it play out in ways big and small in various systems throughout my life.

I cried all night before our scheduled meeting as I struggled with the conflicting duties of boss and friend. I hated the position I was in. I couldn't see clearly for myself the right thing to do, and so, like a rookie, I trusted the voices around me that were the loudest and most persistent, voices that championed the idea that women who refuse to play by the rules need to be expelled.

The next day, I walked into the library, looked both my friends in the eye, and fired Lara.

And then sat paralyzed in my chair as I watched their marriage crumble.

~

At the top of Disappointment Cleaver, Mike, John, and Sterling had their packs off, backs to the rising sun. Below us, Rainier's ridges rippled away in waves of sapphire and cobalt. We were alone on the mountain until a small gray bird, no bigger than my fist, flew up and landed on a rock. She looked around as though being at twelve thousand feet was the most natural thing in the world. Nothing lives at twelve thousand feet. No trees, no scrubby little bushes, no insects—nothing that should

entice a little bird to make such a journey. I wondered what she was seeking.

Maybe she wondered what I was seeking.

~

From the top of Disappointment Cleaver, we meandered to the part of the trail that traverses massive crevasses. For now, there was still an ice bridge over the crevasses. There were anchors to secure our rope as we climbed through, an added safety measure in case one of us slipped or the bridge gave way. I felt incredibly grateful to the person who had left them there. They had taken the time to put the anchors in place—not for themselves and their own safety but for those who would come after. I was struck by the kind of love strangers show for each other sometimes.

As we moved up and over the ice bridge, I looked down, staring into the crevasse's belly. As the crevasse deepened, the snow and ice transitioned from soft and shimmering aquamarine to varying shades of magnificent blue to end in foreboding blackness. Beautiful, to be sure, but in a way that hushed and terrified. Without the lifeline of a rope, to slide into that blue was to slip into your tomb and become part of the mountain forever.

I was face-to-face with the thing I had feared for so long. But surprisingly, I didn't want to turn away or hurry or panic or cry. I wanted to take it in, to absorb the terrible beauty of it. To look deeper.

A few months after that day at the library, buoyed by family, John and Lara decided to move to Utah to try to salvage their marriage. I traveled to Utah for a work project, and Lara and I met at a café. I'd hoped to reconcile but still hadn't taken the time to authentically see and understand her. She recognized this and flung all of her pain into words like poisonous darts. After that, neither she nor John spoke to me for a very long time. Eventually, they did share that they had decided to divorce. It was amicable, they said, and they loved each other more than ever.

Nonetheless, divorce felt like massive failure. Not their failure—mine. I thought maybe if I'd been a better leader and had done a better job of managing the culture at the studio, they could have worked together peaceably. Or if it were inevitable that co-directorship in title only would come to a head, maybe if I'd chosen different words at the library—if I could have just said it better—they would still be married. Maybe if I'd been a better friend, I could have helped Lara to stay connected with her faith. If I had shown up in the way I should have, maybe she wouldn't have felt the need to pull away from both the Church and John, which to me felt like one and the same. Maybe if I hadn't failed them, their happily-forever-after, with all of its eternal implications, would still be viable.

After the divorce, I numbed my pain by drowning myself in busyness and productivity, proving to the world that I wasn't also broken. Obviously, I didn't have time to be broken. I was too needed and important.

I also didn't have time for any relationships outside of my immediate family. At church, I sat alone with my arms crossed over my belly as though I was protecting it and didn't talk to anyone. I declined all social invitations from kind women who reached out to me. At work, I hid in my office and did my best to avoid all unnecessary interactions. I cried a lot—at random times and for no apparent reason. With each passing day, my husband was becoming increasingly concerned about me.

Untethered, I'd slipped into a crevasse mentally and emotionally. Stuck and traumatized, I didn't know how to get out of the place I was in.

Then one day I found the most beautiful bouquet of flowers on my doorstep. It was an ordinary day, not a birthday or an anniversary or a get-flowers kind of day. And these flowers were so lovely—the kind of flowers that I would choose for myself. The words on the card were simple. "I can never take back the words I said when I was angry, but I just want you to know how sorry I am."

It was as though a long purple rope had finally made its way down to the place where I was trapped, and someone began rescuing me from the pit.

I just never expected that person would be Lara.

~

Mike was relieved when the crevasses were behind us. The change in his mood from hyper-focused to jovial made me realize that we had just overcome something significant.

All that was left was two thousand feet of switchbacks up the glacier. At this elevation and pitch, we hoped to climb five hundred feet per hour. The sun was rising in the sky, the snow was a blinding white, and the view of the blue-green world far below us was stunning in every direction.

We walked along a little footpath in the snow with the mountain sloping aggressively down to the rocks and crevasses below. If I looked down, the whole world would spin. If I just kept my eyes on the trail, I was fine. The snow was perfect—not so icy that our crampons couldn't dig in, but also not so melty that the snow moved under our feet. I took each crunchy step with careful intentionality—a promise I'd made to Matt, who couldn't come because of a hip injury. "Make every step a good step," he'd said with his arms wrapped around me, more than a little sad he had to sit this one out. He'd been here before with John and Lara and understood the beauty of the journey.

Although less physically demanding than the cleaver, this last bit was as unrelenting as an eternal step class. Mike allowed us a break every hour or so. Sterling and I were both climbing at an altitude higher than we'd ever attempted, which led to a lingering concern about altitude sickness. Without warning, altitude sickness could cripple a climber with headaches, dizziness, or nausea, making it impossible for them and their team to progress further. So far, we'd been lucky.

As I climbed, I wondered where John's mind was right now. Two nights ago, at dinner, he told me he was trying to bring a better version of himself to the mountain this time. To meet the same challenges but respond differently. A do-over.

I thought of my last conversation with Lara about a month before. Since the flowers, we had been working on rebuilding our friendship. We didn't talk about the past very often, but sometimes we ventured there cautiously. On this night, she had been talking about John and their climb and the proposal and the heaviness of it all when she turned to me suddenly and said, "Let's be honest, John was carrying YOUR expectations up the mountain."

Those words pierced my heart like a knife. For years, this fear lived inside of me, that my actions had been the impetus for so much pain and regret—the marriage, the studio challenges, the divorce—all of it shrouded in my warped expectations. At the time, I'd loved being tangled in the excitement of their relationship. I'd been eager for John to propose. What could be more heroic, more impressive, than a proposal on top of a giant mountain? I told him it would make for a story that would echo through generations to his children's children's children. I didn't stop to think that maybe my words were putting undue pressure on John to take this step before he was really ready. Maybe, at my urging, the careful development of their relationship was given short shrift in service of an Instagrammable proposal.

When Lara mentioned my expectations, it was the first time someone had spoken these things out loud, at least in my presence. My fear now entered the world, took form, and demanded that I see it for what it was.

It wasn't pretty.

Like John, to face my fears, I needed a do-over. I needed to climb a mountain, this time not staying behind, safe and sanctimonious, and without slipping invisible burdens into anyone's pack. Here I was, trudging along a mountain ridge, doing the work, managing my own journey, and not trying to craft anyone else's experience from afar.

This time I was carrying my own damn expectations up the mountain.

As I climbed and experienced the mountain for myself, I began to understand something that had never been clear to me before: I didn't create the crevasse between John and Lara when I fired her. Crevasses are caused by stressors hidden deep within the glacier; they are massive and often invisible for a very long time. A climber doesn't create a crevasse when they step onto it; they just break through the facade of ice and snow that was allowing it to stay hidden. Observing the wild and powerful mountain helped me understand that there are a few things I have control over—and many I do not. Some of the things I do not control are other people's happiness and the fundamental needs of their souls. Coming to terms with that idea was both liberating and terrifying.

~

There were four false summits, and Mike liked to use them to tease us. "What if I told you that was the summit?" he'd say. "Is it?" we'd ask each time, taking the bait. "Nope! It's a false summit! Hours left to climb!"

And then finally, one of his false summits looked different than the others—instead of a just a ridge of snow, this one was rocky. "What if I told you that was the summit?" he asked. "I'd say we have hours left to climb," I said with a sigh, tired and dejected.

"Well, you're wrong because this IS the summit!" he said enthusiastically, knowing that his pronouncement would be as welcome as Christmas morning.

I couldn't believe it. The end was in sight. I was actually going to summit Mt. Rainier.

~

At the rim of the crater, we high-fived and shouted. To get to the highest point of the mountain, we had to cross the crater and go up

a small knoll, but now we were certain to summit. We basked in the warm glow of what we'd accomplished together.

A feeling of intense empowerment washed over me. I'd answered my own question—I was strong enough and brave enough.

At the summit, without warning or explanation, John dropped to his knees and began to pray. Mike, Sterling, and I instantly assumed the role of keeping vigil. Our time spent linked up by the purple rope had connected all of us in ways that allowed us to sense one another's needs. We knew in this moment John needed silence and space.

The wind whipped across the crater rim, gusting in fits. Underneath that noise was the subtle sound of air moving through the sky, the sound you hear with your ear next to a conch seashell but a thousand times bigger.

Sanctifying enormous pain requires an enormous altar. I realized John had come to the biggest one he could think of, bringing what remained of his bitterness, resentment, anger, and distress. When he fell to his knees, he laid these things down on the snow, each its own fatted calf, and prayed to be released from their weight forever.

And while I didn't get on my knees, because that gesture belonged to John, I stood atop my altar and said my own silent prayer. I released the weight of what I had been carrying—the parts that were mine and the parts that had never been mine to carry in the first place. I decided it was time to forgive myself. Whatever mistakes I made along the way, whatever pain I had caused, my path had brought me here, to this otherworldly place at the top of the earth. I wouldn't trade this experience for anything. I accepted the path that had brought me to it.

I had long been willing to offer grace to other people. It was time I found some for myself.

A new wind came. We couldn't see it, but we felt its power. It swirled around, among, and through us, pulling at our coats, stinging our cheeks, and filling our lungs. This was a sacred, purifying wind that exists only at the tops of the mountains, where earth and heaven meet.

The wind received the heavy things that each of us had brought, lifting each to the sky, where they transformed into tiny bits of sand and dust and blew away.

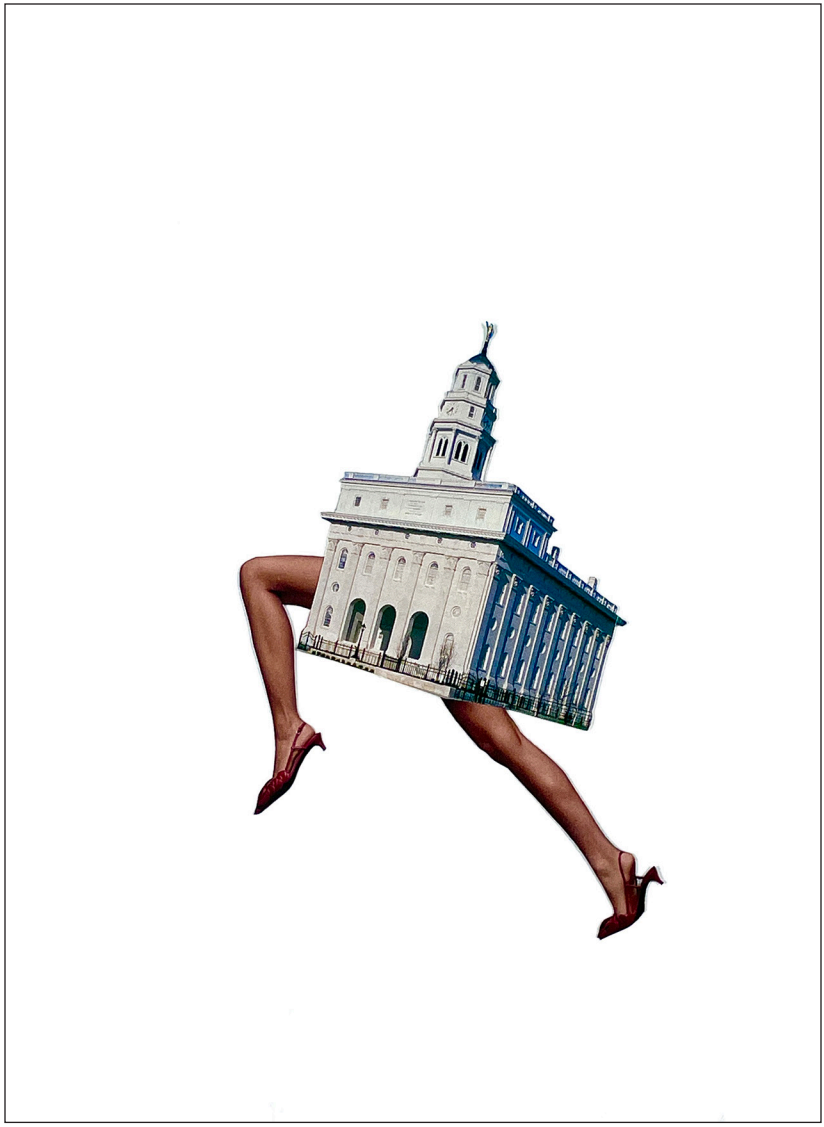
John got up from his knees and came toward us. The four of us wrapped our arms around each other in a giant embrace, the embrace of people who experience something too big for words.

Then John had a big hug just for me. "Does this mean we're friends again?" I asked through tears.

He was crying too. "We've always been friends, Heather. We just needed to walk a different path for a little while."

And with that, we walked to the edge of the summit and looked out over the world and screamed into the wind—for him, for me, and for Lara too. One final release of whatever was still hurting between us.

HEATHER J. LONGHURST {heather@ourwildpreciouslife.com} recently retired from a two-decades-long career in dance education, where she served as executive director of Pacific Ballroom Dance, a non-profit organization located in Auburn, Washington. An emerging writer, her work has been featured in *No Sidebar* and published by the Center for the Study of Christian Values in Literature. She is currently writing her first novel. You can find her at www .ourwildpreciouslife.com.



"Temple Body: Holiness to the Lord Running,"
10" x 8", hand-cut magazine images
on fabric-wrapped art board, 2021,
by Amber Lee Weiss

A REFLECTION ON JOSEPH SMITH'S RESTORATIONIST VISION OF TRUTH

Ryan D. Ward

"Truth, the sum of existence . . ."
—John Jaques, 1851[1]

The way of viewing truth in the Church differs from the common philosophical concept of truth as something that corresponds to the historical or present facts of a given situation. The Church's version of truth is that it is something possessed by God, it never varies, is eternally fixed, and is made known to humankind through revelation.[2] This absolute view of truth is problematic because it is open to being used by those in positions of power and influence to manipulate and oppress others. Everyone is familiar with the colloquialism "history is written by the victors."[3] This statement conveys the way that the concept of truth has been manipulated and used to oppress throughout history. The damage and trauma is littered across generations, from the ruthless persecution of so-called heretics after the adoption of Christianity as the religion of Roman empire to the Spanish Inquisition, from the Crusades to the witch hunts, from the massive slaughter, enslavement,

1. From "Truth," a poem included in the first edition of the Pearl of Great Price. It was later set to music by Ellen Knowles Melling, titled "Oh Say, What is Truth?," and included in the LDS hymnal as no. 272.

2. *Doctrines of the Gospel Student Manual*, Religion 430 and 431 (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2010), chap. 1, available at https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/doctrines-of-the-gospel-student-manual/1-divine-truth?lang=eng.

3. This statement is generally attributed to Winston Churchill, although this claim is unsubstantiated.

exploitation, and oppression of Indigenous peoples throughout the world sanctioned by Christian colonizers to the use of theological and scriptural "truth" to oppress and marginalize women and other vulnerable groups throughout history and into the present day.

In some cases, the concept of absolute truth is used to explicitly oppress and exploit in the name of religion. But more often, this view of truth leads to an inadvertent discounting or marginalizing of alternative views and groups. Due to the specific gender, racial, and cultural makeup of Church leadership, some groups or issues may not be addressed or considered. At an institutional level, religious organizations, including our own, may dictate acceptable positions, doctrinal beliefs, and practices and levy penalties for nonconformity. Those with different experiences who criticize or openly challenge official teaching or narrative can be subject to informal ostracization or formal ecclesiastical discipline. Thus, tight control is maintained over the interpretation and verification of truth by leaders, and the degree to which personal experience and opinion may be held to correspond to the truth is circumscribed. Because an absolute notion of truth is vulnerable to misuse and abuse, what is needed is a way to incorporate individual, varied, and diverse human experience into our understanding and conceptual view of truth.

Truth Revealed Anew

On May 6, 1833, following the summer adjournment of the School of the Prophets in Kirtland, Ohio, Joseph Smith received a revelation that was to become section 93 of the Doctrine and Covenants. The revelation taught that all humankind existed in the beginning with God and Christ as intelligences—autonomous agents organized by God: "Man was also in the beginning with God. Intelligence, or the light of truth, was not created or made, neither indeed can be."[4] In the very next verse comes a startling pronouncement which forms the basis of my exploration: "All truth is independent in that sphere in which God has

4. Doctrine and Covenants 93:29.

placed it, to act for itself, as all intelligence also; otherwise there is no existence."[5]

There are three important aspects of the verse to consider: 1) truth is independent, 2) truth is an autonomous agent able to act for itself, 3) existence itself depends on this independence and autonomous agency.

Truth as an Independent Agent

For truth to be independent suggests that it exists outside of God's control. It has not been created, neither can it be, according to verse 29. God is able to place it in a specific sphere, but, once placed, it functions as an autonomous agent that acts outside of God's control. Aside from this verse, there is no further mention of the independence of truth anywhere in the scriptures. Teaching and interpretation of this concept by Church leaders often mentions this verse as indicative of the fact that there is absolute and relative truth.[6] Absolute truths cannot be changed, whereas relative truth refers to facts that someone discovers that are not veridical statements of reality but approximations that change with further inquiry, experience, and revelation.[7]

Absolute truths are here referred to as the unchanging reality of God's relation to the world—even if people do not believe, they are still true. But it is unclear how this type of "truth" stands independent of a creator of the world to which it applies and by which it is circumscribed. Furthermore, according to Alma, God is also subject to eternal laws that must be obeyed or he will "cease to be God."[8] This presents

5. Doctrine and Covenants 93:30.

6. Spencer W. Kimball, "Absolute Truth" (devotional address given at Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, Sept. 6, 1977, available at https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/spencer-w-kimball/absolute-truth/).

7. D. Todd Christofferson, "Truth Endures" (address to CES religious educators, Salt Lake Tabernacle, Salt Lake City, Utah, Jan. 26, 2018, available at https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/broadcasts/article/evening-with-a-general-authority/2018/01/truth-endures?lang=eng).

8. Alma 42:13, 22.

a conundrum in that it is unclear how laws that stand outside of God and to which he is subject could be "placed" anywhere by him, as is clearly stated in verse 30. For these and other reasons, truth here being independent does not seem to refer to an absolute truth of God or the universe that remains unchanging and unchangeable for eternity.

The fact that truth is referred to here as an autonomous agent that can act for itself has more scriptural and doctrinal parallels within our theology.[9] The doctrine of agency is critical to our understanding of the purpose and meaning of the existence of humanity. The interpretation that truth is placed by God in a sphere to act for itself is consistent with foundational Mormon teachings about agency and supports interpreting verse 30 as indicating that truth is crucially related to embodied mortal experience.

Truth as the Action of Embodied Humanity in History

If we consider embodied human beings as a critical aspect of truth, our understanding of truth necessarily has to be informed and conditioned by the critical and varied aspects of human existence. The embodied nature of our existence means that each individual will live out their lives in different places, countries, cities, and are subject to different life experiences, opportunities, and challenges as a function of their particular state, including the impacts of gender, race, and ethnicity, along with cultural, economic, political, and other factors. If embodied human existence constitutes truth, then truth must encompass the range of experiences, perspectives, choices, consequences, and life trajectories of all humanity. Truth was placed in the world as embodied humanity in all its infinite diversity and continues to be truth as we grow and act as agents throughout our lives.

To clarify, truth can be defined as *the action of embodied humanity in history*. As such, truth in the world is ever evolving and becoming. Verse 24 says that truth is "knowledge" of things as they are, and were,

9. 2 Nephi 2:13–26; 2 Nephi 10:23; Alma 12:31; Helaman 14:30.

and are to come. I take this to mean that knowledge of these things comes through experience, either personally or through the works and words of others, or through divine gift of understanding the realities of human experience throughout history. In experiencing, we come to know the truth of human existence. Truth is, in actuality, things as they have been, are, and will be.[10] For individuals, then, truth constitutes knowledge of human action in history. From an omniscient perspective, truth is the actual, ongoing action of humanity in history.

Jesus as the Truth

Because truth cannot be separated from individual human experience, only one who fully experienced what all of humanity experienced could claim to understand and comprehend all truth. In section 88, Joseph revealed how Christ's atonement and condescension into mortality had granted him such comprehension: "He that ascended up on high, as also he descended below all things, in that he comprehended all things, that he might be in all and through all things, the light of truth."[11] Now we begin to understand what Jesus means when he refers to himself as "the truth." His life in mortality, surrounded by the suffering of the poor, oppressed, and marginalized, already had allowed him to "bear witness unto the truth."[12] Furthermore, one interpretation of this view

10. This notion of truth parallels the thought of Hegel, who asserted that to truly know something was to know its past, present, and future state. All present "truth" is but a snapshot of the "absolute" or "totality" of truth that is becoming. See Georg Hegel, *The Science of Logic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015; first published in German in 1812). Similarly, Harold Joachim's "coherence" theory of truth suggests that something is true to the extent that it coheres with the character of a more significant "whole." For Joachim, there is only one "truth," and individual judgments or beliefs are only true "to a degree." See Harold Joachim, *The Nature of Truth* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1977; first published in 1906).

11. Doctrine and Covenants 88:6.

12. John 18:37.

is that Jesus' solidarity with humanity through his incarnation and atonement enabled him to experience all that embodied humanity had, would, and will experience. When Jesus personally experienced in mortality the sum total of human experience, he quite literally became the totality of truth.

Another interpretation that is consistent with the view of truth proposed here is that in calling himself the truth, Jesus was explicitly referring to his mortal embodiment. According to this view, Jesus was truth in the same way that embodied humanity is truth. By referring to himself as truth, Jesus affirmed this central characteristic of the truth of humanity. Although this idea may seem unfamiliar to many members of the Church, it has a long historical and scholarly tradition. At issue is the meaning of the phrase "son of man," which appears numerous times in the Bible. The translation of the phrase from Hebrew and Aramaic indicates that it was a colloquial way of referring to a generic human being, or humanity generally, but with a specific contrast to deity in its emphasis on the mortal condition.[13]

Why would Jesus refer to himself in this way? Why not refer to his own divinity, or use the other names that have become common for him: Savior, Redeemer, Lord, Messiah? In fact, at every opportunity to embrace these titles, Jesus rejected them, preferring this diminutive generic term for humanity. The revelation by Joseph Smith that Jesus grew from "grace to grace" and "received not of the fullness at first"[14] suggests that he may have been unaware of his purpose and mission for a time. One might assume that once awareness struck, he would begin referring to his divinity, but this does not happen. There seems to be something very important to Jesus about his mortal embodiment and humanity in general. The view of truth taken here suggests that it was

13. Restoration scripture has been interpreted as indicating that the name is another title for the Savior. See Doctrine and Covenants 45:39; 49:6, 22; 58:65; Moses 6:57.

14. Doctrine and Covenants 93:13.

Jesus' humanity that made him the truth, not his divinity. His referral to himself as "son of man" seems to indicate that he recognized the truth of his embodied mortal action as a part of the ongoing truth of humanity acting in history.

God's Glory as Truth

We understand the purpose of this life as being to demonstrate that we can keep God's commandments, make and keep sacred covenants by receiving saving ordinances, and become progressively sanctified through the atonement of Christ. A succinct statement of this is given in the book of Moses: "For behold, this is my work and my glory, to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man."[15] Here we find ourselves at loggerheads regarding what to make of a scriptural term that is used in multiple different ways. Specifically, what exactly is referred to here by God's "glory"? At various times in the scriptures, "glory" refers to worldly fame and accolades,[16] heavenly blessing and favor,[17] exultation,[18] aesthetic beauty,[19] brightness,[20] fullness of life in the world to come,[21] and an enabling power,[22] among other things. Later in the revelation in section 93, Joseph gives as succinct a definition of God's glory as we get

15. Moses 1:39.

16. Proverbs 25:27; Matthew 4:8; 6:2; John 7:18; 1 Thessalonians 2:6; 1 Peter 1:24; Doctrine and Covenants 10:19; 76:61.

17. 1 Samuel 4:21; Psalm 8:5; 62:7; 84:11; Proverbs 4:9.

18. Psalm 149:5; Jeremiah 9:24; 1 Corinthians 3:21; James 3:14; 1 Peter 1:8; 2 Nephi 33:6; Alma 26:16.

19. 1 Corinthians 11:15.

20. 1 Corinthians 15:41; 2 Corinthians 3:7; Doctrine and Covenants 76:70.

21. Proverbs 4:9; 2 Corinthians 4:17; Colossians 3:4; 1 Timothy 3:16; 1 Peter 5:1, 4, 10; 2 Peter 1:17; Alma 14:11; 36:28; Doctrine and Covenants 6:30; 29:12; 58:3; 66:2; 75:5; 76:6; 101:65; 104:7; 124:17; 130:2; 132:19; 133:32; 136:31; Moses 6:59; 7:3; Abraham 3:26.

22. Moses 1:2, 11, 14.

in scripture, yet when considered with the view of truth explored above, it provides a key to understanding God in relation to humanity and why human existence and experience as truth is crucial to God: "The glory of God is intelligence, or, in other words, light and truth."[23] Up until now in the revelation, Joseph has played loosely with these three terms: intelligence, light, and truth. Here he clarifies for us that intelligence, light, and truth are synonymous. Not only that, they *are* the glory of God. When considered in conjunction with the interpretation of truth explored above, we can interpret this verse to mean that *the glory of God is the perpetual and ongoing truth being lived out in and through embodied humanity*.

This definition of glory helps us make sense of Moses 1:39 in context. The way we usually read this verse is that God's work and glory, everything that he does and the crowning achievement of his being, is to bring to pass our immortality and eternal life. But this verse comes at the end of Moses' vision of the creation and the natural and human history of the world.[24] God has here shown Moses all of the earth's existence and inhabitants, the whole of the natural history of the earth. He has also intimated that there are numberless other worlds and inhabitants that he has created. It is at the end of this spectacular vision that verse 39 comes. God seems to be saying that the driving force in all of creation, including humankind, is to progress toward a state of godliness. Everything that has happened, everything that is happening, and everything that will happen, is moving toward that final end. God's glory is creation and humanity in action in history. Because this theology considers all of our experience in mortality as helping us to become like God—indeed, gods in our own right—we can therefore view God as the potentiality of humanity and creation. As such, God's glory is necessarily incomplete and ongoing and will not be realized fully until all humanity and creation lives out the totality of its existence. As long

23. Doctrine and Covenants 93:36.

24. Moses 1:27–28.

as there is an ongoing creation that acts with agency, God's truth and glory will continue to deepen and expand.

An Expanded Restorationist View of Truth

The view of truth as the action of embodied humanity in history cannot accommodate an interpretation of truth that includes anything less than the totality of human existence and experience. According to the current interpretation, God cannot create truth because truth is independent of God. He organizes it in creation, and it acts for itself. It is therefore not possible for any organization or religious tradition to hold either more or less truth than any other, any more than it is possible for God to create truth. This means that God also does not dictate what is true and what is not because truth is a function of embodied human experience. Intelligence, cloaked in mortal humanity, acts with agency, and this is truth. It is not something that can be revealed, verified, or witnessed to, at least not in the sense we traditionally think of. It is simply the ongoing action of humanity in history.

Rather than being a form of relativism or pointing to the belief that all truth claims are equally valid and therefore we can believe and act however we will, this position claims that truth, as understood by individuals, is incomplete because it forms only a part of the total truth as comprised by human existence. Therefore, it makes no sense to compare one "truth" to another because the sum total of all truths being lived out individually and in relation is the full truth. Thus, this view subsumes relativism within a totality of truth that is ongoing, continuously changing, and being realized in the lived experience of humanity.

Our faith tradition claims to accept all truth wherever it may be found, yet we often view and portray ourselves as holding a strict monopoly on truth. The interpretation explored here suggests that such claims are incompatible with the fundamental nature of truth as an independent agent. Thus, for our tradition to encompass all truth, we would need to recognize, accept, and claim all human experience as the ongoing truth of God. The challenge of our missionary and other efforts

would not be to determine and decide how most successfully to convert others to our faith but instead how to understand and experience our lives within our covenant community in light of, and in relation to, the ongoing truth around us in our communities, cities, nations, and the world.

Within our congregations and pews, we would feel less threatened and more empowered by the diversity of experience and perspective of our members. Historically oppressed groups, such as women, racial groups, LGBTQ+ individuals, and other minorities, would be given respected places in our conversations and efforts. We would recognize that prevailing views, understandings, and treatment of some groups and individuals have been conditioned by a long history of the normalization of their marginalization and oppression in society. Failure to acknowledge this, coupled with a position on truth that denies the reality of the truth of all unique existence and experience, has amplified marginalization in our faith tradition and theology. Recognizing all lived experience for the truth it is would help us to embark on the long-needed and painful journey of justice and reconciliation. Such reconciliation would allow our faith tradition to more fully reflect and embody the full majesty and beauty of the glory of God manifest in the ongoing truth of the lived experience of humanity. I believe that the seeds of a more universal, expansive, and inclusive vision of truth were revealed, however fleetingly and opaquely, to Joseph Smith in this brief but magnificent verse. Perhaps reflections like this one can contribute to the recovery and further imagination, development, and articulation of this unique and powerful restorationist concept of truth.

RYAN D. WARD {ryan.ward@otago.ac.nz} received a BS, MS, and PhD from Utah State University, specializing in experimental psychology. Following postdoctoral work at Columbia University, he accepted a position at the University of Otago, where he is currently a senior lecturer in the Department of Psychology. He studies the neural basis of learning and models of psychiatric disease. He teaches courses on drugs, addiction, policy, and research methods. He lives with his wife and five children in New Zealand.

DEVELOPING TALENTS

Alene Wecker

As a mother of six young children, I was surprised when I received the impression to apply for grad school. I already held a bachelor of music, and though I taught voice lessons and sang in various community organizations, none of those things require credentials. It made little sense to put my two preschool-aged children into daycare just to advance a seemingly useless degree.

However, the prompting was undeniable. I was certain that the Lord must want me to further my education so I could begin singing professionally. He would put me on a path where I could use my talents to bless and edify the lives of others.

I was accepted into a master's program and began balancing work, kids, and school. Managing everyone's schedules was not easy, but I was constantly buoyed by the knowledge that God had a work for me to do and that I was exactly where I needed to be. I fully anticipated that he would continue to help me after graduation as I began searching for employment.

But the life of a professional American opera singer means a lot of travel, usually four to six weeks away for every gig. The thought of leaving my family for that length of time was heartrending. Another option was to work in Europe, where opera singers are employed by a single theater and therefore do not need to travel. But this would require uprooting my children from their friends and family to a place where they do not even speak the language. Though a transcontinental move presented logistical challenges that gave me panic attacks, I focused on my vision of what God planned for me and did everything in my power to make it happen. It wasn't until I began my European audition tour that I learned I didn't want to make the sacrifices a career

in opera would necessitate. Not only that, but it also wasn't what he wanted for me, either.

I returned home from Europe, discouraged and confused. Had I misunderstood Heavenly Father's promptings? What was I supposed to do now? Why had I sacrificed so much to earn a degree if I wasn't going to use it?

I continued to teach and sing with community organizations, but even that was stalled by the pandemic. Opera houses throughout the world closed. With zero engagements on the horizon and six children who needed assistance with distance learning, I lost all motivation to practice.

I stopped singing.

After months of silence, I shook the proverbial cobwebs off my voice, sat at the piano, and sang through some of my favorite pieces. I had forgotten the joy of singing. A sense of peace enveloped me, knowing that I was again on the path he had envisioned for me. And it wasn't in Europe, sharing my talents with thousands. It was in my own home, singing for the sheer joy of it, in the middle of a pandemic.

Even as I offered a prayer of gratitude for the gift of song and the happiness it brought me, I still felt that I wasn't doing enough. After all, what good is art if it is not shared? It becomes no more than an ungiven gift, like a feast prepared and plated but never eaten. Yes, I could sit and feast alone, but indulging in a solitary meal hardly feels like it justifies the hours of labor required to create such decadence. My time in school felt both wasteful and selfish since I had diverted my attention away from my family for apparently no reason.

The next day, I was studying the Lord's words to Oliver Cowdery in Doctrine and Covenants 5:4: "And you have a gift . . . and I have commanded that you should pretend to no other gift until my purpose is fulfilled in this." I pondered again on his purpose in gifting me with my voice. To what end? How was I supposed to use this gift? In the still, quiet hours of the morning, the answers came.

What if God gave me the gift of my voice for my *own* enjoyment? Not to bless others but simply because he loves me and wants me to be happy? What if he built into the very fiber of my soul a way to experience joy during trials? A way to escape, a way for my soul to expand, a way for my heart to take flight? What if he loved me enough to provide this freedom when the demands of my young family pressed so heavily upon me that I often struggled to meet my own most basic needs? An outlet so accessible—available even while washing dishes and rocking babes—that I wouldn't even recognize his blessing? What if he's waiting for me to drop my warped vision of his will and all the shame associated with developing the gift he gave me and use it for the sole purpose of feeling joy?

I learned that I don't have to share my gifts with thousands to fulfill his purpose because when I sing, I feel God's love for me.

And that is enough.

ALENE WECKER {akwecker@gmail.com} obtained her master's degree in music from Brigham Young University in 2019 and then turned her attention to writing. She likes to tell herself her education comes in handy as she describes debutantes who, like herself, are frequently forced to display their mediocre skills at the pianoforte. Her debut novel, *An Engagement of Sorts*, was published by Covenant Communications in 2021.

"Temple Body: Moroni Head,"
10" x 8", hand-cut magazine images
on fabric-wrapped art board, 2021,
by Amber Lee Weiss

THE NEW CALLING

Robert Bennett

No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be,
Am an attendant lord, one that will do
To swell a progress, start a scene or two,
Advise the prince; no doubt, an easy tool,
Deferential, glad to be of use,
Politic, cautious, and meticulous;
Full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse;
At times, indeed, almost ridiculous—
Almost, at times, the Fool.
—T. S. Eliot, from "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"

I accepted the new calling, of course. Without reservation. My father raised me to always go wherever God asks me to go and all. Even though I suspected that Bishop Oaks was just being petty. He never came right out and officially declared it a punishment, of course, but the whole ward knew that it was. I mean, they had all heard what I said in fast and testimony meeting, and the bishop couldn't even wait two weeks before handing me my pink slip, promptly releasing me as the second counselor in the elders quorum presidency. The timing wasn't just suspicious; it was outright obvious, palpably premeditated. Bishop Oaks was sending a clear, unequivocal message: A price had to be paid for speaking out in sacrament meeting like that, for not toeing the party line in public. At least in the Boise Idaho West Stake Indian Lakes Ward. At least as long as Bishop Heber C. Oaks was presiding. Come hell or high water, he was going to run a tight ship, so there was not going to be some kind of mutiny under his watch. No, it's all "aye, aye, captain" or you'll swab the decks around here. In times like these, it is becoming increasingly difficult to tell the Christians from the pirates.

Maybe I never should have said it. Maybe this whole new calling thing was just part of some larger, divinely inspired repentance process designed to bring me back in line. Only when I was a kid—back in the early sixties—things were simpler. There were just the three R's: Recognize your sin, feel Remorse for it, and Resolve not to do it again. But nowadays the R's seem to keep multiplying. Restitution. Reformation. Realization. Before you knew it, there were five or seven. Renunciation. Requisition. Redemption. On a good day, sometimes as many as nine or even more. Regeneration. Renewal. Recovery. It has gotten to the point where there is a new R almost every week, and now they are telling me that I need to Recant, too. Give me a break! We all know that's not going to happen. If you put me in the same situation again, if I had to do it all over, we all know that I would say the exact same thing. Even when Brother Richardson cornered me after the meeting, I didn't back down, and my position hasn't changed one bit. If anything, stating it publicly has only strengthened my resolve.

Normally, I'm not one to make waves. Sure, I occasionally read *Dialogue* and *Sunstone*, but that doesn't mean that I don't believe in the Book of Mormon, and it clearly states that anyone with the spirit of contention is of the devil. So, I'm not one to casually contend, but this time somebody had to say something, and who else was going to do it? Not Brother Richardson or Sister Smoot. That's for sure. They always bought (and sold) the party line—hook, line, and sinker. Sure, Sister Anderson and Brother Graham were somewhat more nuanced, perhaps even sympathetic—behind closed doors at any rate—but neither of them had the backbone to ever stand up and say anything controversial in public. So, the lot fell to me, and I simply said what had to be said. As respectfully as I could, of course, but that doesn't mean that I pulled any punches. After all, my mother raised me to be bold and courageous, like Nephi and the armies of Helaman, so let's just say that everybody in the congregation knew exactly what I was saying and exactly why I was saying it. If this new calling is meant to be some kind of punishment for saying what had to be said, then I can live with that. After all, I knew

perfectly well the risk that I was taking. You can't say anything with a certain disposition in this church without assuming some level of risk. You'd have to be a real rookie to not know at least that much.

Not that getting called as the assistant ward librarian raised me to the level of a martyr. I wasn't some latter-day Giordano Bruno. Though he was, of course, a personal hero of mine. You always have to respect someone who isn't afraid to speak out and take a stand in front of a tough crowd. Well, I had spoken out, and I had taken my stand, and now it looked like I was going to spend the second hour every week standing next to a multifunctional Xerox Versalink C505 ConnectKey technology–enabled smart workplace assistant, handing out ragged old-school Bibles and triple combinations to smartphoneless Primary kids and checking out state-of-the-art audiovisual equipment to their technologically illiterate parents. The irony wasn't lost on me: I have been the director of special collections at the university for almost three decades now, and I am the only three-time past vice treasurer of the Association of College and Research Libraries, and now my new calling is to be a librarian, and an assistant librarian at that. Go figure.

So, I was promptly issued my new calling, and I was even sustained by the ward, unanimously—though I did notice that Sister Smoot and Brother Richardson never raised their hands either way—but I never did get officially set apart. Maybe the bishop was just trying to avoid me. You know, hoping to prevent an ugly confrontation over the substance of what I had said. Or maybe he was just busy. He had to call a new Sunday School presidency, and he was shuffling around a few of the Young Women counselors, after all. And tithing settlement was coming up, too, so it's not like he was just sitting around looking for things to do. Or maybe it just wasn't one of those callings. Maybe you don't really need the power of the priesthood or any special blessings from heaven to remember to always choose the double-sided option whenever possible. You know to save paper costs for the Lord's sacred tithing funds—and to protect the environment, of course. And maybe you don't really need to rely on anything more than the arm of flesh

to find the right pictures in the Gospel Arts Library. They are clearly numbered, after all, and there is always the head ward librarian, Sister Nelson, to show me the ropes if I ever lose my way.

And maybe they are right. Maybe I don't need the spirit of discernment or the gift of prophecy to hand out fraying hymn books or make sure the Roku is working properly. But just because I was never set apart, and just because I'm not exactly exercising priesthood keys, doesn't mean that I don't have to magnify my calling just like everybody else. As the Good Book says, there are diversities of gifts, differences of administration, and even multiplicities of operations, but the same God worketh all in all. The body may hath many members, but all the members of that body, being many, are but one body in the Lord, so the foot can't say to the hand, or the knee to the elbow, that one member hath more abundant comeliness than another. No, I am part of a team, the Lord's team, so I am going to step up to the plate and take my pitches just like everyone else in the lineup—even if I just so happen to be batting last. I may be just a guy, but I am the next guy up, so to speak, so I'm not going to let my teammates down.

The only problem was: How exactly do you magnify your calling as an assistant ward librarian? There just aren't any real-life examples in the scriptures. I mean, like Nephi, I, too, could go and do the things the Lord commands, but what exactly are His commandments for being an anxiously engaged assistant ward librarian? There are no sections in the D&C about how to collate copies of the Relief Society newsletter, and the Book of Mormon says nothing about how to pair different colored dry-erase markers with working erasers in individualized Ziploc bags. After all, us librarians aren't called to boldly preach sacred gospel truths like the Apostle Paul or to bring souls unto repentance like the sons of Alma, and you don't exactly need faith or forbearance to use the paper cutter, which is arguably my most serious responsibility. All you need is a little common sense and some basic principles of caution.

I guess that I could have fancied myself some kind of latter-day Mormon, dutifully preserving the records of my people and carefully

curating and editing my tribe's sacred archive of records, but that just seemed to be a delusion of grandeur. After all, Mormon was compiling centuries of golden plates into the most correct of any book on the face of this earth; I was just busy back-cataloguing the greatest hits of the past five decades, the halcyon days, of Church correlation. I wasn't making generation-defining editorial decisions or inserting bold prophetic interpolations to guide the narrative flow of a new book of scripture. I wasn't condensing missionary journals into daring tales of adventure and inspiring spiritual masterpieces. I wasn't carefully interweaving the sacred testimonies of ancient prophets into a brave new tapestry of revelation that would ultimately convince both the Jews and the Gentiles in these latter days. No! I am not Mormon, nor was I meant to be; I am but an attendant assistant ward librarian, one who will do, in a pinch, so I had to be content punching my own weight on this one.

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Obviously, the first thing that I needed to do, however, was to hearken unto the counsel of my presiding priesthood authority. After all, obedience is the first law of heaven and the first principle of obtaining righteousness unto the glories of the worlds hereafter, etc., etc. Only that was a little bit awkward. The next man up in my chain of command was Sister Nelson, but I had never served under a woman before. So, it took a little while before I could really envision our relationship in terms of the proper line of priesthood authority. I mean, it felt weird calling my superior simply "Sister." It seemed like I wasn't showing enough respect for her authority. But I couldn't really call her "President" either. She wasn't exactly the president of anything. And we had department heads up at the university, but "Head Nelson" all by itself sounded really awkward. I guess that I could have used the term "Headmistress," but that sounded too British. You know, all Hogwarts and Harry Potter. So, in the end, I really didn't have any other option than to just call her Sister Nelson and trust that she understood that I

meant it with all proper deference to her authority. I wanted to be clear that I always worked under her direction even if we did share many of the same duties and responsibilities.

Next, Sister Nelson and I needed to get on the same page—both with each other and with the librarians in the other wards. Initially, I thought that this obviously meant that we needed to hold some kind of Stake Librarian Executive Committee Correlation Meeting. I even drafted a brief agenda, but Sister Nelson didn't think that was necessary. She said that if we needed to coordinate anything with the other librarians, we usually just jotted something down on a Post-it Note and passed it on to them during the break between meetings. I was pretty sure that she was wrong, but she was my superior, so I deferentially demurred. Just to make sure that we weren't overlooking something important, however, I decided to consult the general Church handbook. The instructions for librarians were quite brief, but, as I suspected, I was right, of course. In a multi-ward building, the agent bishop is supposed to appoint a committee to coordinate the use of the library and manage the budget funds allocated to it. The committee is supposed to include a member of the Sunday School presidency and the head librarian from each ward, but what about the assistant ward librarian? It didn't say anything about me attending the meeting.

So, this put me in something of a pickle: I wanted to magnify my calling, of course, and contribute my heartfelt insights about library procedures and budget constraints, but I also wanted to follow the proper priesthood protocol, which clearly stated that the Stake Librarian Executive Committee Correlation Meeting was for head librarians only. How was I supposed to magnify my calling, however, if I wasn't even invited to the meeting? I guess that I would just have to sustain Sister Nelson's authority and indirectly pass on to her my suggestions through the proper chain of command.

But even this still put me in another pickle: I wanted to correct Sister Nelson and explain to her that the general handbook did call for a Stake Librarian Executive Committee Correlation Meeting, but

I didn't want her to think that I was trying to usurp her authority by going behind her back. I didn't want to throw a wrench in our budding relationship before it had barely even begun, so I prayed about it, but I didn't receive an immediate answer. So, I fasted for additional inspiration, and this time I did receive a distinct impression that maybe I should drop the whole thing and just use Post-it Notes like Sister Nelson had suggested. At least for now. I could always bring up this whole meeting thing later. Besides, it seemed like the old system had been working just fine, and who really needs an extra meeting, especially when you aren't even actually invited to it anyway. Maybe I'd revisit the whole issue in a few months. You know, after Sister Nelson and I developed more of a rapport and after I developed a better understanding of library procedures and policies. If I wasn't going to be attending the meeting myself anyhow, maybe I should start by drafting a white paper first. You know, just to roughly outline some of my most compelling proposals.

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I'm not proud of it, but I have to admit that I probably did waste my first couple weeks mostly moping around. Actually, I was pretty much outright sulking, if you want me to be perfectly honest. Being demoted to the library not only hurt my pride, but it also proved to be a colossal waste of time. Up at the university, the library was such a busy place: There were always acquisitions to make, collections to catalogue, old manuscripts to digitize, and new websites to design. But here at church, all I did was hand out crayons and glue sticks. Maybe the occasional pair of childproof scissors or odds and ends of scrap paper. Between meetings there would be a brief flurry of activity—for five or ten minutes at most—but then the rest of the time was completely dead. All this tedium, however, never seemed to bother Sister Nelson. While I sat there fretting and stewing in my own self-pity about my underutilized talents, she just read a book. She was always so engrossed that I figured

she was just reading some bowdlerized Mormon Harlequin romance, probably about two missionaries who knew each other in the premortal existence, but I asked her anyway: "What are you reading?"

"'Anti-Oedipus, Kinship, and the Subject of Affect: Reading Fanon with Deleuze and Guattari,'" she replied offhandedly. "It's a post-colonial analysis of queer concepts of kinship from diverse historical and theoretical perspectives."

"Deleuze and who?" I asked a little confused.

"Guattari," she clarified. "They are post-Freudian, post-Marxist French philosophers," she added as if that made any sense. She said that she had to read it for her philosophy class on post-structuralism, post-modernism, and post-something else. What is it with all the posts these days? It seems like everything, at least up at the university, is all post this or post that, but I don't pay any attention to all that newfangled nonsense. We didn't need any posts back when I was at BYU. We mostly just read Hugh Nibley. As far as I'm concerned, he will never go out of style like all of today's intellectual fads will.

"I guess that's why I like this calling so much," Sister Nelson continued. "I can get a little reading done when no one is in here, and with my twins due in two months, heaven knows that I need to keep ahead on the reading lists for my comprehensive exams. Sometimes, I think that the only reason I was called to this calling is because it is so easy I can still do it with my new babies." Her explanation of our calling wasn't doing anything to help my bruised ego, of course.

"With all this time on our hands, I just feel like there must be something we could do to magnify our calling a little more," I lamented out loud, hoping that my comment might spur Sister Nelson into taking our calling a little more seriously. I wasn't trying to be self-righteous, but back in my day we didn't do schoolwork on the Sabbath, let alone while we were on the clock for our church calling.

"I usually just read a book," she stated the obvious. "But if you really want to make yourself useful, I suppose that you could start by cleaning up this place a little. The shelves are so full of outdated handbooks and

unnecessary pamphlets that I don't even know where we are going to put next year's lesson manuals. I'd help you myself, but I have an exam tomorrow, so I really do need to finish this article."

"Oh, that's okay," I reassured her. "I'm not really doing anything anyhow, so I can get started by myself." After looking around a little, however, I saw what she was talking about: There were broken-down film strip projectors, piles of back issues of *Boys' Life*, dust-covered flannel board stories, partially completed stake histories from the 1940s, a tangled mess of unused thirty-year-old audiovisual cables, and mountains of cassette tapes by John Bytheway. Does anybody even own a cassette player anymore, and who is John Bytheway? And the more that I decluttered, the more I realized that this really is a crucial defining moment for ward librarians. Probably the most important age yet in the history of church libraries. With so many newly emergent media technologies and online resources, so much of the library's traditional functions, so many of its historic resources, are becoming obsolete. Consequently, it is our sacred duty as librarians to clean out these outdated materials, but without sacrificing any of the precious resources needed to retain a proper documentary record of who we are as a people, to preserve our religious heritage, and to compile our sacred history. As you can see, this requires a very delicate balancing act: We need to discard all unnecessary and irrelevant documents, but we also need to conserve the most precious records of our tribe.

Ultimately, I did a complete Marie Kondo and ended up discarding almost three-fourths of the library's print collection. Some might say that I was being excessive, and maybe I was walking some kind of avant-garde edge, but I just wanted to magnify my calling and be forward-looking. I didn't want to be trapped in some Gutenbergian echo chamber, nostalgically fetishizing the printed word. Of course, I kept all the musical scores for the choir, since it would look really weird for everyone in the choir to be holding their phones in their faces, and I siloed maybe a half-dozen copies of *Preach My Gospel*, since prospective missionaries really do use that one. But I discarded so many

unnecessary pamphlets and manuals that our empty library shelves were starting to look like a Soviet-era supermarket. Eventually we'd have to think of creative ways to refill all this newly acquired space with innovative new resources, like perhaps expanded ward histories with personal testimonies from the youth, pictures from the ward Trunk-or-Treat, and fun videos of the Relief Society presidency, and maybe that would be the perfect excuse to convene a Ward Librarian Executive Committee Correlation Meeting. I had already begun filling a notebook with possible new ideas. In the meantime, however, I started by putting up an announcement that the library was looking for new books and asking members to donate any old books that they might have lying around. In just two short months, ward members donated over a hundred books, plenty enough to start restocking the library.

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Before I could get to that important task, however, Sister Nelson and I had to face several sharp theological dilemmas. For example, what were we supposed to do with our first edition of Bruce R. McConkie's *Mormon Doctrine*? Were we supposed to simply discard it because it contains outdated doctrinal errors, especially about Black men and the priesthood, which continues to be such a politically controversial topic? And yet, if we just throw this whole volume out, aren't we destroying a vital part of our sacred tradition, whitewashing the record of what past Church leaders have said, and creating a memory hole that erases our history? And what if some member of the ward wanted to research the historical evolution of the concept of outer darkness? Wouldn't *Mormon Doctrine* be a perfect, almost indispensable, reference? Maybe we should just split the difference and swap our first edition for a revised second edition, but then wouldn't we lose some of the historical poignancy, the unique flavor and character, the personality and genius of the undiluted original? I was torn. As a special collections librarian, I knew the priceless historical value of such a seminal document, so

I couldn't bring myself to discard what was practically a relic, but as a member of the contemporary Church, I must admit that I found its doctrinal errors painfully inconsistent with the forward march of continuing revelation.

I also noticed that we had several copies of the 1990 edition of *For the Strength of Youth*, which labels homosexuality an abomination. More recent editions, however, have revised this down to just a serious sin, so aren't these later revisions more in line with the counsel of the living prophet? I mean won't we as librarians be held responsible by the Lord for loaning out outdated guidelines? And the 1990 edition of *For the Strength of Youth* is hardly a cultural masterpiece that needs to be carefully preserved. After praying together with Sister Nelson, of course, we agreed to keep the McConkie but discard the youth pamphlets. This seemed like an elegant solution: keep pace with the Lord's ongoing process of ever-new, ever-changing revelation while still preserving some seminal traces of the sacred history of our tribe.

It was our print copies of Boyd K. Packer's *To Young Men Only*, however, that posed our greatest dilemma. That had been a crucial moral guidepost for me when I was going through puberty, and it could undoubtedly still inspire new generations of youth to live chaste lives of upstanding moral purity, but the Church has stopped publishing it. I guess that some of its teachings about homosexuality and masturbation have become politically incorrect, but it is a classic sermon delivered with such power and conviction that I hate to part with it. So, what are we supposed to do with our remaining nineteen print copies of this pamphlet in 2020? Maybe we needed to consult someone higher up, so I asked Sister Nelson if I could draft a letter to the bishop and the stake president asking for their guidance. She said that she wasn't sure what to do, so she gave me the green light to write my letter, though she was a little concerned that maybe we shouldn't further burden the bishop and the stake president since they were already so busy with the recent shakeup on the high council and so many temple recommend interviews. I assured her, however, that you can never go wrong by following

the sacred chain of command of the Lord's holy Melchizedek Priesthood. After all, that's what the priesthood line of authority is there for.

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Just as I started drafting my letter, however, Brother Brown stopped by to borrow a stapler—and to fill me in on how Ryan's mission was going. Ryan had been in Buenos Aires for six or seven months now, and every week Brother Brown stopped by to show me another round of photos. "Here's Ryan's new companion. Here's Ryan's latest baptism. Here's Ryan at the Rose Garden in Palermo Park. Here's Ryan at Avenida 9 de Julio. Here's Ryan at a barbecue with his new ward."

"Looks like he is at least eating well," I noted casually. "Nothing quite like a fine Argentine grill, but how is the mission work going?"

"Oh, it is going great," he continued. "Ryan and his new companion are now the top baptizers in the mission. They have baptized every week for the last three months. It's BreighEllen he is worried about now."

Brother Brown was, of course, referring to the Hansen girl. She and Ryan had been dating since their junior year of high school. They were our ward's Prince Harry and Meghan Markle. Such a perfect couple. Glamorous model citizens, but still spirited and independent-minded. She was supposed to be waiting for him, but from the sound of things, maybe she was having second thoughts. "Did she Dear John him?" I asked cautiously.

"Not yet, but they are going through a rough patch. I can't really go into all the details, of course, but he has been struggling with his testimony. It's nothing serious, just all the usual stuff: the conflicting accounts of the First Vision, Joseph's early treasure digging and folk magic, the rock in the hat, anachronisms in the Book of Mormon, Book of Abraham translation issues, Lamanite DNA, Deutero-Isaiah, Black men and the priesthood, the CES Letter, and, of course, polygamy. Anyhow, when Ryan told BreighEllen that he was having second thoughts about his testimony, she started having second thoughts about

him. They are working things out now, but can you keep them in your prayers?" he asked before hurrying off to class with the stapler.

"I can do more than that," I replied, stopping him momentarily. "Why don't you send him this copy of Richard Bushman's *Rough Stone Rolling*? Brother Graham just donated a second copy to the library, so we don't really need it. It sure helped me when I was going through my faith crisis. Maybe it could help Ryan regain his testimony, too. And Sister Anderson also donated copies of Terryl and Fiona Givens's *The Crucible of Doubt* and Patrick Mason's *Planted: Belief and Belonging in an Age of Doubt*. Do you think either of those would be helpful?"

"Well, I'm not quite sure that is exactly what Ryan needs right now, but I'll keep it in mind for the future," Brother Brown thanked me politely. I think he was making a real mistake by turning down the Bushman volume. It really is a game-changer, but I suppose he probably knows Ryan's spiritual needs right now better than I do.

That was another part of the calling that I hadn't anticipated: just how many prayers you would be asked to say on behalf of the sick and the afflicted. Sister Call had already stopped by to ask me if I could pray for her brother's cousin's niece who has cancer, and Brother Reynolds had requested that I keep in mind his sister who is going through a divorce. Add to that Sister Kimball's daughter who had recently been in a car wreck and Brother Jones, who was having to decide whether or not to move into assisted living, and there really were a lot of people who needed genuine thoughts and prayers. It was like this every week. Almost everyone who passed by the library had at least one story to share about someone who was struggling with some serious difficulty or another. It was as if people thought that I was some kind of proxy for the temple prayer roll, and pretty soon my wife and I were regularly taking meals, or at least cookies, around to an unending stream of ward members to show our sympathy. It was like having a second, or even third, set of ministering families. Maybe this was just part of my baptismal covenant to bear one another's burdens, or maybe it was an extension of my calling. Only, I wasn't sure because I had never

officially been set apart, so I never received much guidance as to what exactly fell within my job description. Between all these people and their diverse stories, however, I ran out of time and ended up having to draft my letter after I got home.

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For the rest of the year, I was kind of adrift. I never did hear back from the bishop or the stake president, but I probably never should have expected to. Clearly, the library wasn't one of their top priorities, but without their guidance Sister Nelson and I didn't really know how to proceed, so I began fasting and praying for new inspiration about what to do next. That was when the spirit of revelation finally hit me—like a ton of bricks—suggesting that maybe I had been approaching my whole calling the wrong way. Maybe restocking the library's physical collection shouldn't be my primary objective; maybe I needed to focus instead on helping ward members access the brave new world of internet resources. After all, this is what we were doing up at the university: moving all the journals online and promoting bold new projects in the digital humanities. Nowadays, everything is virtual this and internet that, but what could we do as ward librarians to help members become more aware of the rapidly proliferating world of electronic materials—the websites and podcasts, the YouTube videos and discussion boards, the apps and Twitter accounts, and the blogs and vlogs—that are increasingly becoming available to a new generation of tech-savvy Latter-day Saints? Sure, most members are already familiar with a few basic resources—like maybe FamilySearch and JustServe—but certainly we could do more to acquaint them with less well-known resources such as the Joseph Smith Papers or the new Gospel Topics essays. In fact, with so many rapidly expanding electronic resources, it is almost like you don't even need a physical ward library anymore, so what is a ward librarian supposed to do?

It seemed to me that we needed to start thinking outside the box and find more innovative ways to introduce ward members to the wild west of the Mormon blogosphere. But I didn't really know where to start. I was totally new to this whole Mormon interweb thing. Sure, I read *Sunstone* and *Dialogue* online, of course, and maybe I've dabbled around the FAIR Mormon site a little looking for clever apologetic answers to tricky questions about Book of Mormon archaeology or the translation of the book of Abraham. Other than that, however, I'm a total neophyte, so I just started with a simple internet search, and I was completely blown away. Almost instantly, a vast, mindboggling online world opened before me. My very first search led me to Mormon Archipelago: Gateway to the Bloggernacle, and immediately I realized that Mormon internet sites are as numerous as the isles of the sea. A vast network of hyperlinks instantly connected me both to prominent well-established sites—such as *By Common Consent* and *Times and Seasons*—and to lesser-known gems: *Mormon Monastery*, *KiwiMormon*, and *Zelophehad's Daughters*. And the blogs themselves covered every conceivable subject, ranging from the relationship between Ugaritic literature and the temple ceremony to book reviews of Orson Scott Card's latest novel. I had never realized that Mormonism could come in so many different shapes, sizes, and colors. This wasn't a brave new online universe; it was an exploding multidimensional pluriverse. And browsing this rapidly expanding virtual cosmos became addictive as I gradually unraveled the vast mosaic of cyber-Mormonism one hyperlink at a time. I was being pulled like taffy in every whichever direction, oscillating wildly between traditionalists and progressives, philosophy professors and stay-at-home housewives, artists and theologians, apologists, and anti-Mormons. By the end of the night—I stayed up until 2:00 a.m.—I felt like Alice falling down the rabbit hole; I had entered a topsy-turvy world full of strange new curiosities and bewildering surprises.

I realized almost immediately, however, that the future of the Church really does depend on how members learn to access these

vast new online resources, and given that the Church has yet to call designated internet facilitators and online specialists, it seems like this task now falls to ward librarians by default. We are the ones on the frontlines of helping members access gospel resources, and just because these resources are increasingly electronic doesn't mean that we can't play a crucial role in helping make them available to the ward. With Sister Nelson's permission and under her direction, of course, I decided to start a small monthly library newsletter. Each issue was about ten or fifteen pages long, and it provided a brief overview of the most seminal emerging Mormon online resources. I just kept browsing from link to link, and before I knew it, I had finished dozens of newsletters, and I still had a pile of notebooks full of ideas for future issues. The Bloggernacle was practically infinite, but I was gradually beginning to feel like my efforts were really making a difference. Almost every week somebody new came by the library to thank me for introducing them to some new online resource. I finally felt like maybe everyone actually can magnify their calling—even an assistant ward librarian.

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Just when I was starting to think that I really had things under control, however, that's when the shit hit the fan. Late one night, I was just casually browsing through various obscure Mormon websites—Middle-Aged Mormon Man, Mormon Life Hacker, The Ward Preacher, Teancum's Javelin, Ploni Almoni, stuff like that—gathering ideas for the latest issue of my newsletter, when my next Google search suddenly revealed a series of startling headlines: "Inexcusable Error in Church Manual Revives LDS Church's Dark Racist History," "Catastrophic Blunder in LDS Manual Revives the Racist Curse of Cain," and "Will the LDS Church Ever Correct the Racist Doctrines in its New Manuals?" What? Did a new Church manual, probably one in our own ward library even, really contain racist material? This was going to be a nightmare. The Joneses were a new African American couple in our

ward—the first ever in the Indian Lakes Ward, probably in the entire Boise Idaho West Stake—and Brother Jones was very sensitive about racial issues. As he should be. As the Lord Himself is. Brother Jones was a new professor of African American Studies at Boise State, and he wasn't going to be happy to hear that the Church had just published a racist manual, so I really had to get out in front of this one.

But first I had to even figure out what was going on, so I quickly scanned everything that I could find: the *Salt Lake Tribune*, *By Common Consent*, Radio Free Mormon, LDS Discussions, and especially several deeply moving articles in *Exponent II*. What a disaster! Turns out that the Church's new 2020 *Come, Follow Me* manual, the same one that we had just freshly stocked twelve new copies of in our own ward library, describes the Lamanites' dark skin as the sign of a curse from God. This was, indeed, an unfortunate blast from the Church's racist past, backed by a quotation from a previous prophet no less, but it wasn't a doctrine that the Church currently teaches anymore, so how did it turn up in a newly printed manual? Obviously, somebody had made a serious mistake, which some were calling a "wicked falsehood" and others a "text of terror." This was all so tragic. The Church had worked so hard in recent years to correct more than a century of past racist theology. They even held the monumental "Be One" celebration to mark the fortieth anniversary of the revelation extending the priesthood to Black men, and President Nelson himself had personally addressed the NAACP, but now all that painstaking work was rapidly unraveling.

So, what was the Church going to do about it? Surely they would correct it. Surely they would recall all the manuals and destroy them, replacing them with a new corrected version. As I continued reading the articles, however, I was sorely disappointed. No, the Church wasn't going to retract any printed copies. Instead, they simply planned to edit the online version and ask teachers to redirect members to the new, corrected digital edition. After all, most of the members accessed the manuals electronically anyhow, and reprinting the whole manual would be so expensive. Would it really be worth all the trouble?

Well, this may have been good enough for the Church's corporate headquarters, but it was completely unacceptable to me. I wasn't going to be the ward librarian, even the assistant ward librarian, of a library that contained manuals full of egregiously racist doctrines. Something had to be done. Somebody had to fix this, and since it looked like nobody else was going to do anything, I guess that meant that it was all up to me. Again. After all, the manuals were in my library, so I guess that they were my responsibility. Before I could do anything, however, I first had to talk it over with Sister Nelson. She was my presiding authority, after all, so I couldn't just throw out all the brand-new manuals without her permission. But I still wanted to resolve the issue as quickly as possible—preferably before Brother Jones confronted me in the hall—so I arrived at the library fifteen minutes early, offering up a quick prayer before Sister Nelson arrived. I knew that we were dealing with sensitive, even controversial, material, so I wanted to make sure that the Holy Spirit was guiding me to do exactly what the Lord wanted. As soon as Sister Nelson entered the library, however, I immediately accosted her with a flurry of questions about what we were going to do with the new manuals. She, of course, hadn't heard anything about the manuals, so I had to fill her in on what had happened. Then when I asked her what we should do, she simply replied that maybe the Church could just correct the online version.

"Correct the online version?" I protested. "That is what the Church is doing."

"Great, then that should fix the problem," she calmly noted.

"Fix the problem?" I practically screamed. "How does that fix anything?"

"Well, then people can look up the manual on their phones and get the updated version," she answered, unmoved by my outburst.

"But that doesn't fix all the printed copies. The copies in our library. The copies entrusted personally to our care," I countered.

"Oh, nobody reads those old things anyways," she pointed out offhandedly.

"Old? They're not old. They're brand new. That's the whole problem," I complained. Sure, our dusty old copy of *Mormon Doctrine* contains racist doctrines, but it was published in 1958. These *Come, Follow Me* manuals, however, were just published this year, in 2020. We can't have racist doctrines printed in 2020 in our library.

"Well, what do you want me to do about it?" Sister Nelson patiently asked.

"I don't know. Maybe we could simply correct the manuals ourselves," I suggested. "We could start by printing the corrected online version and insert it into the print copies in the library. Then at least the error would be corrected. At least for the copies in our library. At least for the copies that the Lord has entrusted to us personally."

After Sister Nelson admitted that she saw no reason why we couldn't do that, I quickly printed up the corrected proofs and carefully taped them into the manuals. That was a great start, but I still worried about all the other manuals that had already been distributed to ward members. Maybe we were only directly, personally responsible for the copies in our own library, but it seemed like nobody else was taking any responsibility for all the other uncorrected copies floating all over the ward. Bishop Oaks certainly hadn't done anything to correct the error. He wasn't one for acknowledging that all might not be well in Zion, and the stake president was so busy with the latest drama on the high council that he probably didn't even know what was happening. Meanwhile, everybody else was acting as if nothing had happened even though we were in the midst of a doctrinal apocalypse. It was like we were living in the pre-1978 Church all over again. Once again, racism was the elephant in the room, but nobody was willing to acknowledge it. Neither the Sunday School teacher nor the Sunday School president had said anything about it in Sunday School, and there had been no mention of it whatsoever in the ward bulletin, so how were ward members even supposed to know about the error, let alone correct it? Sure, it was all over the nether regions of the Mormon blogosphere, but how many ward members really keep up on Religion News Service or Sistas in Zion?

Consequently, I decided that I should contact the elders quorum president, President Johnson, to ask him if he could have all the ministering companionships take a corrected version of the manual to each of their ministering assignments, but he just gave me the cold shoulder. He said that the Church had already corrected the online version, so he didn't think that contacting each family personally was really necessary. Besides, he said that we didn't want to draw too much attention to this issue anyhow. You know, let it calmly die down. He lamely complained that the ministering brethren were busy enough as it was. Busy, my ass. Half the quorum never even visited their assignments, and the other half did little more than take their families a plate of cookies once every three or four months. I should know because as second counselor, I was the one who used to do the ministering interviews myself.

But I could see that I wasn't going to get anywhere with President Johnson, so I approached the Relief Society president, Sister Bell, instead. Maybe the sisters could distribute the corrections if the elders wouldn't, but Sister Bell said that she would have to talk to the bishop first. You know, to make sure that it was okay with her presiding authority. Oh, hell! With all the presiding authorities in this Church, it is amazing that anything ever gets done. Like the bishop was going to do anything about it. Sure, he was busy, but mostly it felt like his only concern was his quarterly report to the stake president. Ministering statistics and Church attendance records were all he cared about. If it wasn't in the report, he never seemed to pay any attention to it. Here I was just trying to magnify my calling, but I was getting stonewalled everywhere I turned.

Having to wait for the bishop one more time, however, was the last straw. If he didn't get back to Sister Bell before the next fast and testimony meeting, I was going to have to take matters into my own hands. What choice did I have? I couldn't let such an egregious mistake just be swept under the rug. I was going to have to just go right up to the pulpit and announce the error to the whole ward and set the record straight

myself. I would have to read the incorrect doctrine as it was originally published, then I would have to read the new corrected online version, and then I would probably also have to throw in a quick sermon about the evils of racism. I wasn't going to recite the entire history of racism in the church going back to Brigham Young, and I was more than willing to forgive the whole situation as an honest mistake. I certainly wasn't going to accuse the present Church leadership of deliberate racism, but I wasn't going to just act like nothing had happened either. I couldn't just let it die out quietly like President Johnson wanted to. No, as a valiant assistant ward librarian, I was going to call a spade a spade and cry repentance like Samuel the Lamanite, insisting that these kinds of racist mistakes were grievous sins and admonishing us all to never repeat them.

By the time fast and testimony meeting finally arrived, Sister Bell still hadn't heard back from the bishop, and President Johnson still refused to budge. The Sunday School teacher and Sunday School president still hadn't made a public announcement, and the ward bulletin remained as silent as ever. In the end, nobody had corrected the error. Nobody had even acknowledged it. The time was well past that somebody had to say something, and it sure looked like nobody else was going to do it. It had only been a scant four years since my last public outburst, so I wasn't looking forward to being the one who had to speak out again, but what choice did I have? I approached the pulpit with trepidation and spoke as I was moved upon by the Holy Spirit. After all, what was Bishop Oaks going to do? Give me a new calling?

ROBERT BENNETT {robert.bennett@montana.edu} is a professor of English at Montana State University. He is currently working on a novel, *Elder Lithium: The Misadventures of a Manic Mormon Missionary*. He is a former assistant ward librarian.

"Many Mansions,"
20" x 15", hand-cut magazine
images and foil paper on
fabric-wrapped art board, 2021,
by Amber Lee Weiss

THE PRIVATE INVESTIGATOR

Ryan Shoemaker

The doorbell rang as I hung up the phone, and then I heard my father's deep, imposing voice fill our entryway.

I stood and walked slowly into the unlit hallway unnoticed as my wife, Allison, hugged my father and then took his coat and bag. Though she'd only met him once, at my mom's funeral, I wanted her to share my dislike for the man. From what I'd told her, Allison knew enough about him to warrant a little enmity, or so I thought, but she cheerfully chatted away, asking him about the traffic through Primm Valley and the weather on Cajon Pass.

I heard my father's voice but hardly recognized him. His face was lean and bony, and his hair, thin on the top of his head, had gone almost completely white.

I stepped into the entryway.

"Hey, Champ. How you doing, Slugger?" he said, calling me the pet names of my childhood. The jarring unexpectedness of those names seemed to burst in my ears with multiple frequencies, bringing vividly to my mind twilight summer breezes and the metallic peal of ball connecting with bat under the insect buzz of stadium lights—the sounds of another time, nostalgic and melancholy and irretrievable. When I didn't say anything, my father gazed over my shoulder into the living room. I stepped aside to give him an unobstructed view: the black-and-white family photos of Allison and me against a weathered brick wall in Old Pasadena, Henry and Jake slack and smiling in our arms; the Tuscan leather sectional and the hand-knotted rugs; potted palms in the corners of the room and English ivy draping the built-in mahogany bookcases. I wanted my father to see all of it. I wanted him to take in

each soft, smooth surface reflecting the warm, rich glow of the life I'd given my family.

"Beautiful home," he said. "Magnolia Park. My favorite stretch of Burbank. I guess the P.I. business is all right. Must keep you busy."

"Too busy," Allison said. "You'd think Troy's a long-haul truck driver with how much he works. And then last month he was called to be the bishop. At least now he has to be nice to everyone."

"A bishop?" My father squared his shoulders so he stood a little straighter. His fingers fluttered against his pant legs. "Your mom would be proud." He turned to Allison. "And my grandsons?"

"In bed," Allison said. "They're rascals at the dinner table. Trust me. We wouldn't have a minute of peace. But they'll be up early. You can surprise them. All week I told them grandpa's coming."

I stared at my father. A stranger passing through or a man trying to make an impression? I wasn't sure. He wore tapered khakis with crisp pleats, tasseled Gucci loafers, and a loud Tommy Bahama polo shirt blooming with printed red and yellow hibiscus flowers as big as my hand. The pendant lamp above us flickered on the glass face of the silver Omega chronograph strapped to his wrist. My mind whirred with the incongruous arithmetic of what I knew about his personal finances and the cost of the watch and the loafers.

I knew about his life, more than I'd told Allison. It was at my fingertips: bank records and credit reports, a spotty work history as an entry-level sales rep with a half dozen companies, two short-lived marriages after my mom, some bad checks in Montana that almost landed him in jail, and a DUI outside Reno. I even had his home address. No charming bungalow on a tree-lined street, no bougainvillea-draped arbor or broad, shaded porch. The street view of his North Las Vegas apartment complex brought to my mind the crumbling stucco, dark stairwells, and disintegrating jalopies of the blighted fringes of the San Fernando Valley where my investigators and I often staked out fraudulent insurance claims and delinquent debtors. The bare, inglorious reality of my father's life comforted me. I was glad to see how low he'd fallen.

"Let's eat," Allison said, nodding in my direction, as if to prompt me. I realized I hadn't said a word since my father's arrival.

I lifted an arm, an awkward, wooden gesture, to direct him to the dining room, but instead he laid his right hand on my shoulder. "Give the old man a hug," he said. I almost stepped back, as if his embrace were a punishment. But I stopped, barely flinching as his hand drummed against my back. When he let me go, I looked closely at his face, at the spotted skin stretched tight over the cheekbones, as if the skeleton were working itself through. I could smell him, the rankness of age mixed with a sharp, citrusy cologne. I hadn't seen or spoken to him in four years, not since my mom's funeral, where he'd shown up late, uninvited, and then slouched in a side pew with a bored expression on his flushed face, seemingly more interested in the clock on the chapel wall than in what was said about the woman who'd once been his wife for fourteen years. His conspicuous boredom and the alcohol on his breath had infuriated me, and I let him know it. We'd argued after in the cemetery parking lot. But in those four years, my father had become an old man, slightly stooped, dappled on his face and hands.

He stared back at me with an air of uncertainty and hesitancy, perhaps wondering where we stood, what I knew, what I'd forgiven.

"Yes, let's eat," I said, walking into the dining room, my father trailing behind me.

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My father stood over the table, sniffing the air like an animal on a scent. "You've gone through too much trouble," he told Allison, giving her a courtly bow before sitting down. She pooh-poohed that idea as she stuck a serving spoon into a steaming bowl of mashed potatoes. "We're glad you're here," she said.

As we ate, I watched my father. He barely touched his food, just pushed it around his plate. I knew I was searching for something in his cadence, in his words, a gesture or facial tic. What was I looking for?

Maybe a flicker of guilt and remorse. Just their fleeting shadows would have satisfied me. But I saw nothing of them as his initial unease seemed to melt into a cloying braggadocio, my father as I remembered him, a gravity pulling all the attention in a room to himself. He sat slightly reclined, one elbow parked regally on the armrest, his dreamy gaze fixed on some point behind us, a king on his throne with a captive audience.

He jabbered on through dinner about his adventures as a traveling sales rep, his stellar sales record that had garnered him awards and honors, the stars and world luminaries he'd happened to bump into on his sales trips, their big-hearted invitations to visit them in Beverly Hills and the Hamptons, and, of course, the dangers of traveling desolate roads where he'd had to defend himself with his trusty Smith & Wesson .38. In retirement, he planned to go abroad to live like a king in Bolivia or Ecuador.

Allison listened with an enthusiasm I couldn't muster, leaning in toward my father, clucking her tongue and shaking her head, encouraging him with spirited interjections like "Oh, that's incredible!" and "No, he said that!" as if she were gossiping with a neighbor over the back fence. She seemed taken in by my father, but all I could hear was the silver-tongued phoniness in his self-aggrandizing stories. He spoke as if he were living the high life, a revered and well-compensated employee, a magnetic soul people clamored to befriend. Of course, there was no mention of the spotty work history and the dumpy Vegas apartment, the failed marriages and the bad checks.

"So what about you?" my father finally asked me. "How's business?"

I crushed the linen napkin on my lap and noticed, for the first time, how the crystal bowl holding the mashed potatoes was shaped like a rose. The idea seemed ridiculous.

My father appeared to read something in my gaze, an incredulity and irritation pushing through the neutral expression I'd tried to project since his arrival. His eyes dropped to his plate, where he busied himself cutting a green bean into sections. He suddenly seemed winded, the unease of earlier a palpable presence between us.

When I didn't answer, Allison said, "Troy, tell your dad about that car accident outside your office. I want his opinion."

My father looked up expectantly, fork poised above his plate.

"You tell him," I said.

Allison stared at me, her lips pressed together, and then she turned to my father:

"There was a bad car accident outside Troy's office," she said. "A FedEx truck ran a red light and T-boned a Latino guy in an old truck full of yard equipment. You know what Troy did? He grabs a camera and starts taking pictures of the accident. And then he gives his card to the man, who by that time's laid out on a stretcher in a neck brace, all banged up. You know what happened? Just yesterday he calls Troy, barely able to speak English, to say he's suing FedEx and wants to buy the pictures. Five hundred dollars. That's what Troy charged him. I told Troy he should've just given him the pictures for free."

My father slapped the tabletop with his open palm. "Way to sniff out a buck," he said. "Just like your old man. Carpe diem. Make hay while the sun shines." He patted Allison's hand, as if to reassure her of something. "FedEx will settle for two hundred times what the guy paid for the pictures. He could buy five new trucks with the settlement. He could go back to Mexico and live like royalty." Then my father leaned back and crossed his arms. The story reminded him of something that happened to him when he was younger, and then he was off again on a string of self-congratulatory tales.

I couldn't listen anymore. I couldn't even look at him, at the way his whole body shook and then collapsed with laughter, as if he'd been struck by something funny. I suddenly felt constricted, the chair narrowing against my hips, the table boxing me in, my thick sweater holding me like a straitjacket. A thin sweat glazed my nose and forehead. I wanted to claw at the sweater, rise and throw the chair back, run from the dry, heated air in the dining room and escape into the night.

"I have to leave," I said, standing so quickly my chair almost toppled over.

"Troy!" Allison said. Her fork fell through her fingers and clattered across the wood floor.

"Earlier. That was Eric on the phone," I said. "He can't do surveillance tonight. He's sick."

Allison stared at me. "Can't this wait? I mean, why do you have to go?"

"This is a big case," I said. "There's a deadline. It's priority."

"Can't someone else go?" Allison pressed both her palms onto the tabletop. "You own the company. Can't you get on the phone and make someone else do it?"

"It's too late," I said. "This is my responsibility. It's important."

"There are other things you're responsible for," Allison said, her head tilting in my father's direction.

"A doctor's divorcing his wife because she's a drug addict," I said. "Unless we prove that, she gets custody of the kids. Think of the children." I looked at my father. I wanted to see his face, the absorption of what I said. "I'm sorry," I said. "I have to go."

My father flashed me an easy smile. "My son, the private investigator," he said. "Don't worry about us, Slugger. You go out there and get her."

I pulled my camera from the hall closet, then opened the front door. Dark, heavy clouds filled the sky like a great expanse of upended mountains, each sagging peak like a tightly clenched fist. The tennis courts across the street in Verdugo Park were as brightly lit as a stage. A man and a floppy-haired teenage boy, obviously the man's son, grinned and stared up at the gloomy sky between volleys.

"When are you coming home?" Allison asked.

"I don't know," I said. "Late."

~

I drove north on Scott Road, squinting up at the Verdugo Mountains, but they were more shadow than substance, lost to the night and

to the looming storm, except for a faraway red light on Tongva Peak that pulsed like a heartbeat.

I thought of Allison and my father at the dining room table, and how my father, this man I hardly knew, would soon occupy a bedroom down the hall from mine.

He'd quickly become a stranger to me after leaving, a belated birthday card with no personal addendum to the printed words; the occasional postcard scratched with a nondescript sentence or two I could barely decipher; a phantom my mom scrimped and saved to take to court for a meager check that might or might not come by the fifth of the month. He was like a person I once knew, a distant presence distilled down to a handful of contradictory memories—though the sound of his voice, strangely, had never diminished in my mind, its deepness and resonance, reading me the Hardy Boys, or describing in tantalizing detail, as we tossed a baseball in the backyard of the home we rented in La Crescenta, the life he planned for us, the turreted mansion on Point Dume, the yacht and private jet. It was this voice, my mom later told me, so confident and sure of its power to persuade, like something on TV, that had charmed her when they first met, my father, a lapsed, half-hearted Mormon who appeared one Sunday in her Las Vegas singles ward, and who, like her, had lost both parents at a young age.

His was a voice, I was to learn, that acted as collateral for the most fabulous promises and claims, to my mom, to the gullible strangers my father would unabashedly seek out in parks and restaurants, and to the naïve members in our La Crescenta ward, impressionable newlyweds and middle-aged couples ill prepared for retirement. He had a knack for sniffing out the insolvent. With that voice he could lull people into spilling their financial guts, then he'd shake his head and say something incredible like, "I bet you want to quit that rotten job" or "I know a way to pay off that mortgage in ten years," as if he'd long ago liberated himself from such workaday matters.

Later, some of them would sit in our living room, and I, as my father insisted, was to be at his side, smiling and nodding, a picture

of unwavering filial confidence and trust, as he described an ironclad investment or a wave-of-the-future product certain to bring wealth and prosperity: vacation rentals, magnetic shoe inserts, a patented gas additive to radically improve fuel economy—of course, all for the price of a start-up kit and a cut of whatever they sold to their friends and family. The Armani suit he wore for these occasions and the BMW that magically appeared in our driveway the day of these meetings fortified my father's grand promises and claims. His impassioned promises of wealth and leisure, the vagueness of his products, the evasive, half-answered questions—only years later did I recognize my father as a fraud.

The hokey side businesses never paid out. His day job, something with real estate, something vague and suspect, never paid out either. Not long before he left, I remember three silent Latinos in blue coveralls hauling our furniture away. I remember the whiff of alcohol on my father's breath, and soon violent arguments with my mom about lost paychecks and his elusive whereabouts in the evenings. Then he was gone—and now suddenly he had reappeared, a stranger passing through town on his way to a sales convention in San Diego. My father.

At the end of Scott Road, I stopped at an ornate wrought-iron gate and entered a code the doctor had given me. The gate swung open without a sound.

I drove through wide, twisting streets—Cabrini Drive, Via Venezia, Via Verona—with towering homes, fringed by lavender, rosemary, and cypress, like ships riding sculpted half acres. The doctor's home, on the leveled top of a steep hill, looked over the quivering grid of the San Fernando Valley. The home's tile roof and arched porticos reminded me of a Tuscan villa. I could see into the living room. A single lamp projected a moody light over the walls and furniture.

I parked across the street, obscured in the deep shadow of an untrimmed oleander that arched over the road, a place that offered a view of the front window and driveway. I scanned the radio for a

station, mesmerized by the racing indigo numbers, as if they were a code. The dial stopped. A man with a deep baritone voice argued for a preemptive military strike against North Korea. I reclined the seat until my eyes were just above the bottom of the window, so anyone looking out from the house would see an empty car. The commentator's voice pitched higher as he squabbled with a caller who didn't share his opinion. I wondered if my father had gone to bed.

When Eric called, I was grateful for an excuse to leave. I could have reached out to another one of my investigators, paid him a little more for the inconvenience. Someone would have gone. But as I listened to my father, oblivious and unrepentant, I feared I might say something accusatory and cutting. Or worse—I feared I might haul him out of his chair to ask if he'd fulfilled the spiritual journey he described in the short note we found on the kitchen countertop. I wanted to convey to him in precise detail about our lives after he left: the bleak cinderblock apartment complex off the 170 in North Hollywood, its echoing hallways and stairwells that oozed the sour vapor of cigarettes and mildew; the first job my mom, without a college degree or professional skills, landed in the sweltering laundry of a linen and uniform supplier in Van Nuys, how maggots from bloody scrubs and soiled hospital sheets would crawl up her arms as she loaded the washers; and later, how as a receptionist at a plastics manufacturer in Pacoima she felt insignificant and marginalized, relegated by her boss to answer phones and sort mail during company parties and events. And for me, the stigma of free lunches and thrift store clothes and food stamps. And the insatiable hunger I felt for years. Not for food or drink—but for him. His presence. His voice. How could he cut us from his life so quickly, seemingly without regret and pain? As a husband and father, the thought confounded me.

Suddenly, another light turned on in the doctor's living room, jolting me from my gloomy thoughts. She was there, the doctor's wife, standing at the large picture window in a purple bathrobe, her face illuminated by the ground lights in the yard. Her brown hair hung over

her shoulders, tangled from sleep, as she stared into the night with puffy eyes. She stooped under the weight of something in her arms. Lifting my hand slowly, as if a quick movement might disrupt the scene, I framed her in the viewfinder and pressed record.

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It was past two when I started for home.

Rain beaded the windshield. My breath fogged the glass. I felt as if I were overheating in the car's stale air. I cracked the window, and a cold wind steeped with the mineral odor of wet pavement hit me. Above, the dingy sky was the color of steel wool.

I stopped at Glenoaks and Magnolia, waiting for the red light to turn. The roads were empty. The light changed to green, to yellow, and then to red. I idled there with my foot on the brake, watching the sequence again and again. The colors bled across the drenched asphalt in shivering pillars, a warped likeness of the world.

At home, I quietly opened the front door and walked carefully through the dark living room. Light filtered through the rain-streaked picture window, projecting watery shadows across the wood floors. Allison's potted palms and English ivy cast strange, distorted silhouettes over the walls. The smell of cooked meat lingered in the air. I heard a muffled sound. The blood pulsed in my ears.

"Troy."

My father slouched in the leather loveseat, a bottle in his hand. I felt anger slip in behind the fright. "Are you drinking?" I asked.

"This?" my father said, raising the bottle. He laughed. "No, this is supposed to be some new age miracle cure a friend got me on. Stronger immune system, mental clarity, deeper sleep. All for a price." He breathed out a tired, raspy sigh. "I just want to sleep through the night again. Your mother could fall asleep in a minute. A clear conscience, that's why." He pointed to the sectional. "Stay a couple minutes with your old man."

I forced myself to sit.

"So how'd it go?" he asked.

I stared at his hand gripping the bottle. "What?"

"The surveillance. The mother strung out on drugs."

"Long. Boring."

"So what happened?" he asked. "Smoking gun?"

"That's Hollywood," I said, "the stuff of movies."

"But still, you get the bad guys, right?" My father leaned forward. "I have friends whose kids are teachers, lawyers, dentists, boring stuff like that. But when I tell them you're a private investigator, they're interested. They want specifics."

I noticed how the shadows of the water coursing down the window twined together and cast an enormous net over my father. I rubbed my eyes, wondering what grand, inflated image of me he'd constructed for his friends.

"Like that murder case you did," he said. "The skinheads who killed that Mexican kid in Riverside. I even recorded the interview you did for *Dateline*." He set the bottle on the slatted top of the oak coffee table, next to a stack of Allison's *Good Housekeeping* magazines. In the silvery light, the bottle and the magazines appeared like a sepia still-life painting.

"Why are you here?" I asked. "Do you need something? Money?"

For a moment, he didn't say anything, and I wondered if he'd heard me.

"I just wanted to see you and Allison," he finally said. "I wanted to meet my grandsons. And maybe I thought you and I could just talk."

"About what?" I asked, hardly recognizing my voice. "What do you want? Forgiveness?"

"I don't know," my father said. "Maybe there's no forgiveness. I just thought we could sit and talk like two men who know people make mistakes they regret forever. I don't want to pretend I didn't hurt you and your mom. What I did, leaving like that, I think about it every day."

A car passed slowly, water slushing under its tires. Headlights raked across the living room walls, briefly catching my father's tired, bony

face. He blinked, then held his eyes shut, but not before I saw their heavy sadness. That sadness. I marveled at its sudden familiarity since I'd become a bishop, staring at me from across my church desk, spread over weary, burdened faces waiting for me to utter a reassuring word.

I stood and walked to the window, peering through the streams of water on the glass. The wet pavement glowed under the streetlamps. I wanted to leave, to retreat up the stairs and into the oblivion of sleep. But something held me there. In some way, the glow of the streetlamps and the slushing tires of the passing car, like the hum of a crowd, brought suddenly to my mind warm summer nights, the smell of cut grass and the glow of stadium lights.

I was so close to the window my breath formed small circles on the glass. I knew anyone looking in couldn't see us.

"When we lived in La Crescenta," I said, "remember what happened when you found out the city didn't have Little League? It became your cause. You went to city council meetings. You wrote letters to the chamber of commerce. You got businesses to donate money for uniforms and equipment. You found a coach."

My father laughed. "I charmed them. Or maybe I was just a pain in the old backside. But how could I let all your raw talent go to waste? Lightning on the bases. A lethal arm in the outfield. Don't get me started about you."

I touched the window. It felt glacial against my open palm. "Near the end of my mission, I was in this little ward outside Baton Rouge. I don't know why, but my companion and I had to speak on Father's Day. Who asks missionaries to speak on Father's Day? It made no sense. And what could I say, me with an absent father? Do you know what I talked about? How you started Little League in La Crescenta. After what you did to us, that's what I talked about. My companion was this rich kid from Minneapolis, dad a big executive at Target. With all he said about his dad in that talk, how great he was, he told me that night how his dad would never have spent all that time and gone through all the trouble.

He was almost crying when he said it. He envied me. Can you believe that? He was jealous of us—of you."

Behind me, I heard the rustle of fabric and the fleshy crack of knees, and then my father's steps moving toward me. He stood at my side, breathing heavily.

"The woman, the doctor's wife," I said, "she didn't know I was there. I'm sure of it." The rain was coming harder, peeling the dead leaves from the asphalt and pushing them into the gutters. My reflection smeared and shuddered with the movement of the water on the glass. "You know what she was doing? Rocking her three-year-old daughter to sleep. Singing songs. Wiping her nose. That's what I got. Three hours of it."

"Then it's over," my father said. "Case closed."

"It's not like that," I said. "He'll pay us to keep watching until she does something his lawyer can misconstrue or exaggerate. That's what I do."

My father shook his head. "It seems like a strange business. I guess I really don't understand your work, Troy."

"You don't understand?" I laughed. "I'm a voyeur. I look for what people want to forget. I hope people do terrible things so my clients are happy."

"But they're guilty, right?" my father asked. "I mean, there has to be a reason."

I felt exhausted. "Sure, most are. But the truth is"—I hesitated—"the truth is, if I had to, I could find something on anyone. Everyone has something."

"Seems like a line of work that lends itself to pessimism," my father said. He paused, then tipped his head back and laughed. "I just thought, what if some guy came to your office tomorrow and hired you to find the good in someone? Wouldn't that turn the business upside down?"

"No money in it," I said.

"I'm just speaking in the hypothetical," my father said. "Say this guy walks into your office, gives you a name and address, and hires you to

find some good in this person. Video, photographic evidence, whatever. You know, make a case for it. Could you do it?"

"I guess, if I wanted to," I said.

"And let's say," my father said, tapping a knuckle against the cold glass, "that this is the address, your address, and the guy wants you to sit outside the house, on a night just like this, to watch a father and son talking like we are. Do you think you could find some good, maybe just a little, in the father?"

"It'd be too hard," I said. "Without lights, I couldn't see a thing."

"But what if you could?" my father said, an insistence in his voice I'd never heard before. "What if you could see it all perfectly, the son standing where you are, and the father standing next to the son, not knowing someone's watching?"

Rubbing my eyes, as if that might help me see better, I said: "Dad, after so long, I don't know if I care anymore." And then I stepped away from the window.

I watched my father, who stood like a statue, unaware I was no longer at his side. He reached his arm into the space where I'd stood, smiling sheepishly at his reflection as his arm fell into emptiness. I sat down heavily on the loveseat and pulled at my collar. I felt restricted, caught in the shifting net of watery shadows working down the walls and across my body, knowing that the camera beyond the dark window, meant to find a little good, wouldn't be fixed on my father. But on me.

RYAN SHOEMAKER {ryanshoemaker@suu.edu} has a debut story collection, *Beyond the Lights*, available through No Record Press. T. C. Boyle called it a collection that "moves effortlessly from brilliant comedic pieces to stories of deep emotional resonance." Ryan is an assistant professor at Southern Utah University. Find him at *RyanShoemaker.net*.

Morning Light

Estée Arts Crenshaw

That dark matter that fashioned us, days later
Made light by command, what voice, I wonder
Could shake atoms into place and stir invisible
Waves through the air, as something we cannot see
Allows our eyes to perceive what would otherwise
Remain surfaces and rhythms and shapes.

There is a time each morning, when the sun's spectacle
Whispers its rays over the mountain peaks
And nudges our dreams until we wake, I wonder
When we lie still in the dark, knowing it will come
Knowing we will soon see by it, that aged familiarity
Recognized as if we were there the first time.

ESTÉE ARTS CRENSHAW is a doctoral candidate in the department of Writing and Rhetoric Studies at the University of Utah. She received her MFA in creative writing from Brigham Young University. Estée's academic work in comparative rhetoric focuses on premodern Japanese poetry and aesthetic traditions.

Ministry of angles

Lisa Ottesen Fillerup

You who more than once
spelled angle when meaning angel,
are now one—
maybe both.
A sharp line on white paper
driving hard
and fast
in another space
whose numbers
I do not know.

Yet
In the arithmetic
of our individual journeys,
let us incline,
My dearest angle,
toward that vertex
that despite our variants
we bend,
infinite together,
while the angels do the math.

LISA OTTESEN FILLERUP is a poet and essayist. She has a degree in English from Brigham Young University and lives in Heber, Utah. Her poetry has been appeared in *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, *Irreantum*, and the poetry anthology *Fire in the Pasture*. In 2015, she received the Clarence Dixon Taylor Award from Brigham Young University for her article "The Wasatch Stake Tabernacle — Redefining Pioneers" in the *Utah Historical Quarterly*.

Addendum to Jacob Sorensen's Patriarchal Blessing

Hugo Olaiz

I don't know, Jake,
why Dad asked me to drive you there,
but I did hear every word Brother Allen said,
and here's a few he skipped:

Our Heavenly Father
is pleased with your social media presence—
the Instagram pics, the YouTube skits,
and that new app with the name I can't remember.

God saw your TikToks, Jake,
you doing the Dolphin Dance with the drama crew—
how you shook your butt and laughed.
And God laughed, too.

Jake, there are some things the patriarch promised
that will never come to pass:
no mission,
no bride kneeling across the altar,
no children born under the covenant,
and it will be exactly as God intended it.

For you, Jake,
not slacks but tights, not prayers but yoga,
not the Book of Mormon but a Sondheim score.

And even though the patriarch said "Ephraim,"
the Spirit moves me, Jake, to declare your true tribe:
the one that, when Charlton Heston climbed Mount Sinai,
was hired to choreograph the dance.

They say that when God closes a door
a window is opened,
but I'm telling you, brother, with my gift of prophecy:
For you, a limo, a red carpet,
a golden gate waiting,
and no gatekeeper.

HUGO OLAIZ {HugoRDU@gmail.com} grew up in Argentina. After his LDS mission, he moved to the United States to study linguistics. He has published in *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* and *Sunstone* magazine. He lives in Oxford, Ohio with his husband John-Charles Duffy and a Russell Terrier named Percy.

Recreating Abraham's Star Charts

Elizabeth Pinborough

I pause on the path, drop my sticks,
and bend to read them like runes.
Tell the stars, They said. So I do daily—

I chart their breathless turning as
I gather berries in the bush—
Each twig's finger marks celestial points—

North is Reckoner's Compass. South,
Theory's Backbone. West, God's Thumbs,
and East, Mount Moriah—

Yet, I see more:

Beyond—within—the navigable wilderness
above, 18 quasars guard the edge of the
universe, like many-petaled amaranths.

I peer into time—my tongue bends to liquid
fire, tells of trillions of suns flung from these
orange hives.

Now I perceive the beehive of beingness,
honeycomb of allspace, linking stars into
cells full of honeyed light throughout alltime.[1]

I remember again words the Lord clapped
in my palm—*Write the stars. Write the
stars. Write the stars.*

1. I was inspired in my description of the universe by Mark Penny's unpublished poem exploring a brain created from many separate parts that "are linked / and make each other glow / like crowded insects / all without a queen. . . . Each in its little comb hears from the others, / tugged by its tiny spider-strands of fire." I expanded this neural honeycomb into the fabric of spacetime, with stars as the honeyed symbolic nodes.

Tender Rills

Elizabeth Pinborough

If Gods are poeming Kolob,
if I am poeming God, if we are
poems to each other,

A word is more than a destination
than a path, than a map.

A word is an impulse, an action potential
clanging changing

S t a t e s a l o n g mental
wires slicked with
myelin and sluiced by calcium.
I do not know how it works. Poems (*are more than knowing*) >
arranged around not knowing > more >
than senses spinning sounds.
Poems are alchemy:
soul
+
stars.

From the Angels' Perch at Mount Moriah

Elizabeth Pinborough

Scene: Thicket for a Slaughter

We have seen
bets, contests—

only the great
ones sent to
spar with God:

father, son,
sacrifice.

Scene: An Examination

Question:
the brain,

a tangled
bramble—
the fire

and the knife,
a fearsome
binding.

Answer: the heart,
a bleating, wild
faith,

a ram loosed from
the bush.

Scene: After

Ram's head,
lolling on the

altar beneath
the stars.

ELIZABETH PINBOROUGH is a writer, editor, and artist who lives in Salt Lake City. She graduated from Brigham Young University and Yale Divinity School with degrees in English literature and religion and literature, respectively. She co-edits the literature and arts journal *Young Ravens Literary Review*. She edited *Habits of Being: Mormon Women's Material Culture*, which was published by Exponent II. Her first poetry collection, *The Brain's Lectionary: Psalms and Observations*, was published by By Common Consent Press in 2022.

Paper Route

Scott Stenson

Sabbath afternoon in summer sometimes feels like those February mornings I'd wedge the damp butt of each newspaper in friend's saddle pack clouded gray with his indistinguishable fingerprints. Their buckling mouths a smudged bouquet of garden flowers. Small-town headlines and pictures of distorted figures in frames stuck twisting under tangled and torqued rubber bands meant nothing to me. Not a worry or concern, outside of time and task. Too innocent to care about more than these things. But then, preliminaries accomplished, I'd tremble while smearing the bulging canvas sacks over my side-cocked head and neck, the weight wiping away my cap and silly pom-pom, pulling the hair of my head until I wanted to wake the sleepers. Once I'd lifted the sack into position, I'd lower the cargo suspended by hyperextended thumbs, dropping the load onto my shoulders, jolting my knees as if kneeling to pray at an altar. Banging the storm door with their news, and without a view of my shoes or other obstacles before me in the world. In faith, I'd shuffle-step over threshhold into faint porch light and slow snowflakes in season, thick silence falling. In unplowed street, all labor, strain, and sound—before, now, after—absorbed and covered within the shimmering walls of dull-sloping cliffs, insular drifts, which much softened and dressed in laundered robes

yesterday's dingy carbon-stained ridges. Even leaning out to listen intently for the neighbor's raspy windshield ice scraper, the one buried in brake light and billowing exhaust, seemed impossible in this transfigured place of peace and rest, feet from entryway where I stuffed another's bag for one bite of an apple or one experience with midwinter.

SCOTT STENSON {scottstenson14@gmail.com} earned a PhD in English from the University of Nebraska–Lincoln. He teaches writing and literature at Tennessee Tech University. He has published poetry with *Christianity and Literature*, *BYU Studies*, and *Iris Review*. He and his family have lived in Tennessee for about ten years. Currently, he serves as stake institute teacher. His interests include art, sports, music, and food.

Dialogue and the Daring Disciple

Terryl L. Givens. *Stretching the Heavens: The Life of Eugene England and the Crisis of Modern Mormonism*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021. 344 pp. Hardcover: $34.95. ISBN: 978-1-4696-6433-0.

Reviewed by Karen Rosenbaum

One thing a reader learns from Terryl Givens's new biography is that no one who knew Eugene England could claim to be an objective appraiser of his life. Countless individuals revered him; he had guided and accompanied them on their life journeys. Some individuals distrusted him, couldn't reconcile their approaches to religion with his pleas for dialogue and his challenging questions. In the preface and introduction to *Stretching the Heavens*, Givens briefly acknowledges his own debt to his subject.

Gene's wife Charlotte asked Givens to take on the project, promising him access to journals, correspondence, and other materials not included in the two-hundred-box collection archived at the University of Utah (by Gene's granddaughter Charlotte Hansen) after his passing in 2001. Givens relies on these materials plus articles and interviews to create a painstakingly annotated book. He paints a portrait that reveals the greatness, the goodness—and the vulnerability—of Gene England. He also shows us how Gene fit—and didn't fit—into his Mormon world.

Givens depicts Gene as a devout disciple of Joseph Smith. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was as vitally important to Gene as the air he breathed. But—and this is the dilemma he faced most of his adult life—what do you do when your conscience conflicts with the institution to which you have pledged loyalty?

Lowell Bennion, founder of the University of Utah LDS Institute of Religion, quickened Gene's conscience. Gene confesses that he, as a young student, accepted the traditional reason for Black members not having the priesthood and temple privileges, until Brother Bennion encouraged him to reexamine his views. Gene absorbed Bennion's practical, humanitarian approach to religion. Twenty years before Gene would find himself at odds with the LDS hierarchy, Lowell Bennion would be dismissed from the Church Educational System for his openness to reason and science.

Givens seems surprised that Gene didn't learn from Bennion's experiences that the Church in the last half of the twentieth century was not receptive to what would become the trademark of Gene's own endeavors: dialogue. The name of the journal that he and the four other founders decided upon would govern all of Gene's efforts to reconcile conscience and the Mormon establishment. Having worked closely with students at the University of Utah and at Stanford, he knew how many were troubled about Church history and policy and about what seemed to be an institutional disregard for the exchange of ideas. If they could have real dialogue, perhaps the seekers could find what they needed.

Givens is also astonished that Gene didn't learn from his own experiences. He was constantly reprimanded for his efforts to espouse a thoughtful, humanitarian religion and consistently thwarted in his attempts to open dialogue with various General Authorities, sometimes those least sympathetic to his views. Despite the evidence, Gene seemed to have a hard time believing it was his association with *Dialogue* that stood in the way of employment at Brigham Young University; he would finally resign from the journal's board and be hired. Givens documents the indignant responses of fellow BYU faculty member Joseph McConkie and his father Bruce R. McConkie to Gene's popular honors lecture on the progression of God. The McConkies were *not* amenable to dialogue; in a letter to Gene dated February 19, 1981, Bruce

McConkie wrote, "It is my province to teach to the Church what the doctrine is. It is your province to echo what I say or to remain silent" (167).

Most amazing to contemporary readers, perhaps, is the access that Gene had to the General Authorities, in particular Boyd K. Packer, who responded to Gene over the pulpit, in his office, and in letters. Gene frequently voiced his concerns to men he thought might be more sympathetic—Marion D. Hanks, Neal A. Maxwell—but was often dissatisfied with their reactions too. Still, not only did they grant him audience but they usually responded to the letters in which he pled for acknowledgement of his good intentions and for understanding of his views.

Those views, Givens reiterates, were predictably dangerous for a man who wished to be employed by the Church. He opposed war; he espoused feminism. He defended Fawn Brodie's research and praised Levi Peterson's fiction. He participated in Sunstone symposia. He embraced what threatened the twentieth-century Church and Church Educational System: freedom of discussion, dialogue. In his chapter headings, Givens labels Gene "A Polarizing Disciple" and refers to "The Perils of Provocation" and "A Dangerous Discipleship."

Givens sees Gene as almost oblivious to the probable consequences of his words and actions. "One cannot fully fathom the heart of the man or the tragedy of his life," says Givens, "if one does not see his tragic flaw as a persistent, willful, naiveté" (107). Those who fought with Gene on the battlefield (pardon, Gene, the war metaphor) would probably describe him as persistent, willful, but not naïve. His eyes were open. He knew what he was doing when, as soon as Lavina Fielding Anderson concluded her August 1992 Sunstone Symposium talk with the revelation that the Church kept secret files on some members, he leapt to his feet to name and censure the Strengthening Church Members Committee. Those of us present saw a man passionate about his causes, with enough hope to keep pressing on, no matter the outcome. He stretched

his own vision of the Church into what might be heaven, a paradise that embraced, that loved all humankind.

Stretching the Heavens is a sad book. Charlotte told me she cried after she read the first draft. The book is sad because the church that Gene "loved too much to either leave or leave alone" (136) couldn't give him what he wanted: a more humane institution and affirmation that he was a worthy disciple. The twenty-first-century Church might afford him at least the latter; the opinions he suffered for might not alarm the current hierarchy—at least not so much.

Gene is in large part responsible for those changes. "The Crisis of Modern Mormonism," the last half of the book's subtitle, is still accurate; the Church is losing some of its brightest and best because of adamant positions on women and LGBTQ issues. But there has been a willingness to acknowledge some past problems. There has been more dialogue—and that affords a tempered hope. Givens closes the book with Douglas Thayer's image of Gene doing something that gave him great pleasure—fishing. Gene used a long rod, one that might reach far, perhaps in years as well as yards. He "lived his life well and liked to make long casts" (284). Terryl Givens has documented the sorrows of that life and the promise of the long casts—stretching, perhaps, *to* the heavens.

Personal disclaimer: In writing this review, I found myself unable to refer to Gene by his last name. I too am one of those enormously affected by his ideas and his ways of expressing them. In the English graduate student study on the Stanford Quad, Gene would sit at the front table with his books spread out before him. I would pull out the chair across from him and narrate the woes and wonders in my life. His patience, I understand now, was astounding. He and Charlotte trusted me with their children; I was proud to be a frequent babysitter. Worried that I might starve before I found work, Gene devised a new job—office manager for the newborn *Dialogue*. I managed to disorganize Wes Johnson's campus office, the journal's home.

Many years later, in 2007, Toby Pingree invited me to participate in Sunstone's panel Why I Stay. My presentation pays homage to Gene's memorable essay "Why the Church Is as True as the Gospel," but not just the main theme. At the start, Gene tells of being a restless twelve-year-old in a stake conference when he saw the "transfigured face of Apostle Harold B. Lee . . . giving the new stake an apostolic blessing," and because Gene was *there*, he felt "the presence of the Holy Ghost and the special witness of Jesus Christ." This is why I have stayed in the Church—because I have been touched by others, like Gene, who have stayed—and because if I am *there*, I too may someday feel that hope and holiness.

KAREN ROSENBAUM {karenmcrose@gmail.com} taught English at a California community college for thirty-four gratifying years. From 2004 to 2008, she served as *Dialogue*'s fiction editor. Her fiction and nonfiction have been published in *Dialogue*, *Sunstone*, *Exponent II*, *Irreantum*, several anthologies, and her own short story collection *Mothers, Daughters, Sisters, Wives* (2016). Now she primarily writes personal essays and navigates the challenges of age with her husband Ben McClinton.

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England's Life of Paradox

Kristine L. Haglund. *Eugene England: A Mormon Liberal*. Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2021. 152 pp. Paper: $14.95. ISBN: 978-0-252-08600-7.

Reviewed by David Charles Gore

The attacks of September 11, 2001 are a spectacular reminder that the struggle between religion and politics is alive and well in the twenty-first century. Eugene England's life, which ended just weeks before those

attacks, was very much engaged in that struggle. Although England was not a politician or even especially political in his opinions, he sought a life committed to Christian discipleship as well as intellectual freedom and integrity. These commitments, as Kristine Haglund shows in her illuminating book about England and his times, often run up against the internal politics of a religious community as well as the external relationships of a religious community with wider publics. Haglund recounts the painful personal costs of navigating an ethical life in relationship with institutions that are always pursuing their own interests. She frames this tension as a political one, and rightly so, because politics is the art of sharing a life with other human beings and with the institutions they create. Haglund captures the immense depth and breadth of this thoughtful and committed Mormon, giving us a picture of a man devoted to a Christian mission by way of dialogue.

At the base of England's life was a commitment to dialogue, as evidenced in his act of founding this journal, *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, as well as his body of published scholarship. In his works, readers can discover for themselves a writer committed to tolerance and constantly manifesting a spirit of conversation and compromise. England never seemed to write as if it was his right or anyone else's to have the last word on a subject. His writing evinces that openness to possibility that is a key characteristic of all good conversation. An openness to possibility as well as clearly reasoned discourse make his work accessible and enjoyable. One can sense that England truly believes in and practices the "I might be wrong" persona that emerges from his writing. His style is part and parcel of the expansive version of Mormonism that allowed him to make room for "antiwar protests, antinuclear actions, feminist activism, and working for greater academic freedom at BYU" (18). While Haglund traces how many of England's attempts at peacemaking and dialogue failed, her artful treatment of these failures acts as proof of concept that England's attempt to live peacefully in dialogue has great merit.

It is difficult to belong to an institution of twelve million persons, roughly the number of members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when England died, without experiencing some degree of difficulty wrestling with the demands of personal conscience vis-à-vis an organization that often calls for great personal sacrifice from its members. One directly senses in Haglund's narrative the anguish of a man who is sincerely trying to do the right thing, sincerely trying to understand those with whom he disagrees in spiritual matters, including Bruce R. McConkie, a Church apostle. Haglund's treatment of these disagreements offers a rich picture of the growing pains of Mormonism in the 1980s and 1990s and the struggle to maintain orthodoxy in a movement that emphasizes personal revelation and the dictates of individual conscience. England's disagreement with Bruce R. McConkie "lays bear the sometimes extreme difficulty of real dialogue between authoritative doctrinal interpretation and a lay member's earnest questions about ambiguities in the scriptural and prophetic canon" (63). Haglund highlights how productive this tension was to England and how sincerely he himself did not want it to be resolved too perfectly. After all, much is to be gained as we work through answering the call to be a Christian disciple in the midst of trials, traumas, tribulations, and tears. Without offering easy answers, without shying away from the sometimes ugly truths of institutional power, Haglund helps readers appreciate the need, in England's words, "to live maturely as flawed persons in a flawed world" (41).

Although the case Haglund makes for treating England as a liberal is mixed, she masterfully treats the controversies in his life. It cannot be denied that England was a devoted Mormon and a sincere believer in Jesus Christ, and the best part of the book may well be Haglund's treatment of England's ideas on atonement. What England demanded, consistent with Latter-day Saint theology, was the freedom to bind himself to God, the conscientious ability to assent to key doctrines, to thereby maintain "both integrity and loyalty" (88). Haglund's analysis

underscores the way England practiced his religion in ordinary ways. "England's characteristic response," Haglund writes, "to the irresolvable tensions he articulates is action, and particularly religious practice. The argument England never quite makes explicitly is that religious practice integrates unanswerable questions into a life of meaningful action—of trying, essaying, proving contraries. Paradoxes that resist rational resolutions can nevertheless be meaningfully lived" (90). By insisting that we live with paradox, England gestures toward a measured view of the Atonement. This measured view does not place limitations on the possibilities of salvation and exaltation, but it does take seriously the need to see ourselves harnessed to the work of improving the world alongside "a weeping, compassionate God" (98). England emphasized lived religion and saw that "Mormonism's genius lies in refusing to conflate faithfulness and orthodoxy" (101).

Readers of *Eugene England: A Mormon Liberal* will discover a Mormon who was as committed to dialogue and intellectual discovery as he was to faithfulness to the atonement of Jesus Christ. Those commitments necessarily involved England in his own personal tensions with authorities. Haglund is wise enough to trace those tensions and remind us we are better off with them than without them, that living in paradox is always to be preferred to living in the comfort of oversimplifications. As one of the first in an exciting new series published by the University of Illinois Press, Haglund's book delivers on the promise of providing readers short and accessible introductions to important figures in the intellectual life of Mormonism.

There were two books about Eugene England published this past year. The other is Terryl Givens's *Stretching the Heavens: The Life of Eugene England and the Crisis of Modern Mormonism*, published by the University of North Carolina Press. Both of these books present us similar views of the same man. Both books address the wrestle disciples have with their own conscience as it relates to institutional pressures and imprimaturs. Both books, and Eugene England's life,

are gifts to us as we struggle to make sense of our own agency and accountability.

DAVID CHARLES GORE {dgore@d.umn.edu} is professor and department head in the Department of Communication at the University of Minnesota Duluth, where he teaches courses in the history and theory of rhetoric. He is the author of *The Voice of the People: Political Rhetoric in the Book of Mormon*, published in 2019 by the Neal A. Maxwell Institute at Brigham Young University.

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Portrait of a (Latter-day) Saint

Terryl L. Givens. *Stretching the Heavens: The Life of Eugene England and the Crisis of Modern Mormonism*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021. 344 pp. Hardcover: $34.95. ISBN: 978-1-4696-6433-0.

Reviewed by Robert A. Rees

I miss Gene England! I have especially missed his voice these past twenty years. So many times, I have wondered, "What would Gene have said about . . ." as we have stumbled and bungled into the twenty-first century. I have missed hearing his voice on the other end of the line, missed seeing his emails in my inbox, missed just talking with him about his latest passion or "the solemnities of eternity." What a beautiful thing we believe, as Joseph Smith taught: "And that same sociality which exists among us here will exist among us there, only it will be coupled with eternal glory" (Doctrine and Covenants 130:2).

It takes a pound of confidence, an ounce of humility, and a dash of audacity to write a biography, especially of a great person. Eugene England was, in my judgment, a great man. Knowing him, he would have preferred to be known simply as a good man. He was also that.

In truth, Gene was one of the most remarkable Latter-day Saints of my generation, and I believe history will only enlarge his stature as a teacher, scholar, and especially Christian, in the original sense of that word—someone who follows, is devoted to, and attempts to emulate Jesus. History will also show him to be one of the most influential Latter-day Saints of the latter half of the twentieth century.

Not every great person is privileged to have a biographer capable of capturing the essence of his or her heart, mind, and soul, as well as the time in which he or she lived. Gene's family and friends are blessed in having Terryl Givens as his biographer, for three reasons: Like England, Givens is a literary scholar with a broad interest in the intersection of religion and the humanities; like England, he is someone who has sought to balance his intellectual/scholarly and religious/spiritual lives; and like England, Givens has had and is having a significant influence on Latter-day Saint thought and theology, sometimes, as with England, by being willing to challenge the axioms of conventional Latter-day Saint thought.

The one disadvantage Givens has is that he did not know Gene England well or intimately. That has led him at times, in my estimation, to be awry in some of his judgments and characterizations of England. For example, I don't think Givens is correct in seeing Gene as naïve, partly because he also sees Gene as a tragic figure, and naïveté and tragedy simply don't go together. Gene was savvy as well as smart, and he had an uncanny ability to see through some of the organizational foibles of the Church. He was hopeful that he could influence things, but he was not naïve. He recognized his contribution to some of the conflicts he had with individual Church leaders and was forgiving of them, even when the forgiveness wasn't always reciprocated.

Givens does do a masterful job of placing England within the context of his times and showing his continuing influence on Mormonism. That influence can be seen in multiple ways, not least through the lives of the thousands of students who were blessed to sit at Gene's

feet and in his classrooms. One of his students referred to him as "a marvelous work and a wonder!" To use Emerson's image, England's lengthened shadow continues to fall over both the institutional Church and Mormon culture twenty years after his passing. Given the quality of his books and essays, the various journals and organizations he influenced, and the number of colleagues, students, and fellow members he inspired, it will continue to do so.

I first knew Gene England from "The Possibilities of Dialogue," the essay he wrote for the inaugural issue of *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*. Still in graduate school when that first issue arrived, I sat down and read it from cover to cover—and, like many others throughout the Church at that time, I rejoiced to believe there was a place in the Church for people like me. When I started teaching at UCLA in 1966, I flew up to Palo Alto to meet Gene in person. That began a rich and rewarding friendship that lasted until his passing twenty years ago. In a sense, reading Gene's biography is like reading my own, only obliquely. That is, not only were many of Gene's and my experiences in and with the Church similar, but we also had hundreds of conversations over the years that included most of the experiences and episodes Givens chronicles.

Givens's biography of Gene is also a biography of the Church during one of its most challenging periods. As Givens states in his preface, "I had come to appreciate not just the man and his legacy but also his place in the nexus of cultural conflicts and historic transformations within the church that deserved chronicling and elucidation. His life seemed emblematic not just of a personally fraught spiritual journey but also a watershed in the collision of faithful discipleship and a secular onslaught that had its own particular coloring in the church of the later twentieth century" (xiii–xiv). And, one might add, an entrenched Church polity and ecclesiology.

As an intellectual historian and a scholar deeply immersed in both historical and modern Mormonism, Givens provides a vivid picture of

the Church's belated lurch into modernism and the special role England played in attempting to bridge an entrenched conservatism with an emerging liberalism. It was a path littered with both risk and what Givens calls "paradoxical formulation." That paradox—how a Latter-day Saint can "be completely dedicated to the authority of the church and its prophetic leadership without abdicating his own agency and moral responsibility" (82)—was something that plagued England until the end of his life, as it has many others who have sought to change the Church while remaining devoted to it. As Givens says, "England was on the right side of his church's theological history but at the wrong moment in his church's institutional history" (119). The question, given the Church's long, deep, and even adamantine insistence on near-absolute allegiance to authority, is whether any moment would have been right for someone to challenge the Church's teachings and practices in regard to such issues as polygamy, race, feminism, war, sexuality, and other doctrinal matters that England and others were and still are raising. Givens's subtitle, "The Crisis of Modern Mormonism" (which was not his choice, but rather the publisher's) acknowledges that the tensions England experienced are still with us, although the climate on some issues is more open and hopeful than when he was alive.

The fact is, several apostles, notably Boyd K. Packer and Bruce R. McConkie, were threatened by any notion that doctrine and practice could be questioned or interpreted, especially by what Packer characterized as "so-called intellectuals and scholars." As he said, "The doctrines of the gospel are revealed through the Spirit to prophets, not through the intellect of scholars" (245). Or, as McConkie said to England regarding a difference they had over the question of God's progressing (which McConkie had labeled one of the "seven deadly heresies of Mormonism"), "It is my province to teach to the Church what the doctrine is. It is your province to echo what I say or to remain silent" (167). Never mind that what McConkie called heresy some previous leaders had taught as doctrine or that he was reprimanded by President Kimball

for compiling his list of heresies without Church approval. As Givens notes, some of the teachings "McConkie labeled heresy enjoyed—and still enjoy—wide or even majority support among the leadership" (165). One can't help wondering how things might have turned out differently had England interfaced with different apostles (several contemporary ones come to mind!).

The moral dilemma Givens shows England wrestling with throughout his life continues to face many contemporary Latter-day Saint scholars, intellectuals, and "activists" ("those who take intentional action to make a difference for others"): how does one resolve the conflict between allegiance to ecclesiastical authority and allegiance to one's own conscience? For England and for others, that dilemma becomes much more acute when one perceives the Church's position as causing real or potential harm to individuals and even to groups, as it certainly has with the priesthood and temple ban and LGBTQ policies and practices.

One of the most disturbing pieces of information in Givens's biography is England's report of a conversation he had with apostle Hugh B. Brown over the then-existing priesthood ban. According to England, Brown said, "I think all my brethren in the quorum are wrong on this decision, but I would do nothing to destroy the unity of that quorum on which your and my salvation depends." Since such unity didn't exist during much of the nineteenth century, one wonders at the cost of insisting on it today.

What is admirable about Gene England's discipleship is that it was consistent throughout his life. Not only was he consistently faithful, but he also continued to lay his gifts on the altar of the Church even when he was censured, marginalized, and punished. Not many people know that during his times of darkest despair, when faced with the choice of keeping a large financial inheritance from his parents, Gene and his family elected to give it to the Church. For decades that gift has supported missionary work throughout the world. Today, two

Latter-day Saint temples sit on land Eugene and his family deeded to the Church.

Despite the fact that at times Givens sees England as naïve and strongheaded, he admires him for his devotion and vision: "In England's motives and analysis, with the benefit of hindsight, we find a striking prescience vindicated in subsequent years" (216). "The Latter-day Saint church has in many cases responded in precisely those ways England advocated, and for which he was censured" (280). In reference to a 2016 address apostle M. Russell Ballard gave to Church Educational System faculty, Givens says Ballard was prescribing "almost precisely the strategy that had cost England the goodwill of the leadership" (217). Givens notes of Ballard, that in "Directly countering the anti-intellectual attacks and controversy-avoidance of the 1980s, he recast brutally honest scholars—of the type England was—as assets rather than challengers of the faith" (217).

At a fireside in Oakland, California on October 24, 2021, Givens concluded his portrait of England with these words: "I have never personally witnessed the evidence of a man who did more to exemplify the true Christian spirit." Nor have I. It was a privilege to know Eugene England, to be taught by his expansive mind, to be blessed by his generous and forgiving spirit, to be inspired by his example of courageous discipleship.

Among the things that marked Gene's discipleship was his passion for dialogue and his eagerness to seek reconciliation with those who differed with, criticized, and even despitefully used him. His largeness of spirit can be seen in his willingness, to a fault, to admit error, to apologize for and to seek forgiveness for his mistakes and misjudgments, and to make amends for and peace with those who might have been offended by his words or actions. Even at the end of his life he was apologizing and questioning himself. In a tribute to him, "Eugene England Enters Heaven," in "*Proving Contraries*": *A Collection of Writings in Honor of Eugene England* (Signature Books, 2005), the collection I

edited in his honor, I imagine him even apologizing to Jesus. Remembering Gene's love of Shakespeare and his essay, "'No Cause, No Cause': An Essay Toward Reconciliation," I wrote: "I have imagined Gene entering heaven. I see him reluctantly approaching Christ's throne. In my imagination Gene begins to apologize to the Lord for his mistakes, his pride, his shortcomings, telling the Lord that there is cause for the Lord to be disappointed in his stewardship. But before the words are out of his mouth, I imagine Christ lifting Gene up, clasping him to his bosom and saying with cosmic tenderness [as Lear did to Cordelia], 'No cause, no cause'" (273).

Eugene England stretched the heavens—and for many of us, thank heavens, he stretched the earth as well.

ROBERT A. REES {bobrees2@gmail.com} is director and visiting professor of Latter-day Saint/Mormon Studies at Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley. Previously he taught at UCLA and UC Santa Cruz. His most recent publications are *A New Witness to the World* (2020) and *Why I Stay 2: The Challenges of Discipleship for Contemporary Latter-day Saints* (2021). He is co-founder and vice president of the Bountiful Children's Foundation, which addresses malnutrition among LDS and other children in the developing world.

"No Man Condemned Thee,"
9" x 12", hand-cut magazine
images and foil paper on
fabric-wrapped art board, 2020,
by Amber Lee Weiss

Fitting Comfortably: Mormonism and the Narrative of National Violence

Patrick Q. Mason. *Mormonism and Violence: The Battles of Zion*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2019. 75 pp. Paper: $18.00. ISBN: 9781108706285.[1]

Reviewed by Frederick W. Axelgard

This is an important, accessible book that should be in the hands of everyone who thinks deeply about Mormonism's place in the world. Writing for the Cambridge *Element* series on religion and violence, Patrick Mason has produced a crisp, wonderfully written, and, for its size, surprisingly thorough treatment of a vital topic. Interestingly, though, he feels a need to distance himself from the book's premise.

> An Element titled "Mormonism and Violence" comes with a predetermined narrative, and it is not a happy one. The danger of any sustained treatment of "X and violence" is that it inextricably links X with violence in the mind of the reader. . . . At its worst, a book like this can actually be misleading. Even if all the facts are correct, applying the "and violence" filter to one's subject will necessarily highlight certain aspects while entirely obscuring others. (77)

Mason offers as an antidote to this "predetermined narrative" an epilogue highlighting aspects of twenty-first-century Mormonism that show its peacebuilding potential. But he is constrained to acknowledge in the same breath "the very real strain of violence that runs through Latter-day Saint scripture, history, and culture" (78).

This "very real strain of violence" is the theme of Mason's book. He presents it lucidly in each of its four sections, beginning with a thorough discussion of the pervasive and "captivating" narrative of murder

1. The page numbers cited in this review refer to the Kindle edition of the text. ASIN: B07S6BT2BY. Page numbers source ISBN: 1108706282.

and warfare that haunts the Book of Mormon (6). The next three sections move at a brisk, even pace through a violence-strewn history that reaches from the 1830s to the early twenty-first century. Although much of the material will not be new to careful students of Church history, there are many moments in his account that are no less gripping for their familiarity. These include a piercing overview of the rhetorical violence associated with polygamy (37–38) and skillfully composed summaries that round off each section and subsection, like this one:

> Once the embers of the Mormon Reformation had cooled . . . the appetite for using violence as a legitimate method of building the kingdom of God seems to have waned. Out of both principle and pragmatism, the next generation of Latter-day Saint leadership undertook the project of renouncing the violence that their forebears had selectively embraced and replacing it with violence of a different kind. (57–58)

This passage caps off the unsettling essay on the 1850s, which Mason terms "the most lethal decade in Latter-day Saint history." It touches on an extermination campaign against Ute warriors and atrocities against Paiute men, women, and children. His handling of Mountain Meadows is a model of vivid concision that effectively weaves in context about longstanding conflict with the "gentiles" and tensions surrounding the Utah War. The section concludes with an insightful summary of vigilante violence against "apostates" during the Mormon Reformation of the mid-1850s. Mason neatly qualifies this dense depiction of frontier violence with this observation: "The remarkable fact that historians can name virtually every instance of violence by church members against their opponents in the movement's early decades suggests the relative infrequence of such episodes" (40).

The last main section of the book assumes a large burden. It seeks to explain how the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and its people, after almost half a century of fundamental hostility and outright war with the American nation, eventually came to terms with ceding sovereign authority to the US government. It offers more thoughtful

analysis than preceding chapters but is still replete with important historical tidbits. One is a heretofore little-discussed 1889 First Presidency declaration embracing the sovereignty of the American nation several years before Utah statehood, which reads in part: "Church government and civil government are distinct and separate in our theory and practice, and we regard it as part of our destiny to aid in the maintenance and perpetuity of the institutions of our country" (61). This adjusted posture set the stage for a new century in which American warrior-Saints met their commitment to nationalism by fighting in two world wars and conflict arenas like Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq.

As Mason points out, it was also a century in which a philosophical undercurrent emerged to question that commitment. This undercurrent found expression at the highest echelons of Church leadership in J. Reuben Clark and Spencer W. Kimball, and among intellectuals such as Eugene England and Hugh Nibley. But such objections have done little to affect the predisposition among the American Church at large that today still "accepts and even privileges the state's right to summon them to violence" (77). Meanwhile, the Community of Christ, a "denominational cousin" to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, made a major shift to adopt the pursuit of world peace as a defining principle of its identity and mission (18). Bringing us up to the present, Mason concludes: "Since 1898 Latter-day Saints have fit comfortably into [Catholic theologian] William Cavanaugh's thought experiment: killing in the name of religion is abhorrent and unthinkable, while killing in the name of the state seems to be a perfectly reasonable and even sacred duty" (71).

As an account of where things stand, this book is a compact, useful, and at times even brilliant statement. As a roadmap for what lies ahead, it raises many questions. Such as: How does the thick thread of violence that weaves through Latter-day Saint history, scripture, and culture affect the Church's ability to take different direction? Is the weight of its history so heavy and its reading of the Book of Mormon so firmly

militaristic that it precludes envisioning—let alone building—a future where Latter-day Saints help tip the balance away from "the violence that lies at the heart of the human condition" (6)?

Unfortunately, it would appear that the answer to this last question is likely to be "yes." For one thing, the critical undercurrents Mason speaks of were/are probably even shallower than he suggests. It has been almost fifty years since the US bicentennial, when Spencer W. Kimball told the Saints and American society, "We are a warlike people."[2] Nothing remotely like this has been said since at the general level of the Church, and reference to President Kimball's prophetic perspective in Church publications is virtually non-existent. Similarly, almost twenty years ago then-Elder Russell M. Nelson expressed his belief that peace on earth can actually be achieved and called on Latter-day Saints to be peacemakers; these teachings have also passed quietly into obscurity.[3]

Meanwhile, efforts by Latter-day Saint thinkers to develop a theology on war and violence have been paralyzed for years because (among other things) US-based specialists and academics cannot get beyond their competing pacifist vs. militarist readings of the Book of Mormon. This debate, which has been carried out primarily in articles and book chapters, has also suffered from a certain fragmentation and lack of attention. The Latter-day Saint literature on violence and war urgently needs fully developed, book-length treatments—particularly by authors

2. Spencer W. Kimball, "The False Gods We Worship," *Ensign*, June 1976, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1976/06/the-false-gods-we-worship?lang=eng. President Kimball went on to add, "we train a man in the art of war and call him a patriot, thus, in the manner of Satan's counterfeit of true patriotism, perverting the Savior's teaching: Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you."

3. Russell M. Nelson, "Blessed Are the Peacemakers," Oct. 2002, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2002/10/blessed-are-the-peacemakers?lang=eng.

who are not tied in knots by the polarization of US politics—to deal with a topic so complex and globally significant.

It is my sense that this small volume by Patrick Mason can be read as evidence that the culture of the present-day American Church has little to contribute to a moral quest against war and violence. Mainstream American Mormonism is imbibing fully of the crisis in US political life and mired in a single-minded Book of Mormon exegesis, neither of which positions it to help address the geopolitical tensions or meet the theological needs of a pre-millennial world.[4] There is also the seemingly irresistible appeal of history to consider. Mormon studies has an enduring obsession with telling and re-telling the Mormon story that leaves little space for meaningful attention to the ethics of issues seemingly outside the cultural boundaries of the Church—issues such as violence, war, and peace. There is a genuine need for creative, new thinking that focuses on discovering whether and how Mormonism might help make the wider world of the present and future a better place to live.

The message between the lines of Mason's book is that the time has come to draw on the largely untapped moral resources of Mormonism's global (i.e., non-American) community. A basic reorientation away from US-centric approaches to Mormon history, ethics, and scriptural exegesis is overdue. With respect to the issue of violence, I adopt a point made by Mason and take it a step further. In the present book, he writes delicately of the Saints being influenced by "the pull of religious nationalism," but his writing makes clear that it is the embrace of *American* religious nationalism that has led the Church and its members to accept state power and the violence associated with it (71). In his recent book *Restoration: God's Call to the 21st-Century World*, Mason similarly asks

4. For robust frameworks that use scripture in pursuit of ethics, see Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (San Francisco: Harper, 1996), and N. T. Wright, *Paul and His Recent Interpreters* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015).

Latter-day Saints of the twenty-first century to shed some of the "excess baggage" of nationalism and to

> think harder than we typically do about what claim the nation state has on our loyalties and affections. Are we Americans (or Mexicans, or Filipinos) first, or citizens of the kingdom of God? Is it possible to be "subject to" secular governmental authorities without uncritically worshiping at Caesar's altar? The restoration does not call us to withdraw from political society but neither does it consider the nation holy.[5]

Mason rightly directs his admonition first and foremost to "we Americans," and parenthetically to Saints from other countries. Yet his point can be made more directly. Since Mormonism in the United States appears unwilling to distance itself from the toxic political culture that surrounds it, should American nationalism continue to shape the religion's place in the world? Sadly not, as the faith's longstanding identification with American exceptionalism is proving to be not only parochial but harmful to the quest for a globally relevant Latter-day Saint ethics on violence and war.

FREDERICK W. AXELGARD {axelgardfw2@gmail.com} is an independent scholar with a background in Book of Mormon studies and international politics. His writings have appeared in the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* and *BYU Studies*. His professional career centered on the Middle East, including several years of involvement in Arab-Israeli peace negotiations and service at the US Central Command following the 9/11 terrorist attacks. He graduated from Brigham Young University and received advanced degrees from the Fletcher School of Law & Diplomacy at Tufts University.

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5. Patrick Q. Mason, *Restoration: God's Call to the 21st Century World* (Meridian, Idaho: Faith Matters, 2020), 63.

Establishing Zion in the Heat of Battle

Kenneth L. Alford, ed. *Saints at War: The Gulf War, Afghanistan, and Iraq*. Provo: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2020. 301 pp. Hardcover: $29.99. ISBN: 978-1-9443-9487-5.

Reviewed by CarrieAnne Simonini DeLoach

On April 13, 2021, President Biden announced that the United States would be withdrawing its troops from Afghanistan, indicating a shift in American foreign policy in the Middle East. *Saints at War: The Gulf War, Afghanistan, and Iraq* is, therefore, a timely publication recording the contributions of members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the Gulf War, Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan, and Operation Iraqi Freedom. The volume is the next installment in the *Saints at War* series, a project dedicated to archiving the military experiences of Mormon service members.

The structure of the book lends itself to undergraduate student instruction as well as the military history enthusiast. Each of the three sections is introduced by a timeline chronicling developments in a particular conflict alongside "Church and world events." The colocation of information supports one of the major themes of *Saints at War*, the evolution of Church organization in dynamic combat situations. Following the timelines are brief "overviews" addressing the origins of a conflict and the LDS Church's status in the countries involved. However, the bulk of each chapter is comprised of photographs and narratives of service members, service member families, civilian contractors, and religious leaders impacted by the wars in question.

There are seventy-five accounts included. They overwhelmingly reflect a male, active-duty army combat arms officer's perspective. The editor, Kenneth Alford, does not reveal the methodology for contributor selection, and the reader is left wondering whether this focus is

purposeful or accidental. Combat arms specialties include infantry, armor, combat aviation, air defense artillery, combat engineers, special forces, and field artillery. While these branches are central to any war fought by the United States military, the focus upon them obscures the role of combat service and combat service support occupational specialties—the only positions that were, up until 2015, open to women. There are seven female contributors to *Saints at War*, only two of which are soldiers. The remaining five are the widows of Latter-day Saints killed in combat, an artist who commemorates the deaths of veterans in portraiture, and civilians who served alongside spouses employed in war zones. The focus on the spousal relationship as a part of these women's wartime experiences adds an important perspective but also replicates the "separate spheres" mentality that pervades many military histories in which women's place in war is detached from actual fighting. Three themes repeatedly occur in the narratives of combat experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan: the importance of priesthood organization to the maintenance of spirituality in a combat zone, the protection and comfort offered by personal revelation, and the parallels soldiers drew from the Book of Mormon and twenty-first-century conflicts.

In Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm, the LDS Church had yet to create an infrastructure that could account for, track, and organize deployed service members in the region. It "operated primarily as several separate service member groups and individuals" (8). The situation in Afghanistan would begin in a similarly chaotic manner, with service members called to be group leaders by their home stake presidents, leading in some instances to overlapping realms of responsibility in the war zone. This changed in 2006 when Eugene Wikle was called as the senior service member group leader for the entire country. The Kabul Afghanistan Military District was organized in 2008, complete with a Relief Society, with civilian Carol Thompson called as the first woman district Relief Society president in a war zone. Many of the accounts included are those of the group leaders Wikle set apart, and they tell the unfolding of a more organized Church hierarchy spread

over hundreds of miles and bound by a common purpose and email. Of particular spiritual importance to many of the veterans included in the volume was the 2009 district conference comprising talks from Salt Lake City and combat zone leaders that was disseminated via DVD. The lessons learned in Afghanistan were applied in Iraq, and the Baghdad Iraq Military District was formed in 2009. While *Saints at War* focuses heavily on the technicalities of Church organization in the region, it does so with a spiritual purpose. Soldiers, airmen, and marines within a district are empowered with priesthood keys that are not present in service member groups. The importance of priesthood keys is related in the story of "Brother Abraham," identified as the "first Afghan member of the Church to reside in his native country" (153).

The World War II adage "there are no atheists in fox holes" was also true for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Many soldiers in the volume relay instances in which their example encouraged their compatriots to study the scriptures, hold ecumenical services together, and care for one another. Also numerous were the instances in which soldiers credited personal revelation with preserving an individual's or a unit's safety. This was especially true regarding the imminent danger IEDs (improvised explosive devices) posed to the convoys necessary to sustain a large-scale, long-term military presence. Photographs of damaged Humvees and armored vehicles paralleled recollections of miraculous escapes. However, not every soldier's life was spared, and the most poignant recollections in *Saints at War* were written by Jenny Taylor and Rikka Jacobsen, widows of the conflicts.

Though the anthology comes close to orientalism in its depictions of an unchanged Afghanistan and Iraq, much of this projection of timelessness is due to service members' comparisons of modern warfare to events in the Book of Mormon. Soldiers processed the lives they were required to take, the suffering they witnessed, and the constant danger to themselves and those in their charge through their internalization of the actions of Helaman, Captain Moroni, and the "stripling warriors." For example, special forces operator Colby Jenkins commented, "my

knowledge of the Book of Mormon, in particular, paid tremendous dividends during my deployment. It helped me to better understand the nature of the enemy we faced. The evils the AQAM did to the Afghan people and the manner in which they lived and fought often paralleled the Book of Mormon's Gadianton robbers" (101). Kenneth Alford is to be commended for incorporating narratives that depict modern soldiering as a complex mixture of serving local peoples and fighting an enemy Mormon soldiers humanized, while overcoming feelings of guilt at harming others and surviving the loss of comrades. Much of this complexity is revealed in the moments in which veterans render themselves vulnerable to the reader. These reflections temper the potential of the projection of a sanitized and idealized Mormon masculinity achieved through combat service.

Saints at War is an important contribution to the growing field of Mormon military history and the larger field of military history struggling to address the methodological challenges of preserving the past in an electronically obsessed present. The decline of letter writing and the increase of instant communications like email and cell phones have altered the remnants left behind by veterans. Unarchived inboxes endanger the preservation of military histories. Kenneth Alford demonstrates how such accounts can be written while including the perspectives of Church leaders, civilian contractors, and homefront voices, showing the pervasive impact wars have on nations beyond the battlefield.

CARRIEANNE SIMONINI DELOACH {csd2@rice.edu} received her PhD in history from Rice University. Her dissertation, "Conflicting Loyalties: Mormon Americanization, Sectarianism, and Gender Ideology in Utah's Spanish- and Philippine-American Wars Experience," centers Mormon women as agentive subjects in military history. CarrieAnne is currently the executive director of the Mormon History Association and a participant in the Neal A. Maxwell Institute's Consultation on Latter-day Saint Women in Historical Perspective. Before her career in academia, she served as a Medical Service Corps officer in the United States Army.

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An Assortment of Meditations

Samuel M. Brown. *Where the Soul Hungers: One Doctor's Journey from Atheism to Faith*. Provo: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2021. 157 pp. Paperback: $12.99. ISBN: 978-1-9503-0404-2.

Reviewed by Robert Bennett

Samuel M. Brown's *Where the Soul Hungers* is something of a grab bag of sundry reflections on the gospel. As Brown himself explains, the book is intended to be part "pure devotions" and part "philosophical essays" mixed with scattered attempts to "repent" or "celebrate life and the senses" (10–11). Frequently, he simply offers remarkably fresh interpretations of what might otherwise be considered all too familiar scriptures. Ultimately, this menagerie of meditations extends in multiple inventive and creative directions. As such, there is no central thread that ties the collection together, but this allows Brown ample latitude to explore a surprisingly wide range of territory.

The text starts off with a philosophical tone as Brown attempts to reconfigure intellectual questions in more spiritually productive theoretical frameworks and advocates restoring religious sensibilities to a highly secularized modern world. But it quickly turns in a more personal direction, relating moving anecdotes about Brown's struggles to be a better person, whether this is by becoming a more equal partner in his marriage or by baking "cookies of the priesthood" (79) for fellow church members, which enables him to discover a new "way to bring the mystery, power, and ordinariness of the sacrament into the patterns of ministry" (76). Other engaging stories describe his experiences of being mistaken for a homeless man (twice) and his protracted struggle to learn to appreciate opera. He even offers brief glimpses into how his wife's battle with cancer helped him develop a more "sacramental life,

one more sacred and more ordinary than I had previously known" (72). The emphasis is always on how these personal experiences have helped Brown and, by extension, can also help the reader "expand possibilities for living religiously" (11).

At its best, Brown's meditations reveal surprising new insights into the gospel from unexpected angles and perspectives. Counterintuitively, he advocates for living an *inauthentic* life that rejects modern "expressive individualism" (51) for a more communal life aligned to "something greater and better than" our own personal selves (55). In another clever twist, he subtly reframes a story about the blessings he incorrectly misremembered receiving for not doing homework on Sunday as perhaps really being more about his "arrogance that expects God to deliver blessings on command" (64). He even extends this incorrectly remembered incident to help explain why Joseph Smith told his own First Vision story in different ways on different occasions because of the "twists and turns in the telling of our sacred stories" (66). When it comes to interpreting scriptures, Brown suggests that we might more profitably read the story of David and Goliath by casting ourselves in the role of Goliath rather than David. Provocatively reading this story "upside down" (99), he writes, "When I start to think I've encountered a Goliath in my life, I pause now and ask whether I am in fact the Goliath" (98). This reversal of the narrative, Brown argues, can help promote greater humility and civility in our dealings with others.

The one problematic aspect of Brown's treatise, however, is that it attempts to pass itself off as something of a faith crisis, or at least a faith struggle, with its subtitle describing itself as "one doctor's journey from atheism to faith." Strictly speaking, this is not what Brown's text really is. Brown may self-describe as a "lapsed atheist" (5), but by this he apparently means that his father had to "cajole" him into being baptized because of his "conviction" that he was a "strenuous atheist" at the tender young age of eight and that he considered himself something of a "French existentialist" in high school even if he "didn't understand much of the

actual philosophy" (15). This doesn't really represent the deeply invested, enduring commitment to atheism that the subtitle seems to suggest, especially when Brown admits that his "adolescent system of belief and practice collapsed" with "nothing of any importance" from his former life "remain[ing] as it had been" by the time he turned eighteen (16). Brown may have had a very interesting life as a teenage existentialist, but that is not the story that he presents in this book. Very few details about this former life as an atheist are given—aside from perhaps his nonconformist appearance and a brief questioning of his sexual identity—and even the particulars of his teenage conversion story are not recounted in this volume, though he explains that he has already presented them elsewhere. Certainly, this brief adolescent conversion story is in no way the complex story of a mature, well-educated doctor seriously grappling with issues of faith and doubt. Instead, Brown describes himself perhaps more accurately as "steadfastly religious" (9) with a soul "hungry for the presence of God" (5). Long before he becomes a doctor, he describes his missionary self as a "scrupulous perfectionist" (21), while at college he remains "fastidious about not doing any schoolwork on Sundays" (63). Ultimately, what is recounted in this book are the impressive spiritual musings of a deeply committed believer, a believer who has much to say about his interesting and hard-won personal insights into the gospel, but very little about any serious, let alone protracted, faith crisis. Methinks the teenage atheist doth protest too much.

This, in turn, raises a deeper question not only about this specific volume itself but also about the Maxwell Institute's larger Living Faith series to which this book belongs. Several volumes in this series are powerful personal reflections on living a life deeply committed to the gospel, including Adam S. Miller's *Letters to a Young Mormon* and George B. Handley's *If Truth Were a Child*. While both of these works are informed by each author's life as a scholar, neither one presents itself as the faith crisis of someone immersed in profound doubt. Both authors stand comfortably in their own Mormon skin. Even Patrick Q.

Mason's *Planted: Belief and Belonging in an Age of Doubt* is more about how to respond to other people's faith crises than about Mason's own personal religious struggles. The question should be asked, then, why Brown didn't also take such a readily available approach and simply lay out his meditations on the gospel instead of tacking on his somewhat superficial flirtation with atheism as a bait-and-switch frame narrative. One wonders if Brown's volume is simply trying too hard to attach itself to the rising cultural cachet of faith crisis narratives in Mormon culture at large. If this is as compelling a confrontation with doubt as the Living Faith series can come up with, however, the series might be better served by staying in its own lane.

ROBERT BENNETT {robert.bennett@montana.edu} is a professor at Montana State University in the Department of English. He is currently working on a novel, *Elder Lithium: The Misadventures of a Manic Mormon Missionary*.

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Smoot in New Light

Michael Harold Paulos and Konden Smith Hansen, eds.
The Reed Smoot Hearings: The Investigation of a Mormon Senator and the Transformation of an American Religion.
Logan: Utah State University Press, 2021. 302 pp.
Paper: $46.00. ISBN: 978-1-64642-311-8.

Reviewed by Kathleen Flake

The eight essays in this collection describe and interpret the US Senate's investigation of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints during the Progressive Era. Nominally an investigative hearing on the election of Utah senator Reed Smoot, who was also a member of the

Church's hierarchy, the four-year hearing interrogated for lawlessness the Church and its leadership, not only regarding its marital practices but also temple rites, economic holdings, and political activities. The larger history has been told by others; the contribution of this collection is to highlight and elaborate on some of the enduring questions raised by the hearings and personal detail obscured in other accounts.

The book is divided into two parts: the first concerns the hearings' public effect and the second, the actors. Konden Hansen's essay provides a theoretical frame to the essays that follow. He argues that "America's turn toward secularization began to grasp Mormonism only after" 1890 (9) and succeeded in disciplining it (as well as accepting Smoot) based on "new secular standards . . . rooted in liberal Protestant assumptions" (10) and defined by the triumph of "moral actions as opposed to theological principles" (43). Hansen credits the resolution of the Smoot hearings to Protestantism's "modernist crisis," an internal and eventually schismatic struggle for orthodoxy, which produced twentieth-century conservative evangelicalism and evidenced the multi-determined decline of the WASP establishment.

The remaining three essays in part one discuss, respectively, the Senate debate on whether to seat Smoot; the lawmaking efforts of the national anti-polygamy movements; and the attacks on polygamy after the Smoot hearings. Co-editor Michael Paulos's description of the statements, political positions, and scholarly interpretation of the Senate debate and its consequences will be very helpful to those new to this history. Byron and Kathryn Daynes trace anti-polygamy attitudes and efforts to amend the US Constitution. Although, as the authors say, there is little relation between these efforts and the Smoot hearings, their detailed charting of the fifty-five proposed amendments enables the reader to better understand and appreciate the scope and strength of the anti-polygamy protest. Largely in terms of the journalistic efforts of ex-Mormon Frank J. Cannon, or, as Joseph F. Smith liked to call him, "Furious Judas Cannon," Ken Driggs discusses the decade-long

reaction to the hearings. Each of the authors has demonstrated mastery of these topics in other publications and do not disappoint here, either in terms of their accounting for or interpretation of the hearings.

Part two of the book views the hearings through the experiences of Smoot's wife Alfa May Eldredge (Allie), his secretary Carl Badger, his Church president Joseph F. Smith, and his chief interlocutor, Idaho senator Fred T. Dubois. The book also contains an appendix by Michael Quinn that identifies post-manifesto polygamist marriages performed between 1890 and 1907. The absence of Smoot's journal for the period of the hearings makes all the more welcome Kathryn Egan's description of the 1903 to 1907 correspondence between her great-grandparents. Excerpts from Allie's and Reed's letters and details about their Nauvoo-surviving and Territorial-pioneering families add an intimate and insightful personal commentary on this very public event. Paulos adds a second essay describing Joseph F. Smith's four-day testimony before the Senate investigative committee and an analysis of the scholarly treatment of its significance. His inclusion of portions of the transcript enlivens the description, and its publication here will hopefully draw to it a portion of the attention it received in its day and deserves in ours. If anyone suffered nigh unto Smoot during the hearing, it was probably his secretary Carl Badger. Gary Bergera's reprise of his *Sunstone* essay is a welcome addition to the book, showing Badger as an even more "modern Mormon" than his boss, his "personal agony" a litmus test for the reaction of the Church's younger generation to the hearings' disclosures (222). John Brumbaugh closes the volume with the story of senator and former polygamy-raiding federal marshal Fred T. Dubois. A major orchestrator and would-be political beneficiary of the hearings, Senator Dubois is shown to have failed in both aims. He had to watch Smoot keep his title and himself lose it at the hands of an electorate who deemed him too obsessed with Mormonism.

This is an interesting collection of essays that illuminate a very important period in Latter-day Saint history. The general reader will

find much to amuse, as well as educate, and the scholar will find in it not only much of interest but also opportunities for further research. The relative brevity of these essays makes the volume of use in undergraduate courses in Latter-day Saint and US political history.

KATHLEEN FLAKE {kathleen.flake@virginia.edu} is Richard Lyman Bushman Professor of Mormon Studies at the University of Virginia. She teaches courses in American religious history and in the interaction of American religion and law. Her primary research interests are in the adaptive strategies of American religions and First Amendment questions of church and state. She is the author of *The Politics of American Religious Identity: The Seating of Senator Reed Smoot, Mormon Apostle*. Her current project is "Mormon Matriarchy: A Study of Gendered Power in Antebellum America." She has published in several scholarly journals and is on the editorial board of *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* and the *Mormon Studies Review*.

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The Promise and Limitations of Working-Class Male Protagonists

Levi S. Peterson. *Losing a Bit of Eden: Recent Stories*. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2021. 256 pp. Paper: $14.95. ISBN: 978-1-56085-292-6.

Reviewed by Melissa Leilani Larson

The ten stories that comprise *Losing a Bit of Eden* sustain Levi Peterson's position as one of the most adept scribes of the twentieth-century American West. Each story is well grounded in a particular time and against a specific landscape, and somehow all feels gently connected.

There is no doubt that Peterson is a master of language. This volume is brimming with striking turns of phrase that linger long after one

closes its pages. Several times I came across a line or a moment that made me stop and breathe: *This is the good stuff. This is what I'm here for.* One such instance is found in the story "Jesus Enough"; it's the moment for which the story is named. When protagonist Darby's mother dies, he has the following conversation with his stepfather:

> "Dying, I mean. Just suddenly not existing anymore."
> Darby nodded.
> "It could make you wish Jesus was real."
> "Yes, sir, it could. It does."
> Folks you live with believe he's real, I suspect."
> "They do."
> Jack loosened his tie. "Just having her was Jesus enough for me."

That exchange, simple and unassuming and so very real, hit me hard. There are several other moments like it peppered throughout. "Jesus Enough" is broken up into yearly episodes in Darby's life in turn-of-the-century Montana. Working in a mine as a young man, Darby befriends Harley, a fellow who will go on to assist with a bank robbery and hang for it. When Darby realizes that the man responsible for the heist is still free, he vows to avenge his friend. Along the way he courts a Mormon girl, joins the Church, and settles on a ranch near Park City, Utah. The story is quietly stunning; it unfurls slowly, deliberately, washing over the reader like an incoming tide.

That said, I must mention a sentence that ruined this beautiful work for me. Darby's wife Tilly loses her brother in a horrific accident, and she cries in her husband's arms. Peterson writes: "He pitied her but that didn't keep him from taking advantage of her vulnerability and doing what a married man has a right to do."

I put the book down and went for a walk. I didn't know if I would be able to pick it up again.

This moment in "Jesus Enough" encapsulates the difficulty I experienced with this collection of stories overall. It is sprawling, beautiful, raw, emotional, human. It is also troublingly misogynistic. Other stories

are even more problematic than Darby's. "Gentleman Stallions" is about Irvin, a man who has to muster up the courage to interfere with his boss's decision to rape a woman, a stranger, at first sight. The lackadaisical mention of rape is chilling.

"The Return of the Native" focuses on the elderly Rulon who raped his cousin when they were both teens. When she becomes pregnant, her father disowns her and sends her away. Rulon ruined his cousin's life, and he knows it; he has spent his own lifetime ruminating on it—and the reader is forced to ruminate with him.

Several other stories are about young men who impregnate young women. "Sandrine" is about a young man who nearly runs off with a friend's wife. "Cedar City" is about a missionary who leaves his mission early to marry the young woman carrying his unborn child. "Bode and Iris" are two unlikely lovers brought together by an unexpected pregnancy. In "Badge and Bryant," two fourteen-year-old boys make a pact to each get a girl pregnant.

In "The Shyster," newlywed Arne decides to support his wife Leanne despite her feminist ideals: she doesn't take his name, she prays to Heavenly Mother, and she works as a lawyer—"a shyster," according to Arne's father—who defends sex workers in court. Peterson describes Arne as one who "respected feminists at a distance, but their battle wasn't his." Leanne is a much fuller, more complete portrait of a woman than just about any other in the book. But that isn't saying much, as we only meet her in snatches, and from Arne's perspective.

The opening piece, "Losing a Bit of Eden," is the only story that features a female protagonist: Ellen, a middle-aged woman whose husband serves in the bishopric. When their monthly temple trip ends in disaster, a blizzard forces Ellen into an uncomfortably intimate situation with the bishop. Despite the innocent necessity of their circumstances, Ellen wonders if she has been unfaithful to her husband.

Peterson is often hailed as one of our greatest Mormon writers because his work examines Mormon life with an unflinching gaze. The

irony of this book, however, is that while its gaze may be unflinching, its scope is narrow. Peterson is still writing as though the perspective of working-class white men is the only one worth contemplating. Yes, it is important that we see their stories, but including a wider cast of more fully developed female characters and people of color would echo the diversity of the real world we live in—a world Peterson doesn't seem to want to acknowledge.

MELISSA LEILANI LARSON {mel_leilani@mac.com} is a mixed-race Filipina American playwright and screenwriter. Plays: *Little Happy Secrets*, *Pilot Program*, *Pride & Prejudice*, *Persuasion*, *Sweetheart Come*, *Mountain Law, Gin Mummy* and *Mestiza, or Mixed*. Films: *Jane and Emma*, *Freetown* and "Patience." An O'Neill semi-finalist, Mel is the 2018 recipient of the AML Smith-Pettit Foundation Award for Outstanding Contribution to Mormon Letters and currently serves as President of the Association for Mormon Letters. MFA, Iowa Playwrights Workshop. *melissaleilanilarson.com*

WORLD WITHOUT MASKS

Tyler Johnson

This address was delivered in the sacrament meeting of the Stanford First Ward in June 2021. That Sunday was the first time the congregation had been allowed to meet again in their building after seven months of Zoom-only church and another eight months of meeting in a nearby park. At the time of the address, the Santa Clara County public health department had just lifted its indoor mask mandate for the first time in fifteen months, and cases in that area had ebbed—it appeared the pandemic was largely winding down. Subsequent variants have since changed the outlook significantly. The author encourages vaccination and masking in accordance with local health ordinances and believes we have an ethical obligation to protect the medically vulnerable by masking and vaccination.

Today, June 20, 2021, is the first day since March 15, 2020 that we in the Stanford First Ward have been allowed to attend service in our own building without masks and social distancing. As all of you know, because of the complexity and frankly onerous and sometimes confusing nature of the county COVID restrictions, our ward leadership decided last November that, rather than try to meet in the building, we would meet in the park next door.

As such, we've spent the last eight months lugging our rack of chairs across the parking lot and setting our rows of distanced seats up under the shade of a giant oak tree. We've all sat and strained together to hear the speakers over a faulty portable audio system while scrub jays poke fun at us from the bushes in the background.

That little plot of grass will always occupy a fond place in my heart, reminiscent for me of the Waters of Mormon for Alma's little band of

religious refugees: "All this was done in Mormon; yea, by the waters of Mormon, in the forest of that was near the waters of Mormon; yea, the place of Mormon, the waters of Mormon, the forest of Mormon, how beautiful are they to the eyes of them who there came to the knowledge of their redeemer; yea, and how blessed are they, for they shall sing to his praise forever" (Mosiah 18:30).

Still, even those lovely outdoor meetings required masks for all involved. And so today is the first morning in more than fifteen months when I can look out and see all of your full faces. Since many of you have moved here since the pandemic began, this is the first time I've seen many of your faces, period.

You—and your faces—are a beautiful sight.

Furthermore, this week of unmasking has reminded me how lovely it is to see faces everywhere: smiles, frowns, freckles, dimples, chins, noses. Eyes may be the window to the soul, but we've recognized during the pandemic how much we lose when half a face is hidden behind a mask.

All of this has brought to my mind the verse from 1 John 3:2, which reads: "Beloved, now we are the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as he is."

This verse strikes me because of its insistence that there is more to knowing God than we at first suppose. Various translations of this verse emphasize the point by indicating that we shall see God "just" as He is, or as He "really" is, or as He "truly" is. The point in all cases is that whatever we think we know about God, our knowledge lacks detail, precision, and specificity.

We think we know God, but we see only through a glass darkly.

More than that, I wonder how often our ignorance in knowing God blinds us from seeing the divine all around us. This, it seems to me, is the vital reminder brought to us from the stirring conclusion to one our best-loved hymns. In "A Poor Wayfaring Man of Grief," we

recount together the narrative of a nameless narrator who encounters an unidentified stranger who sequentially passes through hunger, thirst, the lash of the elements, the sting of assault and robbery, and, finally, imprisonment and condemnation.

The narrator, apparently in spite of himself, decides to help the stranger in every instance only to find, in the last verse:

> Then in a moment to my view
> The stranger started from disguise.
> The token in his hands I knew;
> The Savior stood before mine eyes.
> He spake, and my poor name he named,
> "Of me, thou hast not been ashamed.
> These deeds shall thy memorial be;
> Fear not, thou didst them unto me."[1]

Here again, we have it: after six verses, the narrator finally comes to see the nameless stranger *as he really is*. This theme runs deep through restored Christian theology. We read in Jacob, after all, "for the spirit speaketh the truth and lieth not. Wherefore, it speaketh of things as they really are, and of things as they really will be; wherefore, these things are manifested unto us plainly, for the salvation of our souls" (4:13).

Likewise, out entire notion of mortality is one of forgetfulness. We may come to Earth trailing clouds of glory, but Joseph's teaching was that a veil necessarily keeps invisible our heavenly home. And, of course, one of the temple's most powerful motifs is just that: a veil. As the brother of Jared's encounter with Jesus reminds us: the end of our believing will be for the veil to be rent away—for God to be unmasked—and for us to see Jesus and our Heavenly Parents as they really are.

Thus, this unmasking Sunday carries with it deep religious overtones for us as Latter-day saints. Still, my hope is that we will ensure

1. "A Poor Wayfaring Man of Grief," *Hymns*, no. 29.

that these religious overtones come not only from our imaginings of a coming day of reunion with God. No, the most important religious lessons for this day of unmasking come to us here and now.

As we have studied the Doctrine and Covenants this year, I have been haunted again and again by the mini-parable that is contained in a single verse in the Doctrine and Covenants, section 38 verse 26, where we read: "For what man among you having twelve sons, and is no respecter of them, and they serve him obediently, and he saith unto the one: Be thou clothed in robes and sit thou here; and to the other: Be thou clothed in rags and sit thou there—and looketh upon his sons and saith I am just?"

And then, in case we've missed the point, the next verse concludes: "Behold, this I have given unto you as a parable, and it is even as I am. I say unto you, be one; and if you are not one ye are not mine."

This parable haunts me because the pandemic has been an era of great unmasking. It has fixed our collective cultural gaze on the many ways in which we are the children at that table and reminds us how great the responsibility we have for better ensuring the equitable distribution of opportunity and resources between us.

Because of our belief in agency, no matter how fairly our Heavenly Parents wish the Earth's bounty was shared between their children, too often those of us with the power to do so keep too much for ourselves.

The pandemic has reminded us, as one example, that those who work the hardest at some of society's most difficult and thankless jobs too often receive a pittance for their efforts. Likewise, those whose skin is darker than that of their peers too often find themselves deprived of just access to basic rights such as life and liberty without unjust incursions, including from the very people who are supposed to keep all of us safe.

This all brings me back to King Benjamin, that nearly inexhaustible source of wisdom and truth. I have often been struck by his insistence on talking not about "the poor" but about "the beggar." This point seems

crucial because it does not allow us to blur our gaze, thinking only of nameless, faceless masses.

No, a beggar is an individual, a single person who confronts us with a mouth, a nose, and eyes.

I met a beggar on my way to work three days ago. I could not pass by unmoved precisely because he was one person, a man of average height and build with chocolate brown skin, decaying teeth, a stooped carriage, soft eyes, and a stuttering vocal inflection. Helping him was not a matter of an electronic deposit. Instead, it required me to go myself to the store and think about what to buy—*which types of food would he be able to chew without good teeth?*, for example—for this particular man.

A beggar unmasks the plight of the poor—if we pay enough attention to notice.

In my mind, then, King Benjamin would use this shared cultural unmasking moment to ask, "What have you learned during the year you've been masked? What has your time without seeing each other's faces taught you about my gospel? How will you behave differently because of this time away from those around you? During this time when you've all been masked, have you finally learned to really see each other for the first time?"

As I think on these imagined questions, I'm reminded of these impassioned words, ringing down the decades to us from Dickens's immortal *A Christmas Carol*, as Ebenezer Scrooge encounters Marley's ghost:

> "Oh! captive, bound, and double-ironed," cried the phantom, "not to know, that ages of incessant labour by immortal creatures, for this earth must pass into eternity before the good of which it is susceptible is all developed. Not to know that any Christian spirit working kindly in its little sphere, whatever it may be, will find its mortal life too short for its vast means of usefulness. Not to know that no space of regret can make amends for one life's opportunity! Yet such was I! Oh! such was I!

> "But you were always a good man of business, Jacob," faltered Scrooge, who now began to apply this to himself.
>
> "Business!" cried the Ghost, wringing its hands again. "Mankind was my business. The common welfare was my business; charity, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence were, all, my business. The dealings of my trade were but a drop of water in the comprehensive ocean of my business!"[2]

Here we sit in Silicon Valley, surrounded by riches—of education, of wealth, of opportunity, of comfort—that likely exceed those of any nation in any period of history. We risk becoming fat with the glut of our abundance.

I worry frequently about my family's share of this abundance. Though our house is, by most standards, very small, does it nonetheless represent keeping too much for ourselves? What about our (old and unremarkable) cars? The trips we take? The clothes we buy?

How much is too much? At what point do I keep too much for myself?

Am I seated at the feast, too absorbed with myself to notice how richly I eat while those around me sit down to a place with nothing to eat and no clothes to wear?

Have I learned to really see?

As we remove our masks today, let this be the moment when we listen together to the combined prophetic calls of Alma, Jacob, John, Benjamin, and Jacob Marley. Let us begin to see the world as it really is, our position as it really is, and, most importantly, to see those around as they really are.

In doing do, we will find God all around us. Christ lurks everywhere, waiting to see how we will respond while he is still hiding in disguise.

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2. Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol* (London, 1843; Project Gutenberg, 1992), Stave I, https://www.gutenberg.org/files/46/46-h/46-h.htm#link1/.

As Latter-day Saints we are bound by commandment and covenant to treat each godly countenance that surrounds us with the compassion, dignity, and kindness owed to deity. Let our collective unmasking remind us of those divine disguises and let our actions transform as a result.

This is my prayer as one who is too often forgetful and blind himself.

In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

TYLER JOHNSON {tpjmd@stanford.edu} is a clinical assistant professor of oncology and medicine at the Stanford School of Medicine. He is senior associate program director of the Stanford oncology fellowship program and teaches extensively in the medical school. His clinical care centers on tumors of the gastrointestinal tract. His writing has appeared in the *Salt Lake Tribune*, *Religion News Service*, *BYU Studies*, and the *San Jose Mercury News*, where he contributes regularly.

ARTISTS

DENISE GASSER {deegasser@gmail.com} is a fine artist, art facilitator, and mother of four young boys. Her paintings attempt to lift the veil on the appearance of things and reveal a kind of magical order within. Though subject matter varies, her work consistently embodies tension between organic and geometric, order and chaos, reality and dreams. Denise has lived and worked in the Bay Area, Vancouver, BC, and now resides near the mountains of Utah with her husband and children. She can be found on the web at denisegasser.com and on Instagram @denisegasserart

AMBER LEE WEISS {amber.lee.hertzog@gmail.com} is from Texas and lives in Houston. In addition to making art, Amber is an actress, serves in her ward's youth program, has a part-time retail job, is an army-wife, and loves to dabble in various creative pursuits. She is married and has three small daughters. Amber started to make magazine collages ten years ago but didn't start calling it art until two years ago. Her Instagram is @amberlieves.