# On Spectral Evidence

*Eugene England*

> *And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. . . . And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.*
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> *Matthew 24:10-12*

> *Though I admitted in my feelings and knew all the time that Joseph was a human being and subject to err, still it was none of my business to look after his faults. . . . It was not my prerogative to call him in question with regard to any act of his life. He was God's servant, and not mine.*
>
> *Brigham Young*

OCTOBER 3, 1992, THE FIRST DAY of the 162d semiannual LDS general conference, was the 300th anniversary of the action that finally stopped the Salem witch trials. Those trials, perhaps the greatest blot on American religious devotion, had resulted in the deaths of twenty people, all of whom vigorously proclaimed their innocence to the end.

On October 3, 1692, Increase Mather ended the murders by circulating an essay, *Cases of Conscience,* in which, drawing on his authority as the most prestigious minister in New England, he unequivocally condemned the use in the trials of what was called "spectral evidence." The governor of Massachusetts, Sir William Phips, at last accepted his duty, excused the court, and annulled the warrant that had been signed for eight more deaths.

On October 3, 1992, in remembrance of what can happen when suspicion and criticism based on spectral evidence runs wild—and in contrition for my own sins in that regard, I fasted and, between sessions

of conference, reread Perry Miller's account of the trials and their causes.[1] I also read again Nathaniel Hawthorne's story "Young Goodman Brown," his own act of remembrance and contrition (his ancestor, John Hathorne, was one of the Salem judges).[2] That story tells of a young Puritan in Salem who enters the Devil's territory by accepting spectral evidence; it powerfully shows the loss of faith, of joy, even of life, that usually follows such acceptance.

"Spectral" was the term for evidence based on the commonly held Puritan doctrine that once witches covenanted with Satan they were rewarded with a servant devil, a specter, who took on their likeness and did their bidding, especially in hurting their enemies. Thus, if the specter was seen by such an enemy, that constituted a fair presumption of the witch's guilt. Some seventeenth-century New England thinkers and leaders of course recognized the danger in such a doctrine: that a specter of a person might well be *imagined*, especially by an enemy, or even that Satan might himself create a counterfeit specter of an innocent person as a way to bring damnation to their credulous accusers. But the Salem Village court, despite objections by some ministers, took the position that God's providence would not allow an innocent person to be represented by a specter and proceeded to condemn and kill people mainly on the basis of testimony by their enemies that specters of the accused had afflicted them.

Increase Mather's son Cotton, another of the colony's most prestigious thinkers, had warned against the use of spectral evidence fairly early in the trials, which began in March. On May 31 he had begged the court in a letter not to depend too much on such testimony: "It is very certain that the divells have sometimes represented the shapes of persons not only innocent, but also very virtuous." Cotton prophesies in the letter that if credit is given to such representations by the Devil, "The Door is opened!" and Miller comments, "Had the court heeded his recommendation, there would have been no executions; if, having made it, he had thereafter kept his mouth shut, he would be a hero today."[3]

Miller then traces the tragic record of a man of correct insight and a good heart whose fear and ambition, and especially his confusion about loyalty to the civil authority of the court rather than to truth and to persons, led him later to equivocate his earlier good counsel. Cotton Mather thus contributed to the scapegoating—for which he in turn became a major scapegoat in popular world memory. He did not, as many continue to

1. Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961).

2. Nathaniel Hawthorne, "Young Goodman Brown," in *Great Short Works of Hawthorne* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967).

3. Miller, 194.

assume, himself condemn or burn witches. But when Governor Phips, in the face of growing doubts, on June 15 asked the association of ministers for advice, Mather authored for them *The Return of Several Ministers.* Despite restating the ministers' rejection of spectral evidence as adequate to condemn, he ends that document by reinforcing the traditional Puritan position that civil authority should vigorously punish those the devil had led astray. The court took that latter advice, ignoring the warning about spectral evidence, so the killings continued until Cotton's father read his emphatic essay to the ministers on October 3.

Clearer vision and greater courage by the ministers might have stopped the trials in June, before any deaths. Without their intervention, in Miller's words, "a reckless use of spectral evidence gave rein to the seething passions and festering animosities of New England. Prisons became crowded, every man's life lay at the mercy of any accuser, brother looked sidewise at brother, and the friend of many years' standing became a bad security risk."[4]

No wonder Arthur Miller was able to set in the midst of that madness his powerful drama of frenzied suspicion and imitative violence, *The Crucible.* The play was written as a parable, an indictment of the McCarthyism of the 1950s but universal in its haunting relevance to every period and place when multiplying fears during a time of great change or external threat suddenly focus on one person or group—a scapegoat—and, on the basis of spectral evidence, people condemn, exclude, and even kill each other. It happened in Missouri when the old settlers turned on the Mormons; it happened after the Civil War when Southern whites turned on the blacks; it happened to the Jews in Germany and the Kulaks in the Soviet Union. I believe there is danger of some of it happening right now to a number of groups in our church.

As I listened to conference and watched the priesthood session on television at a stake center I thought of the increasing passions and anxieties, jealousies and name-calling, low morale and scapegoating, an increasing tide of judgments and even punishments based on spectral evidence I have seen in the church lately—mainly at Brigham Young University and along the Wasatch Front but beginning to extend elsewhere. Obviously I mean by "spectral evidence" something somewhat different than the Puritans but similar enough that the parallel is instructive: We are too often making judgments of other human beings based on static, partial, even merely reported images of them that we take to represent their whole beings and therefore to constitute a fair presumption of their evilness or guilt which we and others must act upon. When we do so we are using evidence as spectral and devilishly dangerous as that which condemned

4. Ibid., 195.

the Puritan "witches."

When church members write to the First Presidency complaining about an action of their bishop or a speech by a high councilor, they are, I believe, using something like spectral evidence—and the letter is rightly sent back to them. When BYU students or their parents complain to church or university leaders because they are offended by one of their professors rather than discussing the offense directly with them (or their immediate supervisor), that is also, I believe, using spectral evidence. When persons are rejected from a teaching position, or denied publication, simply because of an unusual belief or controversial reputation, they are victims of spectral evidence. When anyone is denied due process, the right to face their accusers directly—or treated in any way that disregards their rights and feelings as long-standing, proven, virtuous members of the church—they are victims of the kind of irrational fears that gripped Salem and killed some of its best people through spectral evidence. And when any of us stereotype religion teachers as being reactionary or narrow-minded or criticize, in public or in private conversations, the church's general authorities, we are guilty of responding to spectral evidence.

Of course, criticism and judgment are proper—even required—for certain responsibilities, but they are deeply flawed and dangerous, I believe, when they do not include direct response to whole persons rather than indirect and punitive response to specters of them.

The great evil of spectral evidence, of course, even when it stops short of punishment, is that it reduces the most precious eternal beings in the universe, children of God with infinite capacity who are constantly changing, to static, partial beings. A specter can never properly represent the whole being—which is one reason we are warned not to judge and that we will be judged (that is, will judge ourselves) the same way we judge: partially. Human beings cannot be reduced to an action, a political or intellectual position, a quotation in a newspaper, an essay or story they have written. Each of those, even if clearly and fully seen (which is impossible, since we always see only partially, from a particular point of view), is still only part, a static part, of what is a constantly dynamic, complex, failing, and repenting potential god. We are never less—and actually much more because of our infinite potential—than the complete sum of our history, our stories, a sum which is constantly increasing, changing, through time.

The weekend of October 3 and 4 was perfect Utah Indian summer. Though it cooled off to freezing at night, it was quite warm in the day, emphasizing the warm colors of the leaves that filled the canyons and contrasted with the cool, dense blue of the sky. We have a cabin a few miles up the South Fork of the Provo River, in an area of narrow canyon that

angles generally southeast, leaving no large northern slopes for pines. The steep mountain walls on both sides are covered with deciduous shrubs and trees which because of the dry summer had already dropped most of their leaves—mainly the soft reds of mountain maple and soft yellows of box elder mixed with bronze scrub oak. The masses of leaves had completely covered the ground of the hillsides and had blown down across the lawns and fields to the river: "worlds of wanwood leafmeal lie"—and Hopkins was right, it was not the leaves I was mourning for.[5]

Our cabin is surrounded by aspen and cottonwoods, whose leaves were just turning bright gold and lime yellow and a few starting to fall, so that as I looked up from reading or listening to conference or walked out for a few minutes, I was surrounded, from ground to sky, with golden-yellow light which seemed substantial, heavy and falling even as it lifted me, my lungs easily filling against it.

When I drove down Provo Canyon to general priesthood meeting about 5:30, against the setting sun, I drove through air thick with falling motes of gold. Across from Upper Falls, where the traffic was shifted sharply from the two left lanes to the right lanes of the new freeway being built (the place where a BYU professor, Marek Kaliszewski, would be killed driving up the canyon just two weeks later), one last beam from the setting sun made the reflector strips on the center dividing lines disappear long enough that I drifted straight into the oncoming lane. I wrenched the car back just in time to miss a car and then drove slowly, my heart pounding, down to the stake center in north Provo.

As I watched what might be called the "specter" of Elder Dallin Oaks during the session—the electronic image of him sent out from the tabernacle through the air and projected before me, larger-than-life, on a screen—I thought of the other specters of him that I had heard used, by both liberals and conservatives, to reduce him to a partial, static version, sometimes critically.

I recently received in the mail a piece of paper that contained samples of spectral evidence. The paper quoted a stereotype of liberals: "The joke currently amusing the staff at the Church Office Building is the definition of a Mormon liberal as someone who drinks Coke, reads *Sunstone*, and prefaces every statement in the Articles of Faith with 'Would you believe?'" The paper probably came from a pained Mormon liberal, because it then responded in kind—and in extra measure for revenge—with a series of stereotypes of conservatives: "A Mormon conservative does his home

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5. Gerard Manley Hopkins, "Spring and Fall" ("Margaret, are you grieving/ Over Goldengrove unleaving?"), in *The Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, eds. W. H. Gardner and N. H. Mackenzie (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 89.

teaching on the last day of the month, unless there is a BYU basketball game, and then he waits a day and covers two months with the one visit. . . . He ends each message with, 'If there is something I can do for you, let me know'—until the family does ask a favor and then he suggests they use the want ads."

This can be an amusing game, but it illustrates the process of escalation that I find increasing and particularly dangerous. The person who sent me the paper, apparently bombarded by spectral evidence about liberals and possibly some personal rejection, responded with spectral evidence that will, I'm afraid, only increase the painful divisions and sense of mutual rejection.

What has happened to the terms "liberal" and "conservative" in recent years is a primary example of the serious mischief that reliance on spectral evidence can do to a community. Those terms traditionally were simply political labels, identifying two equally ethical perspectives in our democracy; they stood for the two main different, but honorable, positions from which people could seek to improve society—arguing, developing programs, compromising, voting and respecting each other as that process worked to provide better ideas than either position by itself could have produced. But in the last dozen years, especially the right wing of my own party, the Republicans, have tried to make those labels, those mere specters which before were only simple and rough guides to political tendencies, stand for the whole identity of persons as good (conservatives) or evil (liberals). It is a great tragedy that this effort has succeeded in my own state and religious community—and also provoked in some an equal and opposite reaction, so that for them "conservative" has come to be a term of dismissal of others as ignorant and heartless.

In the current philosophical and literary jargon, to use spectral evidence is to "totalize," to accept and promote by repeating, or even acting punitively upon, a specter—a real or imagined part that is made to stand for the whole—of someone who seems to be dangerous or to have done damage. It is *not* to open oneself up to the "other" as a whole person directly and continuously, critically but also receptively, in the personal give-and-take, mutual calling-to-account and forgiving, that may be the heart of eternal life. Totalizing on the basis of spectral evidence is to deny the perspective insisted on by Joseph Smith in the King Follett Discourse: "All the minds and spirits that God ever sent into the world are susceptible of enlargement and improvement."[6] It is to refuse Christ's clear instruction, "If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone" (Matt. 18:15), which he reemphasized in modern

6. Joseph Smith, "The King Follett Discourse: A New Amalgamated Text," ed. Stan Larson, *Brigham Young University Studies* 18 (Winter 1978): 204.

revelation: "If thy brother or sister offend thee, thou shalt take him or her between him or her and thee alone" (D&C 42:88).

I know this is difficult. I know that often when we make the supreme effort and, rather than responding in kind, go in humility to a person who has offended us and seek understanding we may still be rejected. I know that many right now feel they have acted in good faith, opened themselves up to others—and been totalized, even betrayed. I have heard some say, "I just don't trust so-and-so any more" or "I'm certain feminists [or conservatives or general authorities], no matter what I do, will not respond to me kindly, as a whole person, so I must protect myself."

I reject such counsel—even if the perception of unkindness by others that produces it is accurate. Just as it is wrong to let good ends justify evil means, so it is wrong to let failure to succeed justify evil means and wrong to respond with evil means to evil means. As Lowell Bennion has constantly reminded us, quoting the words of a Hindu proverb: "To action alone thou hast a right, not to its fruits."[7] To put it bluntly, "Liberals (or conservatives) have no right to start using spectral evidence, even if it seems clear that conservatives (or liberals) are determined to use it." Especially in a religious community, trust, like Christ-like love, is to be extended not because others *deserve* it but because they *need* it, because they can *become* trustworthy (or loving) by being nurtured in a community of trust and love. Finally, we need to extend trust, even if doing so makes us vulnerable to great pain and even great cost, in order to save our own souls.

As I watched the specter of Elder Oaks on television, I became aware of a way to get beyond the dangerous temptation to credit spectral evidence—a danger I knew I had succumbed to in times past, recently in a very damaging way. I went to general priesthood meeting that night, after a day of fasting, with a special prayer that I might feel the confirmation of the Spirit as I listened to the Brethren. I prayed again during the songs and prayer and the opening speeches and felt some comfort and reassurance, but I felt most directly what I was seeking when Elder Oaks, departing from his usual clear, carefully reasoned, sometimes rather stern doctrinal messages, began to tell about the heroic Bible stories that had inspired him in his youth with a sense of God's care. I remembered those stories and my own youthful yearnings to be on God's side and to enjoy his acceptance and blessings.

Then Elder Oaks told of an occasion, while he lived in Chicago in the 1960s, when he was confronted by a young man with a gun who demanded his money and his car and probably endangered Sister Oaks, who was locked inside the car with the keys. During a momentary diversion when

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7. Lowell L. Bennion, *Selected Writings of Lowell L. Bennion: 1928-1988*, ed. Eugene England (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988), xxii.

a bus stopped nearby, Elder Oaks, who had his hands raised, was tempted to strike down the smaller man's arm and overpower him, but he had a clear impression from the Spirit that he should not—in fact, a clear vision of what would happen in the struggle: he would accidentally kill the man. He obeyed the Spirit, put his hand on the young man's shoulder and talked to him, so that he was dissuaded and turned and ran away.[8]

Hearing this full story, opening myself to the whole person (though it came to me only on spectral beams of light) and being unusually open to the wholesome and completing power of the Spirit, I could not see Elder Oaks as any of his specters. I saw him as a human being, one I could privately and humbly disagree with at times but openly love and respect and submit myself to. I saw him as an apostle, called by God as a special witness of Jesus Christ and an authority over God's kingdom on earth, to which I belong by covenant, a person I obey and do not criticize.

Hugh Nibley, in a discourse called "Criticizing the Brethren," talked about the shift in perspective that would allow one to say what I have just said. He told about being assigned, as a young faculty member in the 1950s, to go with Elder Spencer W. Kimball to a stake conference to recruit students for BYU. As their train made a stop in Los Angeles, Nibley, who knew the bookstores near the old Los Angeles station, hopped off, bought a rare ten-volume set of books, and barely made it back to the train by running across a lot:

> As we sat talking about the books, Brother Kimball casually took an immaculate linen handkerchief from the breast pocket of his jacket, and, stooping over, vigorously dusted off my shoes and trousers. It was the most natural thing in the world, and we both took it completely for granted. . . . but ever since, that has conditioned my attitude toward the Brethren. I truly believe that they are chosen servants of God.[9]

My own experience that produced a similar life-long conviction was in some ways more dramatic, but it has been reconfirmed a number of times by simple human experiences like Brother Nibley's—such as that talk on October 3 by Elder Oaks. When I was twelve, our family moved from Downey, in southeast Idaho, where we continued to raise dryland wheat, to live the winter months in Salt Lake City. My father was called during that first year to serve on the high council of the new Hillside Stake, formed from the Sugarhouse Stake. During a Sunday session of the first conference of the new stake, on March 24, 1946, because my father was being sustained

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8. Dallin H. Oaks, "Bible Stories and Personal Protection," *Ensign* 22 (Nov. 1992): 39.

9. Hugh Nibley, *Criticizing the Brethren* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1989), 24.

I sat on the front row of the chapel, in the old Wasatch Ward on Emerson Avenue, with my younger sister and mother right behind me.

The visiting authority was Elder Harold B. Lee, a young apostle called five years before. During his address, just when I was leaning back over the seat to tease my sister, I felt something that went throughout my body and forceful enough to turn me around to look up at Elder Lee, perhaps ten feet away. After the meeting I learned from my parents that he had suddenly interrupted his speech and had begun to give the congregation an apostolic blessing. I don't remember what he said but only the feeling—like burning deep inside me but also sweet like honey—and an idea connected with that feeling: that Elder Lee was a person called of God as an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, one of a body of such persons appointed to direct Christ's church. That feeling and idea have sometimes waned and waxed a bit over the years since but have always remained grounded in the deepest part of me, the part that I recognize as my eternal intelligence and the awareness of which is more real to me than anything else.

In late September 1992 our family celebrated the sixtieth wedding anniversary of my parents, who now live with my sister in Smithfield, Utah. We children and grandchildren and assorted spouses met for dinner at the marvelously preserved old Bluebird Restaurant in Logan. We had a short program honoring my parents, and then my mother stood and, with remarkable energy, given her declining health and 83 years, bore her testimony to her family. She told of feeling directly guided by the Spirit as she led the women's auxiliaries when my father was president of the North Central States Mission, of being healed from illness by the power of the priesthood, so immediately that she could feel the illness move out of her body through her arms and legs. And she told, the first time I could remember her mentioning it since it happened, about the feeling in that meeting with Elder Lee, how everyone she talked to had felt it with us, how I had asked her about it after the meeting. She said it was like a day of Pentecost to the people of the stake.

What did that day mean to me? A fundamental shift in the way I saw myself in the church: since then I have had no anxiety that the leaders would lead the church astray, have felt no need to set them straight. I have had no reason to think them infallible and plenty of reason, including the frank admissions of some, to know they make mistakes. But I have not felt it my business to correct or to criticize them. I have felt about them as Brigham Young felt about Joseph Smith:

> Though I admitted in my feelings and knew all the time that Joseph was a human being and subject to err, still it was none of my business to look after his faults. . . . It was not for me to question whether Joseph was dictated by the Lord at all times and under all circumstances. . . . It was not my

> prerogative to call him in question with regard to any act of his life. He was God's servant, and not mine.[10]

I believe the apostles are called by God to be special witnesses of Christ and bear testimony that is potentially saving to all the world—including me—and, as prophets, seers, and revelators, to proclaim the official doctrines and policies of the church. This means that so long as I claim to be part of the church I obey them—and that I am anxiously engaged in the work of the church they direct and in bearing my own testimony of Christ and his restored gospel wherever and however I can.

My calling is to be a teacher and writer, to use my gifts to seek and promote truth and virtue, and to build up the Kingdom of God with all my means. What happens, then, if I am asked by the Brethren to believe something or do something I think is wrong, even after careful thought and prayer? If the matter in question is simply a policy about church procedure and I am not obliged, in obedience, to do or say anything that in itself violates my integrity, I can quietly obey and wait for further understanding. Certainly it is possible for an individual among the Brethren to ask me to do or believe something I simply could not, at least in good conscience. As Elder Boyd K. Packer explained in a devotional address at BYU in 1991, safety lies in the motto, "'Follow the *Brethren*,' not 'Follow the *Brother*.'"[11] He told how the presiding councils of the church go to great effort to make certain they function that way, how he as a BYU trustee had been careful to observe that principle, and testified, "If ever another course has been followed, trouble has followed as surely as night follows day."[12]

It is, of course, not always easy for us who are not in the presiding councils to distinguish between the Brother and the Brethren, so I have come, through careful study and trial, to the following approach: I am bound by my beliefs about their calling to be attentive and receptive to everything any of the Brothers say—to listen charitably and invite the Spirit to confirm, to be fundamentally believing and submissive. I am bound by covenant to obey the official directions of the president, the First Presidency, and the Quorum of the Twelve—and to obey according to the best understanding that plain sense and the confirmation of the Spirit can give me, and not according to the claimed understanding of any other person.

This is not a simple or easy approach. It requires constant attention and

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10. Brigham Young, "He That Loveth Not His Brother," *Journal of Discourses* (London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1854-86), 4:297.

11. Boyd K. Packer, "'I Say unto You, Be One'," in *Brigham Young University 1990-91 Devotional and Fireside Speeches* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1991), 84.

12. Ibid.

response. It exacts the costs of discipleship—sacrifice, discipline, sometimes humiliation—and it means that I must daily risk my salvation, as I choose to obey the Brethren as prophets, seers, and revelators and follow their ethical and religious leadership. To do this authentically, in good faith, I must constantly renew that faith as its source: my deepest feelings and sense of knowing that come from my full life experience and thought and spiritual confirmations—that include both my spiritual testimony given me in the presence of Harold B. Lee and my daily living of the restored gospel. I must constantly try to be true to both of the main roots of my integrity: (1) my convictions based on careful thought and carefully considered experience—both worldly and spiritual—and (2) my convictions about the principles, covenants, and authority in Christ's church that I have accepted on the basis of such thought, experience, and witness. I cannot shift that responsibility to any other person or to any absolute authority or dogma—nor can I avoid the consequences for my integrity of not being true to covenants I have made and authority I have accepted in good faith. Finally, I must constantly test and renew these covenants and convictions as Paul directed and Joseph Smith exemplified: "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (1 Thess. 5:21).

One of the most troubled times of my life came about when I failed to make the distinction between Brother and Brethren. In 1979, as an associate director of the Honors Program at BYU, I gave a talk to honors students on the LDS ideal of continuing, life-long education in which I used, among other examples, the doctrine of eternal progression in knowledge. I mentioned that one of the reasons our ideal of becoming like God is so attractive is that if we do we will be able to experience the joy of learning forever. I had been taught that doctrine all my life and believed it to be perfectly orthodox—in fact, in my research for my talk I had located many references by Brigham Young and other prophets that exulted in the doctrine.

In the summer of 1980 Elder Bruce R. McConkie gave an address at BYU entitled "The Seven Deadly Heresies" in which he ranked the belief that God is progressing in knowledge as heresy number one.[13] I was surprised and confused, as were a number of students who came to me pointing out the discrepancy between his remarks and those of various prophets. I studied the matter carefully and found that there were other leaders besides Elder McConkie, including Hyrum Smith and Joseph Fielding Smith, who had also expressed a belief that God is absolute, perfect, and not progressing.

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13. Bruce R. McConkie, "The Seven Deadly Heresies," in *Brigham Young University Speeches of the Year* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1980), 74-80.

I also found that Brigham Young and B. H. Roberts had developed a concept that could explain such an apparent contradiction: God is perfect in relation to our mortal sphere, has all knowledge regarding it, but is learning and progressing in spheres beyond ours that have nothing to do with ours—thus not endangering in any way his perfect redemptive plan and power in our sphere. It thus was possible to talk of God as perfect and unchanging when praising him in regard to us and our sphere—or to speak of him as developing and enjoying new ideas and experiences when imagining the adventure of Godhood in spheres beyond ours—and to be right and orthodox, with prophetic precedent, in both cases.

I wrote Elder McConkie explaining all this and how it had helped me resolve students' anxieties about prophetic differences. I heard nothing until six months later, when I received a phone call in London from a friend at BYU asking if a letter being circulated, purporting to be from Elder McConkie to me, was accurate. I was shocked at the content of the letter and could not confirm it as genuine until weeks later when the original arrived in England by surface mail. The letter rejected my explanation and the sources I had cited and instructed me not to speak or write about the subject. I wrote back saying I would obey.

Unfortunately a copy of Elder McConkie's letter to me had somehow been taken from his office or someone he sent a copy to and, probably because it contained a reference to a controversial teaching by Brigham Young, was widely circulated by anti-Mormons. I was deeply embarrassed by that publicity and concerned about the damage it might do to the church and my family, but I did not criticize Elder McConkie and I objected when others did so in my presence. I listened carefully to his speeches and opened my heart to believe all I could that he taught and to be obedient to my promise. I was especially moved, along with many others, by his very personal and humble testimony of Jesus Christ in his last address, in April 1985 general conference.

But I was hurting inside during most of this time, a hurt which increased after Elder McConkie's death until I spent some time considering that nagging pain and concluded that I had violated my integrity in agreeing so readily to obey, against my convictions, a single Brother rather than the Brethren in so important a matter. I knew that the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve, in one of their very first joint statements, 23 August 1865, had denounced the idea that God is *not* progressing in knowledge as heresy[14] and that no subsequent official statement of the Brethren had reversed that position.

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14. Eugene England, "Perfection and Progression: Two Complementary Ways to Talk about God," *Brigham Young University Studies* 29 (Summer 1989): 37.

It was certainly not my prerogative to publicly challenge or oppose Elder McConkie's ideas, especially while he was serving as an apostle. But neither did it any longer seem right for me to remain silent about what I understood to be an important and official teaching of the Restoration affecting the education of my students, so in 1989 I published an essay in *Brigham Young University Studies*, exploring as objectively as possible two complementary ways of talking about God—as perfect and as progressing.

An even more painful experience occurred last summer. This time I felt the pain both of being the victim of spectral evidence and of using it myself—and found myself, though unaware of it at the time, actually criticizing the Brethren. If I had thought a little more calmly at that time, I would have recognized a condition that I have studied much in my research on the relationships between literature and the gospel of Jesus Christ—the universal and almost irresistible tendency, when a variety of tensions and mutual offenses and revenges are growing like a plague in a society, for all the fear and anxiety suddenly to focus on a scapegoat.

I should have remembered during my anger in August what I reread on October 3—Perry Miller's description of what led up to the witch trials: (1) the growing anxieties of Puritans about their children, who had not had the original conversion experience of the founders; (2) increasing concerns about changing political conditions as their original charter was revoked after the return of Catholic Royalists to power in England; and (3) the increasing worry of the ministers that the community had "abysmally degenerated." Miller describes Cotton Mather's attempt to explain what had happened in *The Wonders of the Invisible World*:

> There is something both appealing and repulsive in Cotton's frantic clutching at the old array of sins in order to explain this affliction, at those village vices so long since arraigned: back-biting, scandal-mongering, talebearing, suits-at-law—precisely that cave of winds into which anthropologists of today would search for "causes" of the saturnalia that overwhelmed Salem Village.[15]

This seems to me exactly descriptive of many church members in the past few years, at least along the Wasatch Front: people accusing others of being Korihors or traitors or Nazis, rumors of persecution flying throughout the Mormon intellectual community, people being denied positions or opportunities on spectral evidence, and backbiting concerning the Brethren. I am ashamed that into this cave of winds I boldly and angrily stepped and committed a gross scapegoating based purely on spectral evidence.

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15. Miller, 202.

It happened this way: Lavina Fielding Anderson gave a presentation at the August 1992 Sunstone Symposium on how we might go about healing the breach that has seemed to be growing between church authorities and Mormon intellectuals and feminists (see her essay in this issue). My anxiety and pain increased during her catalogue of events in which I knew people had been badly hurt, hurt at the heart of their faith, and I suddenly became convinced that actions of the Strengthening Church Members Committee (which I had recently heard something about) were behind most of those events—and my general hurt and fear focused in anger. During the question-and-answer period I accused the committee of undermining the church and invited the audience to use their influence to stop it.

I had in mind that people would write general authorities they knew and that thus the committee, which I assumed was ad hoc and middle management, would be quietly discontinued. But in my heart was probably a desire to punish, and the powers of darkness were glad to oblige—that is, the natural laws of reciprocal violence that are always unleashed by growing, unresolved animosities based on spectral evidence and by the scapegoating that suddenly focuses that growing plague. Television cameras, which in my anger I had forgotten, captured and replayed the scene on the news; an Associated Press reporter went right out, called the church spokesman, and got a confirmation of the existence of the committee and some of its activities in question, which was reported nationwide.

Meanwhile I went home to Provo in a welter of emotions (still angry, sometimes glad, even a bit self-righteous about speaking out, but then doubtful, increasingly aware that I had violated a sacred principle for me—that offenses should be dealt with personally and privately). As the publicity continued, much of it negative and surely useful to anti-Mormons, I felt much anguish; I remembered a comment to me that night after the session from one in the audience, who may well have been alluding to my recent book, *The Quality of Mercy*: "Well that was brave, but it wasn't very merciful." Indeed, I felt like a hypocrite, and when I learned from the First Presidency statement the next week that the committee actually consisted of two apostles, Elder James E. Faust and Elder Russell M. Nelson, I felt despair that I had, however unwittingly, criticized them and possibly invited others to do so. I immediately wrote an apology to them, at the same time doing what I should have done before if I had been patient enough to find out how: I told them directly and personally what concerned me about the committee's actions as I now understood them, of the hurt I felt those actions had caused me and others I knew.

On October 3 I read again not only Perry Miller's account of the witch trials but also Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown," the best piece of American literature I know for conveying what it feels like to be, not a

victim, but a *victimizer* through spectral evidence. On my day of humiliation I identified closely with that brash young Salem Village Puritan, newly married and thus perforce a newly covenanted member of the community, who adventures forth into the forest to test his faith against the devil and accepts the devil's spectral evidence that all others in the community, including his wife, are given over to evil, are even participants with him in a witches' sabbath, and returns to a life of gloom—having lost faith, hope, and charity. Goodman Brown makes the same mistake that the Salem court made—confusing a person with that person's specter.

Hawthorne thus creates, for a careful reader, a clear sense that the devil can be a projection of ourselves, our deepest fears and animosities, and that as we move into his territory and accept his evidence, he is able to tell truths to convey more important lies that besmirch the character of whomever *we* wish to scapegoat—ultimately even everyone. The devil, for instance, exploits his (and our) recognition of the real evils committed by individual Puritans (he mentions whipping Quakers and burning Indian villages) to condemn them universally, even to promote a belief in universal evil. As David Levin writes in his excellent essay on this matter, "At the witch meeting, the 'shape of evil' invites Goodman Brown to 'the communion' of the human 'race,' the communion of evil, but we have no more right than Brown himself to believe the Father of Lies."[16]

When Young Goodman Brown is convinced that even his wife, Faith, whom he foolishly left behind that night, is present at the devilish sabbath, he suddenly finds himself alone, and Hawthorne asks the reader to consider whether he had "fallen asleep in the forest and only dreamed a wild dream of a witch meeting." In either case, the gloom that darkens his life from then on is only his inverted (and perverted) "faith" in the veracity of spectral evidence, and Hawthorne turns the issue to the reader, to me and you, "Be it so if you will": We must choose. And that choice will reveal whether our faith is in divine wholeness and progression or in the reductive partiality of spectral evidence. Levin in his commentary reminds us of the personal and social implications of this psychological allegory: "Hawthorne condemns that graceless perversion of true Calvinism which, in universal suspicion, actually led a community to the unjust destruction of twenty men and women."[17]

It is just such a "graceless perversion" of honorable motives and of true Mormonism that I fear is increasing now and may yet lead to much destruction of faith and love—as well as the pain many are already feeling. I feel the fear so deeply in part because I have felt in my bones what it is

16. David Levin, "Shadows of Doubt: Specter Evidence in Hawthorne's 'Young Goodman Brown,'" in *American Literature* 34 (Fall 1963): 351.

17. Ibid., 352.

like to be part of the perversion. Between my "outburst" (as the AP reporter rightly called it) on August 6 and my day of repentance on October 3, I went through another shift in perspective.

On the one hand I became conscious that people in the church, even in an organized way, were willing, in the name of honorable ends, to use spectral evidence to judge, hurt, intimidate, and even punish people. Perhaps most troubling of all, I learned that others, even though disagreeing with such means, were willing to stand by and let those things happen, even participate to some extent.

On the other hand I became more fully aware that *I* could participate in the same kind of activity—with gusto. In my own hurt and desire for revenge I could use spectral evidence to judge and try to punish people, even risking harm to the church I believe is even truer than the gospel and risking violation of my sacred covenants and deep commitment not to criticize the Brethren.

It is time to stop. The risk is enormous. I believe we may be at the period in the last days prophesied by Christ: "Then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another" (Matt. 24:10). We must, in our community, stop listening to, accepting, or passing on to others spectral evidence. We must, I believe, specifically stop dealing indirectly, spectrally, with our offenses. We must stop (1) writing to people in authority with our complaints and hurts rather than facing them directly; (2) using church authority to indirectly intimidate or punish rather than dealing face-to-face with those who offend us in speech or writing; and (3) criticizing the Brethren.

I believe there are some positive things to do, in addition to the things we need to *stop* doing. We can bear witness against the use of spectral evidence—by teaching all we can influence not to use it, by kindly but firmly standing up against its use on ourselves, and by refusing to participate in its use on others, including the Brethren. We can cease to condemn others publicly for their faults, even their use of spectral evidence on us. We can extend trust even when we feel it is not deserved or has been betrayed—which seems to me exactly the ultimate vulnerability that Christ exhibited and asked of us.

I believe that, just as there is naturally the kind of escalation of imitative hurt and revenge which I have seen recently in the communities I know best, so there can be an escalation of love and trust. The new statements on academic freedom at BYU, whatever their faults, convey a remarkable degree of trust from the Board of Trustees to the faculty and administration. We all know the board has absolute power over BYU and can fire and hire as it pleases. It has consciously given up some of that power: First, it has agreed in principle to a statement on academic freedom that recognizes the unique nature of a university, its need for unfettered inquiry and for the

atmosphere of love and trust that *should* govern our behavior. Second, it has accepted a procedure of judgment in cases of termination for cause at BYU which is essentially lodged in faculty committees. I wish to respond to that trust with reciprocal expressions of trust and of my desire to be a responsible holder of the unique freedoms I have at BYU, especially the freedom to relate the gospel and my testimony to my study of literature, as both a teacher and writer.

I am especially grateful to President Gordon B. Hinckley for his devotional address on October 13, 1992. In it he expressed his confidence that "never in the history of [BYU] has there been a faculty better qualified professionally nor one more loyal and dedicated to the standards of [the church]."[18] I feel certain from my own observation that he is right. I invite my colleagues to feel that way about themselves and each other—and invite the church membership at large to accept that vote of confidence in us from a prophet and member of the board.

President Hinckley quoted the first section of the Doctrine and Covenants, "But that every man might speak in the name of God the Lord, even the Savior of the world," and continued: "We trust you to do so. We love you. We respect you."[19] As one faculty member said in a meeting two days later in which some of the gathering tensions were discussed, "That address was like a stone was lifted from my heart."

As for me, my job is to act and to teach my students in ways that can improve the moral quality of life in every way I can, including using what I learn from the Brethren and from literature and experience and the scriptures and the Spirit—and to try meticulously never to use spectral evidence myself. It is certainly not to use the imagined weaknesses of the Brethren or problems in the church as an excuse for my own failings—or to lash out in kind.

I can also, as Nibley suggests, talk my griefs over with the Lord, so that things bottled up do not lead to the kind of explosion I have learned that *I* am as capable of as others are:

> Be the importunate widow and complain. Itemize your griefs, your doctrinal objections, your personal tastes. Lay them out in full detail and get it out of your system. . . . With this understanding—you will do all this before the only Person qualified to judge either you or your tormentors. As you bring your complaints, be fully aware that he knows everything already—including everything there is to know about you.[20]

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18. Gordon B. Hinckley, "Trust and Accountability," BYU Devotional Address, 13 Oct. 1992, 2, available through BYU Alumni Association.

19. Ibid.

20. Nibley, 24.

Good advice for all of us, "from the highest to the least and last ordained" (as my grandfather used to pray). And the Savior has some hope for us, even in his prophecy concerning our day, if we are able to follow that good advice: "Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved" (Matt. 24:12-13).