

The Theology of Desire

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Part II

This is the second of a two-part essay. The first part appeared in Dialogue 40, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 1–42. The essay reconfigures the erotic within the context of LDS theology. It examines the tension which arises when the puritanical practices and modernist assumptions of contemporary LDS culture are contrasted with the erotic underpinnings of LDS metaphysics and anthropology.

Artists and Revelators

The Lord, like the artist, uses symbol to get his meaning across.¹ Hosea married a whore to symbolize the Lord's continuing commitment in the face of Israel's brazen unfaithfulness and conjugation with idolaters (Hos. 1:2). Ezekiel ate dung (though he objected to human dung and was allowed to substitute cow dung) to symbolize Israel's assimilation of that which was abominable and rejected of God. He also lay on his left side with his face to an iron pan for three hundred and ninety days, to symbolize the number of years Israel would be under siege due to their unfaithfulness (Ezek. 4:12–17, 3–5). Isaiah was commanded to beget children and give them names symbolic of prophetic events (Isa. 8:1–4, 18, 7:3). In a day of rational abstraction, we find it difficult to relate any more to symbol, which is grounded in physical and emotional experience. We barely relate any more to the agricultural parables of Jesus, since most of us no longer get elbow-deep with the soil or the plants or the animals. Nature is no longer experienced by humankind² as that benevolent power which provides sustenance. As Bart Simpson so eloquently expressed it in his pastiche of a dinnertime prayer, "Dear God, we pay for all this stuff ourselves, so thanks for nothing." With our factory farms and grocery conglomerates, we have insulated ourselves from all but the destructive power of nature—earth-

quakes, tornadoes, etc.—and this has affected our perception of the disposition of God toward us. In our short-sighted mania for progress, we have silenced symbol and reduced its referents.

The ability to navigate symbol is imperative if we are to understand scriptures, rituals such as the sacrament, baptism, and the endowment, if we are to access an atonement that “defies comprehension,”³ and if we are to understand the created world and our place in it under an ineffable God. Scholars of anthropology and folklore have long seen the need for a return of a symbolic, mythic understanding of our collective and individual experience to contemporary culture. The resurrection of myth could serve to heal our fragmented postmodern consciousness and enable a return to faith for those whose intellects have separated them from a more direct sensation of God and an appreciation of his mystery. Mythologist Joseph Campbell insists:

Myth must be kept alive. The people who can keep it alive are artists of one kind or another. The function of the artist is the mythologization of the environment and the world. . . . There’s an old romantic notion . . . that the ideas and poetry of the traditional cultures come out of the folk. They do not. They come out of an elite experience, the experience of people particularly gifted, whose ears are open to the song of the universe. These people speak to the folk, and there is an answer from the folk, which is then received as an interaction. But the first impulse in the shaping of a folk tradition comes from above, not from below.⁴

While we may be comfortable attributing divine inspiration to medical researchers and billionaire philanthropists, we feel a bit more squeamish about attributing it to artists. We want to believe that enlightenment and progress come through righteous persons, persons who, if not members of the Church, are at least living by its standards. Geniuses in any field tend to be eccentric; but in the arts this eccentricity so often translates into alcoholism, drug abuse, sexual deviancy, misanthropy, and suicide that we are automatically suspicious of an artist. We may wish to consider the extent to which these behaviors represent the natural reaction of any individual human beings who inexplicably find their experience of the world to be so vastly different from that of their fellows that they cannot in their whole lives find an existential pillow to rest their heads. Artists tend to be the more deviant the more they and their vision are disfranchised and devalued within the culture. Art today is severed from its place in everyday life and religious ceremony and relegated to museums where it

becomes just another consumer-spectator commodity. Psychologist Rollo May observes:

Society *appears* to worship artists, but this is pretense; actually contemporary society buys and sells him, and any individual with money can buy up all an artist's canvases and dump them into a big hole in a field. . . . The artist is actually a second-class citizen; he is accepted as the "frosting" and not the bread of life. . . . The contemporary artist finds himself in a strange bind and is tempted to fall into despair. . . . How can you force people to see—which is the artist's function—with such competition [as televised war, which desensitizes the citizenry]?⁵

Artists are seers in a very literal way. All of life for them is a trance and a vision. The true artist I am speaking of here is not just anyone who picks up a paintbrush or even who makes a living at painting or dancing or writing poems, but someone who has seen a vision and feels compelled to share it. Campbell identifies the artist as today's shaman:

The shaman is the person, male or female, who in his late childhood or early youth has an overwhelming psychological experience that turns him totally inward. . . . The whole consciousness opens up, and the shaman falls into it. This shaman experience has been described many, many times [in world folklore]. It occurs all the way from Siberia right through the Americas down to Tierra del Fuego. . . . This is an actual experience of transit through the earth to the realm of mythological imagery, to God, to the seat of power.⁶

What has happened in this kind of experience is that the partition between the conscious and subconscious minds has dissolved. An artist may or may not claim to have "seen God." The experience may not come so suddenly. But however it comes, it is this visionary consciousness that sets such an individual apart from his fellows. As Picasso said of Chagall, "He must have an angel in his head."⁷ Because artists have navigated the subconscious realm and lived to tell about it, they have lost the usual fear of those inner realms where instincts, drives, and emotions lurk. They know their place within the picture of everyday life and attempt to translate that knowledge for us in allegorical terms. Art cannot be fully reduced to rational explanation any more than God can. What does a painting "mean"? A symphony? Though rational analysis of symbolic elements may enhance our access, we apprehend the arts on the level of gut instinct. The physically-emotionally illiterate find themselves faced with their own ignorance and fear.

Artists thus challenge our assumptions about the world, both by the

content of their art and by the very fact of their existence as enlightened beings and types of Christ. As types of the Prototype, they represent the height of a human ability or abilities—in this case, visionary power and creative agency. For Mormons, the idea that an individual may be so set apart presents an extreme challenge to notions of authority and personal revelation.

Contrary to the scriptures, we have come to believe that legitimate visions and spiritual gifts come only by institutional association and/or through conscious and persistent righteous living. Paul was certainly not “living righteously” at the time of his epiphany, nor was Alma the Younger. And they along with Alma the Elder received their commissions unmediated by the institution. King Lamoni had been a murderer and a heathen when he was struck down with a vision of Christ. He promptly rose up and prophesied. His wife was also cast into a visionary state. Upon arising, she “cried with a loud voice, saying: O blessed Jesus, who has saved my soul from an awful hell!” and began speaking in tongues (Alma 18:41–43, 19:12–13, 29–30). When Lamoni’s father asked Aaron what he should do to have eternal life and be born of God, Aaron did not say, “Get baptized and endure to the end,” though the church and the baptismal ordinance were fully in place at the time. “But Aaron said to him: if thou desirest this thing, if thou wilt bow down before God, yea, if thou wilt repent of all thy sins, and will bow down before God, and call on his name in faith, believing that ye shall receive, then shalt thou receive the hope which thou desirest” (Alma 22:15–16). And, in Southern Baptist or Pentecostal fashion, he did. Joseph Smith was hardly prepared at age fourteen for what happened in the grove. The scriptures tell us that there are many gifts, many ways of receiving them, and many levels of spiritual intelligence (Abr. 3:18–19). The Lord giveth, and the Lord taketh away. The Church is the Church’s, but the universe is the Lord’s.

In addition to the scriptural record, we have examples from life that confound our neatly packaged theories. One is the existence of psychics. Notwithstanding many opportunistic frauds, there are decent and good persons with the gift of clairvoyance. I knew one such person, a woman to whom I was assigned as a visiting teacher. A recent convert, she shared with me her sorrow at being treated by other members as if she were “a witch.” Interestingly, she worked as an artist in the entomology department of a university. Her drawings of insects were incredibly detailed and seemingly flawless. She drew many of them in a trance-like state. She often

“saw” events before they transpired; and when I asked her how it was she knew these things, she said, “People don’t realize. The information is just out there. It’s a matter of accessing what is around us all the time but that we just don’t see.” This accords with Brigham Young’s statement, “Where is the spirit world? It is right here.”⁸ It would seem that certain gifts and abilities are neither good nor evil in themselves but could more accurately be thought of as powers to be employed for whatever ends the recipient desires. Artists are in possession of great powers, and they know it. This knowledge is their greatest burden and blessing.

The young Joseph Smith insisted that he had seen the Father and the Son, despite persecution, because it was his personal testimony. It would have been a lie and an insult to God to say other than that which expressed the truth of his peculiar experience. Though we may not feel comfortable putting the controversial scientist or painter or novelist in the same category with Jesus and Joseph Smith, this same indomitable sense of personal knowledge characterizes all innovators. Since the most fundamental sin is the denying of agency, the question is not whether persons have a right to think, feel, act, and express themselves, but how, when, and to whom it would be most appropriate to do so.

Naturally, since ideas go abroad in the world, especially these days, there is little one can do to control the latter two variables. And given the extent of our personal limitations, we may feel that we can do only slightly more to control the former. Many artist-priests have agonized over this dilemma—Tolstoy renounced his greatest works, Gerard Manley Hopkins burned sheaves of poetry, and Emily Dickinson avoided the problem by shutting up all her work in a trunk. We are faced daily with a profusion of choices whose consequences are far too complex for us to gauge. Either we numb ourselves to that reality, or we summon the courage of our convictions. In either case, the rest of the universe will continue to churn around us.

It is reassuring to the artist and, by extension, to all who exercise creative agency to note that even the word of God—especially the word of God—has been grossly misunderstood and misapplied, taken out of context, exploited for ends quite opposite those for which it was originally intended. But for the sake of the immortality and eternal life of the few who could and would utilize his word—and his Word—the Lord did not withhold. “What I the Lord have spoken, I have spoken, and I excuse not my-

self" (D&C 1:38). The light—and the Light—shone in darkness whether the darkness comprehended it or not.

To act for oneself in any way is risky business because there is no precedent that fully applies to the present context. The essence of creativity is that it is not repetition. "The first man to compare the cheeks of a young woman to a rose," said Dali, "was obviously a poet; the first to repeat it was possibly an idiot."⁹ Each moment is new and represents potential life and death, salvation and damnation. Whereas the average citizen is oblivious to this responsibility, the artist-priest carries it around in his very body.

"I am the poet of the body," said Whitman. "And I am the poet of the soul. / The pleasures of heaven are with me, and the pains of hell are with me, / The first I graft and increase upon myself. . . . The latter I translate into a new tongue."¹⁰ Poets stir up our senses and emotions. Playwrights and fiction writers remind us of our own mortality—the uncontrollability of the circumstances of our own births and childhoods, the unpredictability of the moments and manners of our deaths, our fickle and easily broken hearts, our bodies that sicken and age and become crippled and ugly, the changing meanings we attach to past events, the psychological and societal roots of sin and crime, the cruel complexities of family life, the ironies of injustice. They confront us, in short, with the naked facts of existence and challenge us to arrive at moral decisions regarding them. What if we were Count Ugolino or Juliet or Anna Karenina or Stanley Kowalski or Janie Crawford or Bigger Thomas? How would we choose under their circumstances? Fiction gives us an opportunity to explore our agency without the inevitable and non-retractable disasters of actual trial and error. As an extension of agency for both reader and writer, fiction readies us for the creation of worlds.

Visual artists put us in touch with questions of beauty and desire—what brings us pleasure or pain, how we react to our own sensations of pleasure or pain, what we long for and what we forcibly deny, and how we respond to the novel juxtaposition of shapes and objects, primordial symbols and direct sensual-emotional stimulants like color, line, and texture. Visual language is of a different class than music, mathematics, and linguistics, which use more of the conceptual-analytical left hemisphere of the brain. The raw visual experience speaks first to the right cerebral hemisphere, which processes data in a nonrational fashion. While music comes to us linearly, visual art presents us with a whole reality all at once, a

gestalt. Puritans are generally more comfortable with music than with visual art because music has no concrete physical presence. It is less representational and therefore less susceptible of censorship. Lyrics may come under condemnation; but as long as the music itself does not arouse overt physical sensation, as with drums, it is difficult to pin a label of evil on it (though some have tried.) It is much easier to cry untruth or immorality against a visual or a literary work. Mormon writers tend to stay in the perceived safe-zone of historical fiction, which can supposedly be verified objectively and rationally, and fantasy, which does not claim to represent reality, and so is exempt.

The visual faculty uses more concerted brain capacity than any of the other senses, evolutionists tell us, because it is more important for our survival. Neuronal activity in the visual cortex is closely correlated with voluntary movement, as sight significantly informs proprioception and spatial awareness. More than any other sense, sight engages desire. Compare, for instance, the level of interest engendered by a man's meeting a woman over the phone versus meeting her in person. Or consider the appeal of packaging and store displays. We want what we see. Imagination is built of image, because it, like sight, fills in the blank spaces in data to complete patterns. The nature of the act of seeing brings us into the realm of multiplex and holistic reality and infinite possibility. Those who know the future are seers, not hearers.

We are uncomfortable with ambivalence and multivalence. We would prefer, if it were possible, to be presented with a complete pattern, one that has no blanks to fill in. We want to skim across the surface of life and think only very literally about our experience here. Art which is strictly illustrative keeps us in the safe realm of linear and pragmatic rationalism. Much of Mormon "art" falls into this category.

There has been some movement in recent years toward acknowledging the nonrational in Church-approved art, as for instance in the emotional postures and facial expressions of the figures in Liz Lemon Swindle's Smith family paintings. While this is a step in the right direction, still the nonrational is experienced indirectly, being mediated through conceptual-narrative content. What is treated is not the artist's gut response or the viewer's gut response, but only the figure's response in isolation, as if it were a subject in a laboratory whose emotions we are coolly observing. There is a visual *analysis* of emotion as opposed to a direct visual experience of emotion, or a synthesis of the two.

Artist Walter Rane takes us another step closer to balance and synthesis in combining narrative portrayal of emotion—bold gestures and facial expressions—with its non-analytic portrayal through dynamic lines and curves, mood-enhancing color, and sweeping, suggestive brushwork. He also employs some symbolic devices as, for example, the dividing line that the ship’s rigging creates between good and evil forces in *They Did Treat Me with Much Harshness*.¹¹ Though his style still feels a bit stilted and self-conscious, seeming yet to do more explaining than revealing, it is a vast improvement over the bland LDS “program art” of the mid-twentieth century.

The reason Edvard Munch’s painting *The Scream* hits us so strongly is that it integrates narrative with similar-meaning nondiscursive elements, thereby inviting a profound translation, and Rane is headed in that direction. Still, these attempts are far from Chagall’s free-floating and overlapping symbol or Rouault’s bold visual testimony of the emotions of Christ. To the extent we are unfamiliar with the raw visual idiom, we fail to notice the incongruity between form and content in much of Church-use art. But such incongruities are just as jarring or silly as “A Poor Wayfaring Man of Grief” would be sung to the tune of “Praise to the Man.” Even strictly naturalistic works that portray Christ frankly as a physical-emotional being, for example, Caravaggio’s *The Doubting of St. Thomas*, Kramskoy’s *Christ in the Wilderness*, or Ge’s *Golgotha* are viewed with shock and contempt by many Mormons.¹² The full implications of the nonrational aspects of LDS theology have yet to find artistic expression within the culture.

In producing a puritanically sanitized and rationally finite art in preference to a multidimensional and multivalent one, we miss the fact that God’s creation is also multivalent: “And behold, all things have their likeness, and all things are created and made to bear record of me, both things which are temporal, and things which are spiritual; things which are in the heavens above, and things which are on the earth, and things which are in the earth, and things which are under the earth, both above and beneath: all things bear record of me” (Moses 6:63). We cannot quantify God and his creations according to human mathematics. The law of types has been his mode since the beginning, and he continues to speak to us in types, shadows, likenesses, symbolic densities, and telescoping truths. In his supreme concentricity, he reveals the whole pattern of the universe in a drop of water:

The earth rolls upon her wings, and the sun giveth his light by day, and the moon giveth her light by night, and the stars also give their light, as they roll upon their wings in their glory, in the midst of the power of God.

Unto what shall I liken these kingdoms that ye may understand?

Behold, all these are kingdoms, and any man who hath seen any or the least of these hath seen God moving in his majesty and power. (D&C 88:45-47)

Often we fail to access the sublime truths in a work of art simply because we lack an interpreter for its unknown tongues. If such an interpreter appeared, perhaps we would be willing to hear the message. Sometimes we purposely avoid “the message in the bottle” through indiscriminate censorship. When we ban books on the sole basis that they portray adultery or deal with other hard issues of our day—environmental pollution, poverty, homosexuality, depression, technoimperialism, divorce, child abuse—or ban paintings solely because they portray some amount of nudity or violence or make a statement on some social ill, we miss crucial lessons that may come in no other way in our mechanized world. Despite having read the scriptures, we miss the fact that adultery can be symbolic of deeper spiritual realities, as can violence. In equating all sexual or violent or unpleasant or intensely pleasant images with the evils of commercial pornography and the exploitative designs of the entertainment industry, we miss many lessons that are rich in truths about God, the world he created, and our place in it. Joseph Smith said, “Thy mind, O man! if thou wilt lead a soul unto salvation, must stretch as high as the heavens, and search into and contemplate the darkest abyss.”¹³ To be unafraid of our own pleasure, pain, sickness, and sin, and to develop discernment thereby, is to contemplate salvation.

At the center point of all gospel laws and types stands the figure of the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Ne. 11:4). Jesus Christ exists in Mormon theology as a historical figure as well as a *perceptual* facilitator (“the Light of the world”) (John 8:12; Mosiah 16:9; Alma 38:9; 3 Ne. 9:18; D&C 10:70) and a *conceptual* facilitator (“the Word made flesh”¹⁴), as both a personage and a way and means of being. He is both a literal and a figurative reality. Because of the generosity of the symbolic, art may bear testimony of Christian truth without explicit mention of Christ or scriptural personalities or members of churches. Or it may mention all of those things and be rife with falsehood, hypocrisy, and just plain sloppy craftsmanship. Since Christian truth is not limited to talk of Christ but encompasses all “things

as they really are” (Jac. 4:13), any honest and organic description of human experience can be considered Christian.

Furthermore, we learn by contrast, and the Christian agenda cannot be served by denying the existence of evil. As with the parables of Jesus, it is up to listeners to use their spiritual along with their physical ears. The testimony of the artist is not always easy to hear. But of what worth would Shakespeare be if he had avoided sex and violence? Of what worth would Dickens be, or Steinbeck, or Arthur Miller, or Picasso, if they had avoided the issues of their day? Not every painting ought to be viewed and not every book ought to be read by every person. It would be unwise to tout any particular work—say a portrait of the Savior—as the absolute model of truth, since truth cannot be captured, or to try to delineate a Christian standard—since what will provoke one person’s testimony to grow will shrivel up another’s. Let the Holy Spirit guide our personal selection, and let artists work out their own salvation on the same basis. And let those who are responsible for exposing others, especially youth, to art respect its power and tread carefully. In these ways we can avoid the unproductive extreme of codification and censorship.

When a society straps its artists into a “moral” straitjacket, the result is an art that resembles the propagandist Socialist Realism of the former Soviet Union. Such experiments in the politicization of art have shown the folly of trying to manipulate the course of inspiration. The Lord will inspire whom he will, when and where and in what manner he will, and neither ecclesiastical nor political nor academic institutions, however well-meaning, can hope to direct that process and neither, for that matter, can artists themselves. A tightly controlled society where standardization and conformity are valued over personal freedom of conscience and expression can never hope to produce great art, for art is forever outside the usual grammar of orthodoxy, which it understands as a provisional form. Artists answer directly to God. They are put here to dance and play before the Lord:

And David danced before the Lord with all his might; and David was girded with a linen ephod. . . .

And as the ark of the Lord came into the city of David, Michal Saul’s daughter looked through a window, and saw king David leaping and dancing before the Lord; and she despised him in her heart. . . .

Then David returned to bless his household. And Michal the daughter of Saul came out to meet David and said, How glorious was the king of

Israel to day in the eyes of the handmaids of his servants; as one of the vain fellows shamelessly uncovereth himself!

And David said unto Michal, It was before the Lord, which chose me before thy father, and before all his house, to appoint me ruler over the people of the Lord, over Israel: therefore will I play before the Lord.

And I will yet be more vile than thus, and will be base in mine own sight: and of the maidservants which thou hast spoken of, of them shall I be had in honour.

Therefore Michal the daughter of Saul had no child unto the day of her death. (2 Sam. 6:14, 16, 20–23)

To deny art its place is to be cursed with sterility.

The true artist may be heretical; but if so it is probably not because he or she is trying to be. And likewise, if he or she is orthodox it is probably not because he or she is trying to be. The artist by design is simply not motivated by the expectations of society but, like the prophet, is driven almost exclusively by inner conviction. He or she embodies that constructive confusedness that leads the society on to new order. In May's words: "He is by nature our archrebel. I am not speaking here of art as social protest: it can be that, as it was with Delacroix, and artists are almost always in the front line of social causes. I mean rather that his whole work is a rebellion against the status quo of society—that which would make the society banal, conformist, stagnant. . . . He does not *impose* form on a chaotic world as the thinker does; he *exists in this form*."¹⁵

During his reign, Pope John Paul II issued a letter to artists in which he encouraged the revelation of art as a complement to God's other revelatory means. Calling works of art "genuine sources of theology," he said, "The Church has always appealed to [artists'] creative powers in interpreting the Gospel message and discerning its precise application in the life of the Christian community. This partnership has been a source of mutual spiritual enrichment."¹⁶ But in a church culture in which revelation on all deep questions of human existence is viewed as coming only through the auspices of the institution, in which much revelation has become standardized and codified, the artist is implicitly mistrusted as a competitor with the prophets rather than welcomed as a partner. In a society in which no mystery is perceived to exist, the calling of the artist to depict the Christian mystery is moot. This view bespeaks a general ignorance about the nature of the creative act and a seeming fear of beauty.

All art that is worthy of the term is erotic in nature, because it is a "third thing" born from the intercourse between God and a human be-

ing. Artworks have often been likened to children, who take on a life of their own as they are released into the world and are received and used. True art, like a child, is born out of the desire for communion (with self, other, and God) and the desire for eternal continuation of the identity and, for these ends, makes use of the human attraction to beauty. To be attracted is to be enticed, to be seduced, and with this alluring comes the rationalist's fear of "losing control," what the mystics call "ecstasy."

We fear beauty because it touches us in a very deep and private place. In experiencing the ecstasy of beauty, whether in art or nature, in orgasm or in mystical union with Deity, we experience a kind of death, the death of the ego. "Except a [grain] of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal" (John 12:24–25). In the experience of beauty, we are transformed. Scholar of religious art Jane Dillenberger explains: "For a precious moment, we stand within the work of art, see with the artist's eyes, and feel with the artist's pulse beat. In that instant all of our accustomed and limited ways of thinking and feeling are transcended. As the moment fades we are like travelers returning from a strange and wondrous country to our own. But that new seeing remains with us and hallows even the most familiar and mundane details of everyday living."¹⁷

It has been said that beauty is whatever brings joy; but joy, as it happens, comes after the storm. Childbirth is preceded by a process of travail, a process which follows the same chemical cascade as orgasm and which entails the same empowering surrender of self, riding as it does on the very edge of pleasure/pain and life/death. In order to rise above all things, it is necessary first to descend below them. Through a grace-mediated alchemy, beauty is created from ashes (Isa. 61:3). This the poets well know. "Death is the mother of beauty, mystical, / Within whose burning bosom we devise / Our earthly mothers waiting, sleeplessly."¹⁸ "Those masterful images [of poetry and art] because complete / Grew in pure mind, but out of what began? / A mound of refuse or the sweepings of a street, / Old kettles, old bottles, and a broken can, / Old iron, old bones, old rags. . . / In the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart."¹⁹

True artists make us uncomfortable because their mode of creation is organic—that is, not only does it follow the law of types, but it also follows the model of constructive chaos that, as we have discussed, God employs in his own creative work. Mormon theology states that God did not

create the world out of nothing but that he “organized” it out of eternally existing matter.²⁰ We have vainly assumed that this organization follows the two-dimensional pattern of human organizing, in which efficiency, functionality, and uniformity are the goal. Lavishness and beauty are superfluous and even a hindrance to pragmatic ends. Yet how different are the creations of God, especially in the area of reproduction! Who has not marveled at the sheer superfluity of seeds in the world, both animal and vegetable? Anyone who has gazed into the swirling purple galaxy of a passionflower or looked at pond water under the microscope senses that God is as much artist as engineer. The whole living planet bursts forth with an unstoppable fecundity and lavish beauty, a quasi-chaotic superabundance.

Evolutionists are quick to point out that the beautiful is also practical; a single plant produces a billion seeds because there may be a drought that only a few survive. Flowers scintillate with bright colors in order to attract pollinating insects. But even in its practicality, organic creation differs from the nonorganic in its goals. God’s goal is the eternal continuation of the generative power. The goal itself is dynamic. Human beings’ goal is more frequently comfort. Our wish is to achieve stasis. God created the world “to please the eye and to gladden the heart” (D&C 59:18). Humans more frequently create their world to please the ego and to gloat in a sense of self-sufficiency. When in our pride we attempt to create without divine partnership, we may ostensibly seek to please the eye, but all we succeed in doing is tricking the eye with unsatisfying combinations that titillate but fail to gladden the heart:

Yea, all things which come of the earth, in the season thereof, are made for the benefit and use of man, both to please the eye and gladden the heart.

Yea, for food and for raiment, for taste and for smell, to strengthen the body and to enliven the soul.

And it pleaseth God that he hath given all these things unto man; for unto this end were they made to be used, with judgment, not to excess, neither by extortion.

And in nothing doth man offend God, or against none is his wrath kindled, save those who confess not his hand in all things, and obey not his commandments. (D&C 59:18–21; see also Moses 3:9, 4:12–13)

This passage clearly links the pleasure of God with the pleasure of humanity. One of my first impressions of Mormons was that they just didn’t know how to party. I don’t mean party in the sense of vile, “riot-

ous living” but in the sense of celebration, spontaneous delight, jubilation. Mormons don’t seem to get excited about much of anything. Weddings in my family are always big celebrations—ribbons and bells and gorgeous attire, live bands playing, dancing, storytelling, and lots and lots of food and drink and hugging and kissing and laughter and tears. The Mormon wedding receptions I’ve attended were more like small-business office parties. Boring! What people have greater cause for celebration, for hand-clapping and shouting and leaping for joy, than the Latter-day Saints? We have even been instructed to do so in scripture: “If thou art merry, praise the Lord with singing, with music, with dancing, and with a prayer of praise and thanksgiving” (D&C 136:28). Yet we seem to take this instruction no more seriously than the commandment to “weep for the loss of them that die” (D&C 42:45). As to loud laughter, that may not be so much a function of decibels as of quality and intent, whether it be the innocent trill of spontaneous delight, the mindless cackling of flippancy, the bellowing of pride, or the snicker of derision.

If God rejoices in the pleasures of the body, how do we distinguish between a righteous sensuality and hedonism or carnality? After urging fasting and prayer, the Lord declares that “inasmuch as ye do these things with thanksgiving, with cheerful hearts and countenances. . . . Verily I say, that inasmuch as ye do this, the fulness of the earth is yours” (D&C 59:15–16). The key to the distinction, it seems, lies in what Buddhists call “letting go of attachment and aversion,” Hindus call “relinquishing the fruits of one’s actions,” and Christians call “not my will, but thine be done.” I like the Buddhist terminology, because it points out two sides of ungodliness: the attempt to avoid pain on the one hand and the attempt to guarantee pleasure on the other—or, in the perverse theology of the ascetic, to avoid pleasure and to guarantee pain. Both kinds of dualist thinking represent a rational attempt to escape chaos and paradox. Nietzsche called this propensity “the will to power.” In today’s vernacular we would call it “control.” We speak of living in “an age of addiction” in which “control freaks” cannot “let go and let God.” Our affluence has made us fat and bound us in mental cages with silken cords.

To be faced with deprivations—or to face ourselves with them through fasting and other acts of sacrifice—puts us in touch with the strength and contours of our own desire and allows us the opportunity to transmute it, to surrender it to a higher good which remains beyond

our control. Deprived people are always more capable of merriment than satiated ones. We don't have to become ascetics. What we need is simply to accept fully and with gratitude sensual pleasures "in the season thereof" (D&C 59:18), meaning according to the Lord's timetable and commandments, and handle them according to a patience that can be content without grasping at excess portions by extorting another's portion from him or her, either directly as in adultery or indirectly as in capitalist consumerism.

To follow God is to trust the ebb and flow of "seasons," to embrace with equanimity both feast time and famine, both living and dying, both speaking and silence. This is the pathos of obedience. As we consciously—not blindly, but with full self-awareness—decide to keep our appetites and passions within the bounds the Lord has set, we face the depth of our neediness and concentrate the power of our desire. This is why masturbation is so draining—because we let the power of our desire and will leak from us formlessly, without the firm resistance of another will. In seeking to guarantee and prolong our own comfort, and again in our presumptuous self-condemnations and self-justifications, we deny the Lord's "hand in all things" and force our own hand.

Faith, Will, and Women

In making use of the figure of erotic love as an analogy for the human interface with God, it may be helpful to explicate the nature of the relationship between male and female in LDS theology. Whereas it is common to align male sexuality with assertiveness and female with passivity, I have purposely avoided this polarity. While on a physiological level it is true that there must be desire on the part of the male, though not the female for intercourse to occur, the female's receptive-negative-inward role in penetration and conception is balanced by her equally female expressive-positive-outward role in expelling a child into the world and secreting milk to feed it. Additionally, the act of surrender is indeed an act of will and is required of both genders in their relations with each other as well as with God.

Mormon practice segregates the genders in a variety of contexts, beginning from an early age. There are clear differences in roles both within the ecclesiastical setting and in the home. However, on a soteriological level, there is no distinction made in Mormon doctrine between genders. Leaders have consistently (in the past few years, insistently) preached that

men and women are equals before God and that marriage is to be a partnership of equals.²¹ This is the kind of equality taught, and even practiced, in the temple, where women perform priesthood ordinances and are inducted into ascending levels of priesthood organization alongside the men. The endowment is a priesthood initiation ceremony for both genders, and both come out of the initiation wearing the sacred garb of priests. Women also receive promises of priesthood power and authority in the afterlife identical to men's.²²

All of this, along with the continued affirmation of the existence of Heavenly Mother,²³ suggests a picture of interdependency between the genders that more closely resembles the Eastern yin-yang or linga-yoni model than the Mosaic-Pauline one. Feminists have made the mistake of attempting to empower women by having them become men in their ways of thinking, feeling, and acting, while Mormon doctrine would have them assume power on the basis of their irreplaceable uniqueness and complementarity. The doctrine that no male gets exalted without a female is more generous than many women would give it credit.

The LDS teaching that Mary and Jesus, and even Heavenly Father, were and are sexually active clears female sexuality of any trace of filthiness. Whereas many theologies, Christian and non-, promote celibacy as the ultimate in godliness and purity, Mormon theology sees sexual union as godly and the forbidding of marriage as an affront to God (D&C 49:15). The Lord could have designed for progeny to be created in some other way. He chose to link the power of procreation with the erotic. The religious thought that comes closest to the Mormon in my mind is the Hindu celebration of Krishna's erotic relationship with Radha. "The highest worship of Krishna must bring the worshipper to Radha. Krishna and Radha are the supreme predominating and the supreme predominated aspects of divinity, respectively. One complements the other, and each are interdependent aspects of ultimate reality."²⁴ What a glorious day it will be when Mormon artists depict Heavenly Father and Mother, or Jesus and Mary Magdalene, with the frank and innocent eroticism of the Hindus' beautiful depictions of Krishna and Radha. Certainly no better confirmation of female sexuality exists in Christianity than in Mormonism. If the culture represses the female, it does so in spite of its own doctrines.

Traditionally, there has been a tendency to think of the male as the prototypical and nonsexual or presexual human being, and the female as

the repository of (or scapegoat for) human sexuality. There is some doctrinal (though not, as some believe, embryological²⁵) precedent for this notion. Creation accounts state that the male was created first, and then the female, as a sort of variation on the theme (Gen. 1–2; Moses 2–3; Abr. 4–5). In Old Testament-based theologies (Jewish, Muslim, historic Christian) which fail to acknowledge the eternal nature of sex and gender, human sexuality might be assumed to originate with the creation of the female. However, LDS theology renders this interpretation invalid. Sexuality is an eternal reality and God has made both genders equally responsible for their individual and collective sensual-emotional experience as a condition of embodiment.

Joseph Smith taught that “it is natural for females to have feelings of charity and benevolence.”²⁶ But nowhere is it written that it is unnatural or improper or impossible for males to have feelings of charity and benevolence—in fact, without such feelings, men cannot be saved or retain their priesthood, and are “nothing” (D&C 121:41–42, 45; 1 Cor. 13:2; Moro. 7:44, 46). Heavenly Father and Jesus are both male, yet they epitomize charity and benevolence. Only beings who can feel and feel deeply are Christ-like, since a large part of Christ’s mission was empathizing with every human sensation. To what extent does the cultural prohibition of male feeling and of physical and emotional closeness between males contribute to one-upmanship, violence and aggression between men, and conversely, to homosexuality? The notion that either males or females are inherently more “spiritual” or “righteous” than the other is false, based on the fact that God is no respecter of persons and has given free agency to all alike. To view women as inherently more righteous than men is to view them as limited in their agency. To force women to shoulder the emotional load of men in the belief that men are incapable of feeling as deeply is simply bad theology.

If the whole of creation is both holy and “sexual,” as I have proposed, then intimacy between human beings is not, or should not be, limited to genital intercourse. Is the expulsion of a baby from the vagina and the breastfeeding of the baby “sexual”? Certainly. Is the mother committing a lesbian act if the child is a girl or involved in incest if it is a boy? Of course not. Freud correctly identified the attraction of the developing child for its other-gender parent (not really “opposite-gender,” after all, since they have all but a few parts in common); but this is an innocent and beneficial process of sexual imprinting which prepares the

child for eventual choices in marriage and parenthood, and not an unhealthy “complex.”²⁷ Since the female has a primary biological sexual relationship with both genders and both ages of humanity in the processes of conception, parturition, and lactation, her sexuality is more diffuse. The female tendency to emotional self-awareness and empathy may arise from the same processes. Yet all stand to learn and benefit thereby, and female modes of being in the world are as universal psychologically, spiritually, and symbolically as the male.

Additionally, female sexuality supports the notion of pleasure for pleasure’s sake, as the female continues, and even increases, sexual activity both during pregnancy and after menopause. In fact, one of the best ways to induce labor is to have a deep orgasm, as both processes rely on a surge of the hormone oxytocin. This biological fact links female sexual pleasure to the continuation of the race. Tradition holds that most women seek affection over sexual pleasure. I will not dispute the validity of this rule other than to say that I have spoken with numerous exceptions to it, particularly among the younger generation. I, myself, am certainly an exception to it. It is my belief that, as women come to exercise more agency in general in contemporary society, they also discover their sex drive. The entire history of humankind, from the Fall on, could be viewed as the attempt of men to run from the agency of women.

Perhaps the ugliest practice ever instituted for the control of women’s sexual agency is the African practice of female genital mutilation, sometimes euphemistically called “female circumcision.” At the age of seven or eight, a girl is bound and her clitoris is scraped out with a crude blade, her labia minora and all potentially hair-bearing areas of the vulva are cut off, and her labia majora are slit and the raw edges sewn together with only a straw to hold open a hole out of which to urinate and menstruate. If the girl survives the process, she is considered “cleansed” and worthy of marriage. On her wedding night, her husband must use extreme force or a knife to cut the opening large enough for entrance. Infections are frequent, as the urine and menses can barely escape. For child-bearing, the woman must again be cut and her mutilated genitalia resewn. Not only does this practice subject a woman to indescribable suffering but it also, with the removal of the clitoris, insures that she will never enjoy sex.

In the West, the attempt to scientifically control female sexuality can be seen in the appropriation of childbirth by technocrats. Most Western

women today are grossly ignorant of their own bodies and the uniquely female processes of labor and delivery. They divert this power to “specialists,” accepting the disease-management and crisis-intervention model of childbirth. Many women approach childbirth as a strictly mechanical event and are willing partners in the banishment of the spiritual component from this and other sexual events in their lives. The compartmentalizing of birth, like the compartmentalizing of death, shields us from the realities of our own embodiment. But at what price do we shield ourselves from fear and pain?²⁸ It is ironic that such ignorance should exist among members of a religion that preaches the high calling of motherhood. It seems that we prefer a sanitized version of motherhood. We want to get the results (posterity) without the messy God-designed process. And if possible, we would prefer to get them after they are out of diapers.

I enjoyed very much assisting in the home births of my two grandsons and at the home deliveries of the two daughters of a close friend. Both women were naked and unashamed. Childbirth is the most orgasmic experience in all of life, and I shared that experience with these women, not in some dirty way, but in complete innocence and love.

I remember the warm feeling of my grandmother’s full breasts pressed against my chest as we embraced, the sense of nurturance it gave me. Of course, I had absolutely no desire to “have sex” with my grandmother—at the time, I didn’t even know what that meant—but I was appreciating her sexual characteristics. I have great admiration for the massive musculature of an Angus bull or an NFL running back. I have always enjoyed seeing and feeling others’ bodies—male and female, old, young, and in between—not for some sort of perverse, isolated genital stimulation, but for sheer delight in the beauty and variety of God’s supreme creation and for the sense of acceptance and human unity it gives me. We live in an age when sexuality has been reduced to a nasty mechanical twitch, when innocent hugging and kissing between parents and children or between same-sex or other-sex friends has been decontextualized and associated exclusively with this soulless genital twitch. I even hesitated to write this paper because of the warped associations people might make.

Yet silence is complicity. In promoting emotional literacy and competence in both genders, in accepting and promoting honest and open physical sensation and expression, in embracing a more whole and nature-honoring lifestyle through home birth, home death, home schooling, home food production, home health care, etc., and in promoting the arts,

especially the visual arts, in the home, Church, and community, we re-infuse feminine creative power into everyday life. In seeing the connections or disconnections between doctrine and practice, in standing for true doctrine and refusing to be determined by false tradition, Mormon women and men have an opportunity to usher in a new age. I feel that it is imperative that Latter-day Saints view their own theology apart from its conventional cultural interpretations as it applies to the confused issues of the day, because I fully believe that, in its purity, it can correct those confusions.

A case in point is the current confusion in Western society over gender roles and the nature and purposes of marriage. We know that “marriage is ordained of God” (D&C 49:15; “The Family . . . Proclamation”). But seldom do we stop to consider just what marriage means. In her book *Marriage, a History*, scholar Stephanie Coontz charts a historical process of action, reaction, and negotiation that very neatly and, for me, quite delightfully resembles a chaos formula.²⁹ Most of us are aware on some level that, for most of history, marriage had little or nothing to do with romantic love; yet we persist in projecting our own psychology onto peoples of the past, as in certain kitschy novels about biblical women. For many thousands of years and across the globe, marriage was for the most part an economic and political institution. Prior to modern birth-control technologies, sex meant children, and children meant workers and heirs to the throne, or to lands and houses. Marriage was a way to regulate sexuality and organize inheritance.

It’s not that people didn’t fall in love in ancient times—there is a record of love poetry to the contrary—but they may have thought it incongruous to do so with their potential spouses. For the ancient Israelites, marriage was a religious as well as an economic and political arrangement, and sexuality was confined to it primarily for purposes of sustaining the faith through posterity. Romantic love was incidental and even inimical to that purpose. Jacob “loved” Rachel, we are told. Yet the business contract had priority. This thinking explains the well-known infractions of European nobility as well as even events in our own time, such as the sudden marriage of Aristotle Onassis to Jackie Kennedy when he had kept Maria Callas as a mistress for so many years.

We assume that women in such situations felt themselves to be horribly oppressed, and some did; yet it would appear that, in general, people felt that their systems worked and that they derived needed advantages. A

girl may have welcomed her elders' arrangement of her marriage just as we today would welcome a professional arrangement of our 401K. If the educated and independent woman of today whose high-tech, global, human-rights-conscious environment has made brute force and unilateral thinking obsolete were transplanted intact into a past age, she would certainly feel oppressed. For those of us living on the high end of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, marital love and the freedom to choose one's partner are not luxuries. In the LDS debate about polygamy, opponents and apologists alike speak of oppression as if it were objectifiable, whereas oppression is experienced relative to one's level of consciousness and is culturally modulated. One's level of consciousness and one's culture are intertwined, and both influence how we construct the narratives of our lives.

Our expectations of marriage today arise not just out of the fact that we are developmentally advanced in terms of the evolution of consciousness, but also because our culture of isolation puts more pressure than ever on the marriage relationship to fulfill the need for intimacy. In a highly mobile and virtual world where intimate contact with extended family members, neighbors, and townspeople has all but disappeared, intimacy has come to be associated almost exclusively with the sex act. And the sex act detached from procreation allows for multiple options beyond the heterosexual or even the human one. The Church thus preserves Eros as a holistic ideal in promoting marriage and childbearing within supportive communities, in proscribing extramarital sex, and in providing, through segregation, an intimate group setting where close same-sex relationships can theoretically flourish. The black and white of yin and yang are not diluted to a neutral gray.

Though the idea of physical evolution from species to species has been declared false by Mormon prophets,³⁰ the idea of the psycho-social evolution of the human race, and particularly between the sexes, coincides well with LDS spiritual cosmogony. The last shall be first, in part because they are more spiritually evolved. Relations between the genders have experienced a series of growth spurts in our day, beginning with the Enlightenment. As the analytical mode came to fore, it generated its equally evil twin, sentimentalism. In the unnatural separation of mind from body, the feminine became defined in terms of affection and "refinement," and marriage was given an otherworldly status. Men hesitated to have sex with their wives, seeing them as too "pure" and angelic for such rough "animalism." Admirable men of the late eighteenth and early nine-

teenth centuries, among them Benjamin Franklin, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Daniel Webster, and Charles Dickens, kept mistresses for that reason.

Motherhood was severed from its deep sexual and sensual roots and put on a pedestal as a delicate and ethereal quality. Childbirth became cloaked in secrecy, women stopped attending each other's births, and obstetrics intervened. (And anyone who believes that this was an improvement ought to read obstetric history.) The free-love communalists and polygamists of the nineteenth century, along with the flappers of the 1920s and the beatniks and wife-swappers of the 1960s, represent efforts, however inarticulate, to reintegrate the physical and sexual with the spiritual and emotional within Western culture, to reassimilate female sexuality into the collective psyche. These attempts appeared as well-timed intrusions of chaos into hyperrational designs—labor contractions in preparation for today's nascent concept of unity between mind and body and between the sexes. The recent vogue of pregnant Hollywood divas, metro-sexuals, and vagina monologues represent (we can only hope) the last spasms of societal paradigm shift.

While many people decry the current state of marriage and pray for a return to the supposedly stable male-breadwinner, female-domestic marriages of the 1950s, it is becoming increasingly apparent that this split-level system contained the seeds of its own demise. It was a concession to the mechanical age that we are beginning to realize could not be sustained any more than the consumption of fossil fuels or the use of biocides. "The Family: A Proclamation to the World" states that "by divine design," "fathers are to preside over their families . . . and are responsible to provide the necessities of life and the protection of their families. Mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children." But they are "obligated to help one another as equal partners."³¹

These roles were assigned, or perhaps we could more accurately say predicted, at the time of the Fall (Gen. 3:16–19), and have taken on many variations throughout history. In our post-industrial age in which the separation of home and family from work and sustenance and the association of employment with identity and worth have reached an extreme, it has become more and more difficult to negotiate the equality of the partnership. The proclamation is sound advice for keeping a family as intact as possible, given the present circumstances. The suggestions of our prophets keep us from experiencing the more destructive aspects of chaos.

But when the earth is restored to its paradisiacal state, will society be divided along economic lines, with fathers under the necessity of leaving their families for eight to ten hours a day? Will people be defined by their worldly careers as they are now? Is the rat-race a divine pattern? Are factories and refineries and chemical plants eternal? Will we need jets and neurosurgery? Moreover, when the enmity of all flesh has ceased and Satan is bound, what will there be for men to protect women from? If the earth is to become again as the Garden of Eden, we may expect to be doing a lot of gardening and animal husbandry. In an agrarian society, everyone is literally a breadwinner; and in a terrestrial world, everyone has the time to nurture children. Perhaps we need to view the technological achievements of humanity as we do the toys of a child—necessary for the development of the mind and body but, after a certain stage, mere silliness. There is far greater technology involved in the creation of a single blade of grass than there is in that of the most sophisticated toy.

In Christ, we are redeemed from the Fall; and when he comes again, we may assume that women will no longer need to bear their children in sorrow and men will no longer need to sweat over noxious weeds. There is a resistance among Mormons to the idea that we can or should prepare for the millennium by beginning to institute its principles now. We expect to continue unthinkingly to marry and give in marriage until the last second, when the Lord will impose the millennial order upon us. Yet “the righteousness of [God’s] people” is what binds Satan (1 Ne. 22:26). Joseph Smith taught that “men must become harmless before the brute creation, and when men lose their vicious dispositions and cease to destroy the animal race, the lion and the lamb can dwell together, and the sucking child can play with the serpent in safety.”³² The Prophet here seems to go as far as the Christian Scientists, who believe that humankind will bring about a return to paradise by our own efforts and raised consciousness. Our doctrine strongly supports the idea of preparation, and preparation includes adjusting our mindsets and, where possible, our lifestyles toward a higher order.

Today’s “peer marriages,” the culmination of the collective trial-and-error process of the human race, represent, I believe, the Mormon theological ideal. How this ideal will play out in practical terms remains to be seen, both in and outside of the Church. We stand on the cusp of paradigms with many conservatives crying out against the culminating wave of change. They fail to see that God’s hand is in both sacred and so-called

profane history and rail against trends that are extreme only because they are attempting to cancel out a previous extreme. While encouraging us to speak out and stand for right, LDS prophets caution us not to panic or resent the inevitable. Resistance is vain because, to the extent processes follow the constructively chaotic laws of natural systems (God's laws), they cannot be stopped. One is reminded of Joseph Smith's comment about the futility of stretching forth a "puny arm" to stop the Missouri River (D&C 121:33). The God-intended end state of the male-female relationship will be reached only by passing through periods of reconstructive chaos. We may as well relax and enjoy the storm, confident that it will soon peak and that the earth will be delivered thereby.

It would be impossible, unfortunately, to treat the issue of gender in LDS theology without noting the effect on the Mormon corporate sexual psyche of the prolix practice of polygamy. There are two conflicting doctrines regarding this practice. Jacob 2:24 tells us that "David and Solomon truly had many wives and concubines, which thing was abominable before me, saith the Lord." This practice was and still is common in some cultures of Africa, South Asia, and the Middle East, consistent with a view of women as sexual property and of men as not responsible for restraint. Jacob transmits God's word thus:

Wherefore, thus saith the Lord, I have led this people forth out of the land of Jerusalem, by the power of mine arm, that I might raise up unto me a righteous branch from the loins of Joseph.

Wherefore, I the Lord God will not suffer that this people shall do like unto them of old.

. . . For there shall not any man among you have save it be one wife: and concubines he shall have none;

For I, the Lord God, delight in the chastity of women. And whoredoms are an abomination before me; thus saith the Lord of Hosts.

Wherefore, this people shall keep my commandments . . . or cursed be the land for their sakes.

For if I will, saith the Lord of Hosts, raise up seed unto me, I will command my people; otherwise, they shall hearken unto these things. For behold, I have seen the sorrow, and heard the mourning of the daughters of my people in the land of Jerusalem, yea, and in all the lands of my people, because of the wickedness and abominations of their husbands.

And I will not suffer . . . that the cries of the fair daughters of this people, which I have led out of the land of Jerusalem, shall come up unto me against the men of my people, saith the Lord of Hosts.

For they shall not lead away captive the daughters of my people because of their tenderness, save I shall visit them with a sore curse, even unto

utter destruction; for they shall not commit whoredoms, like unto them of old. (Jac. 2:25–33)

The Lehitites were to establish a new society based on a more accurate psychosocial perception of the female and a higher erotic ideal. After all, in the beginning God created Adam and Eve, who together as a unit were known as “Adam,” “one flesh,” or “man” (Gen. 5:2, 2:23–24; Abr. 4:26–27). The Gods did not create Adam and multiple Eves, nor Eve and multiple Adams; and as far as we know, though the whole of the human race waited for tabernacles, Adam and Eve remained monogamous. For that matter, nowhere is it written that there exists more than one Heavenly Mother, as some winking men have proposed. It is Lamech, a descendent of Cain and a murderer, who is first mentioned as having had more than one wife (Gen. 4:19, 23). From the Jacob passage, it would appear that the Lord acknowledged the devastating emotional impact polygamy had on women both in “the land of Jerusalem” and in other areas where it was practiced, suggesting that even low-consciousness women were affected.

Jacob tells the Nephite polygamists that the Lamanites were more righteous than they because “their husbands love their wives, and their wives love their husbands; and their husbands and their wives love their children” (Jac. 3:7), suggesting that the practice of polygamy undermines natural affections. Despite the nineteenth-century rhetoric of love and affection, one wonders how affectionate a man could be when he visited his wife only a few weeks out of the year and then only for the purpose of impregnating her. The ill effects on children of emotionally or physically absent fathers are also affirmed in this passage. Jacob warns the Nephite offenders, “Ye have broken the hearts of your tender wives, and lost the confidence of your children” (2:35). The Lord acknowledges the practice as a kind of captivity for women (2:33).

Clearly this passage does not indicate that David and Solomon were justified in taking multiple wives. On the contrary, the Lord says that their having many wives and concubines was “abominable” before him. The word “abominable” or “abomination” is perhaps the strongest pejorative used in scripture, reserved for such practices as sodomy and bestiality. At the same time, the Lord leaves open the possibility that he might override the higher law and command this “abominable” practice in a specific context for a specific temporal end—the increasing of the population.

Doctrine and Covenants 132 presents a conflicting picture. There,

not only David and Solomon, but also Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses are presented as having been fully justified in possessing many wives and concubines. The assertion is made that the Lord had commanded such behavior and, other than in the case of David with Bathsheba, had accounted it as “righteousness” (D&C 132:37–39). In contrast to the Old Testament account (Gen. 16:1–3), Abraham is pictured as having taken Hagar to wife, not at Sarah’s insistence but at God’s command (D&C 132:34, 65.) The practice of polygamy is portrayed as not just *a* but as *the* “new and everlasting covenant” (132:4)—and if everlasting, then not provisional—which all those to whom it is revealed must obey or be “damned” (132:3–4, 6). Many nineteenth-century Utah leaders vehemently taught that polygamy was necessary for exaltation.³³ While falling short of condemning a practice that consumed Mormon apologetics for fifty years, contemporary Mormon leaders hasten to stress that polygamy is not a requirement for salvation or exaltation; they diplomatically leave it as an option.³⁴ What is disturbing about the conflict between these two doctrinal passages is not the fact that they command different things—that, as we have seen, is a frequent occurrence in the historic dealings of God with humankind—but that both views purport to be the higher and eternally enduring (“everlasting”) principle.

It is clear, for instance, that the cases of Nephi and Abraham being commanded to kill represent brief and time-specific exceptions to the higher and more general principle and commandment against murder. But the hierarchy is not clear in Mormon thought surrounding polygamy. If we accept the Jacob passage as the higher and more general principle and commandment, then we must view the nineteenth-century Mormon practice of polygamy as an exception—and perhaps as one that went on far longer than the Lord ever designed it should. We chalk it up to the tendency in all emergent religious traditions to codify and concretize passing phenomena, and to the tendency of “almost all men” to exercise unrighteous dominion if given a foothold (D&C 121:39). If we accept section 132 at face value, then we view the Jacob passage as an antiquated exception and see the Church’s abandonment of polygamy as a cowardly acquiescence to social pressure. Worse, if we also accept the divine origin of the Manifesto, we see God himself as having acquiesced to social pressure.

We cannot reconcile these two doctrinal viewpoints, even within the system we have set up of constructive chaos and multiple and eclipsing paradigms, because they possess no concentricity. One of them is simply

an aberration; that is, one (or both) of them is the temporary program. Some Mormons have concluded, along with non-Mormons who take a common sense perspective, that Joseph Smith, if only in this one instance, was not a prophet and was, perhaps, even a lecher. This was the view held by the editors of the *Nauwoo Expositor*, who accused Joseph of being a “fallen prophet” for his secret-to-the-death practice of polygamy, an accusation that fueled the flames that led to his murder. Others, along with non-Mormons of an academic bent, such as Harold Bloom, see religious genius in the practice.³⁵ Bloom believes that it is the nature of men to be polygynous, though by what criteria he arrives at this conclusion, no one knows; perhaps such criteria would also prove it is the nature of women to be polyandrous, and Joseph Smith participated in that practice as well. But early Utah leaders denied this motivation. Said Apostle Orson Hyde: “It is true that the people of Utah believe in and practice polygamy. Not because our natural desires lead us into that condition and state of life, but because our God hath commanded it. . . . We also wish to be counted Abraham’s children . . . ; and being told that if we are the children of Abraham, we will do the works of Abraham, we are not a little anxious to do as he did. Among other things that he did, he took more than one wife.”³⁶

According to this logic, one wonders whether the brethren felt impelled to live in tents, wear sandals, ride camels, eat falafel and tabouli, and sacrifice animals and their own sons. In reading through records of the early Utah period, several things become quite apparent: that plural marriage was a reprehensible idea to nearly every woman and most men upon their first being introduced to it; that leaders strenuously promoted it as the eternal plan of God and declared that failure to comply would result in damnation; that the sole stated purpose for the institution was for men to have multitudinous offspring (Heber C. Kimball bragged that he could produce seventy-five thousand in twenty-five years)³⁷ and that therefore, younger and younger wives must be taken and the marriages consummated; that women entered into it on the basis of faith but that the majority had extreme heartache over the practice. Polyandry as a countervailing practice was never instituted after the death of Joseph Smith.

When the wives complained (after all, they were virtual single parents without the privilege of sexual or emotional access to their spouses or of decision-making power over practical affairs, such power being sternly proclaimed as the husband’s prerogative), Brigham Young berated them

for “whining,” told them not to expect happiness here but only hereafter, and accused them of “henpecking.”³⁸ His second counselor, Jedediah M. Grant, accused the women of faithlessness and trying to “break up the Church of God.”³⁹ Meanwhile, one wonders whether the brethren were equally miserable enacting the ultimate male fantasy of having sex with an endless supply of virgins. That the Lord would burden me with such a duty!

The women of nineteenth-century America were very different from the women of the Near East in two or three thousand B.C. The women of today are even less capable of enduring the neglect of basic human needs and desires. I thank God for sending me to earth no sooner than he did and for a patriarchal blessing that directs me to become a mother and homemaker as well as to enter a profession and “earn a living” in order “to support your husband and children in righteous endeavors.” In addition to thanking God for the timely guidance of living prophets, I thank him for the latitude I’ve been given in this winding-up stage of history to pursue self-actualization through ways of being that are both traditionally male and traditionally female. As women explore and live out the deepest aspects of their free agency and feminine power—and only as they do so—will they discover the deepest aspects of masculine power that merge with and define it within the psyche, the spot of yang in the yin, the X-chromosome in the pirouetting double-helix of DNA. The same must be true for men. What better way to learn to empathize with and ultimately honor the other gender than to be partly that other oneself?

If the Light of Christ serves as a rudimentary indicator of right and wrong, can we dismiss the fact that the first natural instinct of virtually everyone to the idea of polygamy is revulsion, as it is to the idea of homosexuality or abortion? I am reminded of the saying of a Christian radio show host: “I can’t help it if I’m homophobic—I was born that way.” It seems obvious to me that polygamy is an aberration. Happiness is not its object and design. According to the Canadian Department of Justice’s exhaustively researched report, worldwide and cross-culturally, women and children of polygynous unions today fare worse—sometimes drastically worse—than their monogamous counterparts along every measurable indicator of happiness, well-being, and human potential.⁴⁰ They also fare worse in several comparison studies with homosexual unions. Mental illness, physical illness, low self-esteem, poverty, stunted education, family conflict and violence, and delayed personality development are not God’s design for his

daughters. In a slight twist on Bloom, I see the genius of a prophet rather than the genius of a genius (applying Kierkegaard's definition) in Joseph's transgression, and see the polygyny and polyandry he practiced within a chaos paradigm as a brief and perhaps necessary experiment on the order of other social-sexual experiments of his day. Most Mormons simply choose to shelve the issue in light of the value of so many other doctrines and practices, and are content to let sleeping dogs lie.

Meanwhile, however, one cannot help but note that Utah women consume more Prozac than any other demographic group in the nation.⁴¹ Some apologists have attempted to mitigate this statistic,⁴² yet it certainly accords with my personal observations as a convert who has lived and moved among many cultures. I see a tremendous amount of unexpressed femininity in American Mormon culture, as well as a huge smoldering bolus of repressed anger on the part of women.

These truths first came home to me as I read the novels of Virginia Sorensen. She repeats the same characters and problems in story after story with a noticeable increase in artistic frustration over the years, but no psycho-spiritual growth and movement with its corresponding formal development as in, say, James Joyce. Her last novel, *The Man with the Key* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974) is a horrific testimony to the desperation of repressed female sexuality. I had the impression that she, along with other Mormon artists, was not only at odds with her culture but was actually being absorbed and digested alive by it, like a bacterium by a macrophage.

The painting *The Responsible Woman* by James C. Christensen, in which a female figure loaded down with baggage like a pack mule succeeds in flying while holding out a candle to light her way, seems to me obscene in its unconscious consent to dysfunction.⁴³ Especially in the work of female, but also of male, Mormon writers, one registers a sense of entrapment and despair beneath the veneer of realist dailiness. Poetry is either sappy sentimentalism or emotionally constipated intellectualism, sadly exemplifying the "evil twins" of dualist philosophy.

The repression of the sensual-emotional and intuitive in any culture represents the repression of archetypically female ways of being. Reliance on the god of science in the form of pharmaceuticals also signals the devaluation of a more feminine-holistic "earth-mother" approach to healing. Fear of the seduction of art is also connected with fear of women's procreative power and cyclic-dynamic modes of sexuality, which seem to men at

times to be sheer chaos. In actuality, as the failures and excesses of the Enlightenment project (not to mention the Taliban project) have shown, either gender's modes of being without the balancing influence of the other will sooner or later create destructive chaos. Only in the delicate dance of Christian Eros, a charitable love full of self-awareness, empathy, and the firm, free desire of both parties, can we reach the full measure of our creation. The erotic ideal is one man and one woman equally joined in a sacrificial and sacramental act which in turn unites them with a personal God. Rollo May observes:

The fact that love is personal is shown in the love act itself. Man is the only creature who makes love face to face, who copulates looking at his partner. Yes, we can turn our heads or assume other positions for variety's sake, but these are variations on a theme—the theme of making love vis-à-vis each other. This opens the whole front of the person—the breasts, the chest, the stomach, all the parts which are most tender and most vulnerable—to the kindness or the cruelty of the partner. The man can thus see in the eyes of the woman the nuances of delight or awe, the tremulousness or the angst; it is the posture of the ultimate baring of one's self. This marks the emergence of man as a psychological creature: it is the shift from animal to man. Even monkeys mount from the rear.⁴⁴

It may sound strange to speak of a Christian Eros; yet as the most concentrated expression of agency, sexual desire is a type of all other desire. The being who is denied it here is demoted to a premortal level of agency.

Alma 32:27 tells us that the first prerequisite to faith is desire: “Behold, if ye will awake and arouse your faculties, even to an experiment upon my words, and exercise a particle of faith, yea, even if ye can no more than desire to believe, let this desire work in you, even until ye believe in a manner that ye can give place for a portion of my words.”

We commonly associate “desire” with lust and covetousness. Yet Alma insists that, without desire, and strong desire at that, we can be neither happy nor good:

All things shall be restored to their proper order. . . .

The one raised to happiness according to his desires of happiness, or good according to his desires of good; and the other to evil according to his desires of evil; for as he has desired to do evil all the day long even so shall he have his reward when the night cometh.

And so it is on the other hand. If he hath repented of his sins, and desired righteousness until the end of his days, even so he shall be rewarded unto righteousness. (Alma 41:4-6; see also Alma 29:4)

Doctrine and Covenants 88:121 tells us to “cease from all lustful desires,” but also encourages “the offering up of [our] most holy desires” unto the Lord (D&C 95:16). Through holy desire, we have communion with Deity, a mutual sensitivity and responsiveness. Lust asserts itself without feeling for a response. Lust appears to be not a function of wanting per se, but of wanting too much and too soon (covetousness, attachment)—or too little and too late (laziness, aversion). Lust is an attitude of grasping at that which has not been given, or refusing to accept with gratitude that which has. Lust, in other words, is pride. Lust fails to see life as a gift and seeks to consume it as spoil. Lust cannot allow the whims which arise out of the neutral realm of infinite possibility to be simply observed and noted in passing but instead, indiscriminately (or sometimes with conscious evil intent), identifies with them and begins to crystallize them into desire, and from there into action.

On some level, I may wish to have sexual intercourse with approximately one-third of the men I see; but contextualized within my marriage and family life, my entire past experience, and my present sense of deeper needs, that wish never solidifies as true desire. Contextualized within the even more comprehensive mind of God through the Light of Christ and the Holy Ghost, I find that I “have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually” (Mosiah 5:2; see also Mosiah 4:13). The capacity to desire is a neutral potential, and one that must be engaged, for God spews the lukewarm out of his mouth. The Lord never meant for us to relinquish our desires, only to relinquish control of their final result; for in shunting aside our agency we lose the ability to analyze and make critical judgment, to be curious, to feel and to imagine and to be alive. The result would be rampant depression, for joy comes through the exercise of will.

It follows that any system that seeks to coerce one human being to relinquish his or her desire in order to fulfill another’s in a one-sided relationship, as in political dictatorship, slavery, or polygyny, is contrary to the ultimate, that is celestial, law of God. The reason given for the institution of the United Order, the order of the City of Enoch, was:

... that you may be equal in the bonds of heavenly things, yea, and earthly things also, for the obtaining of heavenly things.

For if ye are not equal in earthly things ye cannot be equal in obtaining heavenly things.

For if you will that I give unto you a place in the celestial world, you must prepare yourselves by doing the things which I have commanded you and required of you. (D&C 78:5–6; emphasis mine)

This order was to be “a permanent and everlasting establishment and order” (D&C 78:4; see also D&C 82:20) so that every human being could have equal privilege in exercising agency, or stewardship, and in answering for his or her own sins. The principle here is that there is a direct correlation between one’s ability to progress spiritually and the control one is allowed to exercise over one’s environment. “And the soul who sins against this covenant, and hardeneth his heart against it . . . shall be delivered over to the buffetings of Satan until the day of redemption” (D&C 82:21). That the early Utahns so zealously promoted polygyny as an everlasting, celestial order, while failing to reinstate the less personally gratifying but more egalitarian revealed social order, says something about their level of Christian love.

It has always been God’s desire to share all he has equally among his people. Those who live a celestial law do likewise, and here is a great secret. Women are to obey their husbands as their husbands obey the Lord, and to obey the Lord means this: that you share your power equally. In fact, according to the model of personal sacrifice and servant-leadership as exemplified by the Savior, we might argue that men ought to be subservient to women instead of the other way around and that, from this perspective, polyandry makes much more sense than polygyny. It is when we view power in a godly sense that these zero-sum arguments begin to break down. We begin to see power-sharing as agency-building.

Elder Dallin H. Oaks reminds us of the distinction between agency as will, and freedom as the ability to enact that will.⁴⁵ The Lord alternately grants and withholds freedom in order to help us develop our agency “line upon line.” The greatest task in becoming godlike is to learn to give others freedom in an equally constructive way. Heavenly Father provided for our agency in the Garden of Eden, and he provided for our freedom when he sent his Son:

And the Messiah cometh in the fullness of time, that he may redeem the children of men from the fall. And because they are redeemed from the fall they have become free forever, knowing good from evil; to act for themselves and not to be acted upon, save it be by the punishment of the law at the great and last day, according to the commandments which God hath given.

Wherefore men are free according to the flesh; and all things are given them which are expedient unto man. And they are free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men, or to choose captiv-

ity and death, according to the captivity of the devil; for he seeketh that all men might be miserable like unto himself. (2 Ne. 2:26–27)

What “men,” male and female, have inherited is not disposition or necessarily freedom, but agency. In the end, we receive according to our desires, because it is our desires that have governed all of our choices, whether to think or feel, to speak or act. Accidents, acts of God (see, e.g., Alma 19:22–23; Mosiah 13:2–3), or oppression by others may prevent us from enacting our choices, leaving them in an inarticulate state. Unrighteous dominion will seal the sins upon the heads of the oppressors. But the deepest intents of our hearts count just the same. Whether one performs an action out of habit or duty or fear of punishment or hope of reward or pure love, the difference in result is not immediately or externally apparent, and so the pharisaically minded make no distinction. Yet if we get nothing else out of Jesus’s teachings, we must acknowledge his emphasis on the soteriological importance of inner states.⁴⁶ A good tree bringeth forth good fruit, and an evil one evil. Brigham Young taught, “When you judge a man or a woman, judge the intentions of the heart. It is not by words, particularly, nor by actions that men will be judged in the great day of the Lord; but in connection with words and actions, the sentiments and intentions of the heart will be taken, and by these men will be judged.”⁴⁷ It behooves us, therefore, to awaken to a consciousness of our deepest desires and meet God there.

In LDS theology, the surrender of self and the assertion of self are not mutually exclusive but complementary and integral processes. Spiritual development consists in the balance between learning to give up what one wants and learning to get what one wants. In his erotic encounter with the divine, neither does the human being “leave himself behind.”⁴⁸ Jacob pitted his will against the Lord’s, wrestling with him all night. When the representative of the Lord said, “Let me go, for the day breaketh,” Jacob answered, “I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.” His name was changed to Israel then, “for as a prince thou hast power with God and with men, and hast prevailed” (Gen. 32:26, 28). Can a man prevail with God? What do we make of Jacob’s hubris? We often hear the saying of Job: “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him”; but seldom do we hear the second half of the verse: “but I will maintain mine own ways before him.” “Behold,” Job declares, “I have ordered my cause; I know that I shall be justified” (Job 13:15, 18). Enos’s “soul hungered,” and he “prayed with many long strugglings” and “labored [internally] with all diligence” until

he received according to his desires (Enos 1:4, 11, 12). The brother of Jared insisted that the Lord provide air and light during the long voyage to the promised land. He did his part in smelting the stones. Then, like Jacob, he pressed the Lord for a blessing. For what might be considered from a certain perspective to be an attitude of murmuring and an act of daring, he was granted the sublime privilege of seeing the Lord and told that no man had attained to greater “faith” (Eth. 3:2, 9). In the most poignant example of the righteous clash-and-merge of righteous wills, Jesus “fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt” (Matt. 26:39).

Desire, like hunger and thirst, arises out of dissatisfaction. All progress, personal and societal, religious and secular, has been born of discontent. Edison invented the light bulb because he was a bored insomniac. The Church itself would not exist but for the questioning discontent of a fourteen-year-old boy with the religions of his day. Virtually all of the revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants were received in answer to specific queries by a man for whom suspense was the greatest suffering.⁴⁹ We are to study things out in our minds, and only then go to the Lord and ask if it is right (D&C 9:8). Men and women are not to be commanded in all things but “should be anxiously engaged in a good cause, and do many things of their own free will, and bring to pass much righteousness; For the power is in them, wherein they are agents unto themselves” (D&C 58:27–28). Jesus assures us, “Whatsoever things ye shall ask the Father in my name shall be given unto you. Therefore, ask, and ye shall receive; knock, and it shall be opened unto you; for he that asketh, receiveth; and unto him that knocketh, it shall be opened” (3 Ne. 27:28–29). This, however, requires that we “come boldly unto the throne of grace” (Heb. 4:16).

“Faith,” taught Joseph Smith, “is the principle of action in all intelligent beings.” This is not a startling statement. But he continues:

Faith is not only the principle of action, but of power also, in all intelligent beings, whether in heaven or on earth. . . .

We understand that the principle of power which existed in the bosom of God, by which the worlds were framed, was faith; and that it is by reason of this principle of power existing in the Deity, that all created things exist; so that all things in heaven, on earth, or under the earth exist by reason of faith as it existed in HIM.

Had it not been for the principle of faith the worlds would never have been framed neither would man have been formed of the dust. It is the

principle by which Jehovah works, and through which he exercises power over all temporal as well as eternal things. Take this principle or attribute—for it is an attribute—from the Deity, and he would cease to exist.

Who cannot see, that if God framed the worlds by faith, that it is by faith that he exercises power over them, and that faith is the principle of power? And if the principle of power, it must be so in man as well as in the Deity? This is the testimony of all the sacred writers, and the lesson which they have been endeavouring to teach to man. . . .

It was by faith that the worlds were framed. God spake, chaos heard, and worlds came into order by reason of the faith there was in HIM.⁵⁰

We have come to think of faith as being opposed to knowledge, assuming that once we return to the presence of the Lord, there will be no further need to exercise faith. But neither the scriptures nor the teachings of Joseph Smith bear this out. In the account of the brother of Jared's physical encounter with the Lord (Eth. 3), the words *desire*, *belief*, *faith*, and *knowledge* are compounded one upon the other with no clear boundaries, used almost interchangeably in a quantum leap across the veil. In the premortal world, we walked personally with God, yet we exercised faith there as well (D&C 29:36; Abr. 3:26; Alma 13:3-4). An omniscient God continues to exercise faith in the creation and governance of worlds. Who or what does he have faith in? In himself, in his son Jesus Christ, in us, in the ultimate triumph of good. In the creative act, "the Gods watched those things which they had ordered until they obeyed" (Abr. 4:18). God watches and "broods" (Abr. 4:2) and from within him stirs desire. "And the Lord said: Let us go down" (Abr. 4:1). "And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said: Let there be light" (Gen. 1:2-3).

Faith is a self-existent power and attribute of intelligence, a power that begins with desire. Scientists may trace with precision the path of nerve transmission from a point on the cerebral cortex to the specific muscle that produces a movement, but what initiates the process? The source of decision cannot be scientifically discovered because it is its own source.

Descartes believed that, because he could think about his actions, thought and not action was the fundamental source of identity. Yet underlying our thinking is feeling. And more fundamentally still, we can choose, if we so desire, to observe our own thoughts and feelings as they occur. When we analyze some thought or feeling or action we performed in the past, we understand that we ourselves exist in the present and are

observing, in a sense, a person we used to be. It is when we simultaneously think or feel or act *and* observe ourselves doing it that questions of identity arise. In such meditative states, we become a watcher who exists outside thought and feeling, and our consciousness has transcended linear time. Therefore, identity precedes both thought and feeling. Identity originates with desire. I desire; therefore, I am.

Erotic love represents the ultimate in self-existent power. It is the desire for the continuation “of the seeds” (D&C 132:19), of being itself, of identity. It is a desire for immortality and eternal lives, and it is a desire to pass that gift on through self-sacrifice, self-assertion, and ecstatic, abounding love. Such love by its very nature overflows, multiplies itself, and replenishes the universe. Erotic love is the culmination of faith as the creative power in both God and man. Sacred desire is the power to create worlds.

We tend to dismiss creativity as an attribute of Deity and fail to recognize the need to develop it as Christians. We commonly say, “I’m just not creative,” not realizing that this is tantamount to saying, “I’m just not loving,” or, “I’m just not honest.” We are not all called to be artists, just as we are not all called to be prophets; but we are all called, invited, to develop and exercise the powers they typify. In the arts, in all creative enterprise in the world, we experience a rush of agency and a relief, if temporary, of the burgeoning burden of pregnancy. Through desire, we become pregnant and impregnate, we beget ourselves in multitudinous forms, from ideas to words to concrete objects to children. If we are in the end according to our desires, we may assume that this is how God himself is all that he is. Desire begets desire. God is desire, and Christ is desire incarnate.

The Fall and Eros

LDS theology of the Fall departs significantly from that of other Christians. Many have interpreted the Fall as a great tragedy and believe humankind is under the curse of “original sin.” While Mormon doctrine acknowledges a breach of commandment, it conceives of the act, not in the tragic sense of “sin,” but in the more neutral sense of “transgression.” Brigham Young taught:

Some may regret that our first parents sinned. This is nonsense. If we had been there, and they had not sinned, we should have sinned. I will not blame Adam and Eve. . . .

Did they come out in direct opposition to God and his government? No. But they transgressed a command of the Lord, and through that trans-

gression sin came into the world. The Lord knew they would do this, and he had designed that they should. Then came the curse upon the fruit, upon the vegetables, and upon our mother earth; and it came upon creeping things, upon the grain in the field, the fish in the sea, and upon all things pertaining to this earth, through man's transgression.⁵¹

And what did this "curse" consist of? It consisted of two things: the ability to die, and the ability to procreate. It was the beginning of our having to live by sexuality and murderousness. God himself ritually accepted responsibility for that inescapable fact when, with his own hand, he shed the first blood on earth in order to make animal-skin coverings for our nakedness. The Fall did not automatically cause sin, for sin can come only through the free exercise of dichotomous choice; but it opened the door for that choice to be exercised in a more evolved context than had previously been allowed. Human beings did not become "carnal, sensual, and devilish" until sometime after the Fall when Satan came among the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve and dissuaded them from believing the gospel of Jesus Christ that had previously been taught them by their parents (Moses 5:12–13). LDS scripture teaches that evil is a matter not of being incarnated but of being "carnally-minded" (2 Ne. 9:39, emphasis mine; Alma 30:53, 36:4; D&C 67:10, 12), meaning that evil does not originate with or reside in the body alone, but is a potential of intelligence which infuses the whole spirit-body complex.

That the Fall enabled procreation is a point missed in biblical Christianity; it is first mentioned explicitly in the Book of Mormon (2 Ne. 2:22–25), and is reiterated in the Pearl of Great Price (Moses 5:11). On this seemingly small hinge turns a great weight of doctrine, for to say that Adam and Eve could not procreate until they partook of the tree of knowledge of good and evil of which they were commanded not to partake is to say that they were given two conflicting commandments, for the first of all commandments they were given was to "multiply and replenish the earth" (Gen. 1:27–28). Therefore, God had set them up. They could not keep the first commandment unless they transgressed the second. In other words, the choice was not dichotomous.

This insight aligns with our discussion about nested hierarchies of paradigms, the friction that develops on the cusp of paradigms at points of dimensional transition, and the contextual determination of righteousness. Brother Brigham assures us:

It was all in the economy of heaven, and we need not talk about it; it is

all right. We should never blame Mother Eve, not the least. I am thankful to God that I know good from evil, the bitter from the sweet, the things of God from the things not of God. When I look at the economy of heaven my heart leaps for joy, and if I had the tongue of an angel . . . I would praise God in the highest for his great wisdom and condescension in suffering the children of men to fall into the very sin into which they had fallen, for he did it that they, like Jesus, might descend below all things and [have the potential to] then press forward and rise above all.⁵²

Some have equated the transgression in the garden with sexual sin. This idea is repugnant in LDS theology. Apostle James E. Talmage writes:

I take this occasion to raise my voice against the false interpretation of scripture, which has been adopted by certain people, and is current in their minds, and is referred to in a hushed and half-secret way, that the fall of man consisted in some offense against the laws of chastity and of virtue. Such a doctrine is an abomination. . . . The human race is not born of fornication. These bodies that are given unto us are given in the way the Lord has provided. . . . Our first parents were pure and noble, and when we pass behind the veil we shall perhaps learn something of their high estate.⁵³

Sex and death, the greatest mysteries of mortal life, are thus rendered as blessings in Mormon theology. Rites of passage in all cultures involve initiating youth into these mysteries. Mythologist Mircea Eliade explains:

There is, to begin with, the first and most terrible revelation, that of the sacred as the tremendum. The adolescent begins by being terrorized by a supernatural reality of which he experiences, for the first time, the power, the autonomy, the incommensurability; and following upon this encounter with the divine terror, the neophyte dies: he dies to childhood—that is, to ignorance and irresponsibility. That is why his family lament and weep for him: when he comes back from the forest he will be another; he will no longer be the child he was . . . ; he will have undergone a series of initiatory ordeals which compel him to confront fear, suffering and torture, but which compel him above all to assume a new mode of being, that which is proper to an adult—namely, that which is conditioned by the almost simultaneous revelation of the sacred, of death and of sexuality.⁵⁴

In the absence of such mythic rituals and narratives in contemporary culture, we have lost touch with the cosmic meaning of the creation, the fall, sex and death, and therefore of the atonement made by the Creator for the terror and grief, torture and suffering created by the human mismanagement of sex and death, our own small alphas and omegas. Many members of the Church, untrained in the mythic imagination, fail

to enter these mysteries in the temple ceremony and, to that extent, forfeit their endowment of power.

It is tempting to think that, since human beings had intelligence and agency prior to coming to earth, there is no real advantage in being embodied—in fact, given the intensity of the pain caused by unfulfilled desire and given the atrocities embodied beings have committed as a result of both their impatience and their sloth, one wonders whether the whole proposition is a mistake. Such thinking misses the fact that it is only in this estate, where intelligence-spirit has evolved into intelligence-spirit-body, that procreative power is enabled. I personally feel, like Brigham Young, that the prize is well worth the price. The prospect of losing my procreative power and the manifold joy that comes only through embodiment and the fecundity of erotic love is not an acceptable one to me. I am filled to overflowing with the painful/pleasurable fire of divine love and seek continuous forms for it. This is what it means to be a god.

The unembodied do not fully experience pain and pleasure, which experience is necessary for a wise creator and governor of worlds, whether the small fiefdoms we erect in this life or the larger ones of the next.⁵⁵ I would not trade either, for this reason: Pain is not always abject suffering. It is possible to reach a point even in this life where pain loses its sting and relativity releases its hold. Joy is not the absence of pain, but the assimilation of it. This is the escape from eternal torment. This is the door of the sky. This is the peace which passeth all understanding. This is the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In theological tandem with the Fall is the atonement of Jesus Christ (2 Ne. 9:6–26) Though in liberal circles anthropocentrism is passé, Mormon doctrine maintains that the development of the human race is the purpose of the entire creation and all of God's concern (Moses 1:39; D&C 88:20).⁵⁶ Yet because of the Fall, "man could not merit anything of himself" (Alma 22:14). "For the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam, and will be forever and ever, unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord" (Mosiah 3:19).

Some Mormons speak of "the natural man" as if the phrase indicates an inherently evil disposition. Obviously, in context with all our other doctrines, the "natural man" is but one side of the coin. Residing in the same soul as the "natural man" with base spiritual-physical instincts is

the “supernatural man,” a god in embryo with noble spiritual-physical instincts. This aspect of humanity surfaces as often as the other. Some have also assumed that, as a result of the curse, all creation was demoted from its original status as “very good” (Abr. 2:31) to a position of very bad. However, Mormon doctrine conditions sin on accountability, and the earth, plants, and animals cannot sin due to insufficient awareness. They will enjoy their “eternal felicity” (D&C 77:3) because their behaviors here, even within the dog-eat-dog scheme of enmity, cannot but obey the laws that are encoded in their physiologies. Whereas Adam and Eve were given the choice to obey or disobey the commandment to multiply and replenish the earth, the plants and animals were “caused” to be fruitful (Abr. 4:22). Sin is the province of humans; and exaltation and godhood are the province of humans, who alone of creation are the offspring of Deity. Human beings alone have the capacity to decide between the two propositions that “invite and entice” (Moro. 7:12–13) their psychophysiology.

The status of any given individual’s accountability, however, is dependent on two factors: “That wicked one cometh and taketh away light and truth, *through disobedience*, from the children of men, and *because of the traditions of their fathers*” (D&C 93:39; emphasis mine). This doctrine is a crucial one but is poorly understood. We tend to focus on the sovereignty of the individual and frame sin only in terms of personal disobedience. But there is a communal aspect to sin as well as an individual aspect. Throughout the scriptures, people are frequently blessed or cursed as a group. In fact, the destiny of each is the destiny of all, since “we cannot be made perfect without them, nor they without us.”⁵⁷ We limit and are limited by others.

On the one hand, the concept of communal accountability clears us of much guilt. To the extent that our parents—by extension, all people born prior to our births—failed to comprehend and apply true doctrine (regardless of their stated intent or external religiosity), our awareness is compromised. How much sexual sin, for example, is the result, not of an individual’s failure to intellectually accept the commandments or of a perverse will, but of a failure on the part of his or her parents to come to terms with their own physicality and to provide a guilt-free example and a safe environment for experimentation? It is a grave sin for parents to prevent their children from innocently experimenting with their bodies and emotions. To manipulate their experience through shame and guilt is to leave them unprepared for young adulthood when the stakes of experi-

mentation are much higher. An embodied spirit that is uninformed by parental physical-emotional literacy and graduated trial-and-error experience runs riot. To avoid immorality, youth need self-awareness and empathy in addition to rules and avoidance strategies.

On the other hand, as adults we stand culpable of all we have passed on or failed to pass on to our children—by extension, to all people born after our births. Hence, the sin of every person impinges on every other from Adam and Eve on; and in this sense, sin is not volitional but original, or in other words, human beings are “conceived in sin” (Moses 6:55). Because of the Fall and the cumulative effects of time, there is no possibility of our not sinning. Here we begin to sense that we too, along with Adam and Eve, have been “set up.” For this reason, a merciful and just God thrusts his hand through the veil to retrieve us. The acts that rend the temple veil and recrosses the dimensional barrier transgressed at the Fall, opening the possibility of our growth through experimentation, is the conception, life, death, and undeath of the Son of God, the Son of Man, the ultimate Form. The Father, “in his beautiful and good Eros towards the universe,”⁵⁸ has produced an heir, and asks us to “Hear Him.”⁵⁹

There is only one reason that everything is “all right” after humankind’s leap into sex and death. A Savior was begotten; the holy seed pierced the shell of the earth, took root in the womb of time, was born of blood and baptized in water. He tasted, smelled, touched, heard, and saw. He ate and drank, urinated and defecated, laughed and sobbed, hugged and kissed, sang and danced, shouted and sweated, and sighed and ejaculated. He moved among us so that we could see and hear and smell and feel and be felt by him, touched by him, healed by him. Displaying perfect interaction with context, he remained without sin, and “his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree” (1 Pet. 2:24), a tree of death for a tree of life. By our choice he was murdered and, on the third day, rose above it. We become “his seed” (Mosiah 15:10–14; Isa. 53:10) as we awaken to the potential destruction of each step we take in space and time and accept his atonement wherein he absorbed and transmuted that destruction in his very body. The price of our sexuality and murderousness has been paid by someone who waits patiently for us like a groom on his wedding day.

Through all levels of mythological and concrete reality, he is the One True Way. We can make our second estate our own. We can be endowed permanently with the power of Eros even as God is. May we seek ever to embrace that power in bold humility through the abundant grace

of God in Christ Jesus and the radical doctrines of his restored gospel. Amen.

Notes

1. Hosea 12:10; see also verses listed in Index, Triple Combination (Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price, 1981 LDS edition), under “type” (379).

2. Here and in other passages, gender-inclusive nouns such as “human being” and “humankind” and their accompanying pronouns “he or she” and “they” have been substituted for the author’s preferred gender-inclusive nouns “man” and “mankind” and their pronoun “he,” according to *Dialogue’s* editorial policy.

3. No editor, *Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997), 28.

4. Joseph Campbell, *The Power of Myth* (New York: Broadway Books, 2001), 85.

5. Rollo May, *Power and Innocence: A Search for the Sources of Violence* (New York: Norton, 1998), 234; emphasis his.

6. Campbell, *The Power of Myth*, 85, 87.

7. Joseph A. Harriss, “The Elusive Marc Chagall,” <http://www.Smithsonianmagazine.com/issues/2003/december/chagall.php> (accessed December 14, 2006).

8. John A. Widstoe, comp. and ed., *Discourses of Brigham Young* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978), 376; see also D&C 131:7–8.

9. Salvador Dali, quoted in Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, translated by Ron Padgett (New York: Viking Press, 1971), 13.

10. Walt Whitman, “Song of Myself,” in Mark Van Doren, comp., *The Portable Walt Whitman* (New York: Penguin Books, 1978), 52–53.

11. Walter Rane, *They Did Treat Me with Much Harshness*, painting reproduced in his *By the Hand of Mormon: Scenes from the Land of Promise* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 8; reprinted *Ensign*, January 2004, inside front cover.

12. Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio’s *The Doubting of St. Thomas* (1601–2) may be viewed at www.ibiblio.org/wm/paint/auth/caravaggio/st-thomas.jpg. Ivan Nikolaevich Kramskoy’s *Christ in the Wilderness* (1872–4) may be viewed at www.auburn.edu/academic/liberal_arts/foreign/russian/art/kramskoy-christ.html. Nikolai Nikolaevich Ge’s *Calvary* (1892, unfinished) may be viewed at www.auburn.edu/academic/liberal_arts/foreign/russian/art/ge-calvary.html (accessed January 2, 2007).

13. Joseph Fielding Smith, comp., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (1938; American Fork, Utah: Covenant Communications, 2002 printing), 138.

14. Joseph Smith corrected John 1:1; however, he let the figure stand in John 1:14 and 1:16 of the JST, as well as in 1 John 1:1 and 5:7, and used the figure again in D&C 93:8 and Moses 1:32.

15. May, *Power and Innocence*, 233; emphasis his.

16. "Letter of His Holiness Pope John Paul II to Artists, 1999" 8–9, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul-ii/letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_23041999_artists_en.html (accessed December 14, 2006).

17. Jane Dillenberger, "Reflections on the Field of Religion and the Visual Arts," in *Art as Religious Studies*, edited by Doug Adams and Diane Apostolos-Cappadona (New York: Crossroads, 1987), 13.

18. Wallace Stevens, "Sunday Morning" in *The Palm at the End of the Mind: Selected Poems and a Play by Wallace Stevens*, edited by Holly Stevens (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), 7.

19. W. B. Yeats, "The Circus Animals' Desertion" in *Selected Poems and Two Plays of William Butler Yeats*, edited by M. L. Rosenthal (New York: Collier Books, 1978), 185.

20. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 362–64; Abr. 4:1.

21. Edward L. Kimball, ed., *The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982), 315–16; *Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley*, 690; "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," quoted in (no author), "As Equal Partners," *Ensign*, October 2005, 8–9.

22. James E. Talmage, "The Eternity of Sex," *Young Woman's Journal* 25 (October 1914): 602–3; Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1972), 3:178.

23. First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *Ensign*, November 1995, 102.

24. Swami B. V. Tripurari, *Form of Beauty: The Krishna Art of B. G. Sharma* (Novato, Calif.: Mandala Publishing, 2000), 123.

25. In the development of the normal human embryo from the undifferentiated stage (before eight weeks) through full differentiation at term, the genitals of both sexes make a gradual transition and lose each other's features equally. It is not the case that we all begin embodiment as boys with some going on to become girls, or vice versa. We more accurately begin as hermaphrodites.

26. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 233.

27. For a discussion of healthy versus unhealthy sexual imprinting, as well as a fascinating look at a hypothetical sexually healthy culture, see Anne Stirling

Hastings, *Body and Soul: Sexuality on the Brink of Change* (New York: Insight Books, 1996).

28. See Sheila Kitzinger, "Ritual in the Western Way of Birth" in her *Ourselves as Mothers: The Universal Experience of Motherhood* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1995), 141–65; Robbie Davis-Floyd, "Hospital Birth as a Technocratic Rite of Passage," *Mothering*, Summer 1993, 69–75.

29. Stephanie Coontz, *Marriage, a History: From Obedience to Intimacy or How Love Conquered Marriage* (New York: Viking, 2005).

30. John Taylor, *The Gospel Kingdom* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1987), 52; Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1975), 25; Joseph Fielding Smith, *Man, His Origin and Destiny* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1954).

31. First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve, "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," 102.

32. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 69–70; idea repeated 326–27.

33. See B. Carmon Hardy, *Solemn Passage: The Mormon Polygamous Passage* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 18–19.

34. Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2d ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1979 printing), 578. For a discussion of the implications of the current official policy of silence regarding polygamy's doctrinal status, see Hardy, *Solemn Covenant*, 338–39.

35. Harold Bloom, *The American Religion* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), 96–111.

36. Brigham Young, March (no day), 1857, *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (London and Liverpool: LDS Booksellers Depot, 1855–86), 4:259.

37. Heber C. Kimball, February 8, 1857, *Journal of Discourses*, 4:224.

38. Brigham Young, September 21, 1856, *Journal of Discourses*, 4:56–57.

39. "We have women here who like any thing but the celestial law of God; and if they could break asunder the cable of the Church of Christ, there is scarcely a mother in Israel but would do it this day. And they talk it to their husbands, to their daughters, and to their neighbors, and say they have not seen a week's happiness since they became acquainted with that law, or since their husbands took a second wife. They want to break up the Church of God." Jedediah M. Grant, September 21, 1856, *Journal of Discourses*, 4:50.

40. Canada Department of Justice, *Polygyny and Canada's Obligations under International Human Rights Law*, Chapter 2: "Harms of Polygyny," <http://www.justice.gc.ca/en/dept/pub/poly/chap2.html> (accessed September 2006).

41. Rumors have circulated that the original study confirming this fact is difficult to locate, with the insinuation that it therefore may not exist at all. How-

ever, a .pdf file of the original fifty-page drug-industry study, Brenda Motheral, Emily R. Cox, Doug Mager, Rochelle Henderson, and Ruth Martinez, Prescription Drug Atlas," 2001–2 for ExpressScripts, Inc., is available at <http://www.express-scripts.com/ourcompany/news/outcomesresearch/prescriptiondrugatlas/> (accessed December 18, 2006). See also Kent Ponder, Ph.D., "Mormon Women, Prozac, and Therapy," <http://home.teleport.com/~packham/prozac.htm> (accessed December 16, 2006); Julie Cart, "Study Finds Utah Leads Nation in Anti-depressant Use," *Los Angeles Times*, February 20, 2002, A6, also at <http://rickross.com/reference/mormon/mormon64.html> (accessed December 16, 2006).

42. Andrea G. Radke, Ph.D., *The Place of Mormon Women: Perceptions, Prozac, Polygamy, Priesthood, Patriarchy, and Peace*, http://www.fairlds.org/FAIR_Conferences/2004_Place_of_Mormon_Women.html#en23 (accessed December 16, 2006).

43. James C. Christensen, "The Responsible Woman" (reproduction of painting), *Ensign*, March 2003, 15.

44. Rollo May, *Love and Will* (New York: Dell, 1974), 308.

45. Dallin H. Oaks, "Free Agency and Freedom," in *The Book of Mormon: Second Nephi, the Doctrinal Structure*, edited by Monte Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1989), 1–16.

46. Dallin H. Oaks, "Why Do We Serve?" *Ensign*, November 1984, 12.

47. Widtsoe, *Discourses of Brigham Young*, 273–74.

48. Denys the Areopagite (ca. 500), quoted in Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics, Vol. 1: Seeing the Form* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982), 122.

49. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 296.

50. Joseph Smith, *Lectures on Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 1:9, 13, 15–17, 22; emphasis his.

51. Widtsoe, *Discourses of Brigham Young*, 103; see also Joseph Fielding Smith, *Answers to Gospel Questions*, 5 vols. (1955–66; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1972 printing), 2:214.

52. Widtsoe, *Discourses of Brigham Young*, 103.

53. James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1946), 30.

54. Mircea Eliade, *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries*, translated by Philip Mairet (New York: Harper and Bros., 1960), 195–96.

55. Joseph Fielding Smith, in *Conference Report*, October 1967, 122.

56. See also Widtsoe, *Discourses of Brigham Young*, 57, beginning with “The whole object . . .”

57. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 162.

58. Denys the Areopagite, quoted in von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, 122.

59. Joseph Smith Jr. et al., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, edited by B. H. Roberts, 2d ed. rev. (6 vols., 1902–12, Vol. 7, 1932; rpt., Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1980 printing): 1:5. See also Matt. 17:5; Mark 9:7; Luke 9:35.