

DIALOGUE

a journal of mormon thought

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The Last Memory:
Joseph F. Smith and *Lieux de
Mémoire* in Late Nineteenth-
Century Mormonism¹

Stephen C. Taysom

Introduction

On the day after Christmas in 1915, Joseph F. Smith (JFS), then president of the LDS Church and less than three years away from his own death, spoke to a group of people in the Eleventh Ward meetinghouse in Salt Lake City. The past was always important to JFS and as he got older he found himself, usually at the behest of other Latter-day Saints, giving voice to his memories with increasing frequency. JFS accepted the invitation to speak on this day because “[s]ome of the good folks present are anxious to hear something about my early experiences.”² Although few things are more common than an old man telling stories about his youth, this event, and the dozens like it that JFS participated in during the last years of his life, was about far more than personal memory. These “good folks” wanted to hear something about the early experiences that formed the basis of their own communal identity. JFS represented a rapidly fading live link to a mythical past, a catalyst that could, if primed correctly, reanimate the traumas of Missouri and Nauvoo for a generation that did not know them. JFS did not disappoint on this score. He tied himself to the mythic

events, he reached back and touched the legendary past, and his audience reached out and touched him. He completed the circuit of collective memory in a way that would soon be impossible.

In this essay, I explore how JFS served as a “site of memory” for late nineteenth-century Mormons and how his own memorial experiences shaped first his personal sense of reality and then the wider Mormon collective memory. The vast majority of the memories shared by JFS were deeply traumatic, not only for him but also for the community of which he was the living symbol.

From the time of his father’s murder, JFS began building a narrative that made both sense of the events and capacitated him in making sense of prospective events in light of that narrative. Theorists of biography have noted this propensity. Leon Edel, perhaps the most influential biographical theorist of the last thirty years, argues that every person has a “personal myth.” What he means by this is that all of us have in our minds a story in which we are the main character. We perceive ourselves as individual beings with boundaries, separate from other beings, a self that has a past and a future. In order to provide meaning to our sensory experiences as individuals, we arrange these experiences mythologically—as ideology in narrative form. We construct a beginning and we identify moments that, taken together, provide us with a meaningful storyline—our own “personal myths.”

Norman K. Denzin argues that there are two basic types, or genres, of autobiographical stories that individuals tell. One is called “self-stories” and the other Denzin dubs “personal-experience narratives.” Personal-experience narratives are all about group dynamics. They are stories told that “recreate cherished values and memories of a group.” Self-stories, by contrast, are narratives told about the self with no further ambition beyond being a “story of and about the self in relation to an experience.”³ What makes JFS so interesting from a biographer’s point of view is that his autobiographical anecdotes collapse Denzin’s two categories. JFS’s memories of Nauvoo lie at the exact point where personal-experience narratives and self-stories intersect. His personal memories of Hyrum and Joseph Smith, no matter how banal, are

self-stories in that they are personal and intimate, but they also function as personal-experience narratives because they touch on the Mormon mythos—the narrative and collective memory of the entire Church.

Dan P. McAdams, a psychologist who has done extensive research on what autobiography can tell us about the psychological formation of the self, is a particularly useful resource for trying to tease out meaning from JFS's reminiscences. Like Edel, McAdams embraces the idea of the personal myth, which he defines as those stories one tells about one's self whose purpose is to "rearrange the past so that it can be seen to have given birth to the present."⁴ There is constant contact between one's sense of the past and one's sense of the present, and each influences the other. McAdams argues that personal myths are thus malleable and are frequently recast "to embody new plots and characters and to emphasize different scenes from the past and different expectations for the future."⁵ The recasting is often tied to the life cycle and most people "make progress over time in the search for unity and purpose as we move from adolescence through adulthood."⁶

Unfortunately, we have no documents from JFS's adolescence in which he reminisces about his past. By the time he begins to speak and write extensively and deliberately about his past, he is in late middle-age and his myth has become highly ossified, probably because his life entered a particularly turbulent period in the mid-1880s that lasted for more than twenty years. JFS's personal myth, grounded in his memories of the Missouri and Nauvoo periods, provided a useful tool in making sense of the difficulties he faced on the polygamy "underground," his conflicted emotions surrounding the Manifesto of 1890, the humiliation of the Reed Smoot hearings, the "Second Manifesto" of 1904, and the deaths of several of his children. JFS's memories, constructed to best suit his needs, took the uncertainty out of present trauma by linking it with past trauma. JFS was thus enabled to view the world and life as an integrated whole that cohered around the idea of righteous suffering and living martyrdom.

Sites of Memory

“Memory,” writes historian Geoffrey Cubitt, “is always a view from within a group [whereas] history views groups from the outside.”⁷ What Cubitt applies to “groups” may also be applied to specific periods of time viewed within the frame of a shared cultural identity. This is certainly true in the case of LDS views of the pre-Utah period of their history. In this article, I explore how Joseph F. Smith came to embody the “memory” of a time period that was moving very rapidly into “history” for the Latter-day Saints. As JFS grew older, he became a living specimen of what Pierre Nora calls *lieux de mémoire*, or sites of memory. Nora defines sites of memory as “any significant entity, whether material or non-material in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community.”⁸ The necessity of these sites is grounded in perceived discontinuities between the present life of a community and its shared historical memory. In Nora’s words,

Our interest in *lieux de mémoire* where memory crystallizes and secretes itself has occurred at a particular historical moment, a turning point where consciousness of a break with the past is bound up with the sense that memory has been torn—but torn in such a way as to pose the problem of the embodiment of memory in certain sites where a sense of historical continuity persists. There are *lieux de mémoire*, sites of memory, because there are no longer *milieux de mémoire*, real environments of memory.⁹

Joseph F. Smith became a site of memory as the nineteenth century aged, the pioneer era slipped away, the founding generation died off, plural marriage was renounced, and Mormons became Americans. JFS was a living conduit to the Smith family, and neither he nor his fellow Mormons ever forgot that. Moreover, by emphasizing the trauma of the Mormon past, JFS was sharing not only the knowledge but also the feeling of the cultural trauma. “I am among,” he reminded his audience, “a very few now living who can speak from their own knowledge of an acquaintance with the Prophet Joseph Smith.”¹⁰ JFS assured the ward members that

even though he was only “a child in those days,” he “knew the Prophet Joseph Smith” and “can see him in my mind’s eye just as he seemed to appear to me then.” To hammer home his *bona fides* as a true acquaintance of Joseph Smith, JFS asserted, “I was just as familiar in the home of the Prophet as I was in the home of my father.”¹¹ Especially important in the case of JFS was his role as site of memory for the Missouri and Nauvoo periods. Through the application of theoretical models to archival data, this essay presents the complex role that JFS played as the “last memory” of the founding period.

Personal Myth and the Burden of Embodied Collective Memory

Telling stories about the past became a way of life for JFS. As time wore on, two complementary phenomena emerged. First, fewer and fewer people remained who had enjoyed personal acquaintance with Joseph and Hyrum Smith. Second, the passing decades added stature to the two men in the collective memory of the Mormon people. In March 1904, John R. Winder of the First Presidency proposed, “Whereas, nearly sixty years have passed since the martyrdom of the Prophet and Patriarch, Joseph and Hyrum Smith, and no public building or monument has been erected to their memory. Therefore, be it resolved by this general conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints that a suitable building or monument be erected to their memory.”¹² The surprisingly late date of such a natural suggestion is probably due to the combined factors of increased Church ability to collect and allocate funds for such a purpose and the ever-dwindling numbers of personal acquaintances of the Smith brothers.

By the early twentieth century, these two trends converged and JFS became the main connection between the Mormons as a whole and their by-now mythic past. But even in his own head, JFS was telling himself stories about who he was and why he was. These stories are evident in the way he responded to crises and to joys. The stories themselves carry worth that goes far beyond what historical truth they may contain. The choices involved in

constructing a narrative are not arbitrary and they are not objective descriptions of the passage of time. Hayden White calls this process “*emplotment*.”¹³ French scholar Michel de Certeau observes that there is an important qualitative difference between “*lived history*” and “*history retold*.”¹⁴ Retelling history is a narrative process and narrative is “an art of saying . . . an art of thinking and of operating.” This art, de Certeau notes, “produces effects, not objects.”¹⁵

Not unlike music, the narration of historical events is designed to evoke feeling. Narration is calculated to convey information only secondarily. Its primary purpose is to provide meaning, to give shape and form to the chaos of the past. We can see de Certeau’s hypotheses regarding the power of historical narration validated in the memories that JFS offers from Missouri and Nauvoo. Late in his life, he was chiefly concerned with telling these stories to other people. What is true for the individual, namely that memory is an act of construction based on particular need, is also true for communities, which are always in the process of constructing shared or “collective” memory.

Jan Assmann, one of the most influential writers on the role of collective memory in religious communities, points out, “We say that the dead will live on in the memory of others, as if this were some kind of natural prolongation of their life. In reality, though, this is an act of resuscitation performed by the desire of the group not to allow the dead to disappear but, with the aid of memory, to keep them as members of their community and to take them with them into their progressive present.”¹⁶ JFS’s personal narrative came increasingly to bear the weight of an entire people. JFS’s memories of Nauvoo, in particular, led him to be the Church’s chief practitioner of *anamnesis*, the act of constantly stoking the fires of a group’s collective memory. *Anamnesis* is especially important when it comes to foundational events. Such a person must occupy a special position within his or her culture, a position of absolute rhetorical authority. As one scholar of history, religion, and memory puts it, the main function of *anamnesis* within religious communities is to “recall the foundational events that enabled the chain [of memory] to form, and/or [to] affirm

[the group's] power to persist through whatever vicissitudes have come, and will still come, to threaten it."¹⁷

JFS became the last prominent keeper and forger of the chain of Mormon memory whose authority derived from personal experience. He was replaced as the Mormon anamnesis, not coincidentally, by his son, Joseph F. Smith Jr., who became Church historian and who crafted collective Mormon historical memory for more than half a century. He drew his authority not from personal experience but rather from his privileged access to documents, his position as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve, and his blood relation to the Smith family. This is one of the ways in which JFS's role as memory-maker rippled far beyond the span of his own life. The memory of Nauvoo eventually became JFS's to keep for the Church.

Quite apart from his role of performing anamnesis for the Church, JFS was a master myth-maker in his own life. Note here that "myth" does not suggest lying or deliberate falsehood. In this context, myth might best be thought of as "ideology in narrative form." Myth "naturalizes and legitimizes" ideologies.¹⁸ When applied to the narration of historical events, mythology provides a sense of moral meaning to events in the past that lack such a structure and it convinces the audience that the moral meaning is inevitable and natural. Mythology is an act of narration in which the emplotment of the narrative is driven by a particular, explicit, ideological engine. For JFS, the fuel for the engine was the inexhaustible trauma that flowed from his father's murder in 1844 and his mother's death in 1852.

Memorial Sacrosapes: Missouri

Although JFS was only an infant when he left Missouri, the shadow of the events that transpired there follows him into adulthood. In order to understand why Missouri and, later, Nauvoo came to figure so prominently in JFS's life, especially as he grew older, we may look to a theory of religion developed by Thomas Tweed. Tweed argues, "Whatever else religions do, they move across time and space. They are not static. And they have effects. They

leave traces. They leave trails. Sometimes those trails are worth celebrating. . . . Sometimes trails are sites for mourning.”¹⁹ Tweed calls the trails left behind by the movement—both figurative and literal—of a religious movement “sacrosapes.”²⁰ Sacrosapes help religions make sense of the changes that they make, especially those that are involuntary. Western religions, in particular, hold tightly to the concept of an unchanging God and an accessible Truth. Changes, either in terms of ritual, doctrine, or status, pose potential problems. Successful religions, meaning those that are historically persistent, find ways to make necessary changes so as to remain viable within a given cultural and historical context while simultaneously explaining away the changes as nonexistent, unimportant, or as epiphenomena that are changes in appearance only and which are actually in service of a larger, unchanging phenomenon. This dyadic system of constant change and adjustment in response to historical contingency on one hand and an internal rhetoric of constant stasis on the other is particularly apparent in nineteenth-century Mormonism. Few religions in history have moved, in Tweed’s multivalent use of that term, so much in so short a time. The nineteenth-century Mormon sacroscape includes various moves from one type of family system to another and back again, from one type of conception of God to a much more radical one, from a centrally-based Zionism ideal to a more diffuse one, and so on. Physically, Mormons moved from New York to Ohio to Missouri to Illinois. But Mormons also moved from Europe and the Pacific to the United States. All of this and more comprise the sacroscape. JFS’s stories about his life became the lens through which later generations of Mormons would wander the trails of joy and, more often, the trauma and tragedy of this shared sacroscape. It was in that capacity that JFS left his accounts of Missouri and Nauvoo, and those accounts can only be understood and analyzed with the notion of the sacroscape in mind.

JFS opened the brief autobiographical essay about his early years in blunt fashion: “November 13th 1838. This is the date of my birth. I was born in Far West, Caldwell Co. Missouri, 13 days after my Father was taken a prisoner by the mob.”²¹ JFS’s story starts in the crucible of persecution at the hands of the

mobs in Missouri. Missouri found a lasting and active place not only in Mormon memory but also in the Mormon view of the future. Despite the humiliating string of defeats and evictions that stretched the length of the 1830s and despite the ignominious imprisonment of their leader and prophet, Mormons never let Missouri go. There are two basic, related, reasons for this. The first is that the early revelations established that God wanted Independence as his city, where Christ would one day return and rule personally on the earth. The language in those revelations was so specific and so forceful that they simply could not be ignored no matter how grim the actual situation was. Second, a revelation produced by Joseph Smith in 1834, after the Mormons had been driven off their lands in Jackson County, would be given increasing weight as the years moved on. That 1834 revelation spoke of the “redemption of Zion” and said that Zion could be redeemed—that is, Mormon lands reclaimed—“by power.” According to the revelation, “the blessing which I have promised after your tribulations, and the tribulations of your brethren [is] their restoration to the land of Zion, to be established no more to be thrown down.”²² This promise of a redemption of Zion and a return to Missouri was kept vividly alive throughout the nineteenth century. Many individuals were promised as part of their patriarchal blessings that they would live to return to Missouri in preparation for the second coming of Christ. This belief spread widely and deeply throughout the Mormon culture region.

JFS’s brief sojourn in Missouri had a much greater impact on him and on Mormonism in general than the length of his time there would suggest. In fact, JFS incorporated memorial narratives of the period into his own reminiscences. Memory is a major theme in JFS’s life. One might imagine JFS’s life as existing on two separate tracks. On one track, we find the things he lives “through.” On the other track, we find the things he lives “with.” While everyone has both of these operating in their lives, for JFS, the things that he lived “with” loomed unusually large in his consciousness. The traumatic first ten years of his life remained with him almost constantly until his death. He used these memories to filter, order, arrange, and narrate his lived experiences. The first

ten years were the index by which he made sense of the other things that he lived “through.”

Because memory, the body of things JFS lived “with,” is such an important theme in JFS’s life, it is salutary to flesh out what we mean by that term. In recent decades, a major shift has occurred in the way in which scientists understand the nature of memory. Memory used to be imagined as a sort of mental filing system. In this static model, sensory data were thought to be recorded by the brain and then stored away. These stored files could then be accessed when the need arose or when something triggered a memory. The important thing about this model is that it assumed that memories, once formed, remained basically stable. The only possible changes were thought to come from aging or some disease or injury to the structures of the brain responsible for storage.

Today, neurological research has yielded a new understanding of what memory is and how it functions. Memories are not really retrieved as much as they are “reconstructed” each time they are accessed. This reconstruction involves complex interactions among various structures throughout the brain. The memories, thus, are constructed not only out of recorded sensorial data but also out of things that have occurred since the original memory was created. Memory is a dynamic process, and remembering is defined as “the process of activating memory functions” rather than simply an act of retrieval. If this model is correct, then, according to one expert, “it is plausible to say that [memory] does not represent but rather constructs reality.”²³

This has at least two important implications for our study of JFS. First, we must see his memories, particularly the early ones that he invoked most frequently, as dynamic entities influenced not only by the things through which he lived but also by things that he heard about the past from other people. Memory is a living thing, and JFS’s memories took shape according to how he understood himself and the nature of the world around him. The tone, characters, incidents, and narrative structure of his reminiscences help us understand the factors that shaped his memories. Second, the frequent reconstruction of the memories sometimes led him to include in his own memories things that he could not

have actually experienced. One incident in particular took root in JFS's imagination. Don Carlos Smith, JFS's uncle, was away from home on a mission for the Church in Tennessee when his wife, Agnes Moulton Coolbrith, was turned out of her home as part of the actions in the Mormon War. I have collected two separate sermons in which JFS recounts this story. Exploring these sermons provides a window into JFS's worldview and establishes that his sense of self may be traced unambiguously back to the Missouri period despite having been too young to have experienced the events himself. As soon as he had made explicit his personal link to Joseph Smith, JFS began to tell a story about Missouri. He acknowledged that the story he was about to recount occurred "in my babyhood" but suggested that it had never "been recorded at all, and perhaps no one has given utterance to it." He continued,

My own aunt, who was the wife of Don Carlos Smith and who was then living in exile, having been driven out of her own home, a little log cabin, the best they possessed then, with three little children, a babe in her arms and another little tot holding her hand and another a little older hanging to her skirts, at midnight in the month of November, with the frost in the air and the earth frozen solid, without time to put on her clothes; and she left prints of her feet in blood upon the frozen soil of Missouri. She fled from what she had . . . by the light of the flames that destroyed her little cabin home.²⁴

The intricate detail of this story is stunning and the imagery vivid. There is no question that JFS had imagined this event many times over the decades until it came to represent, for him, the entire Mormon experience in Missouri. He carried what was, in effect, a memory that he had appropriated and woven into his own personal story, a memory that captured what Missouri meant to him: homeless, wounded innocents, alone at midnight, standing on ground so cold that not even the blood of a helpless mother could thaw it. This particular anecdote found its way into multiple sermons.

In addition to the December 1915 sermon, he also recited the story on July 22, 1917, at the Liberty Stake conference in Salt

Lake City. That gathering had as its main focus the celebration of “Pioneer Day,” which marked the anniversary of the arrival of the first Mormon pioneers into Salt Lake Valley on July 24, 1847. By the time JFS took to the pulpit in the Assembly Hall on Temple Square that day, he had already heard sermons by several local Church leaders that had focused on the persecutions that led the saints to Utah. “I certainly hope,” JFS began, that “I might be able in the first place to calm my feelings a little, or I fear I shall make a failure of an attempt to talk to you very much.” The remarks made by the previous speakers about the suffering of the Mormons in Missouri, he remarked, “have struck very close to my feelings.” In an effort to calm himself, JFS told the audience that it was not his intention to dwell upon “the hardships caused by the persecutions” of the Mormons. Despite that caveat, he seemed unable to resist. In fact, Smith devoted the lion’s share of his lengthy address to recounting the wrongs done to the Mormons. It was in this context that JFS again told the story of his aunt. Before telling the story, JFS tried again to stop himself, telling his listeners that “I will try to get away from this subject and do not care to dwell on it.” But in the very next sentence, he dove headlong into the horrors of Missouri. As in 1915, he told again of the woman and her children “driven out of their home to escape mob violence in the month of November, when the snow and frost were upon the ground, and with her two little girls, little children” she was cast out into the “wilderness” leaving “the marks of her bloody feet upon the ground.” By this point, JFS was in danger of being overcome by the power of his own words. “It is always dangerous for me to think of those things. I ought not to do it because of the effect upon my feelings; it stirs up the old Adam in me, and I should always pass it up.”²⁵

There are three important things that the telling of these stories reveals about JFS. First, there was clearly tension in JFS’s mind about how those memories and feelings fit into the Mormonism of the early twentieth century. He even prefaced his December 1915 remarks about persecution by acknowledging that there was a general sense that such public rehearsals could harm relations with “gentiles” who no longer sought to harm Mormons

and who may take offense at being implicated in the gruesome acts of their forbears. Speaking specifically of the stories of the misfortunes in Missouri, JFS said, “That is history which has not been said very much about, because we say now, ‘Hush; don’t wound the feelings and sensibilities of the children of those who drove you out of Missouri. They repent of it, they are sorry for it, they wish you would come back. Now, keep these things silent, don’t say anything about it,’ but you will pardon me for saying it, wont [sic] you.”²⁶ JFS believed that the memories of the Missouri persecutions were being suppressed by Mormons who wanted to appear polite and wanted to avoid rocking the boat.

Second, and more importantly, these stories leave no doubt that JFS remembered Missouri. He remembered it in the sense that the events there had taken on personal, deeply emotional, psychologically foundational meaning for him. He remembered it as a frozen hellscape devoid of comfort, composed of ice and fire and sheer, brutal indifference. It became for him a prototype of the larger world. It is easy to assume that JFS’s conscious, memory-forming life began in Nauvoo, and this is technically true. But memory is a complex thing, and it is far more than a recording device for our experiences. We recreate memories constantly, and it is clear that JFS presented this story from Missouri in the form of a personal memory. He never attributed the story to anyone. He did not introduce it as a family story or a legend handed down to him. He did not do those things because that is not how he thought about the story. He had, over the years, appropriated the memory and imbibed the experience so deeply that in 1917 he could still get visibly angry over the event. Scholars of trauma and collective memory describe a phenomenon called “vicarious traumatization” in which individuals can actually be traumatized—that is, impacted by physical or emotional events in such a way that the person’s psychological well-being is permanently damaged—by events that are either fictional or real ones in which they did not personally participate.²⁷ JFS’s memory of the eviction of his aunt seems like a vivid example of vicarious traumatization.

Finally, like everything else JFS ever did, he formed his memory of Missouri in the shadow of the memory of his father. There is no

mystery about where JFS might have learned about the eviction of his aunt and cousins. One need look no further than Hyrum Smith's affidavit that was sworn out in 1843 as part of the attempt of the Mormons to seek financial redress for the property and lives lost in Missouri. Among the many depredations that Hyrum Smith recounted in his affidavit, one finds the story of "the wife of my brother, the late Don Carlos Smith," who was driven from her home "about 11 o'clock at night, bringing her children along with her, one about two and a half years old, the other a babe in arms. She came on foot, a distance of three miles" being forced to cross a river that was waist deep and trudging "through snow three inches deep." The "ruffians," Hyrum concluded, had "burnt up her house."²⁸

The story was important enough to Hyrum Smith to include it in his redress affidavit. JFS would certainly have seen the affidavit if for no other reason than it was published as part of the *History of the Church* that was produced after the Mormons had arrived in Utah. JFS clearly altered some of the details. Hyrum spoke of two children, JFS of three. JFS mentions nothing of a river and Hyrum says nothing about bloody footprints. Nevertheless, the basic structure of the story is there. JFS's version is more dramatic, even darkly poetic. His memory of this story was shaped and reshaped over the decades, polished by further horrors and traumas until it became, in JFS's mind, an exquisitely sharp tool with which he could render for himself and anyone who cared to listen a portrait of the Mormon experience in the nineteenth century.

It is significant that he chose for this a memory that was important to his father. JFS kept the memory of his father ever close at hand. He could hardly have done otherwise even if he had wanted to, especially given the propensity of others to seek him out and talk about his link to the great heroes of Mormon history. In this case, it seems as though JFS may have literally appropriated one of his father's memories and made of it an anchor for the narrative of persecution, oppression, and martyrdom that would form the core of his identity. JFS and nineteenth-century Mormons in general were tapping into a rich vein of ancient persecution

narrative that had been deployed successfully by Christians for many centuries. In 1843, Hyrum Smith spoke to an audience in Nauvoo on the subject, outlining the importance of persecution to the Latter-day Saints. “Persecution,” he taught, “is one of the means of salvation [because] when persecutions cease, we are likely to forget the first commandment.”²⁹ JFS, in turn, transmitted this trait to his own children. In 1944, decades after JFS’s death, his son Joseph Fielding Smith Jr., wrote to one of his sons, Lewis, “No man in recent times had to endure more hatred [sic] more false accusations and bitterness on the part of the ungodly than did” JFS.³⁰ A year later, he wrote to another son, Douglas, “Your grandfather spent his life in tribulation. No man was ever abused, vilified, lied about more than was he.”³¹ This deep sense of persecution stained JFS’s memorial narratives of his life in Nauvoo just as deeply as those of Missouri.

Memorial Sacrosapes: Nauvoo

As in the case of Missouri, JFS’s childhood in Nauvoo is accessible in two ways: through a recreation of the general historical context and from his own later reminiscences. The former relies on the historical record, and JFS makes few appearances there during the Nauvoo period. We do know a few things, however. JFS’s membership in one of the most important families in Nauvoo would have granted him an elevated status relative to other children his age. He loved to walk the streets of the city, where his father sometimes took him. JFS and his siblings spent time with their grandmother, Lucy Mack Smith, at her home in Nauvoo. They were most amused by Lucy’s practice of sending her dog to the store. Carrying on his back a basket and a grocery list, the dog would in due course return with a basket full of the things Lucy needed.³² Most of the time, however, JFS could be found at his family’s farm. He loved playing in the barn on the property and in later years would recall with great fondness both barn and farm.

JFS also attended school, at least part of the time. Joseph Smith III recalled that he attended a school starting in 1841 “in a little brick store on the south side of Water Street” with “Hyrum’s

children.”³³ The teacher carried a penknife with him at all times, an instrument that he used to rap upon the heads of the children when they were in need of some attention. Although Joseph Smith III does not mention JFS by name, he does indicate that “among Uncle Hyrum’s children who came to this school was a small one whose mother used to call at some time in the afternoon to bring him a cup of milk which he would go outside to drink.”³⁴ It is strange that JS III did not name this child in his account. JFS would have been three or four and his next older brother, Hyrum Jr., who died in 1841 was mentioned by JS III in the very next sentence. Older than Hyrum, Jr. was John Smith, who, having been born in 1832, was the same age as JS III and thus unlikely to have been described as relatively small. It is likely that the little milk-drinking Smith was JFS himself. Unfortunately, JFS leaves barely any reliable archival trace of his presence in Nauvoo.

One can, however, approach JFS’s Nauvoo years through another, more slippery path: his own impressions and memories. It is not giving away anything to note that Hyrum Smith was murdered in the summer of 1844 and that JFS’s entire life from that point forward was an extended attempt to come to grips with that trauma. JFS’s memories of Nauvoo are historically suspect because he had to look back through the bloody mist of Carthage to access them; they are much more useful in helping us understand his own worldview than they are in helping us understand Nauvoo history.

JFS’s impressions of Nauvoo were remarkably conflicted. In an essay he published in the *Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine* in 1915 about his childhood, JFS described Nauvoo as both “beautiful” and “dismal.”³⁵ He recounted the majesty of the temple but pointed out that no one could afford to buy corn. These impressions formed a braided rope of feeling that represented the conflict JFS felt about Nauvoo. On one hand, it was the birthplace of the Mormonism that he defended his entire life. On the other hand, it was the scene of his greatest traumas. One senses that his memories from those years seem far too clear, too crisp and sharp to be the genuine memories imprinted on a three- or four-year-old mind.³⁶ The memories themselves are worth considering in detail,

however, because they tell us something about what Nauvoo came to mean to JFS as he matured. Two memories seem to have been of particular importance to JFS.

Unsurprisingly, all of the memories JFS recounted from the Nauvoo period always include his father. One story that he told multiple times, was of a day on which Joseph and Hyrum came to Hyrum's house.

Again, while I was a little boy, one day, I think it was just about the noon hour, we were anticipating, or my mother was anticipating the return of my father from somewhere for he and Joseph the prophet had been in concealment away from the mob, and I was looking for them. I went out on the bank of the river, close to the old printing office. I sat on the bank of the river, and presently I saw a skiff starting out from the other side of the river. The river there is a mile wide. They rowed on across the stream until they landed close to where I stood. Out of that little skiff the Prophet and my father alighted and walked up the hill. I joined the hand of my father and we went home to my mother, to my father's home. Then both went into the house and sat down; they chatted and talked with each other and while my father was changing his clothes—I suppose his collar and cuffs and something of that kind, probably—Joseph the prophet sat there. He took me on his knee and trotted me a little and then he looked at me a little more carefully and finally he said, "Hyrum, what is the matter with Joseph here?" "Well," he says, "I don't know; what do you think is the matter?" "Why, he looks as though he had not a drop of blood in him." "Oh!" Father says, "that is because he has been living on milk only," for up to that time . . . I had never eaten a thing harder than milk; I was living on it. I do not know whether that had the effect of making me white or pale, but that was the condition that I was in, and that was the remark the Prophet made. I never forgot it.³⁷

The detail of this story is impressive. Smith sets the stage so well. His audience would have heard stories of Nauvoo, and

the imagery Smith conjures up takes them with him back to the banks of that river, “a mile wide.” The image of the child’s hand in his father’s is poignant. The audience knows the tragedy of that gesture: that Smith’s tiny hand will reach forever after to the hand of his father—a hand that he could never find again. The fine-grained description of Hyrum’s pedestrian actions—changing cuffs and collars—is mesmeric in its humanizing effect. Joseph’s role in this story is intriguing. He is a shadow figure at first, outside of the intimacy of “my father’s home.” He takes young Joseph and bounces him, but the prophet only speaks in the service of the pathos that JFS is crafting for his audience: the pale little boy with nothing but milk to nourish him, foreshadowing the storm that the audience knows is rushing inexorably toward this little boy—a storm that will take first father, then home, then mother. Throughout his life, JFS frequently employed blood as a centrally important motif. It emerged in his memorial narrative of Missouri in the form of bloody footprints, and it manifests in this account—“not a drop of blood in him”—as a statement of JFS’s apparent lack of vitality. Perhaps it was important for JFS to convey to his audience the contrast between his near-invisibility as a boy and his vivaciousness as an old man.

The second memory that we will examine is almost certainly more fiction than fact.

One day during cold weather, my father took me by my hand and led me down the road to a little brick building. It was not much larger than . . . a little beehive, but it was the best they had at that time, and in it was a little sheet-iron stove. I remember the looks of it just as well as if I had seen it yesterday. There I remember the Prophet Joseph, my father, Brigham Young, Sidney Rigdon and Willard Richards and there were a number of others. . . . They met in that hovel to consider what they should do with the obligations that rested in their hands, from those that had been despoiled of all they possessed in the world.³⁸

Many Mormons owed money to the Church and to Church leaders but were now incapable of repaying the debts because of the devastated conditions after the exodus from Missouri. JFS

recalled that as they sat there with the actual debtors' contracts in the room, Joseph Smith "opened the door of the stove and stuck them in, and I saw them burn."³⁹ If such a meeting took place, it most certainly would have occurred before April 1842, at which time Joseph Smith declared bankruptcy. That would mean that JFS could have been no older than three and a half. I have no doubt that JFS believed sincerely that he remembered this event. The fact is, however, that this would have been nearly impossible. So we have in this case a memory that he created from some unknown sources and that reflects his sense of what Nauvoo was all about. The memory, however, contains elements of the grand narrative that JFS believed undergirded his entire life. It paints the Mormons as victims who refused to claim victimhood. By destroying the notes and forgiving the debts, Joseph Smith was, in a sense, refusing to further the aims of the "mobs" through self-sacrifice. By the time JFS told this story, the Smith brothers had long since been enshrined as the martyrs of Mormonism from whose blood the seed of the Church sprang. It is not surprising, then, that JFS fashioned a memory that carried echoes of the self-sacrificial martyrdom theme.

Conclusion

This brief essay represents an effort to examine JFS's worldview by applying theoretical templates from memory studies to the historical data dealing with his life. Although space allows for close reading of only a few pieces of data, these are sufficient to suggest that remembering and creating memory affected JFS and the Church as a whole in complex and fascinating ways. His early traumas shaped his overall sense of his own past and, by virtue of his position as a living link to Joseph Smith, the past of Mormonism at large. Memory becomes increasingly important to everyone as they age, but JFS's memory was appropriated by Mormons who longed to touch the experiences of the earliest days and who needed to be close, both physically and memorially, to the blood of "the martyrs." This appropriation placed great pressure on JFS to perform, as memory, the history of persecution

and martyrdom that had come to define the Mormon experience in the nineteenth century.

Notes

1. This article is drawn from my forthcoming book, *Joseph F. Smith: A Life* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press). I wish to thank John Alley and the University of Utah Press for their kind permission to publish this material here.

2. Joseph F. Smith, speech delivered at the Salt Lake Eleventh Ward, MS 1325: Joseph F. Smith papers: Speeches, 1915 December 26, box 38, folder 27, reel 29, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah. The speech was reprinted as “Boyhood Recollections of President Joseph F. Smith, As Told by Himself” in the *Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine* 7 (April 1916): 53–69.

3. Norman K. Denzin, *Interpretive Biography* (Newbury Park, Calif.: SAGE Publications, 1989), 43–44.

4. Dan P. McAdams, *The Stories We Live By: Personal Myths and the Making of the Self* (New York: Guilford, 1993), 102.

5. *Ibid.*, 109.

6. *Ibid.*

7. Geoffrey Cubitt, *History and Memory* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2007), 44.

8. Pierre Nora, “From *Lieux de mémoire* to *Realms of Memory*,” in *Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past, Vol. I: Conflicts and Divisions*, edited by Pierre Nora and Lawrence D. Kritzman, translated by Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), xvii.

9. Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*,” translated by Marc Roudebush, *Representations* 26 (Spring 1989): 7.

10. Joseph F. Smith, Eleventh Ward speech. Also available in “Boyhood Recollections,” 53.

11. *Ibid.*

12. “Apostolic Meeting,” 24 March 1904, CR 100 137: Journal History of the Church 1900–1909, 1904 March–April, volume 412, reel 108, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah. Also found in Report of the Seventieth Annual Conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, April 6–8, 1900 (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, semi-annual), 77.

13. Hayden White, "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact," in *Tropics of Discourse: Essays In Cultural Criticism*, edited by Hayden White (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 83.

14. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1984), 78.

15. *Ibid.*, 79.

16. Jan Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 19–20.

17. Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *Religion as a Chain of Memory* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 125.

18. Bruce Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology, and Scholarship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 147.

19. Thomas A. Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006), 62.

20. *Ibid.*, 61.

21. Joseph F. Smith, "Jos. F. Smith's Journal commencing 13 Nov. 1838," MS 1325: Joseph F. Smith papers: Autobiographical writings, 1838–1848, 1856–1909, Reminiscences, 1838–circa 1848, folder 1, box 1, reel 1, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

22. Joseph Smith, "Revelation, 24 February 1834," in *Revelation Book 1*, 190. A digitized version of this document is available online at <http://josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/revelation-book-1>. The material is currently found in section 103 of the Doctrine and Covenants.

23. Siegfried J. Schmidt, "Memory and Remembrance: A Constructivist Approach," in *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies*, edited by Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nunning (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), 192. Schmidt does an excellent job of summarizing the most recent research in the scientific study of memory.

24. Joseph F. Smith, Eleventh Ward speech. Also available in "Boyhood Recollections," 54–55.

25. Joseph F. Smith, speech delivered at Liberty Stake conference, MS 1325: Joseph F. Smith papers: Speeches, 1917 July 22, box 38, folder 3, reel 29, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

26. Joseph F. Smith, Eleventh Ward speech. Also available in "Boyhood Recollections," 55.

27. Neil J. Smelser, "Psychological Trauma and Cultural Trauma," in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, edited by Jeffrey C. Alexander, et al. (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2004), 40.

28. Hyrum Smith, affidavit in *Journal History of the Church, 1896–2001*, Volume 16 (1843 July–December), Entry for 1 July 1843, CR 100 137/v0016, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

29. As recorded in Levi Richards journal, 14 May 1843, MS 1558: Richards family papers: Levi Richards journal, 1965, folder 5, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

30. Joseph Fielding Smith Jr. to Lewis W. Smith, 10 April 1944, MS 14132: Family correspondence 1934–1949, Joseph Fielding Smith, 1876–1972, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

31. Joseph Fielding Smith, Jr. to Douglas A. Smith, 15 May 1945, MS 14132: Family correspondence 1934–1949, Joseph Fielding Smith, 1876–1972, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

32. Richard P. Harris, "Martha Ann Smith Harris," *Relief Society Magazine* 11, no. 1 (January 1924): 12.

33. Joseph Smith III, *The Memoirs of President Joseph Smith III (1832–1914)*, edited by Mary Audentia Smith Anderson (Independence, Mo.: Price Publishing Company, 2001), 10.

34. *Ibid.*

35. Joseph F. Smith, "Boyhood Recollections of President Joseph F. Smith, As Told by Himself," *Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine* 7 (April 1916): 55.

36. Although JFS claimed to have very clear and detailed memories of the Nauvoo period, there is evidence to suggest that his memories were not reliable for historical purposes. In 1906, for example, JFS's son, Joseph F. Smith, Jr., wrote a letter to Lorin Farr asking him to give the location of the "grove in Nauvoo where public meetings were held." He did not even know if there were one or two groves used for such purposes, so he asked Farr to tell him. It does seem somewhat odd that JFS would remember so much about Nauvoo but that he would be unable to remember where the grove was, or whether there were one or two. Had he known, it is reasonable to assume that Joseph F. Smith, Jr. would have asked his father and settled the matter. See Joseph F. Smith Jr. to Lorin Farr, 29 June 1906, MS 15065: Lorin Farr papers: Cor-

respondence, 1881–1908, box 2, fld. 2, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

37. Joseph F. Smith, Eleventh Ward speech. Also available in “Boyhood Recollections,” 57.

38. Ibid. Also available in “Boyhood Recollections,” 56.

39. Ibid.



Emily McPhie
Poise Amid the Hoopla
Oil on panel

“After the Body of My Spirit”: Embodiment, Empathy, and Mormon Aesthetics

Gary Ettari

Nearly thirty-five years ago, Merrill Bradshaw wrote: “It seems almost unbelievable that after all these years of the development of Mormon thought we still have no genuine Mormon aesthetic theory.”¹ Such a statement might initially strike the reader as a bit out of date considering the abundance of writing on Mormon aesthetics since Bradshaw penned those words.² However, that very abundance illustrates the existence of an ongoing conversation about Mormon aesthetics that reflects the difficulty Bradshaw mentions. Additionally, there is a larger question embedded in Bradshaw’s words: Is there—or can there ever be—genuine Mormon aesthetic theory? The word “genuine,” of course, is problematic, as is the term “Mormon aesthetic.” What is a “genuine Mormon aesthetic” and what does it look like? How is it practiced? What does it value? The answers to these questions, as Bradshaw suggests, are not easy to come by. Given the multiplicity of both individual responses to art and the proliferation of aesthetic theories generally, is it any wonder, one may ask, that Mormon aesthetic theory has not yet achieved what Bradshaw assumed it could?

Of course, Bradshaw’s questions reflect a larger concern of Christian thought generally. Mainstream Christianity, too, has had a tumultuous history regarding art and aesthetics, in part because Christianity has a long tradition of rejecting certain types of art that seem to celebrate or arouse various bodily sensations. Such art, it is assumed, is more likely to lead one to sin rather than to enlightenment.³ In its final session, for example, the Roman

Catholic Church's Council of Trent issued the following statement on religious imagery:

Moreover, in the invocation of saints, the veneration of relics, and the sacred use of images, every superstition shall be removed, all filthy lucre be abolished; finally, all lasciviousness be avoided; in such wise that figures shall not be painted or adorned with a beauty exciting to lust; nor the celebration of the saints, and the visitation of relics be by any perverted into revellings and drunkenness; as if festivals are celebrated to the honour of the saints by luxury and wantonness.⁴

Note especially the acknowledgement (and condemnation) of the fact that at least certain kinds of beauty can excite lust and that the artist is to avoid creating any images that might arouse any or all of the so-called "baser" emotions such as "lust" and "lasciviousness." Such was the Catholic Church's preoccupation with avoiding sin that it prescribed very specific limits for what kind of beauty could be acceptably rendered in a painting. This preoccupation, of course, is not unique to Catholic thought, nor is it restricted to the distant Christian past.

Most compelling about the above passage, however, is the association of beauty with bodily sensations. The body and its attendant sensations have traditionally been sites of anxiety and fear for most strains of Christianity, not just Mormonism, a fact recognized and even occasionally lamented by contemporary Christian theologians. Father Thomas Ryan, for example, suggests that Christianity has disclaimed the human body and that Christians would benefit from reclaiming the body and reintegrating it into Christian theology.⁵ Ryan's suggestion recalls one of Aquinas's assertions regarding the body/soul dichotomy in *On Being and Essence*, where he claims that both the body (what Aquinas terms "matter") and the soul (what Aquinas terms "form") are essential to the composition of a human being; Aquinas's paradigm should be familiar to Mormons since Mormonism, too, conceives of the soul as a combination of body and spirit.⁶

If, then, Mormon thought conceives of the body and the spirit working in concert, why does Mormonism exhibit such trepidation

about the body itself, specifically about the sensorium the body makes available to us? And how does such trepidation inform (or influence the development of) Mormon aesthetic theory? While Mormon doctrine clearly indicates that the body and spirit are to work in concert in order to achieve the eventual perfection of the soul, it is also true that there is a fundamental tension between the body and the spirit inherent in Mormon thought. In part, such a conflict is understandable: Mormon doctrine, like much other Christian doctrine, teaches that the postlapsarian body is subject to appetites that are more difficult to control once the body has undergone the transformation from Edenic to fallen vessel.⁷ The fear that the body and its attendant feelings and sensations can lead us astray is one concept that has limited Mormon thought about art, affect, and aesthetics. Tensions between the bodily and the spiritual as well as between aesthetics and values are, of course, unique to neither Mormonism nor Christianity, but for the purposes of this article, I confine myself to the tensions inherent in the relationship between Mormon values and aesthetic theory more generally.⁸ In doing so, I argue that Mormon theology enables the establishment of an aesthetic framework that privileges a kind of bodily empathy that is resolutely physical and therefore universal. This aesthetic framework is deeply intertwined with Mormon doctrine generally and with the specific, stated goal of Mormon temple worship: to bind together the entirety of the human family.

To accomplish the establishment of this new aesthetic, I begin with three assertions:

- 1) *Current Mormon aesthetic ideas/theories are insufficient because they are generally values-based, meaning that most works of art are evaluated less for aesthetic considerations and more for whether they conform to Mormon ideology and LDS Church standards or are “uplifting” in a general sense.*⁹ Such an approach to art encourages, I would suggest, the diametric opposite of what much art proposes to accomplish: the mediation (and perhaps the collapsing) of the distance between created object and feeling subject.¹⁰
- 2) *Values-based criticism prevents us from seeing art as a broad expression of human experience in all of its variety and complexity.* It therefore

alienates us from a vast array of human experience and emotion with the corresponding consequence that we become more likely to alienate ourselves from those with whom we are supposed to seek communion, i.e. the entire human race.

3) *A possible solution to the problem of what we might call “the dilemma of alienation” is to conceive of an aesthetic based on empathy, specifically a particular kind of bodily empathy that I believe is embedded in Mormon theology but which most Mormon scholars don’t apply to the arts.* If we employ an aesthetic paradigm that both sufficiently accounts for and incorporates bodily sensation, we become more empathetic, more understanding, and less restrictive, thus allowing us to experience, process, and understand a broader (and perhaps deeper) range of emotion and human experience expressed by any given artistic object. We will also then be able to experience, process, and understand this broader palette of emotions in lived experience as well as in art.

I begin with an exchange by now well-known in the realm of Mormon aesthetics: the dialogue between Bruce Jorgensen and Richard Cracroft, two presidents of the Association for Mormon Letters who, in the respective years of their tenures, 1992 and 1993, gave inaugural addresses about the state of Mormon letters. The exchange is important in the history of Mormon aesthetics for a number of reasons, but I want to focus on a question that Jorgensen raises in response to Cracroft’s review of *Harvest: Contemporary Mormon Poems*, edited by Eugene England and Dennis Clark. Among other things, Jorgensen takes issue with Cracroft’s observation that many of the poems in the collection lack a cohesive, unifying, and distinctive Mormon voice and raises the question that is fundamental to the issue of whether there is or can be any sort of cohesive Mormon aesthetic: “I think the central question of all story—and thus possibly of every form of human culture—is just this: How shall we greet the Other? Shall we devour, or annihilate, or welcome?”¹¹

Jorgensen’s question highlights, perhaps unintentionally, one of the central ironies of Mormon history and theology. On the

one hand, Mormons emphasize their uniqueness, their “peculiarity,” and the establishment of the “one true church” in the face of persecution; on the other hand, Mormonism has for its chief goal the uniting of the entire human family through its temple ordinances as well as its insistence on charity (what Mormons define as “the pure love of Christ”), service, and, in the words of one LDS leader, empathy, or “the gift to feel what others feel.”¹² Terryl Givens succinctly summarizes these incongruities: “After predicating their very existence on the corruption of all other Christian faiths . . . and asserting their unique claim to be its ‘only true’ embodiment, Latter-day Saints are chagrined when they are excluded from the very community of believers they have just excoriated.”¹³ Givens thus raises a fundamental question for both Mormon theology and Mormon aesthetics: Can the fundamental tension between exclusivity and inclusivity inherent in Mormon thought be resolved to such a degree that a more nuanced, more complex, and more empathetic view of art can emerge?

I believe the answer to that question is yes, but only if Mormon critics recognize, value, and employ a paradigm of empathy that Mormon doctrine supports but that most Mormon critics seem unaware of. This paradigm of empathy is resolutely tied to the body, both in terms of how Mormon doctrine views it and the somatic responses it experiences when exposed to art. Such a combination of the body as divine gift and as feeling/sensory organ may initially strike the reader as incongruous, but there is evidence both that the body is the central vehicle of Mormon theology and that the body is that central vehicle because it is the organ and instrument of empathy.

Traditionally, the body has been seen in Mormon theology both as a reflection of God’s design and as a link between humanity and God, especially where Mormon doctrine asserts that God has a perfect and incorruptible body and that mankind may also eventually possess such a body. Conversely, Mormon doctrine also asserts that God once possessed an imperfect, corruptible body just as we do now. Joseph Smith, in the King Follett sermon, states as much:

God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens! ... It is the first principle of the Gospel to know for a certainty the Character of God, and to know that we may converse with him as one man converses with another, and that he was once a man like us; yea, that God himself, the Father of us all, dwelt on an earth, the same as Jesus Christ himself did.¹⁴

The phrase “exalted man” clearly links God’s past and man’s future, but further, Smith’s other claim that “we may converse with him as one man converses with another” implies that two embodied beings will inhabit a physical space and be able to communicate with each other because they have bodies. One consequence of having bodies in the afterlife, then, is that bodies allow us to directly communicate with God, suggesting that a kind of embodied discourse will be one way (perhaps the primary way) that humans commune with God. This arrangement further suggests that God would have it this way—that he values this particular form of communication since, presumably, he could have chosen to communicate with human beings in the afterlife in myriad ways and he chose this particular mode.

The embodied God of Mormon theology also further cements the relationship between empathy and aesthetics. James Faulconer, commenting on God’s body, states:

[O]ur experience of the body, the only standard we have for understanding embodiment, suggests that to say that God has a body is to say that his omniscience and omnipotence must be understood in ways quite different from traditional Christianity because embodiment implies situated openness to a world. In other words, divine embodiment also implies that God is affected by the world and by persons in his world.¹⁵

Faulconer’s notion of God’s “situated openness” suggests that God, as an embodied personage, values his own body because it allows him to perceive and interact with the world and the people in it in a particularly empathetic, even affective way. Faulconer himself implies this when he states that “divine embodiment also

implies that God is affected by the world and by persons in his world.” Such an assertion leads to another conclusion: that God not only deliberately chose to be embodied, but also that he may have done so in order to be able to react with and respond to his world and its inhabitants in a particularly bodily/affective way.

Eugene England takes a tack similar to Faulconer’s, even if it is ultimately less body-centered, though England does still posit an empathetic rather than a punishing God. In one article, he suggests that Mormon theology and early Church commentary may allow for a conception of a more empathetic God than what is traditionally conceived of by most Christians. At one point, attempting to differentiate Mormonism’s view of God from what he calls a more “evangelical” view, England asks: “if believing in an absolutistic, punishing God tends to make us more judgmental and punishing, does believing in a weeping, genuinely compassionate God tend to make us more compassionate?”¹⁶ England doesn’t necessarily believe that it does, but his conception of an empathetic God does, on some level, align with Faulconer’s God in the sense that both authors tend to think of God as being intimately and emotionally concerned with human affairs.

While England’s and Faulconer’s conceptions of an empathetic God appear to align generally, it is nonetheless also important to point out the historical tension between Mormonism’s view of the body and mainstream Christianity’s. Faulconer writes, “[T]he earliest latter-day discussion of divine embodiment is best understood as a rejection of traditional Christian doctrine concerning God and the metaphysics that makes that doctrine possible and perhaps even necessary.”¹⁷ Additionally, he reminds us that Joseph Smith believed that “[t]hat which is without body, parts and passions is nothing. There is no other God in heaven but that God who has flesh and bones.” Faulconer’s line of thinking is also echoed by Stephen H. Webb’s claims about how Joseph Smith viewed matter generally. In his recent work, Webb writes, “While Luther’s ‘Here I stand’ put the emphasis on the ‘I,’ Smith put the emphasis on the ground beneath his feet. Physical matter is so trustworthy and good that it is capable of taking innumerable forms in countless worlds, each with their own spiritual drama.”¹⁸ For Webb, as for

Faulconer, Joseph Smith, rather than viewing matter and flesh as dross or unclean, instead conceives of them as central to Mormon theology and, indeed, to the salvation of humankind.

On the other hand, however, David Paulsen, in his “Divine Embodiment: The Earliest Christian Understanding of God,” asserts that Joseph Smith’s concept of God closely adheres to early Christian beliefs about God as an embodied person and further claims that the “later Christian loss of the knowledge that God is embodied resulted from the attempt of early Christian apologists to reconcile their beliefs with their dominantly Greek culture.”¹⁹ Whether one sees Mormonism continuing an established Christian trend or breaking new ground, it’s clear that early Mormonism believed embodiment to be not only a fundamental quality of God but also an essential component of human experience.

If, then, the Mormon God can be conceived of as not only the giver of laws but also as a divine empathizer, a being who seeks both communion and empathy with human beings in a decidedly bodily way, what are the implications for Mormon aesthetic theory? How ought Mormons respond to art? How are Mormons to understand and interpret art? To suggest there is only one way to do so is, of course, absurdly myopic, but I believe that re-conceptualizing the Mormon view of art to incorporate bodily empathy may allow for both a more fully realized and a more deeply and fundamentally moral aesthetic experience than a traditional values-based approach to art.

Perhaps an even more urgent question than the ones asked above is this: What does an aesthetic based on bodily empathy look like and to what moral end(s) might it point us? Mormon visual arts provide many works that can help answer that question, but considering the fact that the body itself is a key component of bodily empathy, it may prove fruitful to examine the work of an artist who takes for his subject the human body itself. The work of Trevor Southey, which often contains nudes, provides numerous opportunities to ground a theory of bodily empathy in a concrete work of art. Southey, a member of the Art and Belief movement that began with a group of Mormon artists in the 1960s, is known in part for his renderings of the human body. As such, his work



Prodigal by Trevor Southey. Reprinted with permission from the artist.

both demonstrates and encourages an awareness of physical bodies and their relationship to the viewer.

Southey's painting *Prodigal* consists of three panels, the frames of the left and the right horizontally-oriented panels slightly intruding on the center, vertically-oriented one. It seems a relatively safe assumption, given the title of the piece and the figures in the painting itself, that the series of images that confront the viewer is meant to convey a visual (re-)telling of the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11–31). Moving left to right, the first panel depicts a nude figure, hunched over, perhaps in shame, perhaps in supplication, facing away from the viewer. We are shown, too, an image of a corn husk just to the left of the hunched figure, recalling the words of Luke 15:16: "And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat." One of the most striking things about the painting is the fact that all four figures in the painting are nude. Because the original parable makes no mention of any of the participants lacking clothing, we can only assume that Southey has deliberately departed from the narrative of the parable, perhaps for more than one reason.

In the painting's central panel, we see the moment before the forgiving father embraces the prodigal son. Note the son's physical position, still with his back to us, on his knees, an attitude of

humility and sorrow, perhaps, more than the despair and shame that the painting's first panel demonstrates. The father, placed slightly above the son, has his right arm outstretched, ready to embrace the repentant child. The nudity in this panel, and indeed, the entire piece, allows us a more intimate, more privileged view of the son's (and father's) unadorned emotions. Without the mediating and masking effect of clothing, both the son's body and its positions facilitate the viewer's ability to identify in a bodily way with the son's emotional states.

The final panel of the painting presents another image of the son's nude body. Here, he is facing the viewer, not hiding himself from the viewer's sight. His head is thrown back, chest out, his legs folding under him. The expression on his face is difficult to read, notably because the head is tilted so far backward, but the expression that is visible along with the position of the body indicate that a change in emotional states has taken place. Here, the body, though dynamically posed, signals a different emotion, perhaps relief, perhaps languor, but certainly a more open, less troubled state than the body in the first panel. If one "reads" the painting's panels from left to right, there is clearly a movement from a "closed" or abject bodily position to the more open one in the far right panel. This movement symbolizes many things: the journey from shame/guilt to forgiveness, the redemptive power of bodily contact that signals acceptance and/or love, and the organic nature of the physical, bodily manifestations of a range of emotions.

That Southey's work triggers a kind of bodily empathy is confirmed by recent forays into empathy theory that suggest the way our bodies process data encourages empathy. Matthew Botvinick, et al., for example, discovered that viewing others' facial expressions of pain stimulated cortical areas in the brain that are also involved in the firsthand experience of pain.²⁰ Other research supports both the empathetic and bodily nature of emotions, especially as it is tied to language. As far back as the 1970s, there was a movement among certain critics to equate the body with what it experienced (e.g., poetry) and to bind the body inextricably to the surrounding environment, one component of which

was poetry. John Vernon, for example, in his *Poetry and the Body*, claims, “Language may actually be one of those things ‘made of other stuff than we are,’ but it also is involved with my body and so with matter.”²¹

The work of other theorists further affirms the notion that the body is deeply involved in processing, perceiving, and apprehending any object that its senses can perceive. Paul Ekman, for example, claims that when we perceive or “apprehend” what he calls an “emotional object,” an object or event that affects our emotional faculty, our first response is a postural/facial one (in other words, a physical one), which then simultaneously triggers an autonomic response *and* what he calls an “emotional state.”²² Additionally, Silvan Tomkins conducted a variety of experiments that recorded various physiological reactions to stimuli and advanced the idea that seven emotional expressions (startle, fear, interest, anger, distress, laughter, and joy) are innate responses of the body that are elicited by the central nervous system. As Jack Thompson summarizes, Tomkins argued that “voice, visual, and skin feedback may play a co-equal role with somatic muscle feedback in determining a specific emotional state. For example, hearing yourself scream increases your sense of terror, or feeling yourself blush increases your sense of embarrassment.”²³ For my purposes, the significant phrase is “hearing yourself scream increases your terror.” Tomkins posits that vocalization increases (we might say, intensifies) the already felt emotional “sense.” The connection Tomkins makes between bodily actions such as screaming or feeling oneself blush and the heightened sense of the particular emotion that the physical action causes substantiates and supports the fact that the physical body is an instrument of empathy.

The relationship between the body and morality is further cemented when, in addition to modern science, we examine the myriad ways in which the body and its constituent parts function in scripture and Mormon practice. Note, for instance, the emphasis on bodily sensation when describing any number of spiritually significant phenomena: the Holy Ghost is, in many places, described as a “burning in the bosom,”²⁴ the Lord commanded Joseph Smith

to let his bowels be “full of charity for all men,” the sacrament prayers use the bodily aspects of Christ, not the spiritual, as a call to remembrance of both him and the baptismal covenants that each member has made, and, perhaps most significantly for my purposes, the Atonement itself is described in distinctly bodily terms, in Doctrine and Covenants 19, especially in verse 18: “Which suffering caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit—and would that I might not drink the bitter cup, and shrink.” I shall return to the importance of such a bodily, sensual description of Christ’s sufferings later, but it is worth suggesting that one reason Christ’s sufferings are described in such bodily terms is so that we may be able to empathize with, understand, and feel grateful for his suffering on our behalf precisely because our body allows us to experience pain, suffering, and bitterness, even if in a lesser sense than did Christ’s [body].

There is another moment in Mormon scripture that incorporates both Christ’s embodiment and its accompanying empathy. This occurs in the book of Ether when the Lord reveals himself to the brother of Jared. In Ether, chapter 3, the brother of Jared, in preparation for a journey to the promised land, has “molten” sixteen clear stones out of a rock on Mount Shelem and has prayed to have the Lord touch them with his finger in order that they might light the Jaredites’ way across the ocean. Perhaps most astonishing about what occurs next is not that the Lord reveals himself to the brother of Jared (quite an event, nonetheless), but that the first information he provides to the dumbfounded brother of Jared is that he, the brother of Jared, is like Christ in that they both possess a body. Verses 15 and 16 read:

And never have I showed myself unto man whom I have created, for never has man believed in me as thou hast. Seest thou that ye are created after mine own image? Yea, even all men were created in the beginning after mine own image.

Behold, this body, which ye now behold, is the body of my spirit; and man have I created after the body of my spirit; and even

as I appear unto thee to be in the spirit will I appear unto my people in the flesh.

Christ reveals many things in that passage, but several aspects of this encounter are especially important to note. First, as he tells the brother of Jared, no one has ever had the level of faith in Christ that the brother of Jared exhibited during his prayer. And, as a reward for this, the great truth that the Lord first teaches the brother of Jared is the truth of both the Lord's and the brother of Jared's fundamental physicality. Note that it is not enough for the Lord to essentially repeat what he has said in Genesis and other texts, that humans are created after his own image. In this instance, Christ goes further, telling and showing the brother of Jared that his essential bodily-ness has both a spiritual and physical element.

This passage recalls the writing of some early Church figures, notably Orson Pratt, who, among others, claims that all spirit is matter, simply more refined matter. Speaking of the Holy Ghost in one instance, Pratt claims that:

The Holy Spirit being one part of the Godhead, is also a material substance, of the same nature and properties in any respects, as the spirits of the Father and Son. It exists in vast immeasurable quantities in connexion [sic] with all material worlds. This is called God in the scriptures, as well as the Father and Son. God the Father and God the Son cannot be everywhere present; indeed they cannot be even in two places at the same instant; but God the Holy Spirit is omnipresent—it extends through all space, intermingling with all other matter, yet no one atom of the Holy Spirit can be in two places at the same instant, which in all cases is an absolute impossibility.²⁵

According to Pratt, understanding that the Holy Spirit is material is absolutely necessary to understanding its operation: its “immeasurable quantities,” its material, physical construction, and organization, allow it to be “in connexion” with all created, material worlds, thus allowing for the presence of God (“God the Holy Spirit”) all through space, which is only possible because the matter that constitutes the Holy Spirit is able to intermingle

with all other matter. The insistent claims of early Church leaders regarding the Godhead's physical aspects are clarified by such passages as the one above and confirmed by Doctrine and Covenants 131:7–8, in which Joseph Smith writes: “There is no such thing as immaterial matter. All spirit is matter, but it is more fine or pure, and can only be discerned by purer eyes; We cannot see it; but when our bodies are purified we shall see that it is all matter.” We see here that even spiritual essences, such as the spirit body that Christ reveals to the brother of Jared, are nonetheless formed of matter. Further, the fact that Jesus Christ possesses a body of spirit that will then become flesh is a revelatory reversal of the progress of the brother of Jared. Jesus Christ appearing as he is, as a “spiritual” body (a body that is nonetheless material, as indicated by Pratt’s words), tells the brother of Jared that he will shortly take upon himself a body of “flesh,” while simultaneously showing the brother of Jared what he can become: a more refined body.²⁶

But what does this mean in the larger context of Mormon embodiment and its role in empathy and aesthetics? If we turn from a “bodily” moment to another, decidedly unembodied one, an answer about the fundamental part the body plays in Mormon theology emerges. In the book of Alma, the Zoramites believe, among other things that disturb Alma, that God is a spirit, now and forever. Alma 31:15–16 reads:

Holy, holy God; we believe that thou art God, and we believe that thou art holy, and that thou wast a spirit, and that thou art a spirit, and that thou wilt be a spirit forever. Holy God, we believe that thou hast separated us from our brethren; and we do not believe in the tradition of our brethren, which was handed down to them by the childishness of their fathers; but we believe that thou hast elected us to be thy holy children; and also thou hast made it known unto us that there shall be no Christ.

Note the correlation in these two verses between the belief that God is a spirit and that there is to be “no Christ.” Then, recall Alma’s description of what the Zoramites do after saying their

public, rote prayer (from verse 23): “Now, after the people had all offered up thanks after this manner, they returned to their homes, never speaking of their God again until they had assembled themselves together again to the holy stand, to offer up thanks after their manner.”

This section of Alma has traditionally been used to warn of the evils of excessive pride, particularly since Alma is careful to note that not only are the Zoramites incorrectly informed about both the existence of Christ and his physical body, but they are also proud and their hearts are “lifted up unto great boasting” (verse 25), not to mention the fact that they were also decidedly materialistic (“their hearts were set upon gold, and upon silver, and upon all manner of fine goods,” [verse 24]). However, I wish to suggest an alternative reading, one that, ironically, illustrates the importance of embodiment in Mormon theology. Note, for instance, the correlation between the Zoramites’ words at the Rameumptom and Alma’s description of their habits once they had finished speaking; the Zoramites deny that God has a body and that Christ will appear and, directly afterward, they return to their homes and never speak of God again. I believe that Alma is here making a connection between the belief in a God of spirit rather than of flesh and a lack of speaking about God himself. One implication of the above passage, in other words, may be that not believing in an embodied God leads one to forget God, or at least, as the verse says, deliberately avoid speaking about him. This idea may be lent additional support if we again recall the sacrament prayers of the LDS Church, prayers that specifically and demonstrably state that in order to obtain the spirit of Christ and take upon one his name, one must first remember and commemorate his flesh and blood.

And why, ultimately, was it so important for the brother of Jared to know that Christ possessed a spirit body and would soon possess a body of flesh? To answer this question, we must return to Doctrine and Covenants 19. The description of the physical agonies that Christ endured during the Atonement perhaps holds the key to his pressing need to inform us of his essential physicality. Note the description of his suffering: “to tremble

because of pain and to bleed at every pore.” Such a description, I would suggest, is aimed specifically at hearers who possess their own body, who understand on a physical, sensory level what bodily suffering is, and who are able to empathize with the Son of God as he describes his physical trial. Christ is careful to say that he suffered both “body and spirit,” but his descriptions of his suffering are resolutely physical in order that humanity might understand, via bodily empathy, what he suffered for them. This leads to two conclusions about the physical body of Christ as it is revealed to the brother of Jared and to us: 1) the importance of our understanding the resolutely physical, tangible nature not only of celestial bodies but also of our experiences in the “life to come” and 2) the irrefutable role the body plays in cultivating and teaching empathy, both for our fellow human beings and for Jesus Christ. It is this second point that supports my claim that Mormon aesthetics would do well to embrace bodily empathy. We are continually told in the scriptures that we must have empathy with—and further, sometimes must mirror the emotional states of—other members of the human family. We are told by Paul to “weep with them that weep” (Romans 12:15), Alma preaches to “mourn with those that mourn” (Mosiah 18:9) as part of the baptismal covenant, and Christ teaches that his followers must feed the hungry and give drink to those who are thirsty. The fact that we are able to feel hunger, thirst, and the emotion of sorrow ourselves as it relates to mourning indicates that the body is the chief instrument of empathy.

From the evidence above, it is clear that the seeds of a new Mormon aesthetic lie within Mormon doctrine, an aesthetic that is based more on empathy and bodily sensation than on “values,” whatever those values may constitute. One reason Mormon aesthetic thought resists the implications of the bodily may have to do with the continuing tension in Christian theology generally between the spirit and body. Despite Mormonism’s insistence on the undeniable importance of the body to its core theology, it nonetheless remains simultaneously skeptical, even fearful, about the body and its sensations. Benjamin E. Park reminds us of the ongoing tension between the spirit and the body in early America:

Rebelling against the strict boundaries set for bodily desires established by early Puritans—even if those boundaries were more embracing than Puritanism’s Victorian descendants—Americans reappraised traditional morals. Coupled with the increasing Romantic tensions of the argument that humanity was innately good, early Americans wanted freedom from traditional cultural mores. These liberating beliefs, however, remained at the folk level and were often denounced by the clergy. Even if an increasing number of people yearned in private to follow their bodily impulses, public discourse continued to emphasize control and restraint.²⁷

One might be able to make the same comment about contemporary Mormon views of the body that Park does about nineteenth-century public discourse: that it emphasizes control and restraint. Park goes on, however, to remind us of Parley P. Pratt’s pamphlet, “Intelligence and Affection,” in which Pratt makes a theological defense of human affections and emotion. As Park states:

Pratt argued that natural bodily impulses were to be cultivated and amplified, not restricted or evaded. He taught that persons who view “our natural affections” as “the results of a fallen and corrupt nature,” and are “carnal, sensual, and devilish” and therefore ought to be “resisted, subdued, or overcome as so many evils which prevent our perfection, or progress in the spiritual life . . . have mistaken the source and fountain of happiness altogether.” Instead, the apostle claimed that any attempts to repress natural inclinations “are expressly and entirely opposed to the spirit, and objects of true religion.”²⁸

Pratt recuperates the assumed “corrupt” natural affections and, by doing so claims that resisting these natural affections is a mistake because they are the “source and fountain of happiness altogether.” Pratt here directly confronts the assumptions that the body and its affections lead one to destruction rather than happiness and joy. Interestingly, Pratt also aligns the natural affections with the spirit of true religion, suggesting that the elements and phenomena of

the body are expressly provided to us in order that we may achieve happiness, not commit sin.

The fear of sin may, in fact, be at the root of the Mormon resistance to embracing a different aesthetic framework. The body in Mormon doctrine, though it is recognized as an exalted part of the resurrected soul (what Mormon theology defines as a combination of the body and the spirit), is also often presented as a gateway to sin and evil. Boyd K. Packer, in a general conference address entitled “Ye Are the Temple of God,” speaks to Mormon youth and tells them, among other things, that

Normal desires and attractions emerge in the teenage years; there is the temptation to experiment, to tamper with the sacred power of procreation. These desires can be intensified, even perverted, by pornography, improper music, or the encouragement from unworthy associations. What would have only been a more or less normal passing phase in establishing gender identity can become implanted and leave you confused, even disturbed. If you consent, the adversary can take control of your thoughts and lead you carefully toward a habit and to an addiction, convincing you that immoral, unnatural behavior is a fixed part of your nature.²⁹

Here, Packer suggests that the body, for all of its positive qualities, can be enticed to participate in acts that the LDS Church deems sinful. Such a position is consistent with Christian teachings generally but also recalls Park’s commentary about the tension between recuperating the body as a divine repository of affections, impulses, and emotions on one hand and viewing its passions as more likely to be sinful than elevating on the other. Such suspicions about the body undoubtedly contribute to the development of the values-based aesthetic that many strands of Christianity, not merely the LDS Church, espouse. However, in light of both scriptural and scientific evidence, it is clear that Mormon theology and Mormon scripture, not to mention the field of human physiology, view the body as a repository of feelings and responses that function, at least in part, to increase our empathy for others.

The tension between these two views of the body is resolved somewhat by the Book of Mormon prophet Alma. In Alma 7:12,

Alma asserts, among other things, that Christ “will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people; and he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities.” In this passage, it’s clear that according to Alma, the body of Christ will become the instrument of empathy; taking on flesh will lead him to “know” the infirmities of his people in order that he may know how best to succor them. By extension, human beings, who are called upon by most Christian churches to consider Christ as their exemplar, are able to utilize their own bodies, indeed, can embrace their own bodily-ness, in order to emulate Christ as best they can. Such an embracing of bodily awareness would encourage them to apprehend and comprehend works of art in such a way as to construct both understanding of and empathy toward our fellow human beings.

This particular kind of bodily empathy also aligns with a core aspect of Mormon belief and practice. As a doctrinal matter, Mormons privilege the communal; in fact, many of their rituals, particularly in the temple, result in, as one Mormon leader puts it, “husbands and wives [being] sealed together, children [being] sealed to their parents for eternity so the family is eternal and will not be separated at death.”³⁰ Further, much of the work that Mormons do in the temple revolves around sealing generations of families to one another. Such doctrines and practices affirm the importance of community, not only in the worldly sense but also in the eternal sense. If, as some Mormon leaders teach,³¹ the purpose of both the gospel of Jesus Christ in general and temple ordinances in particular is to link every member of the human family to one another, an aesthetic framework that permits and even encourages empathy would, among other things, align with Mormon doctrine’s emphasis on the communal.

An aesthetic grounded on bodily empathy could bridge, albeit imperfectly, the gap between Mormonism’s sense of exclusivity (understandable, given its reformational beginnings) and the supposed universality of Christ’s gospel. One consequence of not only values-based aesthetic frameworks but also a wariness of, in

Mormon terminology, “the world” is that many Mormons tend to want art to be exemplary rather than “merely” expressive. If, however, Mormonism can come to view art as an expression of human feelings, desires, passions, and ideas rather than as works that may or may not be contrary to its values, it can begin to formulate an answer to Jorgensen’s question by deciding that it will welcome the Other, not devour or annihilate it.

Notes

1. Merrill Bradshaw, “Toward a Mormon Aesthetic” paper presented at “A Mosaic of Mormon Culture,” a sesquicentennial symposium at Brigham Young University, October 2–3, 1980. The paper was later published in *BYU Studies* 21, no. 1 (1981): 91–99.

2. See, for example, Eugene England and Lavina Fielding Anderson, eds., *Tending the Garden: Essays on Mormon Literature* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996); Thomas J. Lefler and Gideon O. Burton, “Toward a Mormon Cinematic Aesthetic: Film Styles in *Legacy*,” *BYU Studies* 46, no. 2 (2007): 275–304; Levi Peterson, “‘Astonished Each Day’: An Interview with Richard J. Van Wagoner, Utah Artist,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 39, no. 2 (2006): 135–46; Barry Laga, “Making the Absent Visible: The Real, Ideal, and the Abstract in Mormon Art,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 40, no. 2 (2007): 47–77. See also a discussion of Mormon aesthetics and criticism among the following authors: Bruce Jorgensen, “To Tell and Hear Stories: Let the Stranger Say,” *Sunstone* 16 (1993): 41–50, reprinted in England and Anderson, *Tending the Garden* 49–68; Richard Cracroft, “Attuning the Authentic Mormon Voice: Stemming the Sophic Tide in LDS Literature,” *Sunstone* 16 (1993): 51–57; and Gideon O. Burton, “Should We Ask, ‘Is This Mormon Literature?’: Towards a Mormon Criticism,” *The Association for Mormon Letters Annual* (1994): 227–33, reprinted in *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 32, no. 3 (1999): 33–43. And for a perspective on RLDS art and symbolism, see Bryan R. Monte, “Seal, Cross and Nautilus: RLDS/Community of Christ Art and Architecture,” *International Journal of Mormon Studies* 4 (2011): 45–65.

3. For one interesting study among many of the tensions between religion and the arts, see Peter C. Herman, *Squitter-Wits and Muse-Haters: Spenser, Sidney, Milton, and Renaissance Antipoetic Sentiment* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1996).

4. J. Waterworth, ed. and trans., *The Council of Trent: The Twenty-Fifth Session* (London: Dolman, 1848), 235–36.

5. Thomas Ryan, ed., *Reclaiming the Body in Christian Spirituality* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 2004), vii.

6. See, e.g., Doctrine and Covenants 88:15. Also see Daniel H. Ludlow, ed., *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, vol. 3 (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 1080 as well as Joseph Bobik, *Aquinas on Being and Essence: A Translation and Interpretation* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988).

7. See, for example, *Come Unto Me: Relief Society Personal Study Guide 3* (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 1991), 143: “As part of the test of mortality, our bodies have desires, appetites, and passions which we must learn to discipline and control. When these desires are kept within the bounds the Lord has set, they enhance and enrich life. If they are undisciplined, they can destroy both our bodies and spirits.”

8. Readers interested in a more wide-ranging discussion of religion and aesthetics may want to consult the following works: Gesa Elsbeth Thiessen, ed., *Theological Aesthetics: A Reader* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004); Valerie Gonzalez, *Beauty and Islam: Aesthetics in Islamic Art and Architecture* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2001); and Daniel Gold, *Aesthetics and Analysis in Writing on Religion: Modern Fascinations* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2003).

9. See, for example, Quentin L. Cook, “Can Ye Feel So Now?” <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/2012/10/can-ye-feel-so-now?lang=eng> (accessed August 24, 2015); Gene R. Cook, *Raising Up a Family to the Lord* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1993); and Ezra Taft Benson, *Come, Listen to a Prophet’s Voice* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1990).

10. It is not my intention here to attempt the impossible task of elucidating the subject/object relationship and the variety of theoretical approaches to this complex dynamic. However, considering this essay’s emphasis on and argument for a bodily aesthetic, recalling Merleau-Ponty’s work and its re-envisioning of the subject/object relationship by focusing on the body as a sensate processor of stimuli, rather than solely on the mind, may perhaps be useful. See especially Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Donald A. Landes (New York: Routledge, 2013).

11. Bruce Jorgensen, “To Tell and Hear Stories: Let the Stranger Say,” *Sunstone* 16 (1993): 43.

12. Lynn A. Mickelsen, “The Atonement, Repentance, and Dirty Linen,” October 4, 2003, <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/2003/10/the-atonement-repentance-and-dirty-linen?lang=eng> (accessed August 24, 2015).

13. Terryl L. Givens, *People of Paradox: A History of Mormon Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 58.

14. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, compiled by Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1938), 345–46.

15. James E. Faulconer, “Divine Embodiment and Transcendence: Pro-paedeutic Thoughts and Questions,” *Element* 1, no. 1 (2005): par. 36, http://www.smpt.org/docs/faulconer_element1-1.html.

16. Eugene England, “The Weeping God of Mormonism,” *Element* 1, no. 1 (2005): par. 31, http://www.smpt.org/docs/england_element1-1.html.

17. Faulconer, “Divine Embodiment,” par. 10.

18. Stephen H. Webb, *Jesus Christ, Eternal God: Heavenly Flesh and the Metaphysics of Matter* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 255.

19. David Paulsen, “Divine Embodiment: The Earliest Christian Understanding of God,” in *Early Christians in Disarray: Contemporary LDS Perspectives on the Christian Apostasy*, edited by Noel B. Reynolds (Provo: Brigham Young University Press and FARMS, 2005). Available online at <http://publications.maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/fullscreen/?pub=1100&index=10>.

20. Matthew Botvinick, et al., “Viewing facial expressions of pain engages cortical areas involved in the direct experience of pain,” *NeuroImage* 25 (2005): 312–19.

21. John Vernon, *Poetry and the Body* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1979), 13.

22. Paul Ekman, “Expression and the Nature of Emotion,” in *Approaches to Emotion*, edited by Klaus R. Scherer and Paul Ekman (Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1984), 319–44. My discussion of Ekman is informed by *The Psychobiology of Emotions*, edited by Jack George Thompson (New York: Springer, 1988), 276.

23. Thompson, *The Psychobiology of Emotions*, 278–79. Tomkins’s research can be found in Silvan S. Tomkins, “Affect Theory,” 163–95. See also Tomkins, *Affect, Imagery, Consciousness, Volume I: The Positive Affects* (New York: Springer, 1962).

24. See Doctrine and Covenants 9:8. See also further commentary on the notion of the “burning” bosom in Dallin H. Oaks, “Teaching and Learning by the Spirit,” *Ensign*, March 1997, accessed August 28, 2015, <https://www.lds.org/ensign/1997/03/teaching-and-learning-by-the-spirit?lang=eng>.

25. David J. Whittaker, ed., *The Essential Orson Pratt* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1991), 54.

26. For a slightly different but cogent interpretation of this scene, see Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader’s Guide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 241–44.

27. Benjamin E. Park, “Salvation through a Tabernacle: Joseph Smith, Parley P. Pratt, and Early Mormon Theologies of Embodiment,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 43, no. 2 (2010): 23.

28. *Ibid.*, 23–24.

29. Boyd K. Packer, “Ye Are the Temple of God,” <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/2000/10/ye-are-the-temple-of-god?lang=eng> (accessed August 26, 2015).

30. Richard H. Winkel, “The Temple Is about Families,” <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/2006/10/the-temple-is-about-families?lang=eng> (accessed August 26, 2015).

31. See, e.g., John A. Widtsoe, “The Worth of Souls,” *The Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine*, October 1934, 189. “We agreed, right then and there [in the pre-existence], to be not only saviors for ourselves but . . . saviors for the whole human family.”



Emily McPhie
The Two Travelers
Oil on panel

The Thirteenth Article of Faith as a Standard for Literature

Jack Harrell

In 1842, Joseph Smith wrote a letter to John Wentworth, editor of the *Chicago Democrat*, outlining “the rise, progress, persecution, and faith of the Latter-day Saints.”¹ That letter concluded with thirteen “Articles of Faith” that were later published in the Nauvoo *Times and Seasons*. In a general conference of the Church in Salt Lake City in 1880, these articles of faith were canonized as scripture for members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Written in words drawn from Philippians 4:8, the last sentence of the thirteenth article of faith reads, “If there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy, we seek after these things.”² For Latter-day Saints, the question of what to read and what not to read is very important. We live in a world that is flooded with information. It comes to us as text messages, blogs, magazine and journal articles, email, internet posts, and books of all kinds. Navigating this flood is difficult given its volume alone. To this issue of quantity, adding questions of quality—what we should or should not read for our own best health—makes matters ever more difficult. When it comes to judging the literature we read—novels, stories, poems, and so forth—I propose that the thirteenth article of faith is the best standard available to us, a standard that can readily anchor principles of literary quality in reason, scripture, and doctrine.

David J. Whittaker, writing in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, addresses the thirteenth article of faith: “The final declaration provides a broad perspective for life and an invitation to the LDS approach to life.”³ I would like to state in the same spirit, one of a “broad perspective.” The analysis that follows relies on straightforward dictionary definitions of significant terms, mostly taken

from Webster's first edition dictionary of 1828 (*American Dictionary of the English Language*) with some definitions augmented by the third edition of the *American Heritage Dictionary*. The thirteenth article of faith, when applied to the judgment of literature, may just surprise us with its liberality if we strip away our cultural amplifications and simply look at what the words themselves say. In fact, I believe that the thirteenth article of faith may be a most valuable aid in helping us avoid the Book of Mormon sin of "looking beyond the mark" (Jacob 4:14).

The last sentence of the thirteenth article of faith begins: "If there is anything virtuous . . ." The primary definition of *virtue* in Webster's 1828 dictionary is *strength*.⁴ Thus, to be *virtuous* is to be *strong*. Other connotations include "bravery," "moral goodness," "excellence," "efficacy," and "chastity." The English word *virtue* comes from a Latin word meaning *manliness* or *excellence*, from *vir*, meaning *man*. The word *virtuous* also means *good* or *excellent*, as in the related words *virtuosity* and *virtuoso*. The work of a *virtuoso* exhibits "masterly ability, technique, or personal style."⁵ What kind of literary work would be considered strong or brave? A work that exerts persuasive force, that is tough, courageous, and uncompromising in its argument. Such a work would not be a milquetoast effort to reaffirm a reader's worldview. Such a work wouldn't comfort the reader with the familiar. Think about the works you've read that were bold or challenging, that moved you to considering new perspectives. Such works are *virtuous*.

What about a *morally excellent* work of literature? A primary definition of *moral* includes the statement: "Concerned with the judgment of the goodness or badness of human action and character."⁶ Think of Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Edith Wharton, Arthur Miller, Zora Neale Hurston, James Baldwin, Sherman Alexie. Think of Levi Peterson or Eric Samuelson. A novel that examines "the goodness or badness of human action and character" has to depict both. If that novel is morally excellent, it has to depict both very well. By contrast, a novel cleaned up and dressed in its church clothes, prepared for success in the commercial Mormon bookstore, closes its eyes to the "badness of human action or

character.” That novel is impotent and therefore incapable of tackling significant questions of moral excellence.

What makes a work of literature *good*? That’s a very big question. For the sake of this discussion, I’ll say that at the very least, good literature is truthful about the nature of existence and the complexities of human relationships; good literature requires skillful and artistic uses of language, beyond the mere utilitarian; and good literature involves conflict, tension, evidence of the push and pull between individuals and human entities. By contrast, propaganda—material that advocates a particular doctrine or cause—is one-sided and, therefore, lacks the necessary conflict inherent in good literature.

What about *chastity* as an element of the *virtuous*? Too often Latter-day Saints reduce the meaning of *virtue* to *chastity* alone, missing the implications of *virtue* discussed above. Even worse, some Latter-day Saints equate *chastity* with *abstinence* in that they require a literature stripped of all evidence of human sexuality. But the teachings of Mormonism don’t call for the annihilation of sex; Mormonism imbues human sexuality with divine and eternal significance. Yes, the LDS “law of chastity” calls for sexual abstinence before marriage, but it also calls for fidelity (and, therefore, sexual activity) after marriage.⁷ I argue, then, by analogy, that just as a married couple can be sexually active *and* chaste, literature for adults can address matters of sexuality. This can occur if the portrayal of sex leaves the reader with a deeper awareness of the complex needs of others, if the work avoids degrading the reader and the subject matter, if the work enriches the reader with a greater understanding of the human condition.

What of sexual misconduct? Can a book that portrays adultery be considered chaste—a book other than the Bible, that is? Let me answer that by referring to the LDS Church publication *For the Strength of Youth*, which was written to help young people “with the important choices [they] are making now and will yet make in the future.”⁸ The revised version of this pamphlet issued in 2011 discusses entertainment and media: “Do not participate in anything that presents immorality and violence as acceptable.”⁹ The church encourages members to read the Bible and the Book

of Mormon, two texts that present immorality and violence, but these texts do not present immorality and violence as acceptable. This is the key distinction. Isaiah counsels against those who “call evil good, and good evil” (Isa. 5:20). It is not the portrayal of evil that Isaiah forbids, but the portrayal of evil as good.

Generally speaking, “literary” works uphold this standard. As the Oscar Wilde character Miss Prism puts it, “The good ended happily, and the bad unhappily. That is what Fiction means.”¹⁰ Yes, literature is ripe with characters who are liars, cheats, thieves, adulterers, and murderers. But such characters are typically the antagonists of their stories. Even when readers are led to sympathize with these characters, such characters are rarely portrayed as ultimately healthy, heroic, or admirable. Consistently, literature shows sexual recklessness as a preamble to lies and broken relationships. I’ll concede that today’s literature does not insist upon marriage or heterosexuality. But when two people are in a regular romantic/sexual relationship, infidelity by either partner is consistently portrayed as hurtful and wrong. The standard of sexual fidelity to one’s partner is a basic assumption in almost everything we read. In literature, when people break that standard, they suffer negative consequences.

Allowing sexual content in literature is not the same as allowing the pornographic. In fact, a number of distinctions separate pornography from literature. One of them is pornography’s lack of conflict. Pornography takes the conflict out of human relationships. The characters simply “go for it” unchecked—they want something and get it. Not all depictions of sexuality are pornographic, however. In 1973, the Supreme Court defined *obscenity* as that which, “taken as a whole, lacks serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value.” The Supreme Court also labels as *obscene* any expression that “appeals to the prurient”; in other words, that shows an inordinate emphasis on sex.¹¹ A medical textbook on sexuality, for example, has scientific value, and therefore is not “obscene.” Similarly, a novel may have artistic value even if it portrays sexuality. Of course, determining literary and artistic value is no easy task. The topic deserves more discussion than I’m giving it here. But I hope it’s enough to assert that not all

depictions of sex are pornographic—that a work can be *virtuous* even if it deals with sex.

When discussing appropriate reading materials, Mormons are often concerned about crude (unrefined) or vulgar (common) language. Interestingly, the discussion of language in the 2011 *For the Strength of Youth* pamphlet gives equal condemnation to “swearing, mocking, gossiping, or speaking in anger to others.”¹² If we poured through the novels in a commercial Mormon bookstore, we would surely find a paucity of swear words. Would we also find an absence of depictions of “mocking, gossiping, or speaking in anger to others”? I doubt it. I’m glad the Church equally condemns these behaviors in personal expression. But I believe that the portrayal of characters in literature is a different matter. If I portray a shoplifter in my writing, or if I read about one in a novel, that doesn’t mean I’m a shoplifter or that I advocate the practice. The same goes for characters in literature who use crude language or speak in anger to others.

Does crude language have an influence on literary quality? Surely, the *presence* of crude language isn’t a necessary element of good literature. A work of literature doesn’t need vulgar language to be virtuous—to be strong, challenging, or skillfully rendered. But the same goes for the *absence* of crude language. Neither the presence nor the absence of such language ensures literary quality. But wait! Don’t *words* matter? Yes, they do! In good literature, every word matters. Any word can be the wrong word in the context of a particular writer, audience, or text. The issue is not the vulgar word, but *the right word*. Of course, some readers are sensitive to vulgar language; they notice it and, at times, take issue with it. Certainly, such readers should stand by their preferences. But they should remember that the use of certain words neither determines nor precludes literary quality. Sensitive readers should develop the maturity necessary to distinguish between personal taste and literary quality.

A *virtuous* work of literature, then, is brave, strong, and compelling; concerned with matters of good and bad character; and unafraid of conflicts that include sexuality, violence, or crude language. Virtuous literature employs skillful and artistic uses of

language, showing a writer's virtuosity through effective, well-chosen words. Good literature is prized for its artistic value, not simply its informative or didactic content. When we look for virtuous literature, then, what do we find in a Mormon bookstore? Sadly, a predominance of works that are simplistic, propagandistic, and ordinary in quality. In short, the works there are *polite*, but not virtuous. They primarily seek *to not offend*. Lacking complexity and censored in content, they sell like hotcakes mostly because they are *safe*. If safety is one's goal, a Mormon bookstore is the place to be. But those seeking *virtuous* literature have to take the risk of shopping elsewhere.

The thirteenth article of faith also includes, "If there is anything . . . lovely." The 1828 Webster edition defines *lovely* as "amiable; that which may excite love; possessing qualities that may invite affection."¹³ The *American Heritage Dictionary* defines *lovely* as "enjoyable; delightful," with synonyms such as *beautiful*.¹⁴ Let me ask you, have you ever *loved* a book? If you have, then you've found that book *lovely*. More particularly, have you ever read a book, a poem, a story, or seen a play that imbued you with a greater sense of compassion toward others, a heightened sense of our mutual needs, a greater appreciation for the human condition? If so, you've experienced literature that is *lovely*. Ironically, this may be true even when considering literature that portrays ugliness, since one can read about an ugly but sympathetic character and come away feeling compassion for that character and, thus, for other human beings.

"If there is anything . . . of good report." The word *report* comes from a Latin word that means "to carry." A *report* is "an official account or statement," especially "given in reply or inquiry, or by a person authorized." The word also means "to tell or relate from one to another."¹⁵ In one sense, then, a report is a *review*, such as a book review. But a report can also involve the things you hear about a work and share among friends and acquaintances. If a book is praised by reviewers or if people you trust say good things about the book, the book is then "of good report." Of course, "of good report" also implies that the report itself is reliable. Imagine that someone tells you a particular novel

is “awful,” but let’s imagine that this person knows next to nothing about literature. Let’s further imagine that this person can’t tell the difference between a book’s qualities and his own subjective likes and dislikes. Is this a good report? No. One might as well ask a Mormon who has never tasted alcohol to give a report on the quality of this year’s California wines. A work of literature that is “of good report,” then, is a work that has been praised by people who are qualified to speak on literary matters—people who know what they are talking about.

“If there is anything . . . praiseworthy.” *Praiseworthy* means “deserving of praise or applause; commendable.”¹⁶ It comes from a late Latin word meaning “to prize,” related to the Latin for “price.” We might prize or praise a work of literature for its fine language, its well-drawn characters, its complex plot, its philosophical heft. Interestingly, the 1828 Webster definition clarifies that *praise* “differs from fame, renown, and celebrity, which are the expressions of the approbations of numbers.”¹⁷ By that definition, then, a bestseller cannot be called praiseworthy merely on the basis of the numbers of copies sold.

After listing the qualities of virtuous, lovely, of good report, and praiseworthy, the thirteenth article of faith states, “we seek after these things.” I’d like to ask, *Do we really?* As Latter-day Saints, do we seek after that which is “virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy”? I’ll leave you to answer that question for yourself.

In outlining these qualities, Joseph Smith wrote, “Indeed, we may say that we follow the admonition of Paul.” Joseph was referring to the apostle Paul’s epistle to the Philippians in 4:8, in the King James Version: “Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.” The New International Version adds “noble” and “admirable.” The New Living Bible says, “Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise.” The Revised Standard Version adds, “whatever is gracious”; the New Revised Standard Version adds “whatever is

commendable.” I like the admonition to “think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise.”

Earlier, I mentioned my concern that in Mormon culture we can be guilty of “looking beyond the mark.” There exists in cultures and individuals a constant tension between liberal and conservative drives. Both are equally valuable, though “looking beyond the mark” can happen in either direction. I’m not talking about liberal and conservative politics. I’m talking about the liberal drive to open up, reach out, and explore new horizons versus the conservative drive to gather in, maintain, and treasure the known. Today’s American Mormon rarely runs the risk of being too liberal. The greater risk is the tendency to be too conservative—to close ranks, narrow the vision, and become overly cautious. The conservative tends toward the traditional, the status quo. The conservative seeks to preserve and conserve, to resist change, to restrain, to insist on moderation. This tendency often aligns with careful business practices. If I’m in the publishing business, I don’t want to take serious risks with my money. Wanting to keep my investments safe, I’d rather invest in another vampire rip-off of *Twilight*. Of course, many things are well-tested and safe and are also excellent and worthy of praise. But art can’t sit still for very long. It can’t survive in the status quo. Art has to look forward; it has to take risks. Any kind of risk causes anxiety for the conservative drive. Perhaps my argument is simple, then. Addressing Mormon culture, and Mormons generally, my plea is for a step toward the liberal. When it comes to literature and the thirteenth article of faith, I plead for the following:

“Praiseworthy”—Literature should be prized not based on numbers sold but based on literary quality. Praise should be given to literature that challenges us rather than merely reaffirming and comforting us in our views.

“Of good report”—The report should be good, and the person making the report should be knowledgeable and qualified to make literary judgments.

“Lovely”—When someone loves a book, that counts for something, even if the book is simple by educated standards.

“Virtuous”—Some good literature has been tried and tested and satisfies a conservative force; other literature takes risks in strong, compelling ways, sometimes through challenging portrayals of sexuality, violence, or crude language. The latter can be equally as virtuous as the former.

As the membership of the Church grows more diverse, I believe the commercial force that rules a Mormon bookstore will have to change. Its conservative bent is understandable, but that virtue is just one kind of virtue. Fortunately, we have the thirteenth article of faith. If we will read it closely, as we should read all scripture, and take it seriously, we’ll find a standard that aligns with the best literary judgments, supporting the best principles of reason and the gospel.

Notes

1. Joseph Smith, “The Wentworth Letter,” in *Teachings of the Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2011), 437.

2. Articles of Faith 1:13.

3. David J. Whittaker, “Articles of Faith” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, edited by Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 68.

4. *American Dictionary of the English Language*, 1st ed., s.v. “virtue.”

5. *American Heritage Dictionary*, 3rd ed., s.v. “virtuoso.”

6. *Ibid.*, s.v. “moral.”

7. “Chastity” in *True to the Faith: A Gospel Reference* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2004), 29–33.

8. *For the Strength of Youth* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2011), ii.

9. *Ibid.*, 11.

10. Oscar Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895), Project Gutenberg, August 2006, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/844/844-h/844-h.htm> (accessed August 18, 2015).

11. *Miller v. California*, 413 U.S. 15 (1973).
12. *For the Strength of Youth*, 21.
13. *American Dictionary of the English Language*, 1st ed., s.v. “lovely.”
14. *American Heritage Dictionary*, 3rd ed., s.v. “lovely.”
15. *Ibid.*, 3rd ed., s.v. “report.”
16. *American Dictionary of the English Language*, 1st ed., s.v. “praiseworthy.”
17. *Ibid.*

A Mormon Ethic of Food

Rachel Hunt Steenblik

Based on a paper given at the Wheatley “Faith Seeking Understanding” Summer Seminar of Theology and Social Issues sponsored by the Wheatley Institution on July 9, 2015, at Brigham Young University.

In his book *The Omnivore’s Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals*, Michael Pollan identifies major problems caused by the recently emergent food industry and the negative effects they have on the health and wellbeing of individuals, communities, and the environments. Pollan’s observations mirror those of American poet-prophet Wendell Berry. Both highlight losses associated with the demise of independent, small-farm agricultures. Here, I suggest that the Mormon ethic of food in its ideal (if not lived) form beautifully, simply, and powerfully restores what is lost.

At the heart of the industrial food system is a forgetting: a forgetting of the natural food cycle, a forgetting of where our food *should* come from, a forgetting of food without “additives and residues.”¹

We ignore the cruelty animals suffer on factory farms and that they are given neither space to roam nor appropriate foods to eat. Instead, they, like us, are pumped full of corn, hormones, and medication.² Of this, Pollan states, “Were the walls of our meat industry to become transparent, literally or even figuratively, we would not long continue to raise, kill, and eat animals the way we do.”³

We forget the hidden costs of big-industry food and the losses suffered by those who live downstream from industrialized food factories and mono-culture farms whose waterways have been polluted.⁴ We forget the hundreds, even thousands, of miles our food travels from farms to markets before it reaches our tables.⁵

We sometimes forget that the United States government subsidizes corn, rice, and soy to the tune of approximately 1.28 billion dollars per year and that that is one part of why high-fructose corn syrup and soy oils are added to food items that have no business containing them.⁶ This is why Pollan calls some of the resulting products “edible foodlike substances” rather than “food.”⁷ Explicating this reality, he writes, “Very simply, we subsidize high-fructose corn syrup in this country, but not carrots. While the surgeon general is raising alarms over the epidemic of obesity, the president is signing farm bills designed to keep the river of cheap corn flowing, guaranteeing that the cheapest calories in the supermarket will continue to be the unhealthiest.”⁸

We forget the costs of poor health and other ills because the price we pay at the counter is artificially low. “The ninety-nine-cent price of a fast-food hamburger simply doesn’t account for that meal’s true cost—to soil, oil, public health, the public purse, etc.—costs that are never charged directly to the consumer but, indirectly and invisibly, to the taxpayer (in the form of subsidies), the health care system (in the form of foodborne illnesses and obesity), and the environment (in the form of pollution).”⁹

We forget that there are four distinct seasons and that for centuries different foods were associated with their own unique growing periods. Fruits, vegetables, herbs, and even animals have their own natural seasons.¹⁰ We forget that there are wise purposes for this, purposes that fit our bodies and the land. Instead, we have been trained to eat the fruits, vegetables, herbs, and animals we want to eat when we want to eat them, regardless of the region we live in or the time of year.

We forget something broader still and that is the interconnect- edness between the food we eat and the earth we live on. Indeed, “What is most troubling, and sad, about industrial eating” for Pollan “is how thoroughly it obscures all these relationships and connections.”¹¹

“To go from the chicken (*Gallus gallus*) to the Chicken McNugget is to leave this world in a journey of forgetting that could hardly be more costly, not only in terms of the animal’s pain but in our pleasure, too. But forgetting, or not knowing in the first place, is

what the industrial food chain is all about, for if we could see what lies on the far side of the increasingly high walls of our industrial agriculture, we would surely change the way we eat.”¹² Wendell Berry agrees, for “[t]he industrial eater is . . . one who does not know that eating is an agricultural act, who no longer knows or imagines the connections between eating and the land.”¹³ Such eaters “are suffering a kind of cultural amnesia that is misleading and dangerous.”¹⁴

With such changes, we are prone to forget the “pleasure of eating,” the relationship between our bodies and the food we eat—and the way we eat that food.¹⁵ Americans often eat alone, standing up, or in our cars, while Europeans more frequently dine together, slowly, sitting down. Berry summarizes:

[I]ndustrial eating has become a degraded, poor, and paltry thing. Our kitchens and other eating places more and more resemble filling stations, as our homes more and more resemble motels. “Life is not very interesting,” we seem to have decided. “Let its satisfactions be minimal, perfunctory, and fast.” We hurry through our meals to go to work and hurry through our work in order to “recreate” ourselves in the evenings and on weekends and vacations. . . . And all this is carried out in a remarkable obliviousness to the causes and effects, the possibilities and the purposes, of the life of the body in this world.¹⁶

Many busy people have forgotten the joy of cooking meals at home, either with or for the ones they love, and the correspondent joy of sitting around the table in shared conversation and feasting. We often forget to feel gratitude for our food, to say grace.

At the heart of the Mormon food ethic is a remembering, an awareness, and a thankfulness for our food. Among the most important memories re-collected are the deep and abiding connections between the food we eat, the land, our bodies, and other people. Correspondingly, LDS scripture and leaders have espoused a way of life that restores this memory by restoring closeness to the natural life cycle, the soil, the true costs of food production and consumption, and care for animals. It results in greater health and a connectedness that ends in grace, in gratitude.

The earliest foundations for a Mormon food ethic are found in the expanded LDS canon. A commonly quoted scriptural passage from the Doctrine and Covenants reads:

[T]he fulness of the earth is yours, the beasts of the field and the fowls of the air . . . Yea, and the herb, and the good things which come of the earth, whether for food or for raiment, or for houses, or for barns, or for orchards, or for gardens, or for vineyards; Yea, all things which come of the earth, *in the season thereof*, are made for the benefit and the use of man, both to please the eye and to 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*.¹⁷

The emphasis is on joy, with the teaching that the many good things that come from the earth are gifts to *bring* joy for the human body and soul. Yes, they are useful, but they have higher ends. They “please the eye” and “gladden the heart.”¹⁸ They nourish and they clothe. They have delicious tastes and smells. They “strengthen” and “enliven.”¹⁹ The giver of these gifts is pleased and seems to hope that we as human beings will be also. The LDS food ethic places us, then, in a *joyful, grateful, full* relation not only to God but to all the living things of the earth, providing a counter to the soulless, hurried subsistence earlier noted by Wendell Berry. This passage hints at other important concepts that are later fleshed out in a subsequent scriptural passage that helps set the foundation for a Mormon food ethic. Notice in particular the lines “in the season thereof,” and “with judgment, not to excess, neither by extortion.”²⁰

The subsequent passage is Doctrine and Covenants section 89, which Latter-day Saints know colloquially as the Word of Wisdom. Its first verses explain that it is a “Word of Wisdom,” given “for the benefit of . . . the church, and also the saints in Zion—To be sent greeting; not by commandment or constraint, but by revelation and the word of wisdom.”²¹ These same verses also state very clearly why the revelation was given: “In conse-

quence of evils and designs which do and will exist in the hearts of conspiring men in the last days, I have warned you, and forewarn you.”²² It is not too difficult to consider the subsidization of corn, the cruel nature of factory farms, the hidden costs and contents of our food, the thousands of food miles from our farms to our forks, and the overall forgetting surrounding what we eat as part of these “evils and designs” of “conspiring men” about which we are given warning and regarding which this section offers helpful and healthful advice.²³

Such counsel comes in verses 10 and 11, beginning with a repetition of section 59’s phrase “in the season thereof”: “And again, verily I say unto you, all wholesome herbs God hath ordained for the constitution, nature, and use of man—Every herb *in the season thereof*, and every fruit *in the season thereof*; all these *to be used with prudence and thanksgiving*.”²⁴ Herbs and fruits are among the “good things which come of the earth” that are given to us to be used, to be enjoyed, to be eaten, but at particular times—the time in which nature tells us that they are ready, that they are ripe.²⁵ That time varies by location and climate. That time limits, but it also expands. It opens us up to memory of the earth’s cycles, of our own bodies, and of the relationships we once had with our local farmers and communities—relationships we can have again. As one website about eating seasonally states, “There are a number of good reasons to eat more local, seasonal food: to reduce the energy (and associated CO² emissions) needed to grow and transport the food we eat, to avoid paying a premium for food that is scarcer or has travelled a long way, to support the local economy, to reconnect with nature’s cycles and the passing of time, but, most importantly, because seasonal food is fresher and so tends to be tastier and more nutritious.”²⁶

In many different ways, Mother Earth gives us what our bodies need when we need it: for example, citrus fruits in cold and flu season. There is immense wisdom in accepting what—and when—she offers.²⁷ Eating seasonally used to be the way everyone naturally ate. Our ancestors had no presumptions that they should be able to eat peaches year-round unless they did the hard work of preserving them themselves. There are parts of Europe where

it is still this way to some degree. A recent NPR story entitled “In Germany, Seasonal Eating as Way of Life—And Excuse to Celebrate” begins, “You know it’s springtime in Germany when eager shoppers ransack the produce aisle of the local supermarket. In April, it’s the rhubarb, in May, it’s the peaches and in June, it’s the cherries. These fruits only put in a brief appearance while they are in season; the rest of the year, you have to rely on their canned or frozen equivalent.”²⁸ The seasonal nature of food ties the community together through both a collective looking forward toward the future and a collective appreciation of the present. That immense gratitude borne of brief seasons inspired celebratory festivals for specific fruits or vegetables, akin to Utah’s Strawberry, Peach, and Onion Days. This story elucidates how the wise words “Every herb *in the season thereof*, and every fruit *in the season thereof*” lead directly to the next, “all these *to be used with prudence and thanksgiving*.”²⁹

The idea of thanksgiving shows up again in subsequent verses of the same section: “Yea, flesh also of beasts and of the fowls of the air, I, the Lord, have ordained for the use of man with thanksgiving; nevertheless *they are to be used sparingly*; And it is pleasing unto me that *they should not be used, only in times of winter, or of cold, or famine*. . . . And these hath God made for the use of man *only in times of famine and excess of hunger*.”³⁰ There is a sense that this gratitude is a humble acknowledgment of one’s place in the world and an understanding and indebtedness that another being’s death offers us renewed life. With this exists a corresponding revelation that animal lives matter. Twentieth-century LDS president Joseph F. Smith agreed. He asked, “What is it to be humane to the beasts of the fields and birds of the air?” before answering, “It is more than to be considerate of the animal life entrusted to our care. It is a grateful appreciation of God’s creations. It is the lesson of divine love. To Him all life is a sacred creation for the use of His children. Do we stand beside Him in our tender regard for life?”³¹ Smith also stated, “The dominion the Lord gave man over the brute creation has been, to a very large extent, used selfishly, thoughtlessly, cruelly.”³² His predecessor, Brigham Young, recommended “that all men attend to their

flocks and herds with carefulness; and see that no creature in their charge is hungry, thirsty, or cold.”³³ Together their words, crying from the dust, offer a profound critique of factory farm practices.

What do we make of the word “sparingly”? LDS philosophy professor, Chris Foster, suggests that “sparingly” can mean “in great moderation” or “in a sparing or saving manner.”³⁴ The Word of Wisdom, therefore, may be expressing a concern for animal life as well as for our health. An article published in the *Times and Seasons* while Joseph Smith was prophet addressed this issue: “Let men attend to these instructions, let them use the things ordained of God; let them be sparing of the life of animals.”³⁵ Foster also applies Doctrine and Covenants 59’s line “with judgment, not to excess, neither by extortion” to our eating (and treatment) of animals: “The mistreatment of animals on today’s factory farms could easily be referred to as ‘extortion.’ [Definition: obtaining something by means of threats, force, fraud, or wrong use of authority.]”³⁶

Doctrine and Covenants section 89 continues: “All grain is ordained for the use of man . . . to be the staff of life. . . . All grain is good for the food of man; as also the fruit of the vine; that which yieldeth fruit, whether in the ground or above the ground.”³⁷ Ezra Taft Benson in a general conference address invited “every family” to “have on hand grain for at least a year.”³⁸ He also reminded them that “it generally takes several times as much land to produce a given amount of food when grains are fed to livestock and we consume the meat. Let us be careful not to overdo beef cattle and other livestock projects on our . . . farms.”³⁹

Moreover, LDS leaders have long encouraged their stewards to become their *own* farmer producers as well as consumers by growing gardens. One hundred and fifty-five years ago, Brigham Young counseled, “Progress, and improve upon and make beautiful everything around you. Cultivate the earth, and cultivate your minds. Build cities, adorn your habitations, make gardens, orchards, and vineyards, and render the earth so pleasant that when you look upon your labors you may do so with pleasure,”⁴⁰ reminiscent of Doctrine and Covenants 59’s ode to joy and human bodily and spiritual purposes. Another leader, J. Reuben Clark

Jr., carried this call into the beginning of the next century, albeit more succinctly: “Let every man who has a garden spot, garden it; every man who owns a farm, farm it.”⁴¹ Thirty-nine years after that, President Spencer W. Kimball repeated Clark’s concise words before adding his own: “We encourage you to grow all the food that you feasibly can on your own property. Berry bushes, grapevines, fruit trees—plant them if your climate is right for their growth. Grow vegetables and eat them from your own yard. Even those residing in apartments or condominiums can generally grow a little food in pots and planters. . . . If there are children in your home, involve them in the process with assigned responsibilities.”⁴²

Kimball offered this same support again and again, mentioning it in nearly two dozen semi-annual conference addresses, championing the growing of personal, family, and community gardens. Many Latter-day Saints responded to the invitation with faithful action. Kimball exclaimed, “From all directions we hear of gardens which have made an outstanding contribution.”⁴³ Of the “numerous gardens,” many “are found in hanging baskets, in containers on stairways, on trellises, and in window boxes,” emphasizing that the size of one’s garden plot does not matter.⁴⁴ The tiniest growing space is enough to help one remember both the costs and the care that bring a seed to life and then sustain it. Similarly, even the smallest gardens are sufficient to help one feel a greater measure of thankfulness for the food on one’s table and in one’s belly. They, too, can tie an individual more tightly to the earth and to the human family. Michael Pollan seems to concur. In his book *Food Rules: An Eater’s Manual*, he suggests Rule 62: “Plant a vegetable garden if you have the space, a window box if you don’t.”⁴⁵

It is important simply to be near the earth. On one occasion, Ezra Taft Benson stated that “[t]here are blessings in being close to the soil.”⁴⁶ On another, Kimball rejoiced that so “many . . . have followed the counsel to have their own gardens wherever it is possible so that we do not lose contact with the soil and so that we can have the security of being able to provide at least some of our food and necessities.”⁴⁷ Modern science confirms the importance of keeping contact with the soil in some surprising and remarkable

ways.⁴⁸ University of Bristol physiology professor, Dr. Christopher Lowry, found that touching dirt changes one's brain chemistry for the better. Anna North summarizes his research: "He says that bacteria like this [in soil] could one day help treat diseases involving inflammation—and that inflammation is associated not just with physical ills but also with psychiatric ones like PTSD and major depression."⁴⁹

In addition to applauding a more intimate, material connection with the earth, Kimball also gave great weight to understanding the earth's cycles as well as enhancing the relationships that form between humans engaged in joint labor.

I hope that we understand that, while having a garden . . . is often useful in reducing food costs and making available delicious fresh fruits and vegetables, it does much more than this. Who can gauge the value of that special chat between daughter and Dad as they weed or water the garden? How do we evaluate the good that comes from the obvious lessons of planting, cultivating, and the eternal law of the harvest? And how do we measure the family togetherness and cooperating that must accompany successful canning? Yes, we are laying up resources in store, but perhaps the greater good is contained in the lessons of life we learn.⁵⁰

Pollan identifies many of the same good fruits: "What does growing some of your own food have to do with repairing your relationship to food and eating? Everything. To take part in the intricate and endlessly interesting processes of providing for your sustenance is the surest way to escape the culture of fast food and the values implicit in it: that food should be fast, cheap, and easy; that food is a product of industry, not nature; that food is fuel rather than a form of communion with other people, and also with other species—with nature."⁵¹

President Kimball enjoyed sharing the gardening success stories that were sent to him. One such story came from two families in Frankfurt, Germany, who shared a garden plot. They initially had difficulty finding land in their city but ultimately succeeded. Still, after their springtime planting, "the neighbours told us that it would not grow," the German families wrote.⁵² The intrepid

gardeners then reported, “Every kind of vegetable came. It is so wonderful to see the plants grow. We take turns now to go to our garden and water our plants. We are happy to have a garden.”⁵³ From another story in São Paulo: “This [is] a way of making lasting relationships of friends and neighbors. Our gardens are a matter of discussion in private, in socials at home. It has brought our families together.”⁵⁴

Former LDS leader Barbara W. Winder related that her “newly married daughter” and son-in-law “began a series of moves from one place to another—graduate school, first job, and so on.”⁵⁵ In each new place, with each new “climate and soil conditions” (as well as new knowledge and skills), they grew a garden, with ascending levels of success.⁵⁶ As children came, they also learned to help and work together. “Now their gardens are . . . worthwhile . . . projects, as the family enjoys and,” crucially, “*shares* the produce.”⁵⁷ Such willingness to share with others is a genuine mark of gratitude and quiet acknowledgment of one’s own temporal blessings. It is also an intentional act of loving (and remembering) one’s neighbor. This willingness to share is reflected in an anecdote told recently at Weber State University by Kate Holbrook, a specialist in both Mormon women’s history and Mormon foodways: “When I first told one [of] my friends that I was going to study the Mormon ways of eating she said, ‘You know what? Mormon food habits is giving food away.’”⁵⁸

Holbrook’s friend is right. Mormons share food—at births and deaths and many life events in-between. That, too, is part of the Mormon food ethic, integrated seamlessly with the entirety of remembering, care, responsibility, connectedness, and gratitude. I have experienced it myself. When I gave birth to my daughter in Brooklyn, New York, one of the first people to visit me was a woman with three small children whose husband worked from 6 a.m. to 11 p.m. every day in an effort to pay their New York City rent and student loan bills. Despite her own challenges, she came to bring me food. Two of the next people to bring me food were dear friends who were waiting for what would be their unsuccessful IVF results. I felt the deep care and sacrifice from each of them. Another time, another Mormon woman brought

my family homemade bread and soup the day my first book was due at the publisher's. The simple, healthful food buoyed my body and my spirits.

Implementing the Mormon food ethic of eating fruits and herbs in their season, eating meat sparingly and with great gratitude, growing some of our own food, and sharing with others, restores memory and fulfills what Michael Pollan only imagines in *The Omnivore's Dilemma*:

Imagine if we had a food system that actually produced wholesome food. Imagine if it produced that food in a way that restored the land. Imagine if we could eat every meal knowing these few simple things: What it is we're eating. Where it came from. How it found its way to our table. And what it really cost. If that was the reality, then every meal would have the potential to be a perfect meal. We would not need to go hunting for our connection to our food and the web of life that produces it. We would no longer need any reminding that we eat by the grace of nature, not industry, and that what we're eating is never anything more or less than the body of the world. . . . [W]e can . . . make and get our food so that it . . . feeds our bodies and our souls. Imagine it: Every meal would connect us to the joy of living and the wonder of nature. Every meal would be like saying grace.⁵⁹

Notes

1. Wendell Berry, "The Pleasures of Eating," in *What Are People For?: Essays* (Berkeley, Calif.: Counterpoint, 1990), 145–52.

2. "What gets a steer from 80 to 1,100 pounds in fourteen months is tremendous quantities of corn, protein and fat supplements, and an arsenal of new drugs" (Michael Pollan, *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals* [New York: Penguin, 2006], 71).

3. *Ibid.*, 333.

4. One nonprofit organization, the Natural Resources Defense Council, explains, "People who live near or work at factory farms breathe in hundreds of gases, which are formed as manure decomposes. The stench can be unbearable, but worse still, the gases contain many harmful chemicals. . . . Animal waste

also contaminates drinking water supplies. For example, nitrates often seep from lagoons and sprayfields into groundwater. Drinking water contaminated with nitrates can increase the risk of blue baby syndrome, which can cause deaths in infants. High levels of nitrates in drinking water near hog factories have also been linked to spontaneous abortions. Several disease outbreaks related to drinking water have been traced to bacteria and viruses from waste” (“Pollution from Giant Livestock Farms Threatens Public Health,” Natural Resources Defense Council, last modified February 21, 2013, <http://www.nrdc.org/water/pollution/nspills.asp>).

5. The most common number thrown around is 1,500 miles, as in this statement from Melina Shannon-DiPietro of Yale Sustainable Food Program (formerly Project): “Most food travels 1,500 miles before we eat it” (Anne Underwood, “American Campuses Get Greener Than Ever,” *Newsweek*, August 15, 2007, <http://www.newsweek.com/american-campuses-get-greener-ever-99123>). *Slate*’s Jane Black looked into this number and discovered that it is most fitting for those living in the U.S. Midwest but that it still doesn’t track food coming from overseas: “Pirog tallied that produce arriving in Chicago from within the United States traveled 1,518 miles. But even if you live in the Windy City, that doesn’t account for milk or meat, which make up a significant part of American diets. Nor does it account for kiwis from Italy, apples from New Zealand, or grapes from Chile. This, despite the fact that imports make up a growing percentage—15 percent of U.S. food in 2005—of what ends up on our tables.” Further, “Researchers have done little work to calculate food miles for areas outside the Midwest. A 1997 study showed that produce travels an average of 1,129 miles to Austin, 34 percent fewer than to Chicago. In 2001, an analysis of the Jessup, Md., terminal market concluded that U.S.-grown produce traveled an average of more than 1,685 miles. And though there’s no formal research to support it, Pirog says it’s safe to assume that, on average, food travels fewer miles to get to diners in California than to those in New York” (“What’s In a Number?: How the Press Got the Idea that Food Travels 1,500 Miles from Farm to Plate,” *Slate*, September 17, 2008, http://www.slate.com/articles/life/food/2008/09/whats_in_a_number.html).

6. Eric Pianin, “How Billions in Tax Dollars Subsidize the Junk Food Industry,” *Business Insider*, July 25, 2012, <http://www.businessinsider.com/billions-in-tax-dollars-subsidize-the-junk-food-industry-2012-7>.

7. “[Y]ou’re better off eating whole fresh foods rather than processed food products. That’s what I mean by the recommendation to ‘eat food,’ which is not quite as simple as it sounds. For while it used to be that food was all you *could* eat, today there are thousands of other edible foodlike substances in the

supermarket” (Michael Pollan, *In Defense of Food: An Eater’s Manifesto* [New York: Penguin, 2008], 1).

8. Pollan, *Omnivore’s Dilemma*, 108.

9. *Ibid.*, 200.

10. “Feeding animals corn in CAFOs has accustomed us to a year-round supply of fresh meats, many of which we forget were once eaten as seasonally as tomatoes or sweet corn: People would eat most of their beef and pork in late fall or winter, when the animals were fat, and eat chicken in the summer” (*ibid.*, 253).

11. *Ibid.*, 10.

12. *Ibid.*

13. Berry, “Pleasures of Eating,” 146.

14. *Ibid.*

15. *Ibid.*

16. *Ibid.*, 147.

17. Doctrine and Covenants 59:16–20, emphasis added.

18. Doctrine and Covenants 59:18.

19. Doctrine and Covenants 59:19.

20. Doctrine and Covenants 59:18, 20.

21. Doctrine and Covenants 89:1–2.

22. Doctrine and Covenants 89:4.

23. *Ibid.*

24. Doctrine and Covenants 59:18; Doctrine and Covenants 89:10–11, emphasis added.

25. Doctrine and Covenants 59:17. It was pointed out to me that the Spanish translation here refers not to a time or period but to taste and deliciousness. Rather than posing a problem, this highlights even more forcefully that fruits and vegetables taste more delicious when they can spend the appropriate time in soil and sunlight and when they do not have to be picked too early to survive long journeys in trucks and stays in grocery stores.

26. Nick Gitsham, “Why Eat the Seasons?,” Eat The Seasons, accessed September 12, 2015, <http://www.eattheseasons.co.uk/why.php>.

27. This in turn reminds me of mother’s milk, which also changes based on the needs of the recipient.

28. Esme Nicholson, "In Germany, Seasonal Eating as Way of Life— and Excuse to Celebrate," *National Public Radio*, June 22, 2015, www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2015/06/22/415833782/in-germany-seasonal-eating-as-way-of-life-and-excuse-to-celebrate.

29. Doctrine and Covenants 89:11; emphasis added.

30. Doctrine and Covenants 89:12–13, 15; Joseph Smith similarly said, "I exhorted the brethren not to kill a serpent, bird, or an animal of any kind during our journey unless it became necessary in order to preserve ourselves from hunger" (*History of the Church*, 2:71).

31. Joseph F. Smith, "Humane Day," *Juvenile Instructor* 53 (April 1918): 182–83.

32. Joseph F. Smith, "Kindness to Animals," *Juvenile Instructor* 47 (February 1912): 78.

33. Brigham Young, "Territory of Utah Proclamation for a Day of Praise and Thanksgiving," *Deseret News*, vol. 2, no. 4, December 27, 1851, 15. Republished as "Proclamation: For a Day of Praise and Thanksgiving for the Territory of Utah," *Ensign*, November 1971, 40. Available at <http://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/desnews1/id/171459/rec/14> and <https://www.lds.org/ensign/1971/11/proclamation-for-a-day-of-praise-and-thanksgiving-for-the-territory-of-utah?lang=eng>.

34. Chris Foster, "Mormonism and Animal Rights: Harmony or Contradiction?" (presentation at Utah Valley University, August 2011). Hugh Nibley seems to agree: "Meat sparingly. Again, sparing is a good word. It means 'sparing God[']s creatures.' It is to be used with thanksgiving and not with gluttony" ("The Word of Wisdom: A Commentary on D&C 89," Manavu Ward Gospel Doctrine Class, December 1979, <http://publications.maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/fullscreen/?pub=1044&index=1>).

35. Joseph Smith, "Word of Wisdom," *Times and Seasons*, vol. 3, no. 15, June 1, 1842, 801.

36. Christopher Foster, "Mormonism and Animal Rights." Available at <http://www.slideshare.net/Fosterch5/mormonism-and-animal-ethics>.

37. Doctrine and Covenants 89:14, 16.

38. Ezra Taft Benson, "Prepare Ye," October 1973, <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/1973/10/prepare-ye?lang=eng>.

39. *Ibid.*

40. Brigham Young, "Remarks by President Brigham Young, Ogden City, June 12, 1860," *Deseret News*, vol. 10, no. 23, August 8, 1860, 177.

41. Report of the Semi-Annual Conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, April 1937 (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints), 26.

42. Spencer W. Kimball, "Family Preparedness," April 1976, <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/1976/04/family-preparedness?lang=eng>.

43. Spencer W. Kimball, "A Report and a Challenge," October 1976, <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/1976/10/a-report-and-a-challenge?lang=eng>.

44. Ibid.

45. Michael Pollan, *Food Rules: An Eater's Manual* (New York: Penguin, 2009), 135. Several of Pollan's other rules fit neatly within the Mormon food ethic. This is remarkable not because the same solutions are offered but because the groundwork for the Mormon ethic of food was in place more than 180 years ago, during a time when the majority of people grew some of their own food and ate fruit and herbs in their season and animals in winter and times of famine.

46. Benson, "Prepare Ye."

47. Spencer W. Kimball, "The True Way of Life and Salvation," April 1978, <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/1978/04/the-true-way-of-life-and-salvation?lang=eng>.

48. Surprising, that is, for anyone who is not already a gardener. Many know personally the lift to one's mood that comes from spending time in the soil.

49. Anna North, "The Secret to Happiness Can be Found by Digging in the Dirt," *New York Times*, August 31, 2014, <http://op-talk.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/08/31/the-secret-to-happiness-can-be-found-by-digging-in-the-dirt>.

50. Kimball, "Welfare Services: The Gospel in Action," October 1977, <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/1977/10/welfare-services-the-gospel-in-action?lang=eng>.

51. Pollan, *Food Rules*, 135–37.

52. Kimball, "A Report and a Challenge."

53. Ibid.

54. Kimball, "The Lord Expects His Saints to Follow the Commandments," April 1977, <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/1977/04/the-lord-expects-his-saints-to-follow-the-commandments?lang=eng>.

55. Barbara W. Winder, “Draw Near Unto Me through Obedience,” October 1985, <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/1985/10/draw-near-unto-me-through-obedience?lang=eng>

56. Ibid.

57. Ibid.; emphasis added.

58. Kate Holbrook, quoted in Ingrid Maldonado, “Exploring Mormon Ethics of Eating,” Weber State University, *Signpost*, March 24, 2015, <http://www.wsusignpost.com/2015/03/24/exploring-mormon-ethics-of-eating>.

59. Michael Pollan, *The Omnivore’s Dilemma: The Secrets Behind What You Eat, Young Readers Edition* (New York: Penguin, 2009). I offer a comparative citation from the original edition: “But imagine for a moment if we once again knew, strictly as a matter of course, these few unremarkable things: What it is we’re eating. Where it came from. How it found its way to our table. And what, in a true accounting, it really cost. We could then talk about some other things at dinner. For we would no longer need any reminding that however we choose to feed ourselves, we eat by the grace of nature, not industry, and what we’re eating is never anything more or less than the body of the world” (411).

Living and Dying in the Realm of Forgetful People

Elisabeth Muldowney

Are You Able to Remember?

God once asked a murderer about the location of his victim. The murderer evaded the question by posing another: “Am I my brother’s keeper?”

The almighty God of the book of Genesis, who sees all things, directs the universe, and knows when a sparrow dies, didn’t need Cain to tell him what happened to Abel; he already knew. His question appeared superfluous. In fact, if Genesis provided a snapshot of Abel’s whereabouts post-murder, it would definitely reveal something along the lines of the victim’s peace and joy in paradise. Whether from the Jewish, Muslim, or Christian outlook of justice and the afterlife, God assures the heavenly reward of a saintly person, so God above all others would have an idea where to find the obedient Abel.

Yet God asked Cain: “Where is Abel?”

What

My mother forgets her children sometimes.

“Mom, where’s Jake?” I could ask and substitute almost any of my siblings’ names and receive the same response: “Oh! What time is it? He’s at work. I forgot to pick him up!” The investment in a cell phone was one of Jacob’s wisest decisions.

“Can a woman forget her sucking child,” *yes, yes she can*, “that she may not have compassion on the son of her womb?” *I suppose she does have that, even when she forgets*. “Yea, they may forget,” *I see that. Feel that. Know that. I experience the condition of humanity called involuntary selective memory*.

“Yet I will not forget thee, O house of Israel” (1 Nephi 21:15).

To understand what it means to remember every moment of a human life from fetus to gray hairs and then again billions of times over is to understand the surface and rotation and chemistry of every star you see when you drive through the southern Utah desert in the dead of night, the sky studded with celestial bodies.



On late nights at the dance studio, after all of my classmates had wandered out with their parents and I was left staring at my reflection in the glass door, I brooded over my mother’s selective memory, wishing that somehow she could manage to make her desire to remember into an actuality. And the guilt that chiseled at my irritation was the guilt of a girl who failed to manage just the people in dance, school, and work. This girl had much less to love and remember than the woman who helped her neighbors, worked, and served while facilitating her own twelve children’s lives. But I would usually let the anger overwhelm any empathy as I was forced to weigh my options between asking to use the office phone and waiting for Mom to materialize.

In response to these memory lapses, Jacob became resourceful rather than resentful. He developed new tactics to grab my mother’s attention. On one of his last nights of work before departing on a two-year religious mission to Las Vegas, he taped a piece of paper to the back of the front door.

“Mom, don’t forget me, please!”

His signature was redundant because the all-caps and jutting lines informed us of the author. It was more for the rest of the world. My mother left it on the door the entire two years he was away, eager to share the inside joke with whoever asked about her son. She clung to the thought of him. I couldn’t be jealous, but

I wondered why his absence suddenly filled us with the responsibility to honor and remember him. When getting rides was a responsibility that allowed him to function and live, he slipped into the oblivion of the to-do lists. But his independence through the apparently complete severing of our existences brought an urgent obligation to pay homage to his memory.

He wasn't gone forever, though. Two years later, Jacob came home a whole lot tanner. He would choke up talking about his experience saving souls in Vegas for many months after his homecoming. We remembered how he was scrawnier and shorter when he boarded the plane as a nineteen-year-old with a bad temper. And he came home a twenty-one-year-old with a bad temper. He still had a passion for Bach and Rachmaninoff and a familiar knack for freezing around girls. He continued to bang out Chopin on the piano at midnight, and he still took time to pet the dogs.

He fell right into what our memories knew of him, our vague recollections of what these motions once meant to him. In our eagerness to pay homage to his memory, we forgot where he was now, unaware of what memories he now held sacred. More was different than the tan.

He had seen people and places we would never understand. He had walked down streets that were home for him and foreign to us. His soul was molded out of sight by factors he could not or would not describe. He now fought against our memory, inarticulate.

We sat in the car, the two of us, and I let him talk through the feelings of being a returned missionary. "It's hard to be who you are when you come home to people who expect you to be who you were." *I just wish you'd let me grow*, I heard in the silence that followed his attempt at making his agony clear.

When

Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, August 2014: I am on a paved walkway. It has recently faded gray; its surface, updated a few years back, is just now allowing purple clover flowers and floppy-headed cat-tails to climb through cracks for a peek at the sun. And it's only a peek. The sidewalk leads up an incline overshadowed by oak

trees. Oak giants, the weary survivors of mortars. One can hardly see the scarring from cannons belonging to soldiers who fired bits of shrapnel through the space of this park. The park is now so lethargic I wonder how the violence of those years could not fire through time and stare me more boldly in the face. I nod at a passing visitor who leads his boys up the hill as they shriek, “Bang!” while pointing their newly-purchased toy pistols with one hand and keeping their Confederate caps on their heads with the other.

People come by the busloads: to take pictures from this overlook, to climb on the exterior of the model log cabin, to ogle reenactors sporting long-sleeved, wool getups in 100-degree weather. What do they see? Why are they here? I want to hate them for their casualness, but instead I let my dad shuffle from angle to angle, torso tilted back, smartphone at his nose, taking candid shots of me at this or that monument. The fields below the hill—solemn, sacred grounds—look less affected by the Civil War than the ground around the path—ground battered by the onslaught of tourists. On either side of the walkway is compacted brown earth dotted with yellow grass. Little unplanned paths break off from the concrete and wind like tributaries through towering undergrowth. They lead to the discovery of some-society-or-other’s memorial: another something or someone somebody somewhere is supposed to remember. But off in the distance, the real memorial looks like any ordinary meadow. I wonder at nature’s ability to adapt and live on. I remain stuck, straining to grasp and value lost lives that would have been gone by now anyway, war or no war. I strain if only because no one else seems to care. Not even the earth seems to care.

Across the sloping fields the cross-work fences sag with rot. I stroll along the hilltop, thinking about figures that long ago stirred the weeds with last breaths: the whimpering men unable to lift and save themselves, the women hurrying through the fields to find the mostly living, the dogs, like lost children, meandering among the bodies, pausing at the carcasses of the horses whose wide eyes were frozen in frenzied confusion. These are the images I try to create to make me feel something. Anything. Please make me different than these tourists.

The expanse of open land sparkles with wild flowers that laugh at my recreation of the past. White, bespeckled butterflies drift over the milkweed, mirrors of the ghosts who drift over this unmarked graveyard in the night. In daylight, the world keeps spinning. A tractor breaks up a fallow field, disturbing the earth that once yielded a deathly harvest. The plowman, the tourists, me—we court the belief that if the bushes resurface and the wood ferns return, the wounds are all healed.

Why

I've wondered if God was really asking Cain, "Do you love Abel?" The question may seem just as ridiculous as asking where Abel was. After all, Cain had just killed the man. But love and hate are twins, connected by their births, equally rooted in their origin of passion and human need. Apathy is their enemy, a loss of feeling, a disconnection from what it means to be alive. And I look at Cain and his smart-mouthed response during his brief interview with his maker and wonder at what point he crossed the line from hate to not caring at all.



How much of me wants to forget? There are people and places I want to erase from my history, forget how they have hurt me, or I them. And yet they stay. I see their faces on the backs of my eyelids at night, feel their presence in the emptiness of the pillow beside me.

Guilt keeps them here.

And yet, there are others, when life takes me far, far away, or death takes them farther, as much remorse as I attempt to conjure in order to hold to the ghosts of the gone, they move on without me. Or maybe I just leave them behind because my heart is tired of carrying them.

As Cain was condemned to roam the earth a cursed man, did his mind delete his memory as a means of self-preservation? It's possible that remembering not only his crime but those whom

he had offended would have caused an irreparable, emotional short-circuit. Maybe he could not care without breaking. Maybe it would have been important for him to break.

How

“What means the most to me is when people remember them,” Erin said to me. “Because I miss them every day.”

The curtains shifted as if with the swell of my guilt rather than a summer gust. Erin was lounging on the couch, smiling with her mouth only. Her two boys alternated between jumping on her limp body and loudly reproducing animal noises while running through the house. Charles was five or so; Elliot was barely trotting and gurgling half-coherent words. There should have been four children pretending to be lions as they harassed their mother.

Lilly was a few years younger than Charles and she lived about a month. James was only seven months younger than Lilly. He was born prematurely and died almost immediately after birth. I didn’t meet either of them. Elliot came many years later.

The month after Lilly’s birth was filled with late-night phone calls from Mom and even later-night calls up to God. I was at school on the other side of the country. I only heard what was happening; I never experienced taking a shift with the baby at the hospital, never volunteered to watch Charles so Erin could stare at the chest that fluttered with the forced rise and fall of the machine dubbed the “iron heart,” never listened to my brother strum Bach’s “Sheep May Safely Graze” late at night for his baby girl teetering between life and death for forty days and forty nights. All accounts were secondhand. The emotional distance made the pain as far away as the land spreading between us. 2,000 miles away. I wept if only because I wanted to hurt more and couldn’t.

My inconsistent suffering created an inconsistent memory. Lilly’s reality was drowned in finals, a promotion at work, another date, my roommates’ dirty dishes. Then a phone call from home, a passing comment about families, an old friend’s question about Micah and Erin: I would inevitably experience a spike of obligation to pay homage to pain I did not know how to feel. It led me

to draw out the names James and Lilly when convenient. *Sunday School and inspirational stories about healing from loss and leaning on the strength of God. University classrooms and real-life application for the analysis of Anne Bradstreet's poems about her dead grandchildren. Livingrooms and late-night talks about the meaning of life and suffering.* Yet my mouth formed a story about the shapes pain would have taken if I had a memory of touching Lilly's hot, fleshy palm. It's a useful learning experience for the detached aunt. And yet the youngest aunt, my little sister, emailed me during this time and said, "By the way, do not think that I'm not sad about Lilly's death just because I don't mention it. I just don't like to talk about it." And then all of my talking suddenly felt cheap. Was it? I don't know. And I don't know if I lack an answer because I'm too afraid to face my selective memory or if there is something in the human relationship with recollection that is more complicated than I understand.

I don't remember Lilly's or James's birthdays until it's too late to send Erin a commemorative card. The Lord gives life and he takes it away. But who takes away the memories?



My sister Mimi took me to Lilly's grave over Christmas break. The memorial garden was as mysterious as my understanding of this child: chilled winter mist over green fields surrounded by naked trees. Lilly rested in "The Angel Garden" surrounded by the plaques of other infants.

We stood for a while. Mimi suggested singing a song: "Be Still My Soul," I affirmed. Halfway through the first verse we realized we didn't know the words. We giggled before morphing our smiles into solemn hums to finish off the song. I touched my hand to my lips, kissed it, and placed it on the grave.

"Goodbye," I said. *I never met you*, I thought.



I was home for Easter. It seemed an appropriate time to take Lilly daisies from our front yard. I wished I could afford lilies. The

memorial garden looked much the same as it did during my first visit. The hanging moisture obscured the scene and flattened the grass. Many graves bore the tokens of loved ones. Neon Easter egg baskets contrasted with the wet granite headstones. Many more graves remained naked, unornamented by even a flower. *Who mourns for those people? Suffers those losses forever? Why do I feel so keenly obligated to their memory?* I stood overwhelmed by a consciousness that I could not even hold my own niece in the same sort of sacred remembrance everyone else seemed to be able to.

It appeared I was not the first of Lilly's visitors that season. A bright white blossom of an undefined species glowed against the dewy grass in a vase above her grave. I stared at it for a while before adding my daisies, pressing my lips through my hand to the baby's plaque before standing and rescanning the space.

How could I have missed it? A fresh, bright gravestone lay beside Lilly's. In memory of a baby boy born a few weeks ago, the brass lettering told me he died the day of his birth. What was the journey like that had brought the parents to this garden? They had been here recently. They had placed an enormous bouquet of those unidentified white blossoms beside their son's memorial. I looked from flower to flower, plaque to plaque, grasping for the emotion that had inspired the parents' movement of a solitary flower to the grave of another lost child, a child they had no memory of anticipating, a child whose name they would only remember when they visited the grave of their son. I took a daisy from Lilly's bunch and added it to the bursting bouquet on the boy's grave.

I recognized in that moment that I wanted to hold this gesture as long as my mind would let me, yet having experienced it is far more precious than its memory. But still. I can't help but treasure the frame paused in time: adjacent graves, splotchy with drying rain, bordered by growing grass, and crowned with the life of white petals.

By the Mouth of Two or Three

Doug Talley

If the world were truly and wholly sullen,
the starlings would never sing—never.

They would see only blood in the clouds
of sunrise and sunset and hold their peace

until the last of any remaining songs blurred
deep into the earth never to rise again.

But every morning, every evening, they hold
court in a cluster of trees and shimmer—each

dazzling feather dipped in black—shimmer
with ancient ululations that echo the notes

of Judaeen tragedy. Something of this tragedy,
it is true, is worth the singing, or the starlings

would never sing, never, and I, I would never
trouble you, nor anyone else, with this temple

and its walls made up of days and its solitary
window to look through those days and there

discover a life where all birds sing a truth even
the most doubtful will someday acknowledge.

What the Call of the Deep Teaches

Doug Talley

Of the ocean what can we say? It is one pure cask,
and that immensely, of salted water to the brim.

Our lives turn such narrow slivers of consideration
by contrast, largely what the eye and ear scuttle

to the task at hand, a spoon to stir the soup, a needle
for mending, a dried blossom of day lily to snip away.

The world spins in a wealth that will soon occlude us,
yet I am satisfied enough—if little more than color

washed up by daylight in the sea spray of the ship,
my life, modest surely, and tenuous and evanescent,

includes your full affection, opening a cosmos.
Now, in the moonlight of the western Caribbean

we are one and riding that salted water in purity,
with faith, almost, to venture from the ship hand

in hand, step onto the sea, and walk the lighted path
a full moon casts upon the deep, not a dream, nor

a phantasm of the Nazarene striding the backwash,
but such a naked clarity as to radiate consciousness

of a single, irrepressible attraction—to step into
and be one with light, the whole body filled with light.

One Glory of the Moon

Doug Talley

—1 Corinthians 15:51

Wild raspberry leaves had turned deep crimson and the stalks black. For prayer I bowed in the field like one of the stalks, no less resigned. Leaves of silver maple were shed and their underside had surrendered to autumn mauve. In the eastern acre of the woods a sheet of yellow

and orange and brown leaves suggested low fire. Though blue asters had shriveled, with two or three, because of the Indian summer, still clinging madly to their color, a whole nation of robins were feeding in the pasture, the field alive with birds. My prayer? What words

fit for resignation to the death of such beauty? If God can raise children of Abraham from stone, let that late sinking moon, pale and full in the smoky blue, sinking to the low fire of turning leaves, let that late moon rise again, splintered into a country of angels.

Viewing Kershisnik's *Nativity*

Doug Talley

A child, a little girl of four,
a balled string of curiosity,
had to touch the canvas

where an angel in white,
turning from the Nazarene,
looked out to jubilate.

Who could blame her?
The angel flowed in a choir
of angels, a river of white robe

that swam around the Holy Child,
as stunning as the melting snow cap
of Timpanogos under sunlight.

Oils of the hand soil the paint,
the mother explained, *dull the color.*
But what if the hand turned luminous

instead, absorbed that seraphic dazzle
until it glowed like the moon?
What if the milky light coursed ahead

to the girl's heart, flooded the body,
until finally it lifted and swirled her,
heel to crown, into the painting

to join the anthem? What then?
Isn't that how art will touch back?
Swallow the spirit whole forever?

Adam Had an Eden*

Ronald Wilcox

*in mankind is the end of kind
in woman the beginning of woe*

i

So long as I can sing of Eden days
and Eve, presumptuous as an almond blossom,
I shall not shout our age's agonies,
bending between extinction and extinction.

ii

See the apple of Adam's eye,
hung on a rib on a rack in a storm,
bearing her lover's love: pain called
fruit, wrung from wrenching flesh . . .

Weeping Eve hears man in the wind,
his wooing moan her long "Oh no,"
for in mankind is the end of kind
and in woman the beginning of woe.

iii

Once upon a time, Adam had an Eden,
savage with butterflies, roaring with bees.
Days were dreams: windless trees
whispering as a quiet river flows
by its brim of humming sunflowers.
Rock-a-byed in this gentle doze,
half-hidden in verdure for hours,
Eve tastes the tang of the sun

*like melting butter on the tip of her tongue.
She's swimming in goldfish kisses: a fin
winks like an eyelash, tingles her skin:*

a hide-an'-seek lambkin is teasing
 her toy, a purring leopard, sleeping.
 Lying alone, cooled by bluebell dew
 amid limb-born fruit fallen below,
 the languid sun caressing through
 the flex and muscle of vine in slow

*liquid motion, she drowns in rivers of berry
 amid bubbles of grape, clusters of currant,
 apricot-crush and peach, tangerine, cherry.*

iv

So long as I can sing of Eden days
 and Eve, presumptuous as an almond blossom,
 I shall not shout our age's agonies,
 bending between extinction and extinction:

*inexplicable war's raze,
 peace, its cankered interim,
 raging ambivalence of men en masse,*

none of these,
 so long as rosebuds are raw nerves
 in her flesh
 and the spring-wringing robin
twangs, twangs,
 like a broken harp string . . .

*Adam had an Eden = Adam-on-di-Ahman

Lyric of the Larks

Ronald Wilcox

*Sobbing boughs above me bend,
Throbbing red in August wind.*

Down within the bloom of gentle days
in summer warming,
I hear the crystal birds who shatter dew
to sing your name in
rain in
shining meadow hush, and larks, who soar,
alarming
me by singing you, can kill with, love, your
cruel blaming.
If I die by larks, then you will too, for
who will form in
rhyme your perfect eyes, or
who conserve their lucid framing?

*Throbbing boughs in August wind,
Sobbing, red above me, bend.*

I heard the earth hush
when you washed your hair
like after warm rain
and then you smiled
 and there were singing birds
and I captured one gently
and gave him to you
and like a little girl
in ignorant delight
you crushed him to your breast
until he died.

*Sobbing boughs, in August wind,
Throbbing red, above me bend.*

Ah then may you
who were warm summer rain
melting snow from the wind-cooling rose,
white in green-darkened glades here below,
know we lay beneath this tree
a million or more than a year ago,
and oh,

*Sobbing boughs above me bend,
Throbbing red in August wind,*

and something shudders through my veins
calling
 calling
in the sound of the apples
 falling

Canto 12

Ronald Wilcox

Lightning's no easy light to see alive reflecting
Joseph's mind : No magic bottle holds it nor do I
Believe it possible, try as I will to engage in mirrors
As images : how can I imagine what ignited flashing glass
As Joseph fell through the window of his martyrdom?
Keen shards, bright glints, encrypted revelations
Yet to be told but not by him. More foretelling
Could only be by those who followed him in faith,
Believing he had passed all means of streaming
Insights from God to those of Holy Priesthood
Who sign and signal and see expanding explanations
Like ringing lights tossed childlike upon a pond,
Its surface broken as if by diamonds flung
From a steady hand downward like radiant hail
To intervene in man's mind, sheer miracles
Mirroring prophecies like drops of God's thoughts
Ringing outward concentric reflections,
Creating waves, interference patterns
Of affirmations emerging in convergence,
Laws far beyond the child, man, but delighting
In a whee & a squeal dizzily reflecting ourselves,
The simple act engendered by prayers answered
In surprises, secret toys that instruct,
Not the no-nonsense-lessons of a schoolmarm
Strictly teaching with love-taps that sting,
But rather like a rainbow finding a lovely bowl
Of Cherries at its fingertips, a pond
Flaming sundown and shadow,
A drink that cools but never burns the tongue.

Tao Song

Ronald Wilcox

We create ourselves as we go:
memories folding inward
like bread dough kneaded,
brain convolutions, or
tangible patterns on the shore.

We lose ourselves as we move:
heat waves shimmering,
dry shapes underwater-like,
bent mirrors forming
dust-like, dust-like likenesses.

We see ourselves as we feel:
pulsing fooling senses,
the tree inside, leaving
bright roots, quicksilver,
heavy with themselves, us, life.

We know ourselves as we love:
other shadows beside us,
patterns fending themselves
against us, you, morning,
slipping inside our silences.

We save ourselves as we breath:
we pipes of ivory organs,
cathedrals of bones,
tooth-marks on the air,
we spoken once and gone.

We find ourselves in the way:
soul-puffs of dandelions,
beyond ourselves dancing,
weaving in the wind
these happy songs inside.



Emily McPhie
Let Us Put on the Armour of Light
Oil on panel

The Righteous Road

Ryan Shoemaker

My mom held her hand over the phone. “It’s Reed,” she whispered.

I took the phone and leaned against the countertop. “Hello,” I said. “Hello.”

“What, Derrick? No call?” Reed asked.

“I didn’t know you were home.” I lied.

In November, Reed sent a practically illegible postcard. He was always sending postcards—from Istanbul, Mumbai, Munich, Hong Kong—all written in a sharp, hurried scrawl. *Let’s get together over Christmas*, he wrote. *It’ll be like old times*. I’d studied the postcard with its photograph of a cramped and filthy open market in Jerusalem: bins of dried fruit and lentils, skinless goat and sheep carcasses suspended from steel hooks.

And then there were his letters, as long as novellas, self-aggrandizing rants stuffed in manila envelopes he’d decorated with intricate and baffling designs. The message was always the same: the minute details of his service among the impoverished and downtrodden masses, and his grandiose plans for a future that had us saving the world from tyranny and environmental annihilation. I couldn’t finish the letters, nor could I respond with equal enthusiasm. The letters were too rhetorical, trying to persuade me to recapture some embellished memories from years past. Unlike Reed, I’d grown up, moved on, gone to college. I was in my last year of law school at Brigham Young University. I was engaged.

“I knew you wouldn’t get the postcard,” Reed said. “They were going through my mail. Israeli secret service. The *Mossad*. Sometimes they’d follow me. But that’s life.” He said this as if the inconvenience of wire taps and surveillance were a fact of his workaday world.

“What’s important is that you’re here,” Reed said. “There’s someone who needs our help. Eight at my house. You in?”

I could only guess who this somebody might be: the Palestinians, Mexican border crossers, old growth Douglas firs, the spotted owl, hump-backed whales? I imagined one of Reed’s windy, vainglorious speeches, a call to action to save the oppressed or right some ecological wrong, and me sitting there nodding ecstatically as if I still devoutly believed in the cause. I was ready to tell Reed I had to catch a plane in the morning, which was true. I was flying to Aspen to spend the weekend with my fiancée, Cassie, and her family. But the thought of another night playing Scrabble with my parents while my dad grumbled about his irritable bowels and diminishing retirement seemed unbearable. Worse, I imagined Reed showing up on our doorstep.

“I’ll be there,” I said.

My mom was on me the second I hung up the phone. Behind her, the Christmas tree winked on and off in a way that hurt my eyes.

“I never liked Reed,” she said, “even when you were little boys. Always a bad influence. And all that mischief in high school. I never believed you thought of it yourself. His parents had a handful. Edna Swenson still calls me. She cries about him. Did you know that? She wonders where she and Bob went wrong. She blames herself.”

“Boys will be boys.” I said this to get a rise from her, not because I believed it. I was of the opinion, and had been for years, that Reed needed to move beyond the perpetual adolescent state he lived in.

“But when do boys grow up?” my mom said. She began rearranging the nativity on the coffee table. “You grew up. Maybe you can talk some sense into him.” She pointed a shepherd at me. “Tell him to go to college and stop giving his parents grief. Tell him to go back to church. He’s still young enough to serve a mission. It’s Edna’s dream.”

“I’m not going to talk some sense into him,” I said. I didn’t want the responsibility of steering Reed back into the fold. Besides, Reed worshipped Mother Earth. His congregation convened in the tops of trees while angry loggers cursed from below or outside third-world sweat shops where the oppressed toiled for a nickel an hour. His sacrament was a thick joint and cheap wine.

“You just be careful over there,” my mom said. “I can’t imagine he’s changed much. I’m sure he’s still the same old Reed.”

Her warning annoyed me. As if Reed had any influence on me. He was a vestige from another life, an adolescent, simple-minded incarnation of myself I would never relive.



We grew up in the same wooded subdivision outside Auburn, Washington, had the same teachers at Lake View Elementary, attended the same ward. The sand box, Sunday school, cub scouts, T-ball. When didn’t I know Reed?

He always had this deeper ecological and humanitarian consciousness. Our Sunday school teachers, sweet old ladies who brought us oatmeal cookies, stared incredulously as Reed decried the cruelty of Mosaic animal sacrifice or questioned the goodness of a god who required the massacre of every Canaanite living in the Promised Land. At twelve, Reed’s first youth talk in sacrament meeting was a five-minute criticism of God’s command to Adam and Eve to subdue the earth and have dominion over it. “Why can’t all His creations just have an equal relationship?” Reed asked. “Why can’t everything just be free and happy without people messing up the forests and the air?”

When we were fifteen, Reed’s ecological sense found a focus. It was one of those boring summer nights, with nothing to do but sit in Reed’s living room and flip through channels until we were catatonic. The only thing on was a Greenpeace paid advertisement asking for donations to protest the Icelandic seal hunts. I watched in horror as a hulking Nordic in a blue, fur-lined parka clubbed a pod of yelping harp seals to death. The saliva drained from my mouth and a nauseating weight bloomed in my lower guts. I wanted to turn the channel and forget this injustice, find a brainless comedy to purge the disquieting image of the doomed seals. Reed made a choking sound. His lower lip quivered and a glistening line of snot oozed from both nostrils. Tears streamed down his cheeks. I pretended not to notice.

And then in the middle of all that slaughter, the death blows and the freshly-skinned pelts, the camera shifted to four men dragging an activist across the blood-specked ice. Tall, with a blond beard and fierce blue eyes, the activist chanted something about stopping the slaughter. Lars Norgard, we later learned, Greenpeace activist and captain of the *Sea Shepherd*, a man of mythical proportions who'd made a name for himself by ramming a dozen whaling ships.

Wiping the snot from his nose, Reed said, as if in a trance, "That's what I want to be."

Reed called a toll-free number that flashed on the TV screen, and in a couple weeks some brochures came in the mail. We pored over each color photograph: the *Sea Shepherd* slicing through the glacial, turbulent North Atlantic; hippy kids chaining themselves to the bows of fishing boats; and Lars Norgard, with his thick blond beard, standing on the *Sea Shepherd*'s bridge, barking commands into a CB as he stared down a menacing Russian whaling ship. What more could two fifteen-year-old boys want? Adventure, danger, heroes and villains, the open seas. We wrote Lars and volunteered our services. We'd do anything: scrub toilets, cook food, do laundry, whatever he needed.

Lars actually wrote back. We sniffed the envelope and thought we could almost smell the briny sea. While applauding our ecological maturity and commitment to such a noble cause, Lars said by law we'd have to wait until we were eighteen. Until then, if we really wanted to stop the bastards, we should send money for fuel. "Keep believing and continue the fight," he wrote. "Patience. When the time comes, I'll have two spots on the *Sea Shepherd* for my eco-warriors." The words thrilled us.

We must have gotten on some mailing list. The pamphlets and newsletters filled Reed's mailbox: Animal Liberation Front, Amnesty International, PETA, Earth Liberation Front, Doctors without Borders, the Sierra Club. Shocked and sickened, we stared at the sharp color images of clear-cut wastelands and veal calves wallowing in their own feces and skeletal Somalians with distended bellies. Before, such abject suffering and unchecked destruction had only existed in the abstract—a brief image on the evening news. My parents had shielded me, I knew, and now I wanted to do something

about all this misery and devastation, something more than praying for the sick and afflicted or cleaning out flower vases at Mountain View Cemetery or repainting worn bleachers. All that seemed ridiculously inconsequential when I considered the dying whales and the vanquished ancient forests and the starving Somalians.

When we could finally drive, we skipped school one Friday to check out an animal experimentation protest Reed saw advertised in the *Seattle Weekly*. There were about a hundred people there, chanting, waving signs, and marching in front of a towering glass and steel skyscraper in downtown Bellevue. Someone dressed in a fluffy rabbit suit smeared with red paint writhed on the sidewalk. One man wore a dog costume and had Vaseline smeared over his eyes. He howled mournfully as a woman led him around by the paw. Truthfully, Reed and I thought it was a bit much, until we looked at some literature a protester handed us and saw the lab photos of the terrified beagles hanging from their paws, the kittens with electrodes protruding from their skulls, and a chimpanzee in an oxygen mask running on a caged treadmill. All that suffering so Meyer Chemical could sell us lip balm and antifungal cream. The protesters' outrage was contagious. Reed and I walked up to a middle-aged man in dreadlocks who seemed in charge and asked if we could help. Smiling and then giving us both a bro hug, he handed us signs. For the rest of the afternoon we marched, blocked sidewalk traffic, and loudly upbraided anyone who dared enter the building.

After that, we were sneaking up to Seattle a couple times a month to march and pass out literature at anti-fur rallies or knock on doors for Amnesty International. At night, we'd go out with other activists to spray-paint butcher shops and furriers with pithy slogans like *Feed it, don't eat it* or *Are clothes to kill for?* Afterwards, we'd hang out in some grimy apartment in the University District or near Capitol Hill and listen to rousing environmental and humanitarian escapades while Phish played in the background and a thick joint and a jug of wine made the rounds. We partook because these were the fruits of the earth, or so they told us, a shared sacrament for nature's children meant to enlighten the mind and strengthen the body. If I experienced any guilt after that first toke, these assurances certainly mitigated it, as did my budding awareness that as an only

child I felt controlled and smothered. I wanted an identity apart from church and my parents' conservative politics. They bored me. No hobbies, no friends they went out with, no interest in music and art. If that was righteousness, I was pretty sure I didn't want it.

Soon, Reed and I stopped eating meat and dairy. We refused to wear our black leather church shoes, refused to wear any brand that exploited its workers in third-world sweat shops.

At home, my parents said little about my new-found activism, probably believing it would pass. Reed, however, felt morally compelled to win over his siblings and parents to his way of thinking. He saw the roots of their ecological and humanitarian apathy in what he called the naïve and narrow-minded strictures of Mormonism. Suddenly, Reed's rhetoric burned with anti-religious sentiments: religion as a social construct, as a mental illness, as the opium of the masses. He could go on for hours, until even I couldn't take it anymore. His home became a den of acrimony, screaming, and vague threats from Reed's parents, a constant tension simmering just below the surface. Soon, Reed refused to attend church and early morning seminary. This appealed to me, too, for no other reason than that I longed for more sleep. My parents, probably sensing Reed's influence, offered unrestricted use of my dad's old Plymouth Reliant and a Shell gas card if I didn't miss a day of church or seminary. Even Reed liked the idea. Because without a car, how would we get to Seattle?

And then in January of our senior year, Reed didn't show up for school on Monday. At lunch, I called his house. No one answered. When I got home that afternoon, my parents sat solemnly on the living room couch. My mom dabbed at her red, weepy eyes with a crumpled Kleenex. My dad, who shouldn't have been home for another two hours, stood and pointed to the love seat. "Derrick, we need to talk," he said. My heart pounded.

He said Sister Swenson had called that morning. Reed and two others had been arrested Sunday afternoon for vandalizing an Albertson's meat counter in Seattle. But there was more. Brother and Sister Swenson, no doubt distraught and suspicious after receiving this news, had gone through Reed's drawers and discovered a joint and a bag of dried shrooms. "Do you know anything about those?" my dad asked. "Are you and Reed using drugs?"

Staring at our beige carpet, I denied everything, denied vehemently while suddenly realizing my parents knew. I was sure.

Reed was now on a plane to New Mexico, my dad said, where he'd spend the next ten weeks in a wilderness treatment program for drug addiction and behavioral issues. He insisted, at least while Reed was gone, that I take a break from the activism and from our little cadre of hippy friends at school. Now I'd eat lunch with the kids from church. Did I understand? my dad wanted to know. Or did they need to go upstairs and look through my drawers and closet? I stared at his polished Wingtips and nodded quickly.

The next day at school, the church kids—all bores and blind followers of the faith, Reed and I thought—invited me to eat lunch with them, an invitation arranged, I was sure, by my dad and Bishop McKinley. I accepted their invitation, hoping it might allay some of my parents' suspicions. And I'll admit, after two years of fiercely debating the environmental or humanitarian issue *de jour* over lunch with Reed and our friends, I actually enjoyed the cheery, inconsequential conversations about church dances, BYU football, and future mission calls. I sat with them for a month, though I never told Reed.

His first postcard came two weeks after his abrupt departure. "Living off the fat of the land," he wrote. "Stars so pretty. Grateful to the Creator for all good things. Searching for a heart at peace." A week later another postcard: "At harmony with the world. Love and respect for all people." He'd included an enigmatic postscript, a quote from Edward Albee's *The Monkeywrench Gang*, a book we'd read at least three times. The postscript said: "Because we like the taste of freedom, comrades. Because we like the smell of danger."

It wasn't a surprise, then, at least to me, when Reed escaped.

After a search of the area around the camp yielded no Reed, the Sheriff's department got involved, blazing out into the high desert on motorcycles and ATVs, even in a helicopter flown up from Albuquerque. Search and rescue volunteers came from Santa Fe. With no sign of Reed after three days, his parents flew to New Mexico. The ward fasted and prayed for Reed's safe return. My parents, I'm sure assuming Reed was dead, asked if I'd like to meet with a therapist. Not necessary, I told them, believing Reed was out there living his wilderness dream, holed up in a warm shelter,

feasting on pine nuts and cattails as he meditated away the hours. But as the days passed, I considered the possibility that Reed might be gone. At night, worried and unable to sleep, I found myself kneeling at my bedside, something I hadn't done in a long time, praying to God for my friend's safe return. I somehow knew, with an assurance I couldn't articulate—more a feeling than anything else—that Reed was all right.

And then a week later Reed called his parents from Pueblo, Colorado. Incredibly, he'd endured a freezing, high-desert night and walked fifty miles to the interstate, then hitchhiked the 350 miles to Pueblo. He was staying with some guy who was president of the local clean air conservation group.

Reed's parents drove to Pueblo and pleaded with him to finish the treatment program. He refused. He wanted to go home. His parents wouldn't hear of it. Reed had strained the family almost to the point of rupture. They quickly reached a compromise with Reed, one that showed their desperation. Until the end of the school year, they'd rent a studio apartment for Reed near Auburn High, pay the utilities, and give him a food allowance. He could come home once a week for Sunday dinner. Not a bad arrangement, Reed thought.

Every day after school, we smoked weed there, and Reed would often articulate his vision of our lives after graduation, how we'd travel the world over in search of perilous humanitarian and ecological causes to throw ourselves into. It was just talk, or so I thought, the impractical, idealistic machinations of a young man on the cusp of the adult world. Realistically, the next year I saw us at Green River Community College, done with the weed and the booze, hitting the books. And then at nineteen, I'd always assumed Reed and I would do what had been ingrained in us from birth by cheery primary songs and a thousand talks and Sunday school lessons. The mission. I'd meant to bring it up with Reed: the mission as an altruistic adventure, two years serving the indigent gentry of some third-world backwater, learning their language, teaching them to love one another. What was wrong with that? I also understood the unspoken stigma we'd bear if we didn't go.

Though I hadn't told Reed, I was tired of the Seattle activists and their scene. Loud, pushy, self-righteousness, they disliked almost

everything and would go on and on about anarchy and environmental destruction as if they knew nothing else. Ragged clothes and bad teeth, many looked indistinguishable from the homeless and unemployed begging dollars at freeway off ramps and downtown intersections. I didn't want the ascetic's life, though I didn't aspire to excess and luxury either. I wanted a few comforts, a life equal to or perhaps a little better than my parents'. A decent home for my family. Maybe a nice car. Nothing wrong with that.

But if anything, Reed was becoming more extreme, more dedicated to the cause. He had other plans for us.

It was a Friday at the end of May, two weeks to graduation, when he waved a hand-written letter in my face and said, "You want out of this hole? Here's your ticket." We were at his apartment, smoking a joint. Kurt Cobain screamed from the stereo. I squinted at the letter through a pall of smoke.

"Freedom and adventure. Saving the world," Reed said. "Right? Everything we've talked about for the last three years."

Reed, always audacious, always sniffing out the next adventure, had written Lars Norgard to remind him of his promise, and then, to prove we were ready for a life of activism, he'd detailed our activities from the last three years and explained we were eager to take it to the next level. Lars wrote back. We were in luck. There were two spots on the *Sea Shepherd*, but we'd have to act quickly. He'd be docked at the Tacoma Marina for a couple hours on Monday, June 13th. And then Lars warned us that this was the most dangerous work in the world, and for that reason he couldn't guarantee our safety. Reed read those words, smiled, and then read them again.

I feigned excitement for the next two weeks as we bought rucksacks from the army surplus store in Seattle and stuffed them with everything Lars said we needed: wool pants and sweaters, rain gear, lug-soled boots, waders, sunscreen. I smiled as we concocted our plan to meet that Monday morning at the bus stop behind JC Penny. I'd park the Reliant on Main Street, leave a note for our parents on the driver's seat, and then we'd take the bus to Tacoma. I praised the soundness of the plan, all the while knowing I never intended to meet Reed.

That Monday, I lay in bed and listened to the phone ring and ring and then go to the answering machine. I was alone, my dad at work, my mom gone to a church quilting project. “Where are you?” Reed’s voice boomed through the house. “Derrick!” He called again and again. I heard him through the pillow I’d put over my head. Finally, I picked up the phone. I owed Reed at least that.

“You sleep in?” he shouted. “Are you sick?”

I cleared my throat. “I’m not sure. . . .” I struggled to finish the sentence. “That life. I’m not sure I want that life.” I tried to explain: the transient, hand-to-mouth existence, the pessimism and never-ending activism. “I don’t want to give up being Mormon,” I told Reed. “I mean, I thought after all this we’d go on missions.”

“Missions?” Reed said. He seemed confused. “Why would we go on missions?” And then he drew in a sharp breath. “You believe,” he said slowly. “You believe everything they ever taught us.”

I believed, believed weakly, I knew, perhaps believed through association only, a subconscious absorption of faith as I slept through church and early morning seminary. I believed, maybe, because my parents believed, because despite all their buttoned-up, conservative stuffiness they’d loved me selflessly and unconditionally. I imagined that God, if anything, might be an extension of them. I wondered if the church would let me go on a mission, after all the weed and the alcohol and the vandalism done in the name of saving the planet. I’d have to make amends. Tell my parents everything. Meet weekly with Bishop McKinley.

“I won’t even get into how ridiculous it all is,” Reed said. I could hear the disgust in his voice. “Angels and gold plates. But that’s not even the worse part. It’s the culture, Derrick. The Mormon factory. You go on that mission and you walk straight in, and when you come out, you’re just like them. You’ll dress like them and think like them and talk like them. You’ll live in your little bubble. You see that, Derrick? Is that what you want?”

“But what if we do it differently?” I said. The idea suddenly came to me. I held the portable phone tightly to my ear and paced the living room. “Not like our parents. What if we did it our way and still believed?”

“Do it differently?” Reed said. “It’s not in the program, Derrick. They don’t want that.”

I heard the hiss of air breaks and then a monotone voice crackle over a speaker.

“Derrick,” Reed said. His voice trembled. “Come on. There’s still time. You don’t think we can do some good? There’re other ways to do good.”

I felt a rawness in the back of my throat. “I’m sorry,” I said. “I’m sorry.”

That night I called Reed’s father. There was no anger or accusations. Brother Swenson thanked me, and that was it. Reed was eighteen. What could he do? I knew the truth. He was glad Reed was gone.

I spent the year at Green River Community College, attended the stake singles’ ward, made restitution and repented for everything I’d done. I received a mission call to serve in Rio de Janeiro. After, I enrolled at BYU and earned a degree in political science. And then law school. I hadn’t seen Reed in seven years, but in that time, a month had never passed without a letter or postcard from him.



At eight, I stood on Reed’s doorstep. Loud Arabic music rattled the windows, strings and a high androgynous voice locked in a repetitive groove. I knocked hard and waited.

The music stopped, and then a moment later Reed stood in the doorway, smiling. He wore a Greenpeace t-shirt, faded jeans, and a white knitted beanie. “Seven years,” he said, taking my arm and pulling me into the house. “Seven years and rarely a letter. And look at you now: the lawyer in embryo. You gonna stick it to those fat cats in their corporate towers?”

“Sure,” I said. I could only imagine the selfless narrative Reed had conjured up for me, the rabid environmental lawyer saving the world from greedy land developers and wicked industrialists intent on melting the ice caps and decimating every forest. Actually, I was leaning toward corporate law. My dad agreed. The hours were long,

but the money was good. The previous two summers I'd clerked in Latham and Watkins's Los Angeles office, and I was optimistic they'd offer me a job after law school. I wanted stability. I wanted to provide a comfortable life for my family. I wanted to be a partner. But I knew these achievements meant nothing to Reed. He'd think there was no adventure in it, nothing of the bravado and altruism we'd dreamed about and discussed years ago while smoking a joint in his apartment. Worse, he'd think I'd become one of them, sold out for the all-powerful dollar.

"And you, the world traveler," I said, because I knew that's what Reed wanted, a little opening to gush about his adventures, to sing his environmental consciousness and deep empathy for others' suffering.

"I've been a few places," he said, ushering me toward the couch. "But it's good to be home, right? The old stomping ground. You want something to eat or drink?" he asked. "Some juice or cookies?"

"No, I actually just ate. I just came to say hello."

He insisted. "Come on. What can I get you?"

"Really, I'm fine," I said.

"You have to try this tamarind nectar I brought back from Gaza," Reed said.

He was halfway to the kitchen before I could protest.

"How are you parents?" I asked, hoping they'd materialize from somewhere. I was uncomfortable around Reed. After so many years, he felt like a stranger.

"Still believing their conservative conspiracy theories," Reed shouted from the kitchen. "Still praying Reagan will rise from the grave. God help us all. Actually, they took my sister and her husband to Crystal Mountain for the night. They're sick of me already."

Reed returned with a plate of baklava and two glasses brimming with an opaque liquid. He handed me a glass and then set the plate on the coffee table. He took a long drink, smacking his lips and looking at me expectantly. The liquid had the sheen of motor oil and smelled slightly fermented. I took a sip and cringed as the sweetness hit my fillings.

"Delicious, right?" Reed asked. He emptied his glass.

“It’s different,” I said, taking another small drink. I looked around the living room, at the beige carpet and the black leather Lazyboy. Nothing had changed in ten years. In fact, I was sitting on the same brown microfiber sectional where we’d first seen Lars Norgard protesting the harp seal hunts. “How’s Lars Norgard?” I asked. “What’s he like?”

“A phony,” Reed said quickly and unequivocally. He picked at something under his thumbnail. “‘Fuel to help us get the bastards,’ my ass. The man’s a gambling addict. And”—Reed knocked his knuckles together—“he’s a carnivore. An environmental phony. I was done with him a long time ago.”

“Well, it’s good to see you,” I said. “Really good.” I tried to think of more to say, to dredge up some nugget from years ago to carry the conversation, some innocuous memory we could bat around for a minute. I asked about Israel.

“Palestine,” Reed said. “The Zionist propagandists want to erase history, like no one lived there before 1948. Gaza and the West Bank are concentration camps. Genocide. People dying every day and no one hears about it. I wanted to change that.”

I was confused, but not surprised. “I thought you were studying Arabic. Didn’t you mention that in a letter?”

“Just a cover,” Reed said. He put his hand over his mouth and laughed. “My ticket into the country. A lowly student at Berzeit University. My mom was thrilled. I didn’t tell her that I was a human shield with this group called *Adalah*. And then the Zionist pricks caught wind of what I was doing: Israeli Secret Service. They think I’m an insurgent. Can you believe that?”

“You were a human shield?” I said. I thought of long-haired, wild-eyed hippies throwing themselves in front of bulldozers. “Don’t people die doing that?” I could only imagine the swollen image Reed had of himself: the solitary, undeterred student halting that massive tank in Tiananmen Square, the revolutionary, a savior to the oppressed.

“It happens,” Reed said stoically. “It’s war and war has its martyrs. Put your bodies upon the gears and upon the wheels, upon the levers, upon all the apparatus.” Reed shoved a piece of baklava

into his mouth. "At Ramallah and Nablus we stopped the Israelis. We built roadblocks. But that's not all. Remember I always said I wanted to fight in a revolution?"

Reed was on a roll now, warming to the subject. When he reached for another chunk of baklava, I glanced at my watch. I thought of letting him go on for another fifteen minutes before I made my exit.

"None of that passive-aggressive shit," Reed said. "I wanted the real thing. Tear gas and Molotov cocktails. I knew these guys in *Hamas* and sometimes I'd go out with them at night. Patrol, they called it. What a rush. I even got something to show for it." He inched up his sleeve to show me a gauze bandage wrapped tightly around his bicep, and then he unwound it with a practiced dalliance. As the gauze fell away, I saw a crusted red gash no longer than an inch. "The kid standing next to me got it in the stomach," Reed said. "I don't think he made it."

"Someone shot you?" I was incredulous. I wanted to laugh.

"An Israeli sniper." Reed cradled his arm as if it were a badge of honor. "Revolution, brother, the real thing," he said. "Twelve-year-old kids blowing themselves to pieces on Israeli buses. They're committed. You have to admire that."

Reed stood up and walked into the kitchen, raising his voice so I could hear. "Oppression. That's what it is. People should never be oppressed." He returned with a full glass of tamarind nectar. "Bul-lies," he went on, staring down at the glass as if reading something in its black surface. He walked to the window. "Isn't the world full of them, from the playground to the corporate office to the White House? Aren't they everywhere?"

"Everywhere," I said, not in agreement or denial, but merely because that's what Reed wanted to hear. His breath came in short bursts. I looked at my watch and wondered if my parents were in bed yet.

Reed paced the room, passing the glass from one hand to the other. "When I was in Venice last summer, I ran into Liz Schuller at this bar near San Marco's Square. What were the chances, right? You remember Liz from high school? Carly Cantwell was her best friend. You remember Carly. Your little crush."

“Carly Cantwell,” I said, her name strange on my tongue. We’d had some classes together our junior and senior years. We’d even studied together a few times. She was a shy girl, a state champion swimmer with curly blond hair and a lean body tempered through long hours of cutting through water. I had a crush on her, sure, one of those pubescent musings that never comes to anything. She wanted to be a doctor, I remembered. I wondered about her sometimes when searching my bookcase and seeing the green and gold binding of my high school yearbook. “Did Liz mention Carly?” I asked.

“Oh, yeah, buddy, she mentioned Carly,” Reed said. “In fact, I think she told me a little more than she wanted to. *In vino veritas*, if you know what I mean.”

“What’d she say?” I tried to sound casual, but I suddenly found it difficult to breathe. I wondered if something had happened to Carly.

Reed stopped his pacing and looked at me. “You really want to know? You ready for this? Denny Bradshaw raped her the summer after our senior year. It happened at a house party. He cornered her in a bedroom. Sure, she tried to fight him off tooth and nail, but Denny’s huge. And in the middle of it some girl walks in and then just turns around and leaves. Doesn’t do a damn thing. Carly’s crying for help and the girl bolts.”

I stared at my hands. They suddenly felt cold. “Did she tell the police?” I asked. I wanted to hear that justice had been done, that Denny had been punished, though I already knew the answer.

Reed sat on the coffee table and leaned in toward me. “You see, that’s the kicker, my friend. Right as Denny’s zipping up, he tells Carly he’ll kill her if she ever tells. She’s in shock for about a week before Liz convinces her to report what happened. But the police won’t do a thing. That’s the legal system for you. They’ll give you all the justice you want unless it interferes with what Daddy Bradshaw’s passing under the table.”

Denny Bradshaw was a grade above us, a high school athlete whose father owned the largest construction company in Auburn and sat on the school board. I remembered Denny as an arrogant athlete with his shoulder lowered, pushing through the school hallways as if moving down the field, shouting at anyone in his way. At

least once a week at lunch he'd stop at our table with a couple jock friends to wave a hamburger in our faces and laugh hysterically. Once he overturned a garbage can on top of our heads. After high school, he went to Washington State on a football scholarship, but only lasted a couple of years before dropping out and moving back to Auburn to work in the family business. I'd heard a rumor that his father cut him off for embezzling money.

"And you know the girl who walks in on the rape," Reed said, "the only witness who can put Denny away? She's a secretary at Bradshaw Construction. Started a few weeks after the rape. A real coincidence. And what about all the other victims. Liz said there were always rumors."

"It's not right," I said. I looked down at my fisted hands.

"Of course it's not right. It's a travesty." Reed walked to the window and glowered at the darkness beyond the glass. "And with guys like Denny, the great injustice is that it keeps happening. I'd bet my life on it. Seven years after high school, you think he's changed? The man's a predator and we're going to stop him."

Reed turned and stared at me, as if expecting me to say something.

"What? You want to blindside him in an alley?" I asked. "Sneak up behind him with a tire iron? Is that what you're suggesting?"

"Hell no," Reed said. "I'd never harm a living thing. That's not what I do. I want to shame him. I was thinking about a little body work on his car, leave a message he'll understand, let him know somebody's watching."

"Reed, come on." I tried to laugh. "This is crazy. Really."

"He works at that old bar on Main Street," Reed said. "The Mecca. He parks in the back. I've done some reconnaissance. One or two minutes. In and out. We'll leave him a nice note."

"I'm in law school," I said. "We get caught and I'm ruined. I couldn't take the bar."

"Is that all you care about now?" Reed asked. "Come on. If we don't do it, then who will?"

"It just doesn't feel right," I said.

Reed laughed. "Doesn't feel right? Isn't there a higher law? The spirit of the law? Don't you believe that? And what about everything

we used to believe in? Making the world a better place? Helping those who can't help themselves? Don't you believe that anymore?" Reed straightened his face. "Okay, think about it this way: what about that rapist running wild out there? Does that feel right? What about some justice for Carly? Doesn't she deserve that?" When I didn't say anything, Reed kept talking. "Don't you see this shit every day on the news? The Denny Bradshaws of the world pushing their way through life, knocking people to the ground, mouthing off, wanting a free ride? Don't you remember what he called us in high school? How he'd push us around? And let me ask you this. Didn't it always piss you off that you couldn't do a damn thing about it? But what if we could? Tell me, Derrick, and be honest, how would it feel to stick it to Denny? To send him a message?"

I didn't say anything, just stared at my hands, but I knew it would be wonderful, sheer bliss.

"You want to do what's right by the law," Reed said. "I respect that. I value that. But I'm going."



Two weeks later Reed called me in Provo.

"The team's back together," he said, "fighting injustice and oppression. Just like old times." His voice sounded as if it were percolating up from the bottom of the ocean. "Hey, I'm in El Salvador until June and then it's off to Honduras. Maybe you've already heard about the exploitation down here, about the sweatshops. Nike, Reebok, Gap. We're talking nineteenth-century England, children working their fingers to nubs for a nickel an hour. So how about it?"

I felt the weight of the phone on my shoulder, and then the heat building between my ear and the molded plastic.

"Correct me if I'm wrong," Reed said, "but maybe you're not interested."

I moved the phone to my other ear.

"I hope," Reed continued, "that you don't hold something against me."

"No, it's not that," I said, and then I thought: *It's what you are and what I am now. I don't want to be you. I can't be you.* I remembered

Denny's car, not the souped-up muscle car I'd expected, but a beige Ford Taurus station wagon, clean and well-maintained, the kind of car my dad would buy. A small photograph in a plastic frame hung from the rearview mirror. A woman in a white dress holding a smiling baby, and behind her lush trees and lawn.

There was a momentary roar on the other end of the line—a passing truck or bus. I imagined the tropical heat, the crowds of perspiring bodies, dark skin, the chatter of a language I didn't understand, the odor of rot and food permeating the streets.

“Derrick, I know what you're thinking,” Reed said. “You're thinking, ‘He made me do it. He made me smash that car. The sinner made me sin.’ Have you become one of them, Derrick? You gonna say your prayers tonight and write your tithing check and feel so wonderful because your God will right every wrong in the life to come? If you believe that then you're a bigger sinner than I am.”

I unplugged the phone and walked to my bedroom. It was snowing outside, white flakes collecting on the bare branches and dead, yellow lawns. A car passed. The apartment was silent, my roommate gone, shopping or studying in the law library.

From the closet's top shelf I took down a cardboard box full of Reed's letters. Each envelope was decorated with a dizzying arrangement of intricate designs: arabesques, paisleys, loopy-loops twisting and falling in on themselves in a practically untraceable pattern. I saw in the elaborate patterns a complex network of roots going back through the years, back to someone I didn't want to be or think about, back to Reed.

For the next half hour I fed the letters into the shredder under my desk and listened to its high-pitched whine as the paper disappeared into the machine. I found myself repeating something I'd once read, perhaps something I'd taught in Rio's crumbling *favelas*. *To rid our lives of sin, we must destroy the roots of the sin.*



I never imagined Reed living a long life. He didn't either. In high school, he enjoyed mulling over the possible scenarios of his passing. They were all heroic and horribly violent: pulverized by an explosive

harpoon as he protected whales in the northern Atlantic; the human shield ground to a bloody pulp beneath an Israeli tank; hacked to pieces by a crazed band of Islamic militants as they overran a Red Cross hospital in Sudan. For Reed, anything less would have been unworthy of his life, and so he had lived, always searching out that dangerous, altruistic cause to throw himself into.

So when I answered the phone one Saturday morning and heard my dad's voice—strained, fighting for composure—I knew what he'd say.

"Bob and Edna Swenson called this morning," he said. "It's Reed. He's dead."

I stood in the living room and watched Cassie at the kitchen table, laptop open, searching online for the best stroller and crib money could buy. We'd been married about a year and owned a house in Burbank's Magnolia Park. I was an associate in Latham and Watkins's Los Angeles office.

My dad said the American Embassy in Honduras didn't tell Bob and Edna much, just that Reed was there with a human rights group to protest the treatment of workers at a textile mill outside Tegucigalpa: picket lines, boycotts, even sabotage of some of the looms. The Honduran police didn't know if Reed's death and the protests were connected, but they found him, stabbed three times in the chest, a block from his hostel, pockets emptied, shoes stolen.

"Do they know anything else?" I asked.

"His knuckles were bruised," my dad said. "He didn't go easily." And that's what I wanted to hear, that Reed went out fighting.

And then my dad said: "Bob and Edna asked if you'd speak at the funeral. Will you do that? It would mean a lot to them."

Outside, birds chortled in our lemon tree. Down the street someone gunned an engine. "Sure," I said. "If that's what they want."

I put down the phone and walked to the window. Parked in the driveway, my silver BMW glowed in the mid-morning sun. Cassie's yellow tea roses and Santa Barbara daisies edged the front yard. Later, our gardeners, Miguel and Hector, would come to cut the lawn and hedge the bushes. Like my pioneer ancestors, I'd prospered, cultivated my garden, sanctified materialism. I'd served an honorable mission, pursued education, found gainful employment,

married in the temple, paid a generous tithe, and would soon be a father. I was second counselor in my ward's bishopric. I should have felt like a success.

"Who was that?" Cassie asked.

I turned to look at her. I could already see the small bump pushing at her waistline. "My dad," I said. "Somebody I knew from high school died. He called to tell me."

"A friend?" Cassie asked.

I lifted my laptop and walked to the couch. I'd never told Cassie about Reed, never mentioned our years in high school, nor did my parents. There was something unspoken between me and my parents, as if we'd agreed those years never happened. There were other things I didn't tell Cassie. I didn't tell her that twice a year I sent a check to Amnesty International and Earth First!. I didn't tell her how with our friends and at church, there were some opinions I didn't share.

"Just someone I knew," I said. "My parents want me at the funeral, as a favor to the family."

"Are you all right?" Cassie asked.

"I'm fine," I said. "We weren't close."

I needed to buy a plane ticket, pack a bag. In a couple of days, I'd be home, sleeping in my old bed, eating my mom's food. And then the funeral, the bright chapel and drab organ music, and of course Reed, laid out in a dark suit and white shirt, hair trimmed—finally the missionary his mother had dreamed of. I'd stand at the pulpit and say something kind and comforting, something about Reed's love for all living things. But I couldn't say everything. Looking out at all those devout, grieving people who believed Reed's life was a tragedy, how could I say that maybe he'd died a brave man, a rich man, a righteous man?

Confident Interpretations of Silence

David Conley Nelson. *Moroni and the Swastika: Mormons in Nazi Germany*. Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 2015. 432 pp. Hardcover: \$29.95. ISBN 978-0806146683.

Reviewed by Jonathan Green

David Conley Nelson's *Moroni and the Swastika*, although based on the author's doctoral dissertation, is not at heart a scholarly book. It is, rather, a polemical work dressed up in academic regalia. While its footnotes and bibliography give it the appearance of scholarly earnest, its primary commitment is not to placing events in historical context, or to giving a balanced account of primary sources and secondary literature, or to weighing the evidence for or against a given proposition, but to launching accusations against Mormons in Nazi Germany and LDS Church leaders in the United States.

Nelson advances two theses in this book. He first contends that, unlike other sects of comparable size in Nazi Germany, both individual Mormons and the Church as an institution enthusiastically collaborated with the Nazi government to an extent that subjects them to a degree of culpability for the crimes of Nazism; and second, that the Church has distorted postwar commemorations of the Nazi era in order to conceal its collaborationist past. According to Nelson, Mormons in Nazi Germany did not risk persecution or live in a climate of fear, due in part to the Mormons' and Nazis' appreciation of each other's similar worldviews. The Church's dealings with the Nazi government represented "pandering obedience to a godless, tyrannical state" that inflicted an enduring "mark on the Mormon psyche" and subjected postwar Mormon emigrants from Germany to "collective guilt" (343–44). Nelson's argument rests on a comparison with the experiences of other sects under Nazi rule, for which Nelson did not undertake original comparative research. He relies instead on the work of Christine Elizabeth King, principally her 1982 book *The Nazi State and the New Religions: Five Case Studies in Non-Conformity*, which compares the survival strategies employed by Mormons, Christian

Scientists, Seventh-day Adventists, the New Apostolic Church, and Jehovah's Witnesses.

Nelson's contrast of Mormon collaborationism over and against other sects' doing "only what was necessary to survive" (98) represents a gross distortion of King's research (who nevertheless provides a back-cover blurb for *Moroni and the Swastika*). In reading King, one discovers not Mormon uniqueness but rather a broad similarity in attempts at compromise and accommodation among all sects, with the important exception of the Jehovah's Witnesses, who chose the path of resistance and suffered mightily for it. After Hitler came to power in 1933, "All sought to explain and justify themselves to the Nazis, even the Witnesses, and all hoped that their expressions of good will could save them from trouble."¹ The four sects that avoided conflict with the government all emphasized that their members were law-abiding citizens and sought to point out areas of shared belief. While Nelson is indignant over the removal of Jewish terminology from Mormon devotional material, all the sects did so in accordance with Nazi policy; King finds that the Mormons were no better or worse than the others in their treatment of Jews. All the sects refrained from criticizing Nazi policies, and members of each sect made positive statements about the Nazi government to their co-religionists abroad. All the sects, but particularly the Mormons and Christian Scientists, benefitted from international visitors who demonstrated the sect's political influence. The survival strategies of each sect took particular forms: "Mormons continued to forge cultural links with the government, Adventists offered increased co-operation in the state charity and welfare schemes, and the New Apostolic Church organized church parades to incorporate the S.S. and S.A. uniforms and flags."² Nelson's silence regarding the New Apostolic Church is telling; in King's view, the New Apostolic Church was the most emphatic supporter of Nazism among the sects, but Nelson avoids any mention of it. In her conclusions about the five sects, King writes, "For all of them, the survival of their movement was of paramount importance. For all of them there were costs attached to their choice."³

King thus finds the Mormons unique not in their survival strategies but in their success at employing them so as to be largely ignored by the Nazis. For King, this result is surprising, as the Mormons, a millennial sect identified with the United States and represented by a visible missionary force, had much to fear in 1933 from a Nazi government that was hostile to religion in general and to smaller sects in particular. A sect's survival, King notes, did not depend on a rational analysis of a sect's teachings but rather on the personal views of top Nazi officials. The Mormons' survival, in King's view, remains to a certain extent mysterious. (King is, however, not a particularly astute student of Mormon history; in her view, the Nazis were impressed by the Church's "sophistication and wealth,"⁴ which she surmises took the form of substantial payments from the American Church into German welfare programs, for which no evidence survives and at a time when the financial condition of the Church in the United States was perilous.)

The substance of Nelson's first argument in *Moroni and the Swastika*, namely that comparison with other sects shows that Mormon attempts to secure good relations with the Nazi state went beyond the needs of survival, therefore rests on a dramatic misrepresentation of its only source of comparative evidence. Not only did the other sects undertake similar steps, but the personal and irrational nature of the outcome made it impossible to know when the efforts had been sufficient. Like King before him, Nelson is unable to document the reasoning behind the Nazi regime's indifference toward the Church. From the perspective of the present, many of the steps taken between 1933 and 1939 by various mission presidents and Church leaders to secure the good graces of Nazi leaders seem clumsy or even appalling, but one of them, or some set of them, or all of them combined made it possible for the Church to avoid most Nazi interference. Nelson is able to claim that Mormons in Nazi Germany did not live in a climate of fear, only by minimizing the several incidents of friction with the government that did occur, downplaying the effectiveness of the Gestapo, and entirely ignoring the statement made by a Gestapo officer to Hamburg district president Otto

Berndt following his three-day interrogation: “When we have this war behind us, when we have the time to devote to it and after we have eliminated the Jews, you Mormons are next!”⁵ Nelson asserts that Mormon accommodation of the Nazi government rested on ideological similarities between the two, but a broader and more balanced study would very likely find that the Church consistently pursued a strategy of political neutrality and good relations with governments of all kinds throughout the twentieth century as the modern Church stepped onto an international stage.

Nelson’s second thesis in *Moroni and the Swastika* is that the Church distorts how the experience of German Mormons during the Nazi period is remembered, using stories of resistance and suffering to hide a collaborationist reality. Nelson adopts the term “memory beacon” from the work of Douglas Peifer, but Nelson’s usage of the term is quite distinct from Peifer’s. For Peifer, memory beacons are “resonant symbols meaningful to the general public” that are rooted less in actual events than in the symbolic function of the past event in the popular imagination; as such, memory beacons are constructed and contested.⁶ In Nelson’s usage, however, the status of a memory beacon is inherent in the historical object itself, with no formation through public imagination required. Nelson refers to the teenaged Helmuth Hübener, who undertook an anti-Nazi propaganda campaign in Hamburg in 1943 and was executed for it, as a memory beacon not because of how he has been memorialized but because of the virtuousness of his resistance. Consequently, Nelson regards treatment of Hübener’s resistance in Mormon literature and by Mormon scholars as attempts to darken or distort Hübener’s “bright, redeeming light” (288) rather than as contributions to the construction of Hübener as a memory beacon in Peifer’s sense of the term. Nelson even maintains that Hübener is not as famous today as the Stauffenberg plot or the White Rose resistance group primarily because of manipulative efforts by the Church and individual Mormons (337), entirely overlooking that the German public imagination, where Mormon influence is negligible, is the primary site for commemorating resistance.

The most original contribution of *Moroni and the Swastika* is the chapter on Mormon authors' and scholars' interest in Hübener, beginning with a 1976 play by Brigham Young University professor Thomas Rogers. The play was well received on campus, but Church and university leaders prevented the play from touring. To a contemporary observer, this resistance is surprising, as one expects a community to celebrate its heroes and is puzzled by a reluctance to do so. Nelson points to various official and unofficial justifications, primary among them a desire to avoid offending Utah's German-American community, including former Nazis living among them. In this context, it is enlightening to consider another statement by Otto Berndt (and again not mentioned by Nelson) made in a letter to the *Improvement Era* in May 1969 (spelling as in original): "If you try to make a hero out of Helmuth Huebner, how do you classify those who did follow the laws of the land? Are they cowards? What would you call them?"⁷ As district president, Berndt had reigned in the worst excesses of Arthur Zander, Hübener's branch president and a vigorous supporter of Nazism, and Berndt insisted in his letter to the *Improvement Era* that he had always been opposed to Hitler and would have aided Hübener if he had known about what he and his friends were doing. But even Berndt, praised as courageous by Nelson, was opposed to making Hübener into a hero, not out of a concern for unreformed Nazis but in consideration of those who had found themselves trapped in a dilemma with no good solutions. Efforts to come to grips with the past such as the decades-long process of German *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* are not nearly as simple as picking out the heroes and the villains.

Distorted readings of comparative evidence and misapplied theoretical frameworks are not without precedent in scholarly publishing, but *Moroni and the Swastika* is further weakened by several flaws of workmanship, with the following intended as representative examples rather than an exhaustive list. Although several key points hinge on the precise wording of a German document, Nelson never provides the original text or identifies the source of his translations. For an excerpt from a biographical profile of Reed Smoot in *Der Stern*, the Church's German-language

periodical (which Nelson implausibly attributes to Smoot himself and incorrectly cites as the issue from 1 March rather than 15 November 1935), Nelson uses the same translation, including the same bracketed word and ellipses (218–19), as appears in Keele and Tobler’s article.⁸ If Nelson is using other scholars’ translations, he should acknowledge their work by citing it.

Nelson’s omitting the original text when discussing German documents is made all the more worrisome by frequent flaws concerning basic matters of German language, culture, and geography. The city is not “Bamburg” (80), but Bamberg; Bielefeld is not in the “northern Rhineland” (81), but in Westphalia; the Erzgebirge is not a town in Saxony (238), but a mountain range on the Czech border; and the Hansaviertel is not a “suburb” of Berlin (239), but a neighborhood near the middle of the city. The usual translation of “Schreibtischtäter” (113) is not “desk genocide,” but rather “desk offenders” or “desktop criminals”; in the context of the Holocaust, the word refers to the politicians and bureaucrats who set the machinery of genocide into motion and oversaw its logistics.

A particularly egregious example of misreading the German linguistic and historical context concerns the letter issued by the German-Austrian Mission in 1934 to acknowledge the dissolution of LDS Scout units in compliance with Nazi demands to either transfer the units to the Hitler Youth or to shut them down. (Nelson twice states [131, 255] that the Scouting program or a Scout troop had been surrendered to the Hitler Youth, but this is false; the troops were disbanded rather than transferred intact to the Nazi youth organization.) The letter, archived in English translation, uses the closing formula, “With the German salutation,” and Nelson thinks he has discovered a conspiracy to manipulate the historical record: “The letter’s closing appears to have been an after-the-fact, euphemistic redaction of mission historical records by sensitive LDS Church archivists. It is doubtful that the original letter contained the words, ‘With the German salutation,’” rather than closing with *Heil Hitler*. He interprets this use of *Heil Hitler* in the imagined original letter as signaling the Mormons’ capitulation to the Nazi regime in a second way (134). But this is madness: “With the German salutation” is a literal translation of *mit deutschem Gruß*, a widely used valediction

formula recommended by epistolary style guides of the 1930s. Interpreting archival documents is, of course, no simple matter, but the challenge must be met with the appropriate scholarly caution rather than by imagining the evidence to confirm one's theory, stretching the interpretation of the imagined facts beyond what even existing evidence would support, and conjuring up a case of archival malfeasance to explain the lack of evidence for one's thesis.

Speculation, invented motives, and confident interpretations of silence appear in *Moroni and the Swastika* with disconcerting regularity. While looking for a place to live in Berlin in August 1937, Ida Rees, wife of mission president Alfred Rees, noted in her diary that one residence they inspected belonged to a Jewish man, and they "would have to keep his housekeeper." Ida Rees made no further comment on the matter, but Nelson treats this very silence as evidence of her callous disregard for the plight of Jews in Nazi Germany, leaping to the deduction that the "need to employ his servant seemed to be a greater consideration than the owner's fate" (194). While this allegation is already based on an absence of evidence, Nelson then treats his deductive leap as evidence for a general rule of behavior: "A Mormon mission matron did not express concern for Jews in those days; such an intemperate observation could have hindered her husband's task." Nelson's capacity for speculation treats the emotional lives of historical figures as a blank canvas. During the controversy over the Hübener play at BYU, a reporter asked Thomas S. Monson about his thoughts on the matter, and Monson responded, with a sentiment similar to Otto Berndt's in his letter to the *Improvement Era* though less elegantly expressed, "Who knows what was right or wrong then? I don't know what we accomplish by dredging these things up and trying to sort them out." Nelson adds to this that Monson was "obviously irritated by what he considered to be the reporter's impertinent questioning" (327), a detail found nowhere in the sources Nelson cites; Monson's alleged irritation and offense at the reporter's impertinence appear to be fabrications on Nelson's part.

To give just one more example of the frequency and tenor of speculation in *Moroni and the Swastika*, Nelson notes, "No evidence indicates that the LDS Church directly influenced" Neal Chandler's

play based on the Hübener incident, *Appeal to a Lower Court*, which was published in *Sunstone* in December 1990 (331). Chandler, best known for his short story collection *Benediction*, dramatized the events of 1943 from the perspective of a fictive ecclesiastical leader who combines elements of both Arthur Zander and Otto Berndt. Seeking to explore universal implications and moral dilemmas, Chandler invented names for all his characters and eliminated the specific context of Nazi Germany. Nelson, however, sees Chandler's failure to mention Zander by name as evidence that the playwright sympathized with Zander and desired to protect the reputation of a recently-deceased Nazi. As there is no evidence that the Church directly asked Chandler to leave Zander unnamed, Nelson regards Chandler's play as evidence of a general unwillingness among Mormon authors to criticize ecclesiastical leaders (even a Nazi like Arthur Zander, who was also a former branch president). This passage is just one of many in *Moroni and the Swastika* that treats Mormon authors or scholars as inherently untrustworthy.

Pursuing a false hypothesis based on misconstrued evidence and misuse of a theoretical framework are not unknown in scholarly writing, and no book or dissertation is without its flaws. What finally pushes *Moroni and the Swastika* out of the scholarly mainstream and into the realm of polemic, however, is its willingness to indulge in sensationalistic language, up to and including the equation of Mormonism with Nazism. Nelson argues that Mormonism and Nazism shared a common worldview on the basis of Mormons' choosing to "obey the law when the law prescribed penalties severe enough to mandate obedience" (98–99). The logic behind that conclusion remains opaque, and yet Nelson sees in it justification for referring to the Scouting program as the "boot camp" that "drilled the future shock troops of Mormonism" (124), over whom a mission president serves as a "divinely anointed *Oberführer*" (187), a military rank found in the Nazi SA and SS but not in the regular army. Soldiers in the German Wehrmacht, on the other hand, are referred to as "Hitler's stripling warriors" (340). However poor in taste, these comparisons are no mere rhetorical flourishes. Nelson sees the activities of Alfred Rees from 1937 to 1939 not just as attempts to secure the Church's position but as a mission

president's "vigorous effort to ally the Mormon Church with the Nazi government" (198). Nelson even makes the grotesque assertion that Rees's compliance with the prohibition of Jewish terms in devotional materials was intended "presumably as a united front against Judaism" (204). Such a speculative accusation may be acceptable in some quarters of religious polemic, but in mainstream scholarship it requires documentary evidence.

But grotesque comparisons are not uncommon in *Moroni and the Swastika*. According to Nelson, "Latter-day Saints were every bit as authoritarian and intolerant of internal dissent among ordinary members as were the National Socialists regarding rebellion within their ranks" (97), thereby eliding the differences between a stern talk from a mission president—in the one case of internal dissent that Nelson discusses (63)—and torture, execution, or slow death in a concentration camp. For Nelson, the iron fists of Mormonism and Nazism are so similar that resistance to the one entails resistance to the other. Helmuth Hübener, according to Nelson, was "constrained by both Nazi state and Mormon religious regimes" (336). Nelson likewise treats Max Reschke, branch president in Hannover, as a hero both for defying the Nazis by helping a Jewish couple escape the depredations of *Kristallnacht*, and for defying the Church by entering into an adulterous relationship with a family friend and fathering a child with yet another woman, leading to his excommunication. About Reschke's attitude to the Nazi state and the LDS Church, Nelson writes, "He defied both of them, risking physical death in one case and spiritual damnation in another" (264), thereby suggesting a moral equivalence of stunning repulsiveness between rescuing Jews from Nazi persecution and engaging in an illicit affair.

In the Mormon response to National Socialism, there is a great deal that deserves careful consideration and due analysis, as the issues raised at the time are still highly relevant to a church that aspires to political neutrality even as its teachings and policies have political implications that play out differently in every country in the world. While the case of Nazi Germany is unique, it will not be the only time that the Church will have to determine the correct strategy for engaging with a totalitarian or persecuting

regime. *Moroni and the Swastika* is not the book upon which to base a reconsideration of Mormon dealings with government powers, however. Its treatment of its sources is too unreliable, its attribution of motives is too fanciful, and its aim is too firmly directed toward condemnation without understanding.

Notes

1. Christine Elizabeth King, *The Nazi State and the New Religions: Five Case Studies in Non-Conformity* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1982), 184.

2. *Ibid.*, 194.

3. *Ibid.*, 200.

4. *Ibid.*, 84.

5. Alan F. Keele and Douglas F. Tobler, "The Fuhrer's New Clothes: Helmuth Hübener and the Mormons in the Third Reich," *Sunstone* 5, no. 6 (1980): 24.

6. See Douglas Peifer, "Commemoration of Mutiny, Rebellion, and Resistance in Postwar Germany: Public Memory, History, and the Formation of 'Memory Beacons,'" *Journal of Military History* 65 (2001): 1015–16.

7. Otto Berndt, letter published in "Bufs and Rebufs" in response to "The Church in Germanic Lands," *Improvement Era* 72, no. 5 (1969): 100–01.

8. Keele and Tobler, "The Fuhrer's New Clothes," 29 no. 25.

Guilty as Charged? Mormonism in Nazi Germany

David Conley Nelson. *Moroni and the Swastika: Mormons in Nazi Germany*. Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 2015. 432 pp. Hardcover: \$29.95. ISBN 978-0806146683.

Reviewed by Saskia Tielens

Moroni and the Swastika arose, in part, as a response to a query put to the author about the persecution of Mormons in the Third Reich. David Conley Nelson describes how his stepson, raised on the stories of Mormon persecution and Latter-day Saints'

willingness to endure much for the sake of the gospel, made the inference that Mormons must have been among the victims of Nazi Germany. This query led to a research paper, a presentation at the Mormon History Association's annual meeting, and ultimately a doctoral dissertation and a book.

Nelson's book centers on a bold premise: that Mormonism in Germany did not only survive the Third Reich relatively unscathed but actually benefitted from it. Nelson, who has a PhD in history from Texas A&M University, asserts that the Church, helped by faithful historians, is invested in promoting a picture of German Mormons as suffering for the sake of the gospel. However, a more accurate picture would be one of careful collaboration. Nelson claims that German members and their American leaders and missionaries were skillful enough to ensure survival while the Nazis were in power and avoid retribution once the war was over at the same time. Throughout the book, Nelson uses the rhetorical devices of "memory beacons" and "dimmer switches" to illustrate the construction of memory sites and the ways in which realities of collaboration, then, were transformed into memories of appeasement and survival.

The book has a dual focus, dealing both with the history of Mormonism in Germany before and during World War II and the ways in which Mormonism remembers said history. It has three parts, discussing the Mormon *Sonderweg*, the pre-war years, and finally the cultural memory that has come out of those years. Nelson opens with the memory of Max Reschke, a German Mormon who was instrumental in saving Jewish friends and co-workers, yet is not remembered as a hero because his resistance did not match the directive for German Mormons to obey the twelfth article of faith, which prescribes obedience to civil powers at all times and in all nations. According to Nelson, Reschke stands out because he saw a clear conflict "in being a good Mormon and a good citizen of the Nazi State" (5). Reschke is held up as the counter-example of Helmuth Hübener, a resister now heralded for his courage in dissenting.¹ Throughout the book, Nelson includes plenty of biographical examples to support his narrative. This not only humanizes this vast and complex subject but also illuminates one

of the questions at the heart of his book: who gets remembered and who is doomed to be forgotten?

The first section of the book traces the advent of nineteenth-century Mormonism. Nelson places particular emphasis on the importance of foreign, and especially German, converts to the cause of Zion. The first thirty years of Mormonism in Germany is a story of relentless proselytizing in the face of clerical and governmental opposition and the continuous emigration of converts to the United States. The era of unification, followed by World War I and the Weimar Republic, brought more permanence to the Church and provided a useful training ground in how to negotiate with hostile governments, giving Mormons the opportunity to develop the tools they would need to survive the Third Reich. Americans were able to regain ecclesiastical control of local units after the Great War, and the new democratic freedom of the Weimar Republic gave Mormons the right to preach unmolested. Mormonism's connection to America meant German Mormonism could rely on American diplomats, consular officials, and other friends in high places when needed, and the ability to negotiate with German authorities would be the most useful tool available to German Mormon leadership in the coming years.

Part two, then, sets up the pre-war years as the history Mormonism has conveniently chosen to forget. Here and elsewhere, Nelson uses the Jehovah's Witnesses as a counter-example, discussing the ways they opposed the new regime and suffered for that opposition. It is made very explicit here that the charge, as it were, is not that Mormonism survived but that "sometimes their enthusiastic embrace of Hitler's regime exceeded the necessities of survival" (xvi). That Mormonism endured, Nelson claims, has in part to do with selective morality: the twelfth article of faith was hardly obeyed in the United States during the era of polygamy, yet it was held up as the gold standard in Nazi Germany. This apolitical stance went so far as to exploit common interests between Hitler's system and Mormonism, such as a common interest in genealogical research. That Hitler's emphasis on genealogical research had more to do with proving biological purity than offering deceased relatives a form of salvation is conveniently ignored

by Mormons both in America and Germany, Nelson argues.² Other “Hitler myths” are discussed as well, such as the (fancied) connections between Hitler’s teetotalism and the Word of Wisdom or *Eintopfsontag* and fast Sunday, for example. Another chapter deals with the topic of “basketball diplomacy,” or how Mormon missionaries used basketball as a proselytizing tool and ended up helping train the German Olympic basketball team despite the anti-Semitic and fascist character of the 1936 Berlin Olympics. Nelson argues that this helped Mormonism win friends among German officials and position itself as not-an-enemy in the Third Reich. In a similar vein, Mormonism surrendered its Boy Scout program in favor of the Hitler Youth.

Throughout the book, Nelson builds up to an important assertion: that though the Nazis certainly punished individual Mormons, the Church as a whole was not persecuted, despite persistent collective memories that say otherwise. Nelson goes further, however, and argues that Mormon leaders ably navigated life in Nazi Germany, disobeying authorities only when doing so would not bring about any serious consequences. He discusses two men in detail to prove this point, namely mission president Alfred C. Rees and apostle J. Reuben Clark. Rees is characterized as a mission president that is more interested in the political than the spiritual. Clark represents the American interest and, more importantly, the American power that German Mormonism had at its back and that was instrumental for its collaboration and survival.

In part three, Nelson engages with Mormon cultural memory. Opening with the story of Karl Herbert Klopfer, an East German mission president, he discusses the construction of Mormon cultural memory. Klopfer, he argues, is particularly suited to be a “memory beacon” because “Klopfer obediently answered the call of his country while maintaining service to his church” (225). The chapter discusses a variety of memory beacons, from men involved in the evacuation of American missionaries before the war to German Mormon soldiers saved in battle to post-war relief efforts. The last two chapters deal with the legacy of Helmuth Hübener, the teenager caught distributing anti-Nazi leaflets who was executed by the authorities, excommunicated by local leadership, and posthumously

reinstated in the Church in 1946. According to Nelson, Hübener's popularity stems from the "stark contrast [it provides] to a mission president who rendered the 'Heil Hitler' greeting . . . to a church hierarchy that hastily purged Semitic references from its liturgy and ignored the pleas of Mormonism's Jewish converts" (288). What makes the Hübener example interesting for the purposes of this book is the "dimmer switch that allows his commemorative light to be brightened or darkened according to the self-interest of the Salt Lake City church leadership" (288–89). Nelson uses the circumstances surrounding the production of several plays to explore cultural memory surrounding Helmuth Hübener and ultimately concludes that Hübener and the memory of others like him are merely a smoke screen or distraction from the reality of (German) Mormon accommodation.

Throughout the book, Nelson takes on questions of culpability by placing the blame firmly on the shoulders of the institution, not rank-and-file German Mormons. From policies set into place before World War II that denied help to German Mormon Jews to the post-war "dimming" of inconvenient memory beacons, Nelson pushes for a reading of culpability on the part of American Mormon leadership. He demonstrates how cultural memory is constructed and why particular examples are foregrounded and others are forgotten. If I have any criticisms about this section, it is that his theoretical framework of memory beacons serves his book well, but only minimally acknowledges prior scholarship on the construction of memory, even as it builds on said scholarship. Acknowledging this would have lent both credence and depth to his analysis, and I would have been interested in knowing how, for example, the subject of Mormon memories fits in with the larger field of study relating to memory and the Holocaust, or the Second World War more generally. Stripping out the dissertation's theoretical framework may have been a choice necessitated by the book's intended popular audience, and it must be said in that case that this book is very accessible to non-specialists.

Reflecting the priesthood leadership structure of the LDS Church, Nelson's research and analysis focus almost entirely on males. The instances where women make an appearance in the book serve to reemphasize this, as their position in the narrative

is marginal at best, placed there to reinforce their male counterparts' decisions and actions. This omission may be explained by Nelson's dependence on mission records, in which women usually only make a peripheral appearance, but it is a meaningful—and telling—absence in a book of this scope.

This area of study has been long dominated by faith-promoting narratives that do little justice to the complexities of life—and religion—in wartime. This book, however, ultimately swings too far the other way: Nelson seems determined to counter the existing narratives by systematically interpreting historical evidence in the worst possible light. Nevertheless, I would urge readers to ignore the book's sensationalist cover: the branding does not accurately reflect the book's content and more careful readers may still find much to interest them in the book.

Notes

1. Further complicating his status in Mormon memory, Reschke, a branch president, was eventually excommunicated for adultery—not exactly the conduct becoming of a hero featured in the *Ensign*.

2. Here, as elsewhere in the book, while the rank-and-file face questions of culpability (Nelson brings up Hannah Arendt's concept of the “banality of evil” [113]), it is Church leaders who are condemned—as men in the position to know more, there is less room for moral ambiguity. Nelson does say that after the *Kristallnacht*, favorable articles in the *Deseret News* about genealogical research in Germany no longer appeared and “Mormons on both sides of the Atlantic then began to take another view of genealogical research in Hitler's Reich” (115).

Families are Forever and Ever and Ever

Families Are Forever, DVD. Directed by Vivian Kleiman. San Francisco: Family Acceptance Project, Marian Wright Edelman Institute, San Francisco State University, 2013.¹

*Reviewed by Robert A. Rees*²

Families Are Forever is a short film about a Latter-day Saint family, the Montgomerys, living in central California who have a gay son

who came of age during Proposition 8, the California initiative to affirm the definition of marriage as being between one woman and one man. Explaining their active involvement in supporting the initiative, the mother, Wendy, says, “If the Church asks you to do something, you do it.” Her son Jordan, whose homosexuality was unknown to his parents at the time, overheard them talking about the “disgusting” and “horrible” people who opposed Prop 8. According to his father, Tom, this led Jordan to believe that “his parents hate gay people and his Church hates gay people.” Looking back, Jordan says, “I had a plan set up in my head that when I finished college I would move somewhere where my parents couldn’t find me so that they wouldn’t find out they had a gay son.” It wasn’t until several years after the initiative had passed that Jordan’s parents discovered he is gay, when his mother read an entry in his journal about his role in the school play, *Beauty and the Beast*: “In my dreams I would be Beauty and the other boy would be the beast.” Reflecting on these words, Wendy says, “I felt like the son I knew was not the son I knew and that I had to get to know this other boy who felt a little like a stranger to me. What I saw his life would be—what I expected his life to be—as a Mormon boy was now gone. I saw him preparing for a mission for our church, gone. I saw a temple wedding, gone. I saw him being a father, gone. Having grown up Mormon, that is the plan, that’s how it is. So I didn’t even know how to parent that kind of a plan.” Tom adds, “You can’t just leave some void for a young child to wonder whether God has a plan for them.”

Assuring Jordan that they love him and that his being gay “changed nothing,” Tom and Wendy began searching for answers. As Wendy says,

Needless to say, this revelation turned our neatly-ordered Mormon world upside down, causing an intense emotional and spiritual upheaval not only in our immediate family but in our extended family and our congregation. The next few months were critical as we searched desperately for accurate information in the polarizing world of LGBT issues. There was so much I thought I knew about homosexuality but quickly discovered that

most of it was wrong. The Spirit couldn't help me until I was willing to listen and be guided. One thing that was repeated in multiple priesthood blessings I received during this time was that I would be blessed with the power of discernment and would know truth when I found it. As I researched and read through mountains of materials both inside and outside the Church, I was able to determine what would benefit my son and what would be a detriment to him. This happened to me again and again and is a testament to me of the power of prayer and personal revelation. We haven't done everything right, but I would have been utterly lost without the Savior's help.

Initially, the Montgomerys found little that was helpful. Their bishop and stake president told them that Jordan was “just confused” and “not really gay,” and that they shouldn't label him as such. They went to eight different therapists looking for answers, including LDS therapists who wanted to change him, “reverse what he was,” which increased Jordan's depression, suicidal thoughts, and despair. Their instinct was to reject such messages and to keep looking. Eventually, they were led to the scientific research of Dr. Caitlin Ryan and the Family Acceptance Project at San Francisco State University.³

Dr. Ryan is a social research scientist investigating the influence of the family on LGBT children. Her research and its application have had a profound influence on the Montgomerys as well as tens of thousands of other families, including many Latter-day Saint families. What is significant is that, based on her decades of work in Utah, Dr. Ryan understands the special place of the family in LDS theology and culture. Through extensive research and field studies, the Family Acceptance Project has identified more than one hundred parental behaviors, both accepting and rejecting, that can have a dramatic, determinative impact on the lives of their LGBT children.

What Tom and Wendy learned and began applying in their own family was that they could create an affirming, accepting culture within their family without sacrificing either their faith or their devotion to the Church—although it is important to note that

striking this balance has not been easy. The cultural biases against LGBT individuals and their families are still deeply ingrained in Mormon culture. For example, some members of their congregation refused to take the sacrament from Jordan; others said hurtful things both to and about Jordan and his parents. At one point it was necessary for them to move to another, more accepting ward.

Families Are Forever is both powerful and poignant because it captures the real-life experience of a Mormon family caught in what they perceive to be a “Sophie’s choice” between their faith and their family, between their devotion to their religion and their devotion to their highest calling as parents. Ultimately, I don’t believe these are choices God intends for us to face, but in Mormon culture they are sometimes presented as such. Fortunately, the Church’s new website, www.mormonsandgays.org, counters this misperception, assuring parents that they can be true both to the Church and to their families. In speaking of the Christian imperative to love everyone, the site states, “But we can’t truly love the neighbors next door if we don’t love the neighbors under our own roof. Family members with same-sex attraction need our love and understanding. God loves all his children alike, much more than any of us can comprehend, and [he] expects us to follow [him].”⁴ That imperative includes, by the way, gay and lesbian family members who choose to live a different lifestyle than that prescribed by the Church. As Elder Quentin L. Cook says on the website, “As a church, nobody should be more loving and compassionate [than Latter-day Saints]. . . . Let’s not have families exclude or be disrespectful of those who choose a different lifestyle. . . .”⁵

Without his parents’ love and support, Jordan could easily have become one more casualty of an unenlightened Mormon culture. Hearing so many negative messages about gay people, he contemplated suicide. He said to his mom, “What’s the point of my life?” Wendy says, “I can’t tell you what that does to a mother’s heart to hear that. There’s something not right with a thirteen-year-old having to think that. And I found myself being angry that he even had that thought in his head and how unfair those emotions were to him. It’s hard enough being a teenager, without all of that.” In one of the most powerful scenes in the

film, Jordan says, “Our most important value as a church is the family. And being together forever and being sealed in the temple for time and all eternity. But I wasn’t sure I wanted to be with that family forever and ever and ever. Because what if they hated me for eternity?”

The Church’s new website shows that we have come a long way in the past decade. *Families Are Forever* suggests that we still have a very long way to go. It is a blessing that we have friends like Caitlin Ryan who are willing to travel that journey with us—to help show us, to use Paul’s term, a more excellent way.

Philosopher of art Susanne Langer says that film is most like our dreams. Both create a virtual present; in both we are “equidistant from all events” and experience the “immediacy of everything.” Thus, the camera and soundtrack are, respectively, the mind’s eye and ear, which project “a poetic composition, coherent, organic, governed by a definitely conceived feeling.” Film, according to Langer, is “a poetic presentation [that] accounts for its power to assimilate the most diverse materials, and transform them. . . . Like dream, it enralls and commingles all senses; its basic abstraction—direct apparition—is made not only by visual means . . . but by words, which punctuate vision, and music that supports the unity of the shifting world.”⁶ Like dreams, films have a point of view. That is, film is an arranged reality, a constructed narrative. If it is artfully constructed, as is *Families Are Forever*, we see the world presented approximately as the filmmakers intend us to see it. They invite and guide us in seeing the world from their collective point of view.

That point of view in *Families Are Forever* belongs essentially to Caitlin Ryan. Because of her deep and extensive clinical, scientific, and personal experience with the sexual identity and orientation of adolescents—and her concerted commitment to understanding Mormon culture—she has made a film that can help Mormon families, leaders, and members understand the complicated, often treacherous LGBT landscape, showing us that the gospel of Jesus Christ is always about love—love emancipated from erroneous doctrines, untethered from destructive

practices, liberated from cultural mythologies, and undergirded by sound scientific research.

Subtle, artistic elements of the filmmaking in *Families Are Forever* contribute to the construction of the world from this point of view. For example, the film begins with the Montgomery family (which includes five children) decorating their Christmas tree and placing the angel Moroni on the pinnacle, a fitting symbol for a family whose whole life centers on the Church. Early in the film we see Jordan standing pensively in front of a crèche showing the birth of a son who was despised and rejected and wounded in the house of friends, and we wonder what he is thinking.

The film ends with a powerful image of Jordan riding his bike down the middle of the street. That image can be interpreted variously: does it symbolize ambiguity, balance, or indecision? It certainly suggests danger since powerful machines (like automobiles and trucks) barrel down the real streets of our cities, and institutional machines (like churches) dominate the metaphorical streets of our lives. As his father says, “You can’t just leave some void for a young child. . . . I want to make sure that [Jordan] can get to adulthood and not have made huge mistakes that compromise his health and his happiness. And there’s [sic] a lot of land mines along that road, you know. And that’s true about heterosexual or homosexual kids. Figuring all of that out’s not easy. But, if you take your family’s support away, I don’t know how you do it as a kid.”

Jordan, an adolescent Mormon boy, also symbolizes the vulnerability of gay youth alone in a culture that has for decades demonized LGBT individuals. As he looks ahead, what does he see? What future lies ahead for him and all those like him? That future is not in their control but in ours—their parents, siblings, friends, teachers, and Church leaders who believe that families are indeed forever.

Notes

1. *Families Are Forever* is available from the Family Acceptance Project with discussion guides and educational materials in versions for families, for education outside the home, and for institutions at www.familyacceptanceproject.org.

The Family Acceptance Project has also published Caitlin Ryan and Robert A. Rees, “Supportive Families, Healthy Children: Helping Latter-day Saint Families with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Children.” For additional information, contact: fap@sfsu.edu or faprequest@gmail.com. *Families Are Forever* has won twenty awards at film festivals across the United States and abroad, including Affirmation’s inaugural Tree of Life Award.

2. Full disclosure: The author was a consultant on the film and study guide and co-author with Caitlin Ryan of “Supportive Families, Healthy Children: Helping Latter-day Saint Families with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Children.”

3. “The Family Acceptance Project™ is a research, intervention, education, and policy initiative that works to prevent health and mental health risks for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) children and youth, including suicide, homelessness, and HIV—in the context of their families, cultures, and faith communities.”

4. “Love One Another—The Great Christian Imperative,” The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, accessed September 10, 2015, <http://www.mormonsandgays.org>.

5. Quentin L. Cook, “Bishops made incredible sacrifices,” The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, accessed September 10, 2015, <http://www.mormonsandgays.org>.

6. Susanne K. Langer, *Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art* (New York: Scribner’s & Sons, 1953), 411–14.



Emily McPhie
Secrets for a Rhinoceros
Oil on panel

Trajectory and Momentum

Steven Watson

Remarks delivered at the Woodland Park Ward Conference sacrament meeting in Seattle, Washington, on January 25, 2015.

Introduction

It is a privilege to speak to you today as your bishop, but also a responsibility that deeply humbles me. I pray that the Spirit will be with me.

First, let me address one of the most important groups in our congregation today—the Primary children. This meeting is going to be a little longer than normal, so all of you in the Primary please feel free to stand up and shake your arms for a few seconds.

While you are doing that, let me just tell you that we love you, and we love that you are here with us. We, like you, are trying to be like Jesus. We love him and our heavenly parents. We know they love us and we know they love you. Their influence and direction are at work in our Church, in our ward, and with you in the Primary.

Launch

Sisters and brothers, I want to speak today about trajectory and momentum. I'm going to start by telling you a little something about myself that you may not know: I was born on a missile range in the New Mexico desert. If you don't believe me, I can produce a birth certificate that says "White Sands Missile Range" in bold, black ink. This is *the* same missile range—code-named

“Trinity” during the Manhattan Project—that was the location of the detonation of the first atomic bomb. It’s a dubious distinction to be sure. But, besides the location, the other details of my birth are not as exciting as you might imagine. Regardless, you might wonder if being born on a nuclear missile range has had any residual side-effects. Such as, say, curly hair or absent-mindedness. My wife sometimes wonders about the latter. I suppose that there are not enough data to determine either correlation or causation. In any case, it was in this inhospitable desert setting where my mortal sojourn began or “launched,” so to speak.

Missiles are projectiles, and projectiles are defined as bodies projected or impelled forward. So you could argue that, in a literal sense, when we are born into mortality, we are all missiles—bodies impelled forward. And because missiles are in motion, they have trajectories. One of our Church’s websites says that the term “plan of salvation” is used to describe the *trajectory* of human existence. “This ‘plan’ refers to the design God has employed to help us grow, learn, and experience joy. It addresses the fundamental questions ‘Where did we come from?’ ‘Why are we here?’ and ‘Where are we going?’”¹

Although all of our mortal journeys are launched at different times, from different locations, and under different conditions, we all shared the same ultimate target—a return home to our heavenly parents.

But, man, is it a wild ride!

Trajectory

Depending on circumstances, some of our trajectories were aimed true from the get-go; whereas others of us may have started as shots in the dark. Eventually, as we became accountable, agency engaged and we began to guide our own flight path. Some of us have tried to stick more or less to the original flight plan, others of us have intentionally meandered, trying to find smoother sailing or more exciting rides, and still others of us have just recently gotten ourselves tracking in the right direction. Regardless, we all

get blown off course from time to time because the skies can be quite stormy. Like I said, it's a wild ride.

It's particularly challenging for us because we are moving objects with a first-person perspective and everything is rushing by. For the most part we can't see the forest for the trees. But it was designed this way. It had to be to protect our autonomous guidance systems (our agency) so we could learn how to fly. And this requires a huge leap of faith.

Faith

As we read in both Hebrews and Alma, faith is the assurance of things hoped for.² Faith is a stabilizing control that we can acquire on our life trajectory. And when we acquire it, the circumstances that have brought it to us grant us a feeling of assurance of the things for which we hope. And for what do we hope? We hope for the redemption of our bodies,³ for a continuing relationship with our loved ones,⁴ and for a reunion with our God.⁷ When we feel assured of this, we have faith. Faith is a feeling of assurance of salvation. And it is inseparably connected to the atonement of Jesus Christ. Isn't it true that every time we have a powerful spiritual experience, we get a glimpse of the love of God and Jesus Christ through it?

Brothers and sisters, I feel strongly that both individually and collectively as a ward we need to solidify our foundation of faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ. The journey is a long one, and faith is a fragile thing. In a world of confusion, with a continuous barrage of opinions, challenges, and distractions, it's easy to [get] fatigue[d] and feel like we're losing our way. To quote lyrics from an R.E.M. song:

The walls are built up, stone by stone
The fields divided one by one.
And the train conductor says,
Take a break Driver 8, Driver 8 take a break
We've been on this shift too long
And the train conductor says,

Take a break Driver 8, Driver 8 take a break
We can reach our destination,
but we're still a ways away.⁸

Faith Challenges

We all need to take regular, periodic breaks from our busy schedules to recharge our faith. Whether intentionally or unintentionally, it's easy to fail to recharge our faith and let it gradually slip through our fingers. Or, in other circumstances, to have "sore trials [come] upon [us]" that endeavor to wrench it from our hands.⁷ Whatever the reasons behind our personal challenges of faith, surely God is empathetic and not offended by our sincere questions or our feeble knees. "To some it is given by the Holy Ghost to know that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and that he was crucified for the sins of the world. To others it is given to believe on their words, that they also might have eternal life if they continue faithful."⁸

Based on this scripture, LDS scholars Terry and Fiona Givens observe that "it would appear God is suggesting that the grounds for a reasoned devotion to the gospel are available [even] to those who doubt. . . . [T]he Lord apparently anticipates—and validates (as have Latter-day Saint apostles in recent remarks)—those who don't feel the full light of spiritual illumination or revelation."⁹ In a much-quoted general conference address, President Dieter F. Uchtdorf assures:

It's natural to have questions—the acorn of honest inquiry has often sprouted and matured into a great oak of understanding. There are few members of the Church who, at one time or another, have not wrestled with serious or sensitive questions. One of the purposes of the Church is to nurture and cultivate the seed of faith—even in the sometimes sandy soil of doubt and uncertainty. Faith is to hope for things which are not seen but which are true.

Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters—my dear friends—please, first doubt your doubts before you doubt your faith. We

must never allow doubt to hold us prisoner and keep us from the divine love, peace, and gifts that come through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. . . . Regardless of your circumstances, your personal history, or the strength of your testimony, there is room for you in this Church.¹⁰

Choice

How do we then endeavor to recharge our faith or rebuild it in the face of uncertainties? The first step is to exercise our agency; we must make a choice of what to believe. It is a choice between hope and fear. And we must be careful not to make this choice out of fear disguised as practicality, because it is neither practical nor easy to choose to believe. We must dare to hope for the reality of the epic, beautiful, loving, grandeur of the gospel message more than fearing what the possible risk of embracing it in error might pose.

Brother and Sister Givens suggest that

In the perpetual absence of certainty, one may still choose to embrace, and live by a set of propositions that are aesthetically, morally, and rationally appealing. . . . One might focus on the message rather than the messenger.¹¹

One might consider that the contingencies of history and culture and the human element will always constitute the garment in which God's word and will are clothed. And one might refuse to allow our desire for the perfect to be the enemy of the present good. And finally we might ask ourselves, with the early disciples "to whom [else] shall we go?"¹²

Scottish author, poet, and Christian minister George MacDonald proclaims:

Even if there be no hereafter, I would live my time believing in a grand thing that ought to be true if it is not. No facts can take the place of truths, and if these be not truths, then is the loftiest part of our nature a waste. Let me hold by the better than

the actual, and fall into nothingness off the same precipice with Jesus and John and Paul and a thousand more, who were lovely in their lives, and with their death make even the nothingness into which they have passed like the garden of the Lord. I will go further . . . and say, I would rather die for evermore believing as Jesus believed, than live for evermore believing as those that deny him.¹³

Recharge

Once we choose to believe (or reaffirm our choice to believe) we need to get to work realigning our trajectory of faith; to nourish it with great care as Alma says.¹⁴

Our trajectories need almost constant micro-adjustments. This is where our ward goals of prayer and scripture study can help. Moroni writes, “They were numbered among the people of the church of Christ . . . that they might be remembered and nourished by the good word of God, to keep them in the right way, to keep them continually watchful unto prayer, relying alone upon the merits of Christ, who was the author and the finisher of their faith.”¹⁵

Why are these seemingly rote and basic endeavors of scripture study and prayer so vital to our trajectories? Because as President Henry B. Eyring put it, “We all know that human judgment and logical thinking will not be enough to get answers to the questions that matter most in life. We need revelation from God. And we will need not just one revelation in a time of stress, but we need a constantly renewed stream. We need not just one flash of light and comfort, but we need the continuing blessing of communication with God.”¹⁶

The Psalmist wrote, “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.”¹⁷ Nephi wrote, “For he that diligently seeketh shall find; and the mysteries of God shall be unfolded unto them, by the power of the Holy Ghost, as well in these times as in times of old, and as well in times of old as in times to come; wherefore, the course of the Lord is one eternal round.”¹⁸

We can rally around each other and support each other as we endeavor to weave the scriptures more fully into our lives this year. Our lone seminary student is studying the Doctrine and Covenants this year. In order to support him in his reading assignments, the other young men and Young Men leaders have committed to reading the assignments along with him each week. We can all make similar collective efforts at a family or ward level to make the scriptures an integral part of our lives; many of us ought to be able to carve out at least a fraction of the amount of time we spend on Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram and divert it to the scriptures.

Momentum

Once we get our trajectories adjusted, we need to build momentum. My son and I were snowboarding the other day, and a friend of his was at the same mountain. This friend stayed the whole day in an almost flat beginner area just trying to learn to stay upright. Anxious for his friend to make progress so they could eventually ride together, my son said, “Dad, you know, it’s actually easier once you go up on the lift and the hill gets a little steeper. It’s much easier to turn once you get going.” This is so true. I used to play this snowboarding video game called *SSX Tricky*. In the game, as you raced down the mountain, you had to make your avatar perform trick maneuvers to earn boost points that would make you go faster. If you didn’t do any tricks, your run wouldn’t be fast enough to win the race. So, along with the constant chorus of Run-D.M.C.’s “It’s Tricky” playing in the background, there was a voice that would constantly remind you, “You gotta trick to boost!”¹⁹ It is the same with our journeys of faith. Faith can be tricky; to build momentum, you gotta trick to boost.

In this case the “tricks” may not be that flashy. They include fulfilling responsibilities such as home and visiting teaching assignments, serving in our callings, and also the elevated spiritual devotion of attending the temple regularly. Last but not least is the boost we get from turning away from ourselves and toward others—turning inside-out.

Turning Inside-out

Often in the Church we talk about how after faith, repentance, baptism, and confirmation, it's all about enduring to the end. And there is truth in this, but an overly-literal, white-knuckled interpretation of this endurance would frustrate continued progress and be awfully dull.

Eleanor Roosevelt said, "The purpose of life, after all, is to live it, to taste experience to the utmost, to reach out eagerly and without fear for newer and richer experiences."²⁰ I believe the richest and most ennobling experiences in life come from deeply positive interactions with other people.

Our families, our ward, and our communities-at-large can be compared to balls of rubber bands. "Human communities are not one solid, continuous thing—they are made of many individuals, all of whom have to be able to adapt to the needs of the community while still protecting their own interests. A resilient human community, will create itself using patterns and principles that allow the community to absorb shocks and losses, respond quickly, and repair damage or adapt to new circumstances."²¹ This is where our second ward goal—to *pray every day that we are the answer to another's prayer*—becomes applicable.

In an open letter to fellow clergymen, penned while he was in the Birmingham City Jail, Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. observed, "Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. This is the interrelated structure of reality. We may have all come on different ships, but we're in the same boat now."²² On a different occasion, he preached: "The first question which the priest and the Levite asked was: 'If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?' But . . . the good Samaritan reversed the question: 'If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?' Life's most persistent and urgent question is, 'What are you doing for others?'"²³

Joseph Smith said:

Kindness is our religion.

When persons manifest the least kindness and love to me, O what power it has over my mind, while the opposite course has a tendency to harrow up all the harsh feelings and depress the human mind.²⁴

Love is one of the chief characteristics of Deity, and ought to be manifested by those who aspire to be the sons of God. A man filled with the love of God, is not content with blessing his family alone, but ranges through the whole world, anxious to bless the whole human race.²⁵

Comedian Jim Carrey, an unlikely fountain of wisdom, said, “I can tell you from experience that the effect you have on others is the most valuable currency there is.”²⁶

Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoyevsky wrote: “To love someone means to see him as God intended him.”²⁷

And finally the Lord Jesus Christ admonished, “Let thy bowels also be full of charity towards all men, and to the household of faith, and let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly; then shall thy confidence wax strong in the presence of God; and the doctrine of the priesthood shall distill upon thy soul as the dews from heaven. The Holy Ghost shall be thy constant companion.”²⁸

Conclusion

Sisters and brothers, we are all on a faith journey. Where we are on that journey is not important. What is important is where our trajectory is taking us and whether or not we are maintaining momentum. Scriptures and prayer will help strengthen our faith and stabilize our trajectories. Pushing others ahead or letting them draft behind us will counterintuitively increase our own momentum. “You gotta trick to boost.” We’ll shoot for the moon, and even if we miss, at least we’ll have gotten out of the pews and little bit closer to heaven.

I’ll end with what I told the Primary children at the beginning. We are trying to be like Jesus. We love him and our heavenly parents. I know they love us. The gospel of Jesus Christ is true.

The Savior's influence and direction are at work in our Church and in our ward. May we draw ever closer to him.

In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

Notes

1. "Plan of Salvation," The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Newsroom, accessed January 23, 2015, <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/plan-of-salvation>.

2. Hebrews 11:1; Alma 32:21.

3. Romans 8:23–25.

4. Doctrine and Covenants 130:2; Doctrine and Covenants 2.

5. Doctrine and Covenants 45:3–5.

6. R.E.M., "Driver 8" (I.R.S. Records, 1985).

7. "Did You Think to Pray?" *Hymns*, no. 140.

8. Doctrine and Covenants 46:13–14.

9. Terryl Givens and Fiona Givens, *The Crucible of Doubt: Reflections on the Quest for Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2014), 138.

10. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, "Come, Join with Us," October 2013, <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/2013/10/come-join-with-us?lang=eng> (accessed September 25, 2015).

11. Givens and Givens, *Crucible of Doubt*, 138.

12. *Ibid.*, 140.

13. George MacDonald, *Thomas Wingfold, Curate* (London: Hurst and Blackette, 1876), 65–66. This passage is also cited in Givens and Givens, *Crucible of Doubt*, 138–39.

14. Alma 32:37.

15. Moroni 6:4.

16. Henry B. Eyring, "Continuing Revelation," October 2014, <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/2014/10/continuing-revelation?lang=eng> (accessed September 25, 2015).

17. Psalm 119:105.

18. 1 Nephi 10:19.

19. *SSX Tricky*, EA Sports Big, November 2001.

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22. Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from Birmingham Jail," April 16, 1963.

23. Martin Luther King, Jr., "I've Been to the Mountain Top," speech delivered at Mason Temple, Memphis, Tennessee, April 3, 1968.

24. *History of the Church*, 5:23–24

25. *Ibid.*, 4:227; also published as "Extract from an Epistle to the Elders in England," *Times and Seasons* 1, no. 5 (January 1, 1841): 258.

26. Jim Carrey, "Commencement Address," Maharishi University of Management, May 24, 2014. Full video and transcript available online at <https://www.mum.edu/whats-happening/graduation-2014/full-jim-carrey-address-video-and-transcript>.

27. Accessed January 20, 2015, http://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/3137322.Fyodor_Dostoyevsky.

28. Doctrine and Covenants 121:45.



Emily McPhie
When She Was at the Top She Opened the Window
Oil on panel

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