

DIALOGUE

a journal of mormon thought

is an independent quarterly established to express Mormon culture and to examine the relevance of religion to secular life. It is edited by Latter-day Saints who wish to bring their faith into dialogue with the larger stream of world religious thought and with human experience as a whole and to foster artistic and scholarly achievement based on their cultural heritage. The journal encourages a variety of viewpoints; although every effort is made to ensure accurate scholarship and responsible judgment, the views expressed are those of the individual authors and are not necessarily those of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints or of the editors.

Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought is published quarterly by the Dialogue Foundation. *Dialogue* has no official connection with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Contents copyrighted by the Dialogue Foundation. ISSN 0012-2157. *Dialogue* is available in full text in electronic form at www.dialoguejournal.com and is archived by the University of Utah Marriott Library Special Collections, available online at www.lib.utah.edu/portal/site/marriottlibrary. *Dialogue* is also available on microforms through University Microfilms International, www.umi.com.

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WHAT DO WE KNOW OF GOD'S WILL FOR HIS LGBT CHILDREN?: AN EXAMINATION OF THE LDS CHURCH'S POSITION ON HOMOSEXUALITY

Bryce Cook

Perhaps no other social issue in recent times has experienced such rapid change in public opinion as that of homosexuality and same-sex marriage. To many, it has been the civil rights struggle of our time, to others—particularly conservative religious people—it is seen as a sign of the moral decay of our time. The LDS Church has been greatly affected by this issue, garnering much negative attention in the media due to its public fight against same-sex marriage and the perception that it treats LGBT people unfairly.¹ Its positions and policies, particularly

A version of this article was first published online.

1. In using the term “Church” as the entity that promulgates the positions and statements discussed throughout this essay, I am generally referring to the members of the Quorum of the Twelve and First Presidency who are authorized to make policy and pronounce doctrine for the Church. While it is generally held that such policy and doctrine require the unanimous consent of the members of these governing bodies, it is also understood that individual members of these councils often have differing personal opinions. The lack of publicity associated with the Church’s launch of its original mormonsandgays.org website and the inconsistent messaging and tone in Church initiatives and statements on this subject seem to indicate differences of opinion among the top leadership in how to address LGBT issues. For additional examples, see Gregory Prince,

the November 2015 policy that labels members in same-sex marriages apostates and prohibits their children from receiving Church ordinances, have caused some members to question the Church's stance and others to leave the Church.

As an active, believing member of the Church, I have struggled with the Church's positions and policies that have affected so many of the LGBT people I love. In the thirteen-plus years since our oldest son came out as gay, followed by a second son five years ago, I have studied, read, prayed, and pondered extensively on this subject. More importantly, perhaps, I have gotten to know hundreds of LGBT people on a very personal level. I have observed their lives and struggles, and I feel like I have come to know and understand the unique challenges they and their families face as Mormons. Because of this experience and the relationships I have with my LGBT family and friends, I felt compelled to write this article. Recognizing that many of the questions I raise and observations I make in the article may challenge the current thinking of some Church members, I feel that the words of President Dieter F. Uchtdorf at a recent worldwide leadership training conference are particularly appropriate:

Unfortunately, we sometimes don't seek revelation or answers . . . because we think we know the answers already. Brothers and sisters, as good as our previous experience may be, if we stop asking questions, stop thinking, stop pondering, we can thwart the revelations of the Spirit. Remember, it was the questions young Joseph asked that opened the door for the restoration of all things. We can block the growth and knowledge our Heavenly Father intends for us. How often has the Holy Spirit tried to tell us something we needed to know but couldn't get past the massive iron gate of what we thought we already knew?²

"The Exclusion Policy and Biology vs Behavior," *Rational Faiths* (blog), Jan. 13, 2016, <http://rationalfaiths.com/biology-vs-behavior>.

2. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, "Acting on the Truths of the Gospel of Jesus Christ," *Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting*, Feb. 2012, <https://>

The purpose of this article is to examine the LDS Church's position on homosexuality and same-sex marriage from a doctrinal, moral, and empirical perspective. I hope that through such an examination the thoughtful reader may: (1) gain a better understanding of the Church's justifications for this position even as it faces mounting criticism and membership loss; (2) gain a more empathetic understanding of what it means to be LGBT in our church; and (3) sincerely and humbly consider our current state of knowledge about what we as a Church community believe to be God's will for our LGBT brothers and sisters.

Like opinions held by society in general on this issue, the Church's position on homosexuality has evolved quite significantly in recent years, although much of the general membership is likely unaware of the shift. The current official position on homosexuality is perhaps most concisely summarized in its recently updated gospel topic entry on homosexuality (which redirects to "same-sex attraction") on LDS.org:

The Church distinguishes between same-sex attraction and homosexual behavior. People who experience same-sex attraction or identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual can make and keep covenants with God and fully and worthily participate in the Church. Identifying as gay, lesbian, or bisexual or experiencing same-sex attraction is not a sin and does not prohibit one from participating in the Church, holding callings, or attending the temple. . . . We may not know precisely why some people feel attracted to others of the same sex, but for some it is a complex reality and part of the human experience.³

www.lds.org/broadcasts/article/worldwide-leadership-training/2012/01/acting-on-the-truths-of-the-gospel-of-jesus-christ?lang=eng.

3. "Overview," *Same-Sex Attraction*, <https://www.lds.org/topics/same-gender-attraction>. Along with updating this gospel topic entry in October 2016, the Church released an entirely new version of its website devoted to this issue, mormonandgay.org. The original website, mormonsandgays.org, was released in December 2012 without any Church-wide announcement or links to the site from the Church's main webpage, and many members and leaders were unaware of its existence.

The Church's position on same-sex marriage is likewise succinctly stated in *Handbook 2*:

As a doctrinal principle, based on the scriptures, the Church affirms that marriage between a man and a woman is essential to the Creator's plan for the eternal destiny of His children.

Sexual relations are proper only between a man and a woman who are legally and lawfully wedded as husband and wife. Any other sexual relations, including those between persons of the same gender, are sinful and undermine the divinely created institution of the family. The Church accordingly affirms defining marriage as the legal and lawful union between a man and a woman.⁴

Before examining why the Church believes that *being a homosexual* who is naturally and instinctively attracted to those of the same sex is not sinful, but *expressing homosexual feelings and desires* is a sin—even within lawful, monogamous marriage—it is helpful to first understand the origination of the Church's position and how it has changed over time.

Historical Background

For much of recent history, the Church's views on homosexuality have reflected those of the larger American culture. In the nineteenth and most of the twentieth centuries, homosexuality was generally viewed by society, including the medical profession, as a mental disorder or a sexual deviancy. The American Psychological Association's DSM-I, published in 1952, classified homosexuality as a "sociopathic personality disturbance." The revised DSM-II of 1968 reclassified it as a "sexual deviation." In December 1973, the APA removed homosexuality from the DSM but allowed for a diagnosis of Sexual Orientation Disturbance for individuals who were uncomfortable with their same-gender attractions and wanted

4. "Same-Gender Marriages," *Handbook 2: Administering the Church*, 21.4.10.

to change.⁵ This legitimized sexual conversion therapies that the APA has since determined are “unlikely to be successful and involve some risk of harm.”⁶ By the 1900s, most states had criminalized homosexual behavior by enacting sodomy laws, which drove homosexuals deeper into the closet.⁷ However, by the 1970s, LGBT people began to assert their rights to live authentically and without persecution, mainstream media started portraying homosexuals more favorably, and societal views slowly began to shift.

As opinions began to evolve in the larger culture, the Church’s stance remained unchanged, with Spencer W. Kimball, Mark E. Petersen, and Boyd K. Packer being the Church’s primary voices on this topic throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Reflecting their generation’s view of homosexuality, they spoke about the subject with disdain and disgust. They saw society’s softening views on homosexuality, including decriminalization, as evidence of its moral deterioration, as a rapidly spreading contagion that was infecting society and even the Church and was thus a dangerous threat to marriage and family.⁸ However, in demonizing

5. See Jack Drescher, “Out of DSM: Depathologizing Homosexuality,” *Behavioral Sciences* 5, no. 4 (2015): 565–75, available at <http://doi.org/10.3390/bs5040565>.

6. See Judith M. Glassgold, et al., *Report of the American Psychological Association Task Force on Appropriate Therapeutic Responses to Sexual Orientation*, Aug. 2009, available at <https://www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/resources/therapeutic-response.pdf>.

7. See William N. Eskridge Jr., *Dishonorable Passions: Sodomy Laws in America, 1861–2003* (New York: Viking, 2008).

8. Spencer W. Kimball, *The Miracle of Forgiveness* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1969), 40. See also, Spencer W. Kimball, “President Kimball Speaks Out on Morality,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1980, <https://www.lds.org/ensign/1980/11/president-kimball-speaks-out-on-morality?lang=eng>. In another talk, President Kimball stated: “There are said to be millions of perverts who have relinquished their natural affection. . . . This practice is spreading like a prairie fire and changing our world” (Spencer W. Kimball, “Voices of the Past, of the Present, of the Future,” *Ensign*, June 1971, <https://www.lds.org/ensign/1971/06/voices-of-the-past-of-the-present-of-the-future?lang=eng>).

homosexuality, they also demonized homosexuals, which caused untold despair and self-loathing among young gay Latter-day Saints.

Spencer W. Kimball's popular book *The Miracle of Forgiveness*, first published in 1969, devoted an entire chapter entitled "Crime Against Nature" to homosexuality. One LDS historian called it "the earliest and most comprehensive treatment on homosexuality by an apostle, and the foundation from which Mormon thought, policy and political action on homosexuality grew for the past 45 years."⁹ Using terms like "ugly," "repugnant," "ever-deepening degeneracy," "evil," "pervert," "deviant," and "weaklings," he taught that it was a spiritual disease that could be "cured," and to those who felt otherwise, he responded: "How can you say the door cannot be opened until your knuckles are bloody, till your head is bruised, till your muscles are sore? It can be done."¹⁰

This "curable-disease" mindset—based on obsolete psychological thought from the 1950s and 1960s—was embraced by Kimball and other Church leaders because it aligned with their spiritual views of homosexuality.¹¹ Seeing homosexuality as a psychological or spiritual malady, they taught that the cure was intense repentance, self-mastery,

9. Clair Barrus, "The Policy on Gay Couples, and the Priesthood Ban: A Comparison," *Worlds Without End: A Mormon Studies Roundtable* (blog), Nov. 3, 2016, <http://www.withoutend.org/policy-gay-couples-priesthood-ban-comparison>.

10. Kimball, *Miracle of Forgiveness*, 42.

11. Spencer W. Kimball, "Love vs. Lust," *BYU Speeches*, Jan. 5, 1965, https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/spencer-w-kimball_love-vs-lust. In this speech, Kimball cites a 1964 article from *Medical World News* about the "strength of the patient's desire to modify" homosexual desire, stating: "This statement by the Public Health Committee of the New York Academy of Medicine agrees with our philosophy. Man is created in the image of God. He is a god in embryo. He has the seeds of godhood within him and he can, if he is normal, pick himself up by his bootstraps and literally move himself from where he is to where he knows he should be." He speaks at length about curability. Note: BYU removed the text of this speech and left only the audio. A text version is archived at <https://web.archive.org/web/20030519075029/http://mentalhealthlibrary.info/library/same/samelds/samelds2001/links/kimball/kimball.htm>.

and even marriage to the opposite sex. This belief informed the Church's ecclesiastical approach and leadership training, as well as the thinking of Mormon mental-health therapists, for years to come—and it was probably the most psychologically and spiritually damaging of all the Church's teachings on homosexuality.

While the curability mindset has since been mostly abandoned by the Church, it still persists among those who cannot believe that God would create gay people without providing a means to be cured. They simply cannot see a place for homosexuals in the Mormon concept of eternal families. Boyd K. Packer famously expressed this sentiment in his October 2010 general conference address: "Some suppose that they were preset and cannot overcome what they feel are inborn tendencies toward the impure and unnatural. Not so! Why would our Heavenly Father do that to anyone?" The statement was revised days later in the Church's official transcript.¹² With the passing of Elders Kimball, Petersen, and Packer, and the continued evolution in our understanding of homosexuality, many fundamental aspects of the Church's position, such as cause and curability, have changed.¹³ In addition, the harsh, condemning rhetoric of Elders Kimball, Petersen, and Packer gave way to the softer, more compassionate tone of Elders Oaks, Holland, and Christofferson. Many in the general Church membership also began to soften their stance as they observed openly gay coworkers, neighbors, and their own family members living happy, productive lives once they cast off the shame and

12. Boyd K. Packer, "Cleansing the Inner Vessel," Oct. 2010, <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/2010/10/cleansing-the-inner-vessel?lang=eng> (compare audio/video talk at 9:00 to text that starts with, "Some suppose they were preset and cannot overcome what they feel are inborn temptations. . ."). See also, Peggy Fletcher Stack, "Packer Talk Jibes with LDS Stance after Tweak," *Salt Lake Tribune*, Oct. 25, 2010, <http://archive.sltrib.com/story.php?ref=/sltrib/home/50440474-76/packer-church-question-speech.html.csp>.

13. See Ryan T. Cragun, Emily Williams, and J. E. Sumerau, "From Sodomy to Sympathy: LDS Elites' Discursive Construction of Homosexuality Over Time," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 54, no. 2 (2015): 291–310.

condemnation they were raised with. While most Mormons continue to believe that homosexuality should be discouraged by society, a 2015 Pew Research Center survey shows that acceptance among Mormons grew by twelve points—from 24 percent to 36 percent—between 2007 and 2014, the largest increase among all other denominations.¹⁴

However, as Church leaders saw their members following society's trend toward greater acceptance of homosexuality, including same-sex marriage, they began to speak out strongly again—focusing their attention on the evils of same-sex marriage, which they saw as a threat to traditional marriage. The Church also began entering the political arena, fighting same-sex marriage legislation and lobbying for ballot initiatives and legislation that defined marriage as only between one man and one woman. The political action started with Hawaii in 1994 and culminated with a bruising public battle over California's Proposition 8 in 2008, which sought to define marriage as only between a man and a woman. The Church and its members were the largest donors in the Prop 8 fight, which won at the ballot box but was soon overturned in court.¹⁵ Ironically, this political fight may have done more to garner sympathy for gay people and galvanize public support for same-sex marriage—including its ultimate legalization in the US—than any other event.

After Prop 8, the Church tended to stay out of the public political arena on these issues, and instead focused on teaching the doctrine of traditional marriage and family with greater emphasis and frequency within the Church, although it continued to quietly file amicus briefs in anti-gay-marriage court cases around the country. Rather than get-

14. Caryle Murphy, "Most U.S. Christian Groups Grow More Accepting of Homosexuality," *Pew Research Center*, Dec. 18, 2015, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/12/18/most-u-s-christian-groups-grow-more-accepting-of-homosexuality>.

15. Neil J. Young, "Mormons and Same-Sex Marriage: From ERA to Prop 8," in *Out of Obscurity: Mormonism Since 1945*, edited by Patrick Q. Mason and John G. Turner (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 144–69.

ting involved in public lobbying itself, the Church has encouraged its members to stand up for traditional marriage as a necessary foundation for religious freedom, its recent rallying cry.

While still reaffirming its stance that same-sex marriage and homosexual behavior are grievous sins, the Church in the last few years has taken a number of steps that demonstrate improved understanding of, and greater compassion for, its LGBT people. In 2012, the Church quietly released its original *mormonsandgays.org* website that acknowledged same-sex attraction as “a complex reality” but not a sin unless acted upon. The following year when the Boy Scouts of America changed its policy allowing gay youth to participate (and after some previous mixed messages indicating the Church might pull out of the BSA), the Church affirmed its support for the policy change.¹⁶ In 2015, the Church began to argue for a “fairness for all” approach to housing, employment, and transportation laws, balancing religious freedom with reasonable safeguards for LGBT people.¹⁷ It released a public statement and employed lobbyists in support of a proposed LGBT nondiscrimination and religious rights bill in Utah and applauded its passage.¹⁸ That same year, Elder Christofferson announced that Church members could publicly advocate for gay marriage without having their membership threatened, as long as their effort didn’t attack the Church.¹⁹

16. “Church Responds to Boy Scouts Policy Vote,” *Mormon Newsroom*, May 23, 2013, <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/church-responds-to-boy-scouts-of-america-policy-vote>.

17. “Transcript of News Conference on Religious Freedom and Nondiscrimination,” *Mormon Newsroom*, Jan. 27, 2015, <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/publicstatement-on-religious-freedom-and-nondiscrimination>.

18. “Church Applauds Passage of Utah Senate Bill 296,” *Mormon Newsroom*, Mar. 12, 2015, <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/church-issues-statement-on-utah-house-bill-296>.

19. “Elder Christofferson KUTV,” YouTube video, posted by KUTVPhotographers, Mar. 13, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XybDk3CEoHg>.

This progress came to a halt on June 26, 2015 when the US Supreme Court issued its decision that made same-sex marriage legal in the United States. On that very day, the Church responded with a press release stating, “The Court’s decision does not alter the Lord’s doctrine that marriage is a union between a man and a woman ordained by God. While showing respect for those who think differently, the Church will continue to teach and promote marriage between a man and a woman as a central part of our doctrine and practice.”²⁰ From that point on, the tide seemed to turn. The doctrinal emphasis on traditional marriage and the proclamation on the family became a constant theme. The previous messages of tolerance and empathy were drowned out by the familiar refrains of the gay agenda and destruction of the family.

To make matters worse, on November 5, 2015, the Church issued the policy that labeled members in same-sex marriages apostate and barred their children from receiving Church ordinances and serving missions, effectively pushing their families out of the Church. The policy was spiritually and psychologically traumatizing to the Mormon LGBT community. As John Gustav-Wrathall, the president of Affirmation, described it, “In the months since the policy I’ve seen widespread signs of trauma and depression within the LGBT Mormon community, including documented suicides. Many feel the Church just wants to get rid of LGBT people.”²¹ A sharp increase in LDS youth suicides raised significant

20. “Supreme Court Decision Will Not Alter Doctrine on Marriage,” *Mormon Newsroom*, June 26, 2015, <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/supreme-court-decision-will-not-alter-doctrine-on-marriage>. The Church also issued a letter to be read in Church meetings in all units in the United States and Canada beginning Sunday, July 5, 2015 reaffirming its position on marriage. See “Church Leaders Counsel Members after Supreme Court Same-Sex Marriage Decision,” *Church News*, July 1, 2015, <https://www.lds.org/church/news/church-leaders-counsel-members-after-supreme-court-same-sex-marriage-decision?lang=eng>.

21. John Gustav-Wrathall, “John Gustav-Wrathall: Show an Increase of Love,” *Deseret News*, Jan. 31, 2016, <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/865646442/John-Gustav-Wrathall-Show-an-increase-of-love.html>.

concerns among parents of LGBT children and garnered much media attention.²² As if to balance the recent hardline rhetoric, the Church finally responded with a conciliatory statement and an unprecedented series of articles in the Church-owned *Deseret News* on LGBT issues, including references to resources it had previously not endorsed.²³

In October 2016, the Church released an entirely new version of its mormonandgay.org website, which many in the Mormon LGBT community regarded as a significant improvement over the prior version.²⁴ However, given the existence of the November policy, many felt the new website was a minor step toward rapprochement.

With this backdrop, we must acknowledge how, perhaps more than ever, we as a Church community need to confront our position and beliefs about homosexuality head on. We need to ask hard questions about why depression, suicide, and loss of faith seem to be the outcomes of a position that is believed to be of God. While the official position has improved vastly from President Kimball's generation, have we gone as far as the Lord wants us to go? Is there still more he would tell us if we had the humility and courage to ask?

As noted, Church leaders have drawn a very clear line in how far their position on homosexuality can evolve, stating that the current

22. See Michael Barker, Daniel Parkinson, and Benjamin Knoll, "The LGBTQ Mormon Crisis: Responding to the Empirical Research on Suicide," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 49, no. 2 (Summer 2016): 1–24 and Benjamin Knoll, "Youth Suicide Rates and Mormon Religious Context: An Additional Empirical Analysis," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 49, no. 2 (Summer 2016): 25–43.

23. "LDS Church Leaders Mourn Reported Deaths in Mormon LGBT Community," *Deseret News*, Jan. 31, 2016, <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/865646414/LDS-Church-leaders-mourn-reported-deaths-in-Mormon-LGBT-community.html>.

24. In addition to the revised content, the URL was changed from mormon-sandgays.org to mormonandgay.lds.org, sounding less confrontational and linking directly to the Church website.

position on marriage is God's will and therefore cannot and will not change.²⁵ However, we are, like other Christians, selective in which biblical commandments we take literally. Certainly, we do not accept other ancient biblical commandments the way we do those pertaining to homosexuality. Among scriptural passages that are no longer accepted are those that uphold slavery, mandate capital punishment for dishonoring parents, specify female purity rituals, and decree which foods are kosher. For example, Deuteronomy 22:23–29 stipulates that if a man rapes a married or betrothed woman, he is subject to the death penalty; but if he rapes an un-betrothed virgin he can make reparations simply by paying her father fifty shekels of silver and marrying her. Surely, we no longer accept this biblical law as just.

Furthermore, even within its short history, the LDS Church has changed many of its doctrinal positions, deemphasizing or repudiating teachings once thought to be doctrine.²⁶ The ban on Black Latter-day

25. From the “Frequently Asked Questions” page on mormonandgay.org: “Will the Church ever change its doctrine and sanction same-sex marriages?” The answer provided interestingly does not start with “no” but states that “marriage between a man and a woman is an integral teaching of the [Church] and will not change” (<https://mormonandgay.lds.org/articles/frequently-asked-questions>). In a video on the site, Elder D. Todd Christofferson states: “There shouldn’t be a perception or an expectation that the Church’s doctrines or position have changed or are changing. It’s simply not true, and we want youth and all people to understand that. The doctrines that relate to human sexuality and gender are really central to our theology. . . . So homosexual behavior is contrary to those doctrines— has been, always will be—and can never be anything but transgression” (“Purpose of this Website,” <https://mormonandgay.lds.org/videos?id=6326466338746981852>).

26. See Charles R. Harrell, *“This Is My Doctrine”: The Development of Mormon Theology* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2011). For an excellent treatment on how moral standards and religious doctrines have changed through longer history, see Craig Harline, “What Happened to My Bell-Bottoms?: How Things That Were Never Going to Change Have Sometimes Changed Anyway, and How Studying History Can Help Us Make Sense of It All,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 52, no. 4 (2013): 49–76.

Saints from holding the priesthood was thought to be the mind and will of God, but now many of the teachings that supported that ban are passed off as “speculation and opinion.”²⁷ Even after the ban was lifted, interracial marriages were discouraged, which is no longer the case.²⁸ General Authorities once soundly condemned birth control, but now Church leaders counsel that “the decision as to how many children to have and when to have them . . . should be left between the couple and the Lord.”²⁹ Certain doctrines and moral standards that were once considered God’s will have been dropped, while others once considered against God’s will are now held to be moral and acceptable by the Church.

How do we know if a doctrine or standard taught today is an unchangeable eternal truth or just a sociocultural tradition that will one day change? Given the above precedents, we must be willing to ask some sincere and probing questions about the Church’s current stance on homosexuality. Are we justified in resisting societal acceptance of homosexuality, or are we simply holding to past traditions and views that are causing harm to those affected? Is it really God’s will that his children born with a homosexual orientation be required to live their entire lives in celibacy without the emotional, physical, and spiritual attachment of someone they are naturally attracted to? Do we have the courage of

27. “Church Statement Regarding ‘Washington Post’ Article on Race and the Church,” *Mormon Newsroom*, Feb. 29, 2012, <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/racial-remarks-in-washington-post-article>.

28. “Interracial Marriage Discouraged,” *Deseret News*, June 17, 1978, available online at https://news.google.com/newspapers?id=_RxVAAAAIBAJ&sjid=YIADAAAAIBAJ&pg=5866%2C5012493.

29. “Same-Gender Marriages,” *Handbook 2: Administering the Church*, 21.4.10. For earlier condemnations of birth control, see Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, vol. 2 (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954), 273 and Harold B. Lee, *Report of the SemiAnnual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, Oct. 1972 (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, semiannual), 63.

a President Kimball to ask these questions and consider whether the current position is truly God's will or whether it, too, could be in error?

To take these questions seriously and to understand the reasoning and logic that follow, I assume the reader already understands and accepts two basic premises:

1. Being gay is not a choice. A person's sexual orientation, or attraction to one sex or the other, is instinctive and innate. It typically begins to manifest at an early age and grows in great intensity with sexual maturation. While the etiology of sexual orientation is not yet fully understood (although strong evidence exists of a biological/genetic component), we have the testimony of countless gay people—including members of our own church—who have told us that their sexual orientation is innate and not chosen, and that intensive and persistent effort to change it has not succeeded.
2. Homosexuals are just as capable as heterosexuals of forming committed, love-based relationships with a person they are naturally attracted to. And those relationships can be just as edifying and meaningful as the relationships formed by heterosexual couples. (Note: acceptance of this premise does not require a belief that it is acceptable to God.)

If you do not know any gay people personally and have not had the opportunity to really talk to them about their life experience, particularly those who are in committed same-sex relationships, I would encourage you to educate yourself.³⁰

II. Examination of the Doctrinal Basis for the Church's Position

The primary source of doctrine in our church is canonized scripture (the four standard works) and continuing revelation from the words

30. I highly recommend Brent Kerby, ed., *Gay Mormons?: Latter-day Saint Experiences of Same-Gender Attraction* (n.p.: Brent Kerby, 2011). You can also watch/listen to gay Mormons relate their own experiences at the website *Far Between*, which fosters an "on-going dialogue about what it means to be LGBTQIA/SSA and Mormon" (<http://farbetweenmovie.com>).

of latter-day prophets, seers, and revelators. With respect to canonized scripture, there is very little content on homosexuality and nothing that addresses the modern development of love-based same-sex relationships and marriage. The latter-day scriptural canon—consisting of the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price—contains no prohibition against and is completely silent on homosexuality. In the four gospels of the New Testament, Jesus spoke of marriage, divorce, and the sin of adultery, but he never directly addressed homosexuality.

The two most direct passages in the Bible come from the law of Moses and an epistle of Paul. Leviticus 18:22 states: “Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is abomination.” In Romans 1:26–27 (NIV), Paul speaks of women who “exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones,” and of men who in the same way “abandoned natural relations with women” and “committed shameful acts with other men.” While much of the conservative Christian world cites these scriptures as primary evidence of God’s prohibition of homosexual behavior, perhaps somewhat surprisingly LDS Church leaders rarely do. For instance, the Church’s mormonandgay.org website, its most comprehensive resource on this topic, does not cite the Romans and Leviticus passages. Nor does the LDS.org Gospel Topics entry for “Homosexuality” (which redirects to “Same-Sex Attraction”). A search of general conference talks in the last forty-five years yields only five references to the Romans and Leviticus passages—three were from Elder Russell M. Nelson, two were from Elder Boyd K. Packer, and one from President Spencer W. Kimball.

Why is it that current Church teachings on homosexuality and same-sex marriage rarely cite the two main biblical passages that most evangelicals (and likely most Mormon laity) rely on as evidence of God’s prohibition of same-sex relationships? Perhaps Church leadership (and correlation) recognize that more rigorous biblical scholarship does not adequately support the conventional interpretation, or at least that those scriptures do not really address the modern development of love-based

same-sex relationships. While it is beyond the scope of this article to engage in a thorough exegesis of these passages (there are many other sources that do this quite ably), I will give a brief summary of some of the arguments made by some biblical scholars as to why these passages should not be used as evidence against same-sex marriage.

The Leviticus passage is one of many prohibitions given to the children of Israel to set them apart from their Canaanite and Egyptian neighbors as God's covenant people (Leviticus 11:9–12). Like other ancient moral codes, the law of Moses had specific restrictions pertaining to diet and sexual relations. Some of them we follow today; others we do not. For instance, menstruating women were considered unclean, as was anything or anyone they touched. Having sex with a menstruating woman was strictly forbidden and required excommunication of both participants (see Leviticus 15:19–27; 18:19; 20:18).³¹ No Latter-day Saint considers these laws to be binding today, even though they are in the Bible.

The belief in biblical inerrancy is what allowed generations past and present to cite scripture in support of such atrocities as slavery, genocide, treating women as property, and putting homosexuals to death. The Mormon belief that the Bible is “the word of God as far as it is translated correctly” allows some latitude for us to discern God's word from the cultural trappings. Therefore, we need not be inextricably bound by the Leviticus passages on homosexuality any more than we are by the passages regarding ancient dietary codes and sexual mores.

Paul's discussion of homosexual sex in Romans (and in a few other places) was likely addressing the sexual practices common in his time and culture. Greco-Roman society did not view homosexuality as a distinct sexual orientation. Indeed, the Greeks and Romans accepted forms of homosexual behavior that would be unacceptable by today's

31. See also Richard Elliott Friedman and Shawna Dolansky, “Homosexuality,” in *The Bible Now* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 1–40.

standards, including prostitution, master-slave sex, and pederasty.³² It is these practices that Paul was speaking against, not the modern development of egalitarian, love-based homosexual relationships, a concept unknown in those times. By decrying various forms of sexual promiscuity, including the homosexual behaviors common in his time, Paul was calling for Christians to reject lasciviousness and promiscuity in favor of chastity.

Other biblical teachings on marriage (and celibacy) can help us understand how we might be able to accept a departure from biblical tradition. Jesus explicitly taught on three separate occasions, including in the Book of Mormon, that anyone who divorced and remarried, or even someone who married a divorced person, was guilty of adultery (Matthew 5:31–32; Matthew 19:3–9; Mark 10:2–12; 3 Nephi 12:32). This teaching is straightforward and unambiguous, yet our church does not prohibit divorce (even of a temple sealing) as the Catholic Church does. Why has our church been willing to make exception to this clear teaching from the Savior himself? Nothing in the LDS canon or latter-day revelation changed what Jesus taught about divorce. Historically speaking, this acceptance is likely related to our past practice of polygamy, which allowed quite liberal divorce policies. But it may also relate to evolving cultural attitudes and an acknowledgement that mortal life and relationships can be messy and imperfect, often falling short of the ideal. The Church allows mercy and understanding for members who fall short of the ideal of life-long marriage to the same person. Might the same mercy be extended to our gay brothers and sisters whose situation does not fit the heteronormative ideal?

After hearing Jesus' condemnation of divorce, his disciples observed, "it is not good to marry" (Matthew 19:10), which prompted further

32. See Matthew Vines, "The Gay Debate: The Bible and Homosexuality," <http://www.matthewvines.com/transcript> and J. R. Daniel Kirk, "Slave Sex in Ancient Rome," *Storied Theology* (blog), May 5, 2015, <http://www.jrdkirk.com/2015/05/05/slave-sex-in-ancient-rome/>.

teaching from Jesus on the subject of celibacy. Jesus' response to his disciples' observation was that "All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given" (Matthew 19:11). In other words, celibacy is not a universal requirement but can be a gift to some people. He then explained how some eunuchs (or those who have no desire or attraction for a woman) were born that way, some were made eunuchs of men (a common station in the ancient world) and, perhaps most interestingly, some "made themselves eunuchs [or celibate] for the kingdom of heaven's sake" (Matthew 19:12). He again reiterated that this was not a universal principle, stating, "He that is able to receive it, let him receive it" (Matthew 19:12). What might this mean for our gay brothers and sisters? Perhaps there are some who feel they are among the few "to whom it is given" to live a life of celibacy in order to fully devote themselves to Christ and his gospel and willingly make themselves celibate "for the kingdom of heaven's sake." But we must remember that the ability to make this great sacrifice is a gift given to few and not a universal requirement—at least it is not required of any of our heterosexual members. Most of us believe that "it is not good that . . . man should be alone" (Genesis 2:18) and that marriage and lifelong companionship with the one we love is a crowning experience of mortal life. Should it be any different for our gay brothers and sisters?

Are the biblical prohibitions against homosexual relations applicable to those in loving, committed relationships or are they similar to the biblical and religious traditions that have not stood the test of time? Perhaps with some of these ancient laws there are underlying doctrinal concepts that are eternal even if the specific laws themselves are not. For instance, biblical prohibitions against usury (interest) are not relevant by today's standards, but the underlying concept of not taking financial advantage of others would seem to be an eternal principle. And while we no longer judge suicide as equivalent to murder, we still believe in the underlying concept of the sanctity of human life. By the same token, perhaps the eternal principle underlying biblical prohibitions on

homosexual relations is to teach us that the greatest and most meaningful expression of human sexuality is found in an exclusive, committed, love-based relationship (i.e., marriage). Therefore, in studying any of the Bible passages that regulate sexual conduct, we should consider how the law of chastity informs them and whether the deeper meaning of that law applies to all who abide by it, regardless of sexual orientation.

Regardless of how we view biblical mandates on homosexuality, the Church's teachings on the subject of homosexuality and same-sex marriage generally do not draw on the scriptural prohibitions. Rather, Church leaders have developed a theological argument based on teachings about eternal marriage, the plan of salvation, and gender complementarity. These themes are set forth in various documents, including "The Family: A Proclamation to the World" (1995), "The First Presidency Statement on Same-Gender Marriage" (2004),³³ "The Divine Institution of Marriage" (2008),³⁴ and the letter from First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve to all Church units in the US and Canada after the US Supreme Court's ruling legalizing same-sex marriage (2015).³⁵ Of these documents, "The Divine Institution of Marriage" is the most comprehensive and, in the Church's own words, "outline[s] its doctrine

33. "First Presidency Statement on Same-Gender Marriage," *Mormon Newsroom*, Oct. 20, 2004, <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/first-presidency-statement-on-same-gender-marriage>.

34. "The Divine Institution of Marriage," *Mormon Newsroom*, <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/the-divine-institution-of-marriage>. The Church's website does not date this document. An original PDF version provides the date and context for the document, which was in support of the Church's political campaign for Proposition 8 in the state of California. The current document has been modified somewhat extensively from the original, available here: https://www.uvu.edu/religiousstudies/docs/mormonamerican/llds_newsroom_the_divine_institution_of_marriage.pdf.

35. "Church Leaders Counsel Members After Supreme Court Same-Sex Marriage Decision," *Mormon Newsroom*, June 30, 2015, <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/top-church-leaders-counsel-members-after-supreme-court-same-sex-marriage-decision>.

and position on marriage.”³⁶ Therefore, my examination of the Church’s position will focus on the concepts contained in that document.

One stated purpose of the document is to affirm that “intimate relations are acceptable to God only between a husband and a wife.” In response to that statement, one might ask, “why?” Why is sex between a married man and woman acceptable to God, while sex between two married men or two married women is not? Are we absolutely certain of God’s will on this subject? How can we require celibacy of them exclusively? To these questions, the Church has given no direct answer. Have they asked God in humility for an answer? Some members of the Church may cite the proclamation on the family as the revelatory answer to these hard questions. But it has never been canonized as scripture, and when President Packer referred to the proclamation as a “revelation” in his October 2010 conference address, that reference was deleted from the official transcript (along with other incorrect statements).³⁷

Celibacy—what the Church requires for gay people—has been, ironically, called a false and apostate doctrine by some Church leaders.³⁸ All members are expected to be sexually abstinent until marrying, but only gay people are required to be celibate all their lives. As one concerned father of a gay son describes it:

Celibacy is the prescribed solution for the question to which we have no revelation. It is not mentioned in the Proclamation. It is not [taught] in the Bible. Neither celibacy nor homosexuality is mentioned in any work of modern scripture. . . . There is no modern apostle or prophet who has

36. “Supreme Court Decision Will Not Alter Doctrine on Marriage,” *Mormon Newsroom*, June 26, 2015, <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/supreme-court-decision-will-not-alter-doctrine-on-marriage>.

37. Packer, “Cleansing the Inner Vessel” (compare audio/video talk at 00:45 to paragraph three in the text). See also, Stack, “Packer Talk.”

38. See, for example, the entries for “Apostasy” and “Celibacy” in Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1958). There is no entry for “celibacy” in the Gospel Topics section of LDS.org.

expounded on how to live a celibate life. There is no handbook, guide, or Church website addressing the subject. It is just expected. It is what you are left with when the commandments leave you nothing else.³⁹

In sum, celibacy appears to be the fallback position when prophetic vision, theological innovation, and godlike empathy fail. Rather than envision what might be possible, it is easier to default to “that’s how it’s always been.” This same reasoning was used by those who once defended slavery, objected to women’s suffrage, feared the civil rights movement, and upheld the priesthood/temple ban as God’s will. This way of thinking is aptly described by the proverb “Where there is no vision, the people perish” (Proverbs 29:18).⁴⁰ And in this case, we see people literally perish.

The celibacy requirement made logical sense with the old way of thinking about homosexuality—when it was thought to be like a contagion that would ensnare others unless it were essentially quarantined by forced celibacy and public opprobrium. But with the greater light and knowledge given by both science and listening to gay people’s lived experience, society—and the Church—have mostly abandoned that line of thinking, realizing that gay people do not choose their sexual orientation and that there is nothing inherently immoral about being attracted to one’s own sex. Nevertheless, the Church’s doctrine has evolved to a point that leaves gay people in a kind of no-man’s land where their being gay is, thankfully, not considered sinful anymore, but giving expression to their natural affections and capacities for love

39. Thomas Montgomery, “The Doctrine of Celibacy,” *No More Strangers: LGBT Mormon Forum* (blog), Oct. 19, 2014, <http://www.nomorestrangers.org/the-doctrine-of-celibacy>.

40. More accurate translations provide a different interpretation of this proverb, but the interpretation used in this paper is commonly used in the Church, including by President Hinckley.

and human intimacy—even in lawful monogamous marriage—is still considered a “grievous sin.”⁴¹

Having abandoned, for the most part, the old view that homosexuality is a chosen condition, the Church’s rationale for lifelong celibacy now focuses on the “divinity” of marriage and the divine roles of husband/father and wife/mother, declaring that marriage can only be between a man and a woman. In “The Divine Institution of Marriage” (referred to hereafter as “the Marriage document”), the Church makes three chief arguments in support of this declaration and in opposition to same-sex marriage. None are new or unique—all have been cited in legal briefs and in non-LDS sources by parties opposed to same-sex marriage at one time or another.

1. The Procreation Argument: Marriage is closely linked to procreation and only a man and a woman have the biological capacity to procreate; therefore, only men and women should be allowed to marry.

The first problem with the procreation argument is that it is only applied to homosexuals but not to heterosexuals. Heterosexual couples who do not have the biological capacity to procreate (due to menopause, disease, injury, etc.) are still able to marry. Even couples who do not desire children can be married. According to the Church’s position, God still accepts these marriages that are entered into solely for love and companionship. The Church’s handbook of instructions emphasizes that “sexual relations within marriage are divinely approved not only for the purpose of procreation, but also as a way of expressing

41. See for instance, Elder Christofferson’s interview on the policy: “We regard same-sex marriage as a particularly grievous or significant, serious kind of sin that requires Church discipline” (“Church Provides Context on Handbook Changes Affecting Same-Sex Marriages,” *Mormon Newsroom*, Nov. 6, 2015, <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/handbook-changes-same-sex-marriages-elder-christofferson>). As discussed later, even with a softer, more compassionate tone, this teaching still sends the message that gay people are inherently defective.

love and strengthening emotional and spiritual bonds between husband and wife.”⁴² Thus, the Church does not require marriage and sexual relations within marriage to be solely for the purpose of procreation with respect to heterosexuals. If heterosexuals who have no ability or intention to procreate are allowed to marry solely for love and companionship, why can’t homosexuals also be allowed to marry solely for love and companionship? If they have the same capacity as heterosexuals to form loving, lasting unions, and their intimate relations within those marital unions also serve “as a way of expressing love and strengthening emotional and spiritual bonds,” then how do we know that such unions are not divinely approved?

Another problem with the procreation argument is that it is inconsistent with the Church’s prescription of celibacy for gay people. The Church argues against same-sex marriage because a gay couple is unable to procreate and propagate the species, yet the Church’s prescription of celibacy has the same outcome. Whether in a same-sex marriage or living in celibacy, a gay person’s ability to procreate doesn’t change. Therefore, it seems illogical to tell a gay person, “You should be denied the blessings of marriage to the one you love because you can’t procreate” and to follow that with, “Our answer for you is to live a celibate life.”

Finally, there is the unfounded fear that because gay people can’t procreate, society’s acceptance of same-sex marriage would result in rapidly declining birthrates and the depopulation of nations.⁴³ This logic seems to be based on the old “contagion” view of homosexuality

42. “Birth Control,” *Handbook 2: Administering the Church*, 21.4.4.

43. “If the abominable practice became universal it would depopulate the earth in a single generation” (Kimball, *Miracle of Forgiveness*, 40). “One generation of homosexual ‘marriage’ would depopulate a nation, and, if sufficiently widespread, would extinguish its people. Our marriage laws should not abet national suicide” (Dallin H. Oaks, “Principles to Govern Possible Public Statement on Legislation Affecting Rights of Homosexuals,” Aug. 7, 1984, 19). “If [homosexuality were] practiced by all adults, these life-styles would mean the end of the human family” (James E. Faust, “Serving the Lord and

and that acceptance of same-sex marriage would somehow influence heterosexuals to change their sexual orientation or stop procreating. This view is hard to fathom. For those of us who are heterosexual, can we imagine becoming attracted to our own sex and losing all attraction to the opposite sex simply because we know happily-married gay people? Whether married or single, gay people—who have always existed as a small minority of the population—aren’t going to affect national birthrates and aren’t going to cause straight people to turn gay.

2. The Complementarianism Argument: Only marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God because of the complementary natures of male and female.

The Marriage document states that “[t]he special status granted marriage is nevertheless closely linked to the inherent powers and responsibilities of procreation and to the innate differences between the genders. By contrast, same-sex marriage is an institution no longer linked to gender—to the biological realities and complementary natures of male and female.” Complementarianism is the theological view that men and women have different but complementary roles and responsibilities in marriage, family life, religious leadership, and elsewhere. The Church appears to accept complementarianism as doctrine and further holds that the complementarity of male and female provides a rationale for denying marital unions to those of the same sex.

The first problem with this rationale is that it seems to imply that true romantic/emotional/spiritual love can only exist between male and female, and that a same-sex couple—because they do not have complementarity of biological sex—are incapable of that kind of love. Simple observation of gay couples, particularly those who have been together many years, easily dispels this myth.

Resisting the Devil,” *Ensign*, Sept. 1995, <https://www.lds.org/ensign/1995/09/serving-the-lord-and-resisting-the-devil?lang=eng>).

The Church frequently cites the creation narrative in making its argument. In Genesis, we read of God creating Adam and stating, “It is not good that the man should be alone,” then making a woman as a “helpmeet” for him, who is later referred to as Adam’s wife (Genesis 2:18). But is it correct to interpret this account as an edict against same-sex marriage? Such an interpretation reads more into the narrative than is actually there. Just because God created a man and woman in the beginning and intended for them to pair up and procreate doesn’t mean that the gay people he created aren’t also intended to be able to pair up according to their natural-born attraction. Some may argue that this account illustrates a divine pattern for marriage that same-sex marriage violates. But that divine pattern—a marriage between one man and one woman—was broken repeatedly in the Bible (and of course in our own church) by the practice of polygamy. In addition, that original biblical pattern had to allow for incestuous marriage among Adam and Eve’s children and posterity, which was later strictly prohibited in the law of Moses and by the standards of most societies. We must avoid taking this story too literally or extrapolating it to situations to which it does not apply (a practice known as proof texting).

Some look to the future state of an eternally married man and woman, the potential to become like our Heavenly Parents, and the mention of “continuation of the seeds” in Doctrine and Covenants 132:19 as evidence of some kind of spiritual procreation that precludes same-sex marriage in the afterlife. Even if these theological ideas are taken literally, they are not weakened or negated by allowing a small number of God’s children who do not fit that mold the opportunity to marry in this life. Moreover, there are three degrees in the celestial kingdom, and only one requires the “new and everlasting covenant of marriage” (D&C 131:1–4, which early Church leaders and members took to mean plural marriage but has now been defined as eternal marriage between one man and one woman). So even taking a very literal approach to this scripture, there are still two degrees in the celestial kingdom that do not require

marriage between a man and a woman (or women), which could leave room for same-sex married couples as well as single individuals. While I do not favor interpreting Doctrine and Covenants 131 this way, since it puts people on a different standing through no fault of their own regardless of their faithfulness and character, it nevertheless reminds us that there is more to the celestial kingdom than we typically focus on.

Perhaps most importantly, the limited extent of our knowledge of the afterlife regarding sex, procreation, marriage relationships, and becoming heavenly parents should cause us to be more humble and cautious in how we interpret and apply this knowledge. Terryl Givens's exhaustive treatment of the genesis of these doctrines shows how little we really know. For example, he states:

The impossibility of establishing with certainty Smith's position on spirit birth as opposed to spirit adoption is one of many points of indeterminacy in the Mormon past, and a reminder of how much fog enshrouded a narrative that is at times depicted as clear and unfailingly linear in the modern church. It is possible that Smith was undecided relative to two scenarios of human creation. More likely, perhaps, is the fact that neither adoption nor procreation is an adequate human analogue for the process by which Smith believed eternally existing intelligent element (or beings) to be transformed into individual human spirits.⁴⁴

Are we justified in imposing such a drastic restriction on our gay brothers and sisters in this life based on doctrinal speculations that may be more metaphorical than literal and about which we have little to no actual revelation?

Allowing gay people the right to love and marry in accordance with their "biological reality" need not threaten the doctrines that spring from the creation narrative of Adam and Eve or the eternal nature of the family

44. Terryl Givens, *Wrestling the Angel: The Foundations of Mormon Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 157; see also, 107–10, 156–65. See also, Taylor Petrey, "Toward a Post-Heterosexual Mormon Theology," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 44, no. 4 (Winter 2011): 106–49.

or eternal progression. Those doctrines still apply to the vast majority of God's children who are heterosexual. Allowing gay people the same blessings and benefits that heterosexuals derive from marriage would not negate, devalue, or change in any way these doctrines as they apply to heterosexuals. We would just have to humbly acknowledge that at the present time we do not have answers for how those doctrines relate to God's LGBT children but that we are confident he has a wondrous plan for them and loves them as much as he does his heterosexual children.

3. The Families and Children Argument: Redefining marriage will further weaken the institution of marriage and undermine the family.

For this argument, the Marriage document cites a number of academic studies, books, and articles that are frequently cited by conservative religious and political groups opposed to same-sex marriage and LGBT rights. While General Authorities and Church members have traditionally distrusted academia—particularly the social sciences—on issues of family and marriage, the Church has embraced sources that align with its position. However, by citing only those sources and ignoring the numerous studies and personal experiences that reach different conclusions, the document lacks intellectual integrity.

Moreover, if the Church is going to step out of the realm of doctrine and theology and into the realm of academic research and political punditry, it can no longer hold its position to be inerrant, unchallengeable, or equivalent to the voice of God. To the extent that its position relies on science and reason (which is generally a good thing in my opinion), it should be subject to thorough examination such that, ultimately, "truth will prevail." Or as Brigham Young said, "Be willing to receive the truth, let it come from whom it may"⁴⁵—even if such truth doesn't support the current position.

Before addressing the specific claims in this section, I should note that using families and children as an argument against same-sex mar-

45. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young* (1997), 16.

riage is a non-sequitur. Unlike heterosexual marriage, children do not automatically result from a same-sex marriage. And banning same-sex marriage will not stop some gay couples from having children. Therefore, if the Church opposes gay couples raising children, that should be the subject of its prohibition, not same-sex marriage. Nevertheless, I acknowledge that with the improved social standing, stability, and rights granted by legal marriage, more gay couples who choose to marry may desire to have families than ever before. Therefore, I address the following arguments.

First, the Church states:

Extensive studies have shown . . . that a husband and wife who are united in a loving, committed marriage generally provide the ideal environment for protecting, nurturing, and raising children. This is in part because of the differing qualities and strengths that husbands and wives bring to the task by virtue of their gender. As an eminent academic on family life has written: "The burden of social science evidence supports the idea that gender differentiated parenting is important for human development and that the contribution of fathers to child rearing is unique and irreplaceable. . . . The complementarity of male and female parenting styles is striking and of enormous importance to a child's overall development."⁴⁶

This is the gender complementarity argument applied to parenting. The Church cites a number of studies in support of the first statement, which seems like common sense. One could hardly argue that a loving, committed marriage does not provide the ideal environment for raising children; however, such a claim does not demonstrate that two wives or two husbands cannot have a loving, committed relationship that would also provide an ideal environment for raising children. In fact, gay couples who choose to have or adopt children do so with great forethought—it's not something that can happen by accident as it so often

46. "The Divine Institution of Marriage." The source cited is David Popenoe, *Life Without Father* (New York: The Free Press, 1996), 146.

does with heterosexual couples. In my experience knowing a number of same-sex couples who have had children, they are some of the most devoted and loving parents I have ever seen.

With respect to the gender complementarity argument in parenting, this fails to consider that not all heterosexual marriages have distinct gender roles and characteristics. For instance, the man in the marriage may not exhibit all the traits society or the Church considers to be masculine (e.g., emotionally reserved, athletic, career-minded, aggressive) but instead may exhibit many of the traits considered to be essentially feminine (e.g., sensitive, nurturing, artistic, passive). By the same token, two husbands or two wives in a same-sex union may exhibit the full complement of masculine and feminine traits, thereby qualifying for the supposed benefits such traits offer.

Regardless, studies show that children raised by same-sex couples do not differ markedly from those raised by heterosexual parents, as summarized in this research summary by the American Psychological Association over twelve years ago:

Results of social science research have failed to confirm any of these concerns about children of lesbian and gay parents. Research suggests that sexual identities (including gender identity, gender-role behavior, and sexual orientation) develop in much the same ways among children of lesbian mothers as they do among children of heterosexual parents. Studies of other aspects of personal development (including personality, self-concept, and conduct) similarly reveal few differences between children of lesbian mothers and children of heterosexual parents. . . . The picture that emerges from research is one of general engagement in social life with peers, parents, family members, and friends. . . . Overall, results of research suggest that the development, adjustment, and well-being of children with lesbian and gay parents do not differ markedly from that of children with heterosexual parents.⁴⁷

47. "Sexual Orientation, Parents, & Children," adopted by the APA Council of Representatives, July 28 and 30, 2004, <http://www.apa.org/about/policy/parenting.aspx> (citations omitted). See also, "What Does the Scholarly Research

Social science research simply does not jibe with the Church's conclusion.

Finally, the Marriage document concludes:

When marriage is undermined by gender confusion and by distortions of its God-given meaning, the rising generation of children and youth will find it increasingly difficult to develop their natural identities as men or women. Some will find it more difficult to engage in wholesome courtships, form stable marriages, and raise another generation imbued with moral strength and purpose.

This is a bold statement—again drawing on the old “contagion” theory—and, not surprisingly, the Church cites no scientific studies for its support. That is because there are no such reputable studies—it is simply opinion. And this opinion demonstrates a lack of basic understanding by conflating sexual orientation and gender identity. Also, it provides no explanation for how same-sex marriage will make it harder for heterosexuals to date and have stable marriages. As previously discussed, such a claim just doesn't make sense.

Before concluding this section, I feel it is important to address one more doctrinal issue that has been cropping up with more frequency in recent years. It is the doctrinal speculation that a faithful gay person will be “cured” or changed to heterosexual in the next life. This teaching likely stems from the 2006 interview with Elders Oaks and Wickman on same-gender attraction, in which Elder Wickman stated:

One question that might be asked by somebody who is struggling with same-gender attraction is . . . “If I can somehow make it through this life, when I appear on the other side, what will I be like?”

Gratefully, the answer is that same-gender attraction did not exist in the pre-earth life and neither will it exist in the next life. It is a circum-

Say about the Wellbeing of Children with Gay or Lesbian Parents?,” *Columbia Law School Public Policy Research Portal*, <http://whatweknow.law.columbia.edu/topics/lgbt-equality/what-does-the-scholarly-research-say-about-the-wellbeing-of-children-with-gay-or-lesbian-parents>.

stance that for whatever reason or reasons seems to apply right now in mortality, in this nano-second of our eternal existence. . . . [You're] not stuck with it forever. It's just now.⁴⁸

Straight people may take some comfort in this doctrine because it helps them reconcile the obvious unfairness gay people face in this life through no fault of their own. If they can just remain celibate in this life, all will be made right in the next when they are changed. However, like the hurtful folk doctrines white Church members fabricated about black people's lack of valiance in the premortal existence to reconcile the unfair and discriminatory way they were treated in the Church, this belief is actually quite damaging. First, many gay people consider being married to a person of the opposite sex for eternity a horrific prospect. To see it from their perspective, consider how a straight man would feel about being changed to homosexual in the afterlife and being married to another man for the rest of eternity.

Furthermore, many gay people feel that their gay identity is more than just a sexual orientation and comes bundled with a host of gifts such as empathy, artistic expression, and spirituality. They do not want their homosexuality changed because it would feel like giving up an integral part of who they are and losing all the unique gifts that come with being gay. On the other hand, to others whose same-sex attraction feels like a constant weight dragging them down to destruction, this new folk doctrine may make suicide seem like a better choice, or even the only means of finally being rid of their evil desires and susceptibilities. For these reasons, I sincerely hope that the Church will put an end to the teaching of this speculative and unfounded doctrine.

Given these doctrinal considerations, and particularly if we acknowledge that sexual orientation is not chosen, can't be spread like

48. "Interview with Elder Dallin H. Oaks and Elder Lance B. Wickman: 'Same-Gender Attraction,'" *Mormon Newsroom*, <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/interview-oaks-wickman-same-gender-attraction>. The website does not list the date of this interview.

a contagion, and that gay people are just as capable as heterosexuals of forming committed, meaningful marriage relationships, we must be willing to ask the following questions:

Do we really have absolute doctrinal certainty that God's will for his children who are born with a homosexual orientation is lifelong celibacy without the emotional, physical and spiritual attachment to someone they are naturally attracted to and can fall in love with?

Are we so certain of God's will on this subject that we are willing to accept as consequences: depression and personal anguish to the point of suicide in some cases, and loss of faith in God and the Church in the majority of cases?

Are we as a church rightfully resisting societal acceptance of homosexuality, or are we simply holding to past traditions and internal biases that are causing severe harm to gay people, as we previously did with the priesthood ban? Is it possible that society is moving in the right direction, as it generally has over the ages on so many other social issues?

In addition to believing that God can provide an answer, any serious consideration of such admittedly difficult questions requires godlike empathy, humility, and courage. President Kimball's experience leading up to the 1978 revelation provides an instructive model. Once black people became more than an abstract doctrinal issue to him and he came to know and understand them as real people, he developed a godlike empathy for them.⁴⁹ It wasn't until he obtained that empathy, and was humble enough to admit the Church might be wrong, that he had the capacity to actually question the Church's position and to begin studying the issue and petitioning the Lord for more understanding. As President Hinckley said of President Kimball:

Here was a little man, filled with love, able to reach out to people. . . .
He was not the first to worry about the priesthood question, but he

49. Edward L. Kimball, "Spencer W. Kimball and the Revelation on Priesthood," *BYU Studies* 47, no. 2 (2008): 37–38, 40.

had the compassion to pursue it and a boldness that allowed him to act, to get the revelation.⁵⁰

Reflecting back on those times, President Kimball recalled his personal struggle:

Day after day, and especially on Saturdays and Sundays when there were no organizations [sessions] in the temple, I went there when I could be alone.

I was very humble. . . . I was searching for this. . . . I wanted to be sure. . . .

I had a great deal to fight . . . myself, largely, because I had grown up with this thought that Negroes should not have the priesthood and I was prepared to go all the rest of my life until my death and fight for it and defend it as it was.⁵¹

Despite years of prophetic precedent and the statements of so many past leaders, he had the courage to question, and even greater courage to begin talking to other members of the Quorum of the Twelve and First Presidency, which ultimately paved the way for the confirming spirit of revelation and acceptance by the quorum.

Not only was the Spirit working on President Kimball, but it was also working on many faithful members of the Church who knew in their hearts long before 1978 that the Church's position was not of God. How did they know? An oft-cited example for testing prophetic pronouncements is this statement from President J. Reuben Clark:

I say it illustrates a principle—that even the President of the Church, himself, may not always be “moved upon by the Holy Ghost,” when he addresses the people. This has happened about matters of doctrine (usually of a highly speculative character) where subsequent Presidents of the Church and the peoples themselves have felt that in declaring the doctrine, the announcer was not “moved upon by the Holy Ghost.”

50. *Ibid.*, 44.

51. *Ibid.*, 48.

How shall the Church know when these adventurous expeditions of the brethren into these highly speculative principles and doctrines meet the requirements of the statutes that the announcers thereof have been “moved upon by the Holy Ghost”? The Church will know by the testimony of the Holy Ghost in the body of the members, whether the brethren in voicing their views are “moved upon by the Holy Ghost”; and in due time that knowledge will be made manifest.⁵²

How can we know if the controversial positions and teachings of the brethren on homosexuality are from the Holy Ghost? Have the members of the Church received the confirming testimony of the Holy Ghost on this issue, or do they simply accept what our leaders have said because the issue does not affect them personally? How much time must pass, during which gay people continue to suffer and some commit suicide, until “due time” is reached and the truth or error is sufficiently made manifest?

Many members have received answers to this question by the power of the Holy Ghost. They include our gay members who have wrestled for years with this question and have paid the price to know—they have studied, pondered, attended the temple, and pleaded with God in the depths of humility to know what he wants for them. They include faithful parents who have desperately sought answers to help them teach and raise their LGBT children in a way to best balance their spiritual and emotional well-being. They include members who are neither gay nor have LGBT family members but who have hearts that know and feel with a godlike empathy the pains our gay brothers and sisters have had to bear.

For those who feel so certain about our current understanding of God’s will on this subject, we would do well to remember Elder McConkie’s words after having to retract what he said prior to the

52. J. Reuben Clark Jr., “When Are Church Leaders’ Words Entitled to Claim of Scripture?,” *Church News*, July 31, 1954, 10, as cited in footnote 6 of D. Todd Christofferson, “The Doctrine of Christ,” Apr. 2012, <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/2012/04/the-doctrine-of-christ?lang=eng>. See also, James E. Faust, “. . . And The Truth Shall Make You Free,” *New Era*, Mar. 1975, <https://www.lds.org/new-era/1975/03/and-the-truth-shall-make-you-free?lang=eng>.

1978 revelation: “Forget everything that I have said, or what President Brigham Young or President George Q. Cannon or whomsoever has said in days past that is contrary to the present revelation. We spoke with a limited understanding and without the light and knowledge that now has come into the world.”⁵³

III. Examination of the Moral Basis for the Church’s Position

The Church would likely assert that the moral basis for any of its policies or positions is axiomatic if they are based on true doctrine. However, as explained above, there have been many teachings or doctrines—whether contained in the scriptures or taught by latter-day Church leaders—that have been discarded or modified because they are no longer believed to be true and have even been harmful. As President Dieter F. Uchtdorf said, “to be perfectly frank, there have been times when members or leaders in the Church have simply made mistakes. There may have been things said or done that were not in harmony with our values, principles, or doctrine.”⁵⁴ Here I will set aside the question of whether the Church’s current position on homosexuality is God’s will and examine it solely on the basis of moral reasoning. In other words, what conclusion could an honest, moral person arrive at using only her God-given intellect and ability to reason?

First, I have found that those who see same-sex relationships as sinful and immoral focus solely on the sexual aspect of the couple’s relationship. They are generally unfamiliar with gay people and therefore can’t even conceive of a gay person being in a loving relationship similar to that of a loving heterosexual couple. To them, being gay is only about sex. The result is that they see gay people primarily as sex objects instead

53. Bruce R. McConkie, “All Are Alike unto God,” *BYU Speeches*, Aug. 18, 1978, https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/bruce-r-mcconkie_alike-unto-god-2.

54. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “Come, Join with Us,” Oct. 2013, <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/2013/10/come-join-with-us?lang=eng>.

of whole human beings, and they see their relationships as based only on lust and not on love, kindness, and mutual respect. This view is a twisted and unfair basis on which to make a moral judgment. What if this same perspective were used to view young straight couples, newly married and deeply in love? In judging the morality of a gay couple's relationship, we should use the same perspective that we use to view a straight couple's relationship. We should view them as whole human beings who have an innate desire for emotional, intellectual, spiritual, and physical attachment with another human being. We should view their love in terms of mutual affection, kindness, respect, compatibility, complementarity, commitment, and stability, as well as physical attraction. If we generally observe these characteristics in their relationship, we may then conclude that there is no reason their relationship is any less edifying, beneficial, and moral than that of a similarly-situated straight couple.

Human judgment about what is moral or immoral, however, is more often a matter of gut instinct than it is about reason. Sexuality is one area that arouses strong positive or negative feelings in people. Heterosexuals may feel revulsion or discomfort at the thought of same-sex intimacy and may interpret those feelings as their spirit recoiling at something unnatural and immoral. However, this fails to consider the fact that homosexuals may have the same feelings about opposite-sex intimacy.

Furthermore, are such gut instincts always to be trusted? Would it be proper, for instance, to judge interracial marriage as immoral just because you personally feel internal discomfort at the thought of intimacy with someone of another race? In fact, such feelings may have been at the root of early Church doctrines (and civil laws) that declared interracial marriage a sin against nature and denied black people the priesthood and temple blessings. As John Turner notes, "Although fragmentary documentation obscures the reasons for [Brigham] Young's hardening position [on race], his revulsion over the specter of interracial procreation apparently played a major role in his thinking. Perhaps

most fundamentally, a church that emphasized forging links between the generations and eternal sealings between its members would not find it easy to incorporate black Americans within this ecclesial family.”

⁵⁵ Today of course, the Church disavows the idea that mixed-race marriages are sinful.⁵⁶

Like the child who is developmentally incapable of comprehending adult human sexual intimacy, a heterosexual person may be incapable of fully comprehending same-sex intimacy. If heterosexuals get to judge the morality of romantic relationships based on what feels right and natural to them, shouldn't gay people be able to use that same basis to judge their relationships? Some might protest that this line of reasoning is essentially, “if it feels good, do it.” But that is not what I'm suggesting. Rather, gay people should be able to judge the rightness and morality of their relationships the same way heterosexuals do—based on their own gut instinct but still within certain cultural and moral bounds. That basis does not give an automatic moral pass to do whatever they want to do with whomever they want, just as it doesn't for heterosexuals. The same rules regarding consent, age, emotional and mental capacity, and mutual respect still apply, but the rules should apply equally, whether gay or straight. Therefore, if someone wants to rely on their gut instinct as an indicator of morality, let them judge that morality for themselves and not for others whose gut instincts may differ.

Another argument against same-sex relationships is that they are “unnatural” because they go against nature's intended purpose for the

55. John G. Turner, *Brigham Young: Pioneer Prophet* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012), 223. Brigham Young often advocated the death penalty for mixed-race marriage, as in this statement: “Shall I tell you the law of God in regard to the African race? If the white man who belongs to the chosen seed mixes his blood with the seed of Cain, the penalty, under the law of God, is death on the spot. This will always be so” (Brigham Young, Mar. 8, 1863, *Journal of Discourses*, 10:110).

56. “Race and the Priesthood,” *Gospel Topics*, <https://www.lds.org/topics/race-and-the-priesthood?lang=eng>.

sexes. However, whether something is or is not natural is not a good indicator of morality. Think of the many medical advances, such as artificial joints, artificial hearts, and in vitro fertilization, that are unnatural but are not considered immoral. As a missionary in the missionary training center, I remember watching a short documentary about a woman who was born without arms but who had mastered the ability to use her feet to prepare her family's meals, do her children's hair, bottle feed her baby, put on her makeup, drive a car, and, in short, do just about anything a mother with arms could do.⁵⁷ She was doing things with her feet that at first glance, appeared unnatural and even off-putting. Using her feet to peel and cut apples or to caress her baby's face was not what nature had intended for feet. But by the end of the film, I saw her as an inspiration and felt convicted for my initial feelings of discomfort. Certainly no one could say that the "unnatural" way in which she used her feet was immoral. Is it possible to countenance gay sexuality in the same light?

Those who view homosexuality as unnatural would probably cite two main reasons: (1) it cannot produce offspring, which is nature's objective for sexual relations, and (2) gay sex itself is inherently unnatural. Sexual reproduction evolved as a very effective means of ensuring propagation of the species—so, yes, sex for the purpose of having offspring is "natural." However, the vast majority of human sexual activity, including within healthy, stable marriages, is not for the purpose of reproduction but solely to express love and desire. Does that make such sexual activity unnatural? If the outcomes of a committed, loving same-sex relationship are just as positive and edifying as those of a heterosexual relationship, the ability to have children shouldn't determine the "naturalness" of those relationships, whether gay or straight. In addition, a number of genetic and evolutionary theories explain how homosexuality is an advantage in human societies (and actually strengthens wider family units) and therefore continues to exist in a minority of the population.

57. *A Day in the Life of Bonnie Consolo*, directed by Barry J. Spinello (Barr Films, 1975).

Based on these evolutionary advantages, homosexuality can certainly be considered “natural.”⁵⁸

Whether gay sex is seen as “natural” comes down to very personal and subjective opinion that mostly hinges on one’s own sexual orientation. To a straight person, the thought of same-sex intimacy feels unnatural, whereas to a gay person, heterosexual intimacy feels unnatural. Additionally, heterosexual couples may engage in the same types of sexual activity that gay couples do. For a short time, temple worthiness interviews included advice to married couples not to practice “unnatural, impure, or unholy practices” and specified that oral sex was in that category; however, months later that instruction was removed.⁵⁹ The Church has decided—like it did with the very personal and intimate decisions on birth control and family size—to leave practices within the bedroom for individual couples to choose.

Finally, the Church’s prescription for gay people—celibacy—is clearly not natural. Having to forgo human intimacy, physical affection and touch, romantic love, and lifelong companionship goes against human nature.

One way to judge the morality of something is to ask if it causes harm. Does a committed, monogamous same-sex relationship cause harm? The Church has stated its belief that same-sex marriage harms society and families because “children and youth will find it increasingly difficult to develop their natural identities as men or women. Some will

58. William Kremer, “The Evolutionary Puzzle of Homosexuality,” *BBC Magazine*, Feb. 18, 2014, www.bbc.com/news/magazine-26089486. See also, James O’Keefe, “Homosexuality: It’s about Survival, Not Sex,” *TEDx Tallaght*, Nov. 16, 2016, <http://www.tedxtallaght.com/apps/videos/videos/show/18991711-homosexuality-it-s-about-survival-not-sex>.

59. Letter from First Presidency, Jan. 5, 1982, available at <http://rationalfaiths.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Jan-5-19821.pdf>. See also, “Prophetic Counsel about Sex Within Marriage: A Brief History,” *Mormon Matters* (blog), Mar. 17, 2008, <http://www.mormonmatters.org/2008/03/17/prophetic-counsel-about-sex-within-marriage-a-brief-history>.

find it more difficult to engage in wholesome courtships [and] form stable marriages.”⁶⁰ There is simply no basis or evidence for this claim. Rather, it is likely based on the outdated “contagion” belief that people, especially youth and children, are recruited or converted to be gay, for which there is no evidence.

Once all of these erroneous notions are dispelled, it may be possible to see same-sex marriage as a benefit to civilization. Traditionally, society has valued the institution of marriage based on the belief that it causes young single people—who may be prone to more profligate, reckless living that endangers the physical and emotional health of themselves and others—to settle down, become responsible, and think about others above themselves. If marriage really accomplishes this, why wouldn’t we want it for gay people as well as straight people? Would we rather keep gay people on the margins of “acceptable” society, where hookup culture and risky behavior abound, or would we prefer that they have the same opportunity and expectations as straight people to enter into committed marriage relationships?

The great majority of LDS parents of gay children that I know want their gay children to have stable, committed relationships that will result in a greater likelihood of physical and emotional health and well-being—just as they do for their straight children. And those kinds of relationships are more likely to come from legal marriage. As LDS parents, we have taught our children from their earliest years the importance of finding a worthy husband or wife who will love and cherish them, and that the greatest joys in life come from a fulfilling marriage and family life. Should it surprise us that our gay children have internalized those teachings, seen the good examples of their parents, and desire what we have?

In sum, setting aside all religious implications for the moment, if we accept the two basic premises previously introduced, that (1) being

60. “The Divine Institution of Marriage.”

gay is not a choice, and (2) gay people have the same capacity as straight people to enter into committed, loving relationships, we must ask ourselves how a love-based, committed same-sex relationship is any different or less moral than a love-based, committed heterosexual relationship. To go a step further, we should be willing to ask ourselves whether it is moral to deny gay people the right and opportunity to experience what almost every human being desires in terms of romantic love, physical and emotional connection, and lifelong companionship with someone they are naturally attracted to. Surely, any heterosexual can appreciate the way Berta Marquez describes the joy of her marriage:

Tonight, in the evening, after the gloaming I went to the shore to ride the waves. The sea was expansive and endless. As I went deeper and the water surrounded me I thought about how much I wanted to remember and feel the vastness of the universe, of this moment. I was grateful for the beauty of it. I had to stop in the waves to try to absorb what was around me, in the water, in the evening sky.

But the thing I want to remember most is how upon exiting the sea, my little board in tow, looking through the crowds for my companion, she had already taken the initiative to walk to where I was, towel outstretched, ready to surround me in warmth and comfort. This is the person I married, my helpmate, my fellow traveler, my wife. Every day I am legitimately awed by her thoughtfulness and kindness. I am grateful for the communion of our partnership.

I invite those who feel ambivalent about LGBT families, our lives and our marriages to reflect on this: the daily ordinary comforts, hopes and joys you cherish beat within our hearts as well. Carefully catalogue the purpose, strengths, hope and life-giving warmth you feel as you lie beside your beloved, as you wash the dishes together, as you discuss the coming days and how you hope to grow old together. Then think about asking another to forego the blessings and privileges you enjoy daily and ask if perhaps it is okay for others, though different from you in ways small or great, might not also deserve access to the same life affirming blessings you derive daily from the companion beside you. I hope you will see why the same things are vital to us, why we too need

the emotional, spiritual and companionate love that makes life worth living. I hope you will see with new eyes.⁶¹

IV. Examination of the Empirical Basis for the Church's Position

The doctrinal and moral sections of this article primarily use reason and logic to examine the Church's position on homosexuality and same-sex marriage. This section attempts to examine the Church's position from an empirical perspective, based on observation or experience rather than theory or pure logic. Jesus advocated this approach in judging whether something was of God when he taught, "by their fruits ye shall know them" (Matthew 7:16–20; see also, Galatians 5:22–23; Moroni 7:14–19). Elder M. Russell Ballard has further stated that, "A church, or any way of life, should be judged by the fruits or results that it generates."⁶² Therefore, if the Church's position on homosexuality is based on eternal truth and is morally sound, we would expect that living that way would produce "good fruit," while being in a same-sex relationship would produce "bad fruit."

Ideally, an empirical approach would be based on studies and surveys that employ scientific methods.⁶³ However, I will share my personal

61. As shared in the Mormons Building Bridges Facebook group, Oct. 12, 2015. See also, Laura Root, "Being Mormon, Lesbian, and in Love . . ." *Rational Faiths* (blog), Dec. 30, 2016, <http://rationalfaiths.com/being-mormon-lesbian-and-in-love> and Chris Janousek, "I'm Homophilic," *No More Strangers* (blog), Mar. 20, 2014, <http://www.nomorestrangers.org/im-homophilic>.

62. M. Russell Ballard, "Faith, Family, Facts, and Fruits," Oct. 2007, <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/2007/10/faith-family-facts-and-fruits?lang=eng>.

63. Links to such studies, which consistently show highly negative outcomes associated with gay people trying to live according to the Church's position, can be found at the independently-created Gays and Mormons website here: <http://gaysandmormons.org/scientific-research>. Critics of these studies may argue that survey respondents are self-selected rather than randomly selected or that study authors have an agenda. However, it is notable that no studies

observations as someone who has two gay sons, helped found an LDS LGBT support group with over 500 members,⁶⁴ and actively participates in Affirmation, the largest and oldest LDS LGBT organization in existence. In the thirteen years since my oldest son came out, I have read and studied extensively on this subject, I have met and personally know hundreds of LGBT people, I have read the personal accounts and experiences of hundreds more, and I belong to a number of social media groups specifically for LDS LGBT people and their friends and families. I recognize such observations are anecdotal. But you don't have to take my word for it. If you start talking to gay people and others who are familiar with these issues, you will hear the same stories, and I believe they will confirm my observations.⁶⁵ Here are my observations of the

or surveys have been published by groups or individuals who advocate for the Church's position as a way of life for gay people.

64. See ALL: Arizona LDS*LGBT, <http://www.ALLArizona.org>.

65. Brent Kerby, *Gay Mormons?*. Many firsthand accounts can be found online, including the following: Root, "Being Mormon, Lesbian, and In Love"; Kayden Maxwell, "Hero Journey," *No More Strangers* (blog), Oct. 11, 2014, <http://www.nomorestrangers.org/a-gay-mormon-teen-age-16-writes-an-essay-for-english-class>; Sarah Lewis, "That Weak Things May Become Strong," *Each Day is an Adventure When You're a Lewis* (blog), Jan. 11, 2017, <http://eachdayisanadventurelewis.blogspot.com/2017/01/that-weak-things-may-become-strong.html>; John Bonner, "Letter to 14 Year Old Me," *Life Outside the Book of Mormon Belt* (blog), Jan. 12, 2016, <https://outsidethebookofmormonbelt.com/2016/01/12/letter-to-14-year-old-me-by-john>; Jena Peterson, "Authenticity Through Connection," *Rational Faiths* (blog), May 31, 2016, <http://rationalfaiths.com/authenticity-through-connection>; Jonathan Manwaring, "How My Gay Family Members and Friends Have Changed Me," *Northern Lights* (blog), Dec. 5, 2014, <http://ldslights.org/gay-family-members-friends-changed>; Berta Marquez, "A Polyphony of Three," *Affirmation* (blog), Nov. 19, 2015, <http://affirmation.org/polyphony-of-three-bertha-marquez>; "Our Families: Trey and Guy," *Affirmation* (blog), Mar. 1, 2013, <http://affirmation.org/affinity-march-2013/#1>; "Theresa and Rachel: Our Story," *No More Strangers* (blog), June 3, 2013, <http://www.nomorestrangers.org/theresa-and-rachel-our-story>; Matthew Balls, "Jeffrey," *Far Between*, <http://farbetweenmovie.com/jeffrey>; John Gustav-Wrathall, "Doubt

fruits most commonly associated with gay people who are raised in the Church and are trying to live the Church's position of lifelong celibacy:

Early stages (acknowledging being gay/same-sex attracted)

Extreme guilt and self-loathing (even when living Church standards)

Depression and despair with occasional suicidal thoughts

Extreme religiosity and scrupulosity (perfectionism and unhealthy obsession with righteous living and rule-keeping in hopes of changing or proving worthiness)

Later stages (realizing sexual orientation isn't changing)

Periods of depression and despair with suicidal thoughts, sometimes leading to suicide

Social/emotional detachment, inability to form relationships with others

Stagnation, apathy, hopelessness

Overcompensation, perfectionism, overachievement

Obsessive/compulsive behavior associated with pornography and masturbation made worse by feelings of shame, worthlessness, and hopelessness

A perpetual cycle of shame, trying to suppress innate sexuality and live according to the Church's standards but always falling short (periodic hookups, pornography, etc.)

Loss of faith, anger and bitterness against the Church and God

Abandonment of Church membership to preserve emotional and mental health

Your Doubts," *Young Stranger* (blog), Jan. 14, 2014, <http://youngstranger.blogspot.com/2014/01/doubt-your-doubts.html>; John Gustav-Wrathall, "The Pillars of My Faith," *Young Stranger* (blog), Aug. 4, 2014, <http://youngstranger.blogspot.com/2014/08/the-pillars-of-my-faith.html>.

In example after example, I hear of sadness and despair. However, it is not being gay that causes the emotional trauma and mental anguish; it is being gay and raised in a religion and culture that tells you from the time you are an innocent child that your feelings of love and attraction are degrading and sinful, something you must extinguish and bury deep inside. Unlike your straight friends and siblings who revel in their crushes, falling in love, showing physical affection, dating, and marrying, you are taught that the love and attraction you feel is from Satan and if expressed—even in a loving, monogamous marriage—it will cause society’s downfall and the destruction of the family, and you will be declared an apostate, an enemy of the Church.

I belong to a private Facebook group for active LDS parents who have LGBT children. There are over 850 members at last count, with parents joining every day. In reading the stories of these parents, particularly those whose teen children are just coming out as gay, one of the most common themes is that before coming out the children begin pulling away from the Church. While saddened that their children pull away from the Church they love, these parents come to realize that they would rather have an emotionally healthy, well-adjusted gay child out of the Church than a suicidal, emotionally unhealthy child in the Church.

A small proportion of gay people are able to remain active in the Church (although that number continues to decline as they age), and some actually return to activity in the Church after leaving. They are able to maintain a healthy attitude and sense of self-worth because they do not internalize what the Church tells them. They believe that they are whole and undamaged, that being gay is how God intended them to be. And by my observation, most of them do not believe that same-sex marriage is against God’s will, even if they have not chosen that path for themselves in order to maintain full fellowship in the Church (at least for the time being).

A common refrain among religious people is found in this statement by President James E. Faust: “The false belief of inborn homosexual

orientation denies to repentant souls the opportunity to change and will ultimately lead to discouragement, disappointment, and despair.”⁶⁶ This view is understandable and logical if “acting on” one’s homosexuality is believed to be sinful and against God’s will. In this view, gay people may find momentary pleasure in living counter to God’s laws, but ultimately, they will come to find out that “wickedness never was happiness” and will reap the bitter fruits of their unrighteous choices. But what if we find the opposite to be true? What if we observe that gay people living in long-term, committed same-sex relationships are just as happy as their straight counterparts? What if we find that gay couples who live the law of chastity in the same manner required of straight couples (no sexual relations outside of marriage and total fidelity within marriage) receive the same blessings and positive outcomes as straight couples who live that law?

I have met and come to know many same-sex-married gay couples, some who have been married only a short time and some who have been married many years. Here are some of the positive fruits I have observed.

Happiness and fulfillment

Stability and commitment

Sincere love and concern for each other

Greater emotional and spiritual well-being

Light in their countenance, the fruits of the Spirit in their lives

In other words, the blessings and benefits of marriage appear to be available to all those who are willing to abide by the covenant of exclusive commitment, regardless of whether they are gay or straight.

In addition to the positive fruits that marriage—heterosexual or homosexual—brings to individuals and families, it also strengthens our

66. James E. Faust, “Serving the Lord and Resisting the Devil,” *Ensign*, Sept. 1995, <https://www.lds.org/ensign/1995/09/serving-the-lord-and-resisting-the-devil?lang=eng>.

communities and society as a whole. John Gustav-Wrathall gives three reasons that gay marriage should be embraced by all: First, promoting stable, long-term pair bondings increases the likelihood that gay people will form lasting relationships and decreases the likelihood that they will enter into unstable opposite-sex relationships. Second, families create a more stable society. Individuals in a family take care of each other, provide for each other, and nurture each other rather than relying on the state to provide for them. Finally, marriage promotes morality and spirituality. It encourages individuals to bridle their sexual passions and live in committed, enduring relationships. But it also fosters spiritual development. “In many ways, those commitments [to my husband] paved the way for me to come back to the Church,” writes Gustav-Wrathall. “I believe living in a way that honored my love for him made me more sensitive to the promptings of the Spirit.”⁶⁷

Gay people are not immune from the marital and relationship problems that all people face. Indeed, I am aware of some same-sex marriages that were perhaps entered into too hastily and have ended in divorce. However, the joy gay couples are finding in the right to marry may actually be injecting new life into an institution that seems to be dying out in much of secular society.

Until relatively recently, society in general took much the same position as the Church on homosexuality and same-sex marriage. The Church now sees society’s departure from that position as evidence of moral decay. However, the reason we as a society (including a growing number in the Church) are moving away from the Church’s position is that we have been able to observe for ourselves the lives of gay people rather than relying solely on tradition and the cultural prejudices of past generations to inform our views. Gay people are members of our family, our friends, our neighbors, our coworkers, and our sons and daughters.

67. John Gustav-Wrathall, “Why Same-Sex Marriage Will Strengthen Marriage for Everyone,” *Young Stranger* (blog), May 27, 2011, <http://youngstranger.blogspot.com/2011/05/why-same-sex-marriage-will-strengthen.html>.

As they have been able to live their lives more openly and authentically, rather than in fear and hiding, we are able to see for ourselves that they are really no different than we are, that they are better off living with the same freedoms and opportunities that we have—without shame, without condemnation, and without being made to feel that their lives are bringing about the downfall of society and destruction of the family.

If we judge the Church's position on homosexuality and same-sex marriage by its fruits, can we still unequivocally say that this position is of God? Like the Church's earlier teachings about black people, its position on homosexuality is creating great spiritual and emotional harm. If Church leaders do not accept these fruits as I and many others have observed them, then, with the stakes so high, I hope they commission reliable studies and surveys, conduct large-scale interviews of gay people, talk to LDS parents who have gay children, and determine whether its position truly has a positive or negative impact on the lives of gay people. In short, I pray that they will "study it out in their minds" and ask the Lord to confirm their conclusions (D&C 9:8–9).

V. Where to From Here?

The Church has evolved significantly on this issue. And aside from the emotional and spiritual trauma caused by the November 2015 policy, the Church has taken a number of positive steps that have led to greater understanding of and compassion for our gay members of the Church. However, no matter how much the Church encourages love and understanding—no matter how much it tells gay people that there is no sin in being gay while at the same time continuing to tell them that their deep inner desire for love and companionship is considered a defect—this message will continue to cause hopelessness, shame, and bitterness. It will continue to result in depression, suicide, and loss of faith.

More education on this issue and more love and empathy for our gay members will help mitigate some of the negative symptoms they experi-

ence. But the reality is, as long as gay members are treated as unequal to straight members, as long as they are taught from the time they are young that their core natures are essentially a defect that will be fixed in the next life, their psyches and spirits will be damaged. And most of them will leave. Can we really expect otherwise? Would we do any differently if we were in their place? Prior to the 1978 revelation on the priesthood, wasn't it logical to expect that the majority of black people would find the Church a hostile and damaging place because they couldn't receive the same blessings as white members and were taught that they carried the curse of Cain and were spiritually inferior to whites in the premortal existence? Should we expect our gay members to respond any differently given what the Church teaches about their nature?

Just as it took a major doctrinal change in 1978 for the Church to allow black people to be treated as whole human beings and spiritually equal to white people, nothing less than a similar doctrinal change regarding our characterization of homosexuality will allow us to treat gay people as whole human beings and spiritually equal to straight people. This doctrinal change does not require changing our doctrines on eternal marriage or eternal families. It simply requires applying the law of chastity equally to all members regardless of sexual orientation, and recognizing that marriage has the same ability to bless and ennoble the lives of gay couples as straight couples.

Following such a doctrinal change, at some point temple sealings for same-sex couples would inevitably be the next question to arise. However, since Joseph Smith's teachings about the relations between couples in the afterlife and the nature of spiritual procreation are still so vague and undeveloped, these theological/doctrinal issues may be addressed later. There is ample historical and theological basis for exploring such possibilities for LGBT people.⁶⁸

68. See Petrey, "Toward a Post-Heterosexual Mormon Theology."

The longer this change takes, the more we will lose gay people, their family members, their friends, and other sympathetic Church members, particularly younger people who do not see same-sex marriage as a threat to society or a sin against God. And unlike black people who had the choice of not joining the Church during the priesthood/temple ban, gay babies are born into the Church every day and at increasing numbers as the Church grows. Their departure—along with that of their families and those who care about them—ultimately harms us as a community. It leaves a gaping wound in our church, the body of Christ.

Some may argue that if the current doctrine is God's will, it is out of our hands, and that regardless of the despair, the suicides, the mental anguish, the bitterness, the ultimate loss of faith and loss of members, we cannot change what God has decreed.⁶⁹ But do we really believe these fruits are acceptable to God and in accordance with his revealed will, or are we leaning too much on our own heterosexual understanding? Do we believe in continuing revelation or not? Do we not have enough scriptural and historical precedent demonstrating that revelation comes not just when God decides but when we seek it? Think of most of the major revelations given to Joseph Smith, think of the 1978 revelation to President Kimball—all came in response to questioning, seeking, and petitioning the Lord for answers to sincere and sometimes difficult questions. We must remember these fundamental precepts of our Church:

69. In a religious freedom conference held in Arizona on January 21, 2017, Elder Dallin Oaks gave several reasons why the Church must resist societal change on traditional marriage, including: "We believe in revelation from God and we have no power to alter revealed doctrine when it collides with man-made laws or cultures. . . . We also have no power to alter revealed prophetic directions on the application of that doctrine to the circumstances of our day. And we should also note, revelation is the province of God and comes not as we will, but when and how He decides." A recording of the proceedings was provided by a personal acquaintance. For a summary of the conference, see Jill Adair, "Elder Oaks Urges All Church Members to Defend Religious Freedom," *Church News*, Jan. 25, 2017, <https://www.lds.org/church/news/elder-oaks-urges-all-church-members-to-defend-religious-freedom?lang=eng>.

“We believe all that God has revealed, all that He does now reveal, and we believe that *He will yet reveal many great and important things* pertaining to the Kingdom of God. (Articles of Faith 1:9; emphasis added)

“Yea, wo be unto him that saith: We have received, and we need no more!” (2 Nephi 28:27)

“But, behold, I say unto you, that you must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right, and if it is right I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you; therefore, you shall feel that it is right.” (D&C 9:8)

If the answers are not forthcoming or fully apparent at this time, might it be better to be less strident and more humble about what we claim to be the will of God? If we fear to err, might it be better to err on the side of mercy and agency, and to trust more in the Savior’s atonement than in our own imperfect knowledge?

Regardless, even with what we know now, we need a better pastoral approach for this issue. While it won’t fully stop the outflow of gay members and their families, there are things we can do to slow it. Some wards and stakes around the country are already approaching this issue in more positive ways (although less so since the November 2015 policy). We could extend this simple message: Come worship with us and bring your spouse or partner; you will always be welcome in our ward, you have nothing to fear, and we love you and we need you. That message, along with the decision not to automatically initiate Church disciplinary action unless the person desires it as a way back into full fellowship, would do much to heal the spiritual wounds we have inflicted and make the Church a Zion community.

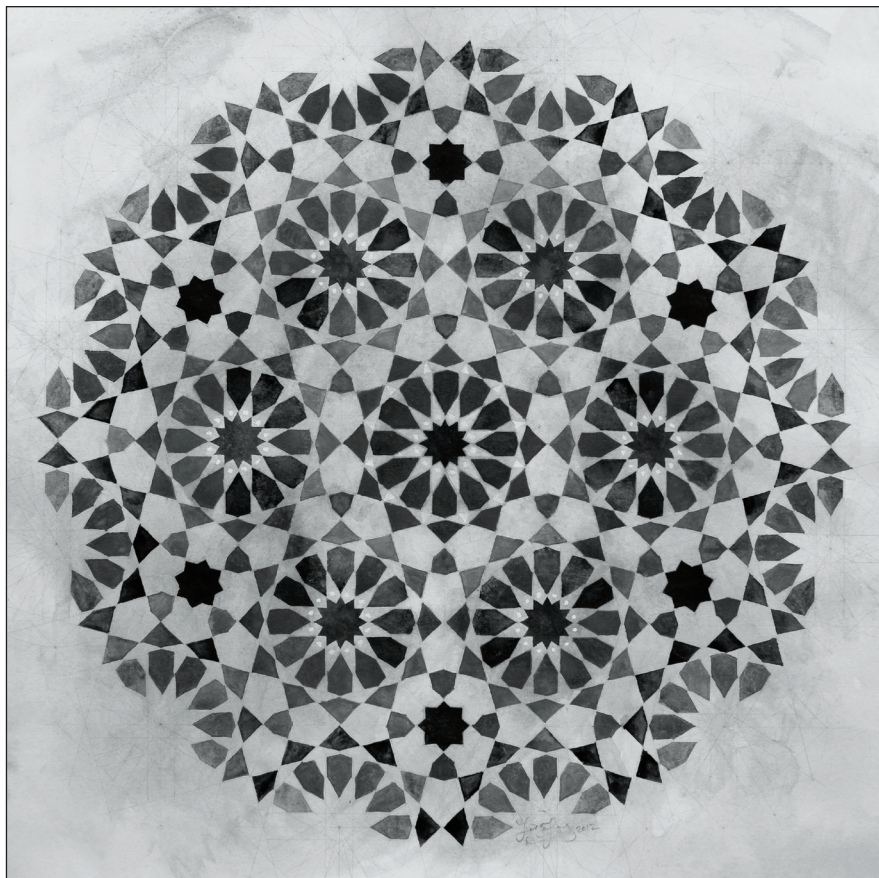
Even if gay members can’t participate as members in full fellowship, we can treat their marriages and partnerships with respect and dignity, just as we do those who are not married in the temple. These individuals should also be treated with love and respect and allowed to worship with us without any fear of Church reprisal. If a gay person or couple has wrestled with the question of how to live their life and feels a spiritual

pull to attend church again, does it make sense to punish them with the harshest action the Church can take, or to make them feel like they are too unworthy and spiritually damaged to simply attend church with us? How I wish we could at least make this simple change in the interim.⁷⁰

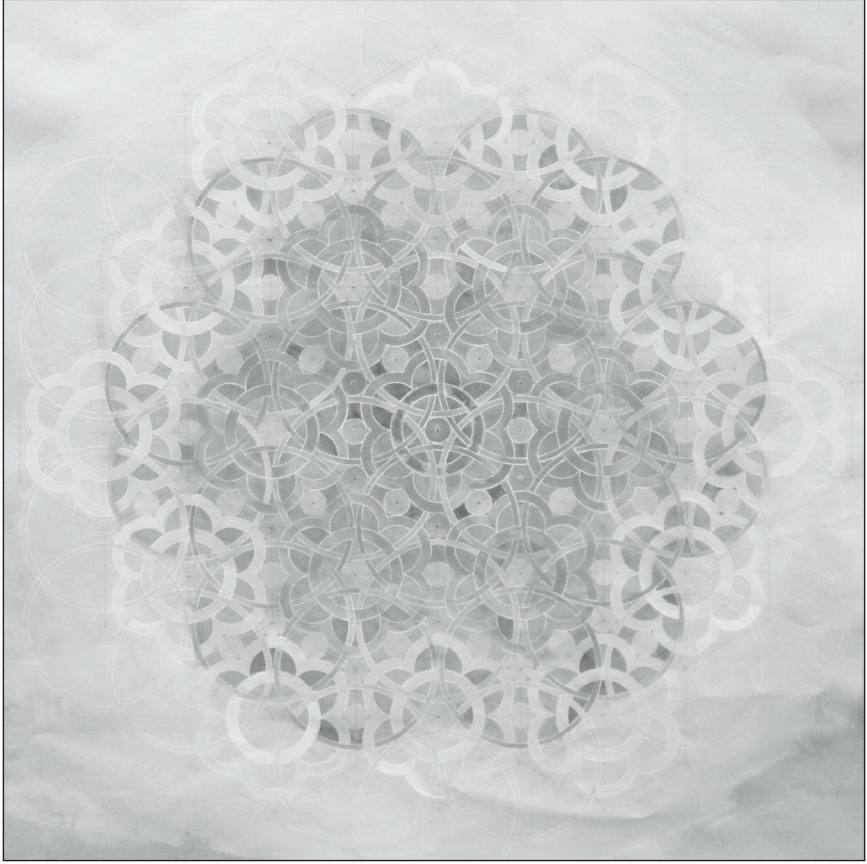
Finally, to those who have sincerely considered this issue and have reached the conclusion that committed, monogamous same-sex marriage is against God's will, I will grant you the respect to believe as your heart and conscience tell you. May I ask the same thing of you? Will you please allow me and others who have spiritually struggled with this issue and reached a different conclusion the right to our agency and personal revelation without judging us to be apostates, unfaithful, or unworthy of being your fellow Latter-day Saints?

Above all, will you recognize the supreme sacrifice our LDS gay members must make to remain active in the LDS Church? To live the Church's position, they must give up a core part of their humanity—their ability to fully and completely love another person—and choose lifelong celibacy, something no one else is asked to do. If, on the other hand, they do not feel the call to sacrifice that part of their humanity, they are then forced to give up full fellowship in the Church and lose relationships with Church and even family members. No matter what choice they make, they lose something precious. May God grant us the inspiration, courage, and grace we need as a church and people to find the right path on this issue—a path that will be in accordance with his will and that will save the lives and souls of our beloved gay members of the Church.

70. I realize with the inception of the November 2015 policy and its subsequent elevation to a "revelation" by President Nelson in his January 2016 YSA devotional talk, this solution is not as simple as it once was. Such a Church-wide solution would necessitate the removal of the policy. Until then, this solution still lies in the hands of individual stake presidents and bishops, which can put them in a difficult position.



Lisa DeLong
Gathering
Handmade watercolour on Arches hotpress paper
2001–2014



Lisa DeLong
Revelation and Echoes
Watercolour, gouache, and Rotring ink on Nideggan paper
2014–2016

MEXICANS, TOURISM, AND BOOK OF MORMON GEOGRAPHY

Colleen McDannell

In April 2011, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints announced that it had distributed the 150 millionth copy of the Book of Mormon. The first copy had been printed in 1830. By the year 2000, the Church was printing one copy every seven seconds. Translated into eighty-two languages, the book is considered by Latter-day Saints to be “another testament of Jesus Christ.”¹ While Mormons and non-Mormons alike have conducted literary analysis on the text, there are only a few studies that consider the history of the book itself.² Even more rare—perhaps

1. “Book of Mormon Reaches 150 Million Copies,” *Church News and Events*, April 20, 2011, <https://www.lds.org/church/news/book-of-mormon-reaches-150-million-copies>.

2. Latter-day Saint explorations of the Book of Mormon are extensive but certainly not approaching the number of studies of the Bible. Recent examples of this genre include: Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader's Guide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Royal Skousen, ed., *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2009); Robert A. Rees and Eugene England, eds., *The Reader's Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Signature Press, 2008); S. Kent Brown, *From Jerusalem to Zarahemla: Literary and Historical Studies of the Book of Mormon* (Provo: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1998); Hugh Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1988); and John W. Welch, “Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon,” *BYU Studies* 10 (Autumn 1969): 69–84.

For cultural histories, see Terry L. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture that Launched a New World Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) and its abridgement, *The Book of Mormon: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009) as well as Paul C. Gutjahr, *The Book of Mormon: A Biography* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2012).

nonexistent—are studies of how the Book of Mormon touches the lives of Latter-day Saints. This essay attempts to remedy, in part, that lack.

One of the challenges of any textual religion is to create an environment where people can develop relationships with the characters and events documented in a sacred book. In the case of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, an additional challenge is to maintain a commitment to the literal truth of the text. The text is not merely a guide to facilitate a relationship with God; it is a history of that relationship. The Book of Mormon is not solely an ethical guideline; it is a report from the past. For orthodox Mormons, Joseph Smith translated the Book of Mormon from real gold plates, and the text documented the complicated history of real ancient peoples. Throughout his life, Joseph Smith rejected the Protestant notion that the extraordinary experiences of Jesus and the apostles were trapped in the past. As a prophet, he unlocked the world of the supernatural—making the divine-human interaction simultaneously more literal and more personal than was customary in Protestant America. Over the centuries, as influential groups of Americans became more rational and more willing to accept layered interpretations of the Bible, Mormons continued to call potential believers to ask: is the Book of Mormon true or is it false?

Maintaining a conviction of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon is no easy task in the era of DNA studies, archaeological excavations, and aggressive attacks by evangelical Protestants. Latter-day Saints cultivate commitment to the veracity of the Book of Mormon in many different ways. Some techniques are obvious: private scriptural study, church-going, and being open to the impromptu and sometimes miraculous revelations of the Holy Spirit. Other ways of practicing the truth are less conventional but increasingly popular.

I want to stress that I use the word “practicing” deliberately. Like playing the piano, if one stops practicing, one’s skills get rusty. In order for religious truths to become normal, natural, and transparent they

must be made familiar.³ To maintain a conviction in a truth one must not simply “believe it.” Belief must be cultivated through bodily acts and through spiritual experiences. For those who have made a statement of the truth of the Book of Mormon, this process must be continual, communal, and creative. How is it that Mormons acquire a “taken-for-granted” understanding of the Book of Mormon?

An increasingly popular way of practicing the truth of the Book of Mormon is through tourism. Mormons who travel to Mexico and Central America often visit ancient ruins in order to enliven their relationship with the scriptures. I prefer “tourism” to “pilgrimage” to underscore the nature of such religious travel. Tourism is enabled by leisure and stimulated by the desire for entertainment. Tourists seek diversion, pleasure, authenticity, education, and uplift. They visit religious places as a part of that wider desire. Spiritual uplift is secondary and not the intended result of travel. Religious tourism, I would argue, lacks the conscious spiritual focus of pilgrimage. This is not to say that tourists do not find spiritual or religious inspiration in their travels; in lived religion, there are no clear boundaries between sacred and profane.⁴ Most of us move easily between our roles as tourist and pilgrim.

I also eschew the term pilgrimage because pilgrimage studies tend to be focused on the religious experiences of the pilgrim. Pilgrims go on pilgrimages, but there is no easy term for those who create and maintain the pilgrimage site. In this essay, I am primarily interested in what *enables* the pilgrim rather than the pilgrim per se. Consequently, my

3. I discuss the importance of practicing religion in *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1995), 2, 272. For theoretical explanations of practice, see Manuel A. Vásquez, “‘Ceci n’est pas un texte’: From Textualism to Practice,” in *More than Belief: A Materialist Theory of Religion* (New York: Oxford, 2011), 231–57 and Courtney Bender, “Practicing Religions,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Religious Studies*, edited by Robert A. Orsi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 273–95.

4. McDannell, *Material Christianity*, 4–8.

focus is not on the American Mormon tourists who hope to “see” Book of Mormon lands. A fuller examination of the various types of Latter-day Saint tourists is left for other scholars. What I am looking at are the Mexican Mormons who interpret their homeland to visitors. How did Mexico become a site for Mormon tourism? I am less interested in the transformative power of the journey for visitors and more interested in how a sacred text becomes enlivened through a parachurch entity—a tour guide company. Since more Mormons currently live outside of the United States than inside, it also behooves us to pay particular attention to how non-Americans practice this quintessentially “American” faith.

Using recent theoretical work developed by historian of American religions Robert A. Orsi, I argue that in order for the Book of Mormon to have a vivid and compelling immediacy it has to be “enlivened.”⁵ For most Latter-day Saints, this occurs through private or family scripture study. This is where they feel the truth of the scriptures that makes the text more real than symbolic. Within tourism to Book of Mormon sites, however, one family of tour guides use what I will call “fragmentary presence” to bring life to the sites. Such presence makes the ruins more than dramatic backgrounds to history stories and gives them sacred power. Well aware of the discrepancies between archaeological dating and Book of Mormon events, the guides discuss the ruins and the people who made the ruins in terms of their ability to carry the fragmentary remains of an ancient truth. The role of the Mormon tour guide is to both exemplify Latter-day Saint belief in his or her life and to point out where one can see the fragments of the Book of Mormon events within the ruins of the Maya. It is in the process of experiencing both the faith

5. See Robert A. Orsi, *History and Presence* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2016), 1–47. Art historian David Freedberg provides the classic argument on how objects become alive in his book *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 283–316.

of the Mexican tour guide and the architectural decoding that Latter-day Saints emotionally connect with the enduring legacy of the sacred.

Mormons in Mexico

The intermingling of US Mormons and residents of Mexico has a long and complicated history.⁶ Mormons first came to Mexico in 1875 when Brigham Young sent Daniel W. Jones and four other men to scout out land for possible Latter-day Saint colonies. Ten years later, when anti-polygamy laws tightened the noose around Utah Mormons, seven communities were established in northern Mexico. By the turn of the century, Mormons had replicated their Zion in the Casas Grandes River Valley: canals and dams brought water to irrigate crops, wide streets bisected neatly kept villages, and English-language schools were built. Ward leaders made sure that order was maintained. Almost 4,000 Latter-day Saints, many living in plural marriages, were residing in the states of Chihuahua and Sonora in 1912. While some Mexican converts were made, this was essentially an American enclave. Mitt Romney's father, for example, was born into this community.

The Mexican Revolution of 1910 severely disrupted the Mormon colonies, so leaders in Salt Lake City called members back to the United States. A few Mexican Saints kept the faith but times were difficult for all religious people in Mexico. Once a privileged religious organization, Catholic religious, political, and social influence had been severely limited by liberal anticlericalism. In 1926, all foreigners were banned from missionary work. It would not be until 1940 that US citizens could enter Mexico as missionaries. At that point, Mormons joined with a host of evangelicals, Pentecostals, Seventh-day Adventists, and Jehovah's Wit-

6. See F. LaMond Tullis, *Mormons in Mexico: The Dynamics of Faith and Culture* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1987).

nesses from “El Norte” to convince Mexican Catholics to leave their church. By 1961 there were 25,000 Latter-day Saints in Mexico.⁷

Being a Latter-day Saint in Mexico was not easy. For many Mexican Mormons, conversion meant facing the distinct possibility of rejection from family and fellow workers. Mexican society was defined by Catholic folkways that expected kinship networks to be strengthened by baptismal sponsorship and lubricated by drink—activities not permitted to Mormons. As in other Latin American countries, family ties also enabled children to find and secure jobs. Catholic rituals, family commitments, and economic structures were tightly interwoven. To leave Catholicism for a “foreign” religion like Mormonism was to make a strong statement that could break families apart. Employers were suspicious and often hostile to those who rejected Catholicism.

As the Latter-day Saint community in Mexico grew, however, a fictive kinship network developed. Mormons cultivated emotional and economic ties that circumvented both family and Catholic folkways. When Mexican Mormons began businesses, they employed other Mormons. Knowing that those hired did not drink or get caught up in expensive family celebrations was reassuring. Minority cultures often support each other financially and socially; Mexican Mormons were no different.

Finding the Book of Mormon

Mexicans and other Mesoamericans had always been of interest to Latter-day Saint missionaries, but in the mid-twentieth century Mormons also became fascinated by the ruins of their southern neighbors. In 1952 Thomas Ferguson, a Latter-day Saint and lawyer, founded the New World Archaeological Foundation with the purpose of studying

7. “Facts and Statistics,” *Newsroom*, <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/facts-and-statistics/country/mexico>. Member statistics in this essay are those reported by the LDS Church, who counts all who have been baptized. Very frequently individuals stop going to church but are not taken off of Church rolls, so the numbers are inflated.

pre-classical New World archaeology. His intention was to find material proof of the Book of Mormon in the jungles of Central America. Ferguson and his friend J. Willard Marriott (of hotel fame) had travelled to Mexico in 1946 and filmed sites that they believed could prove that ancient Israelites had landed in the New World. As with most Latter-day Saints of that time, Ferguson believed that the Book of Mormon “is the only revelation from God in the history of the world that can possibly be tested by scientific physical evidence. . . . Thus, Book of Mormon history is revelation that can be tested by archaeology.”⁸ Initially using his own money, but eventually receiving funds from the LDS Church and Brigham Young University (where he had been hired as an anthropologist), Ferguson conducted a series of excavations in Mexico.

Although the Book of Mormon describes how families sailed from ancient Israel to the New World, it provides no place names that would be recognizable to a modern reader. Joseph Smith did not provide any geographical insights prior to his death in 1844. However, Joseph Smith did say that the angel Moroni “said there was a book deposited written upon gold plates, giving an account of *the* former inhabitants of this *continent* and the source from which they sprang” (Joseph Smith–History 1:34; emphasis mine). Early Mormons argued that the Native American burial mounds that dotted the US countryside were the “sacred archives” of lost peoples.⁹

Throughout the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries, most Mormons agreed with the sacred geography laid out by early Mormon apostle Orson Pratt (1811–1881). Between October 1850 and

8. Thomas Ferguson, Letter to the First Presidency, Jan. 27, 1955, as cited in Stan Larson, “The Odyssey of Thomas Stuart Ferguson,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 23, no. 1 (Spring 1990): 64.

9. Elias Higbee and Parley Pratt, “An Address,” *Times and Seasons* 1, no. 5 (March 1840): 69, as cited by Samuel Morris Brown, *In Heaven as It Is on Earth: Joseph Smith and the Early Mormon Conquest of Death* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 73.

January 1851, while Pratt served as the president of the British Mission, he wrote an extensive essay titled “The Divine Authenticity of the Book of Mormon.” In it he argued that the Book of Mormon should be seen as either totally true or totally false. The story either happened literally as it was written or it did not. To substantiate his position that the Book of Mormon was true, he called on archaeological and historical evidence. Ruins had recently been found in Central America that to his mind substantiated the Book of Mormon’s veracity.¹⁰ “In the 384th year,” Pratt wrote in the *Millennial Star*, “the occupants of Yucatan and Central America, having been driven from their great and magnificent cities, were pursued by the Lamanites to the hill Cumorah in the interior of the state of New York, where the whole nation perished in battle.”¹¹ When Pratt prepared the 1879 edition from the original 1830 Book of Mormon text, he included explanatory footnotes among other revisions. Seventy-five geographical references identified where the events took place.

While the names of families and general geographical markers are included in the 1830 Book of Mormon, Pratt provided modern names and biblical references in his notes to help the reader connect to the sacred history. For instance, the Book of Mormon explains how after the fall of the Tower of Babel, one set of families (Jared and his relatives, “Jaredites”) boarded eight barges and sailed to the New World (Ether 2:1–21). Pratt added notes explaining that they traveled through

10. John L. Stephens and Frederick Catherwood, *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatan*, 2 vols. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1841) and *Incidents of Travel in Yucatan*, 2 vols. (London: John Murray, 1843). For the cultural impact of their discoveries, including on Joseph Smith, see R. Tripp Evans, *Romancing the Maya: Mexican Antiquity in the American Imagination, 1820–1915* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004). Stephens’s discoveries were mentioned in *Times and Seasons* 3, Oct. 1, 1842, 927 and in “Conference Minutes,” *The Latter-day Saints’ Millennial Star* 10, Nov. 15, 1848, 343 and in “Yucatan,” *The Latter-day Saints’ Millennial Star* 10, Nov. 15, 1848, 346–48.

11. “Yucatan,” 347.

China to the coast. Centuries later, around 600 BC, two other groups of colonists arrived in the New World from Israel. Followers of Mulek are mentioned as coming from Jerusalem, but the Book of Mormon gives few additional details. The land the “Mulekites” settle on is also called “Mulek” (Helaman 6:10) as is their city (Alma 52:16). Pratt has them landing near the “straits of Darien” (Isthmus of Panama) and then emigrating to the northern parts of South America.¹²

The main Book of Mormon narrative, however, centers around the Jewish family of Lehi who sailed from a land they called “Bountiful” (1 Nephi 17:5). Pratt notes that they landed in Chile.¹³ For nineteenth-century Latter-day Saints, the descendants of the original families lived throughout the Northern and Southern Hemispheres. Book of Mormon lands could be almost anywhere.¹⁴

By the turn of the century, Mormon intellectuals began to question Pratt’s two-hemisphere geographical model. Out of that questioning, two perspectives on Book of Mormon geography emerged. One set of thinkers argued that while the Book of Mormon was true, the geography was irrelevant. Church leaders in particular promoted this perspective. At a conference on the Book of Mormon in 1903, Latter-day Saint president Joseph F. Smith explained that while geographical questions were interesting, if specific cities “could not be located the matter was not of vital importance.”¹⁵ Most importantly from a doctrinal point

12. Orson Pratt, “Sacred Metallic [sic] Plates,” *The Latter-day Saints’ Millennial Star* 28, Dec. 1, 1866, 761.

13. Pratt wrote the references for the 1879 printing of the Book of Mormon. He annotated 1 Nephi 18:23 as such (footnote K): “1 Nep 2:20, believed to be on the coast of Chili S. America.”

14. For instance, see John Taylor, “The Discovery of Ancient Ruins in Northern California,” *The Latter-day Saints’ Millennial Star* 13, Mar. 15, 1851, 93–95.

15. “Book of Mormon Students Arrive,” *Deseret News*, May 25, 1903. All quotations in this paragraph are from this source. According to Terryl Givens in *By the Hand of Mormon*, archaeological ruins would not be found because “the cataclysmic upheavals in the Western Hemisphere accompanying the death of

of view, “if there were differences of opinion on the question it would not affect the salvation of the people.” Mormons should not consider geography “of such vital importance as the principles of the Gospel.” A leading Church intellectual and general authority, B. H. Roberts, reiterated this point at the conference. The Book of Mormon was not a “physical geography” but rather “a history of the hand dealings of God with this people on this continent” [sic]. This institutional disinterest in sacred geography was solidified when the geographical footnotes were removed from the 1920 edition of the Book of Mormon. Rather than make authoritative statements about where the Book of Mormon took place, Church leadership decided not to make any definitive assessment. They backed away from the literalness that drove early Latter-day Saints to root the Book of Mormon in place as well as time.

That a 1903 conference on the Book of Mormon included a long discussion of geography, however, indicated the strength of the second perspective. If the gold plates were real, and if the Jaredites, Nephites, and other ancient peoples were real, then surely smart people should be able to unearth evidence of where these monumental events took place. In 1900 Benjamin Cluff Jr., host of the conference and president of what would become Brigham Young University, had mounted an unsuccessful expedition to Colombia with the purpose to discover the Nephite capital of Zarahemla.¹⁶ Since Church leaders had decided not to make geographical matters central to faith, interested Latter-day Saints could embark on a detective adventure without fear of contravening established Church doctrine. The doors of speculation swung wide open.

Debating the specifics of Book of Mormon geography became a preoccupation for a set of Mormons. Using internal textual evidence, comparative history, and modern archaeological techniques, Latter-day

Christ, as described in 3 Nephi, would render modern-day identification of Nephite monuments and places impossible” (107).

16. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon*, 105–06.

Saints began to rethink the “two-hemisphere” model of Orson Pratt. Maybe ancient tribes did not settle the New World from Chile to upstate New York? In 1927, Janne M. Sjö Dahl published *An Introduction to the Study of the Book of Mormon*, a seven-volume commentary on the sacred text. A Swedish convert to the Church, Sjö Dahl introduced a “limited geography model” to Latter-day Saint readership.

Sjö Dahl proposed that the Book of Mormon took place entirely in Central America, perhaps going as far north as Mexico. From that point onward, Mesoamerica became the homelands of the Nephites, Lamanites, and Jaredites with scholars arguing over the geographic details. Sjö Dahl’s ideas were published in the Church publication *Improvement Era* in 1927. The descendants of Lehi all settled in a limited area in Mesoamerica, where they waged their battles and where Jesus visited. While their descendants would later spread north and south, the Book of Mormon events only took place in the original area.¹⁷ A 1938 Church Department of Education study guide, while warning that no one theory was correct, noted the trend to greatly reduce the area of Book of Mormon history to a small area in Central America.¹⁸ By the 1960s, Brigham Young University professor Sidney B. Sperry could even argue that the final battle of the Nephites, once thought to have taken place in upstate New York, actually occurred in Mesoamerica.¹⁹ Archaeological attention was now firmly focused on the ruins of Guatemala, Hondu-

17. Janne M. Sjö Dahl, “Suggested Key to Book of Mormon Geography,” *Improvement Era*, Sept. 1927, 977, as cited in Matthew Roper, “Limited Geography and the Book of Mormon: Historical Antecedents and Early Interpretations,” *FARMS Review* 16, no. 2 (2004): 262.

18. William E. Berrett, Milton R. Hunter, Roy A. Welker, and H. Alvah Fitzgerald, *A Guide to the Study of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: LDS Department of Education, 1938), 44-45, as cited in Roper, “Limited Geography,” 263.

19. Sidney B. Sperry, *Book of Mormon Compendium* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1968), as cited in Roper, “Limited Geography,” 264-65. An overview of this argument is found in David A. Palmer, *In Search of Cumorah: New Evidences for the Book of Mormon from Ancient Mexico* (Bountiful, Utah: Horizon, 1981).

ras, El Salvador, Belize, and the Yucatan Peninsula of Mexico. Touring in Mexico, much more accessible than other areas of Central America, increasingly held allure.

While it made sense doctrinally to retreat from specifying where the Book of Mormon events took place, devotionally it did not. Increasingly, Mormon leaders wanted the people in the pews to cultivate both knowledge of Book of Mormon events and a spiritual relationship with its truth.²⁰ Up until the mid-twentieth century, average Mormons were more familiar with the Bible than the Book of Mormon.²¹ Conservatives within the hierarchy also wanted to stop any liberal movement toward turning the Book of Mormon into allegory.²² To encourage Latter-day Saints to read and meditate on the Book of Mormon, Church leaders directed attention toward appropriating the text in multiple ways. In the early 1950s, Primary general president Adele Cannon Howells paid for twelve illustrations by Arnold Friberg to appear in *The Children's Friend*.²³ These muscular depictions of Book of Mormon heroes eventually became classic depictions. In 1961, BYU instituted, for the first time, a required course in the Book of Mormon. When the Church reprinted the 1920 edition in 1963, photographs of Mesoamerican archaeological ruins were added to the Book of Mormon.²⁴ This popular paperback edition

20. Noel B. Reynolds, "The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon in the Twentieth Century," *BYU Studies* 38, no. 2 (1999): 7.

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid., 22–26.

23. Robert T. Barrett and Susan Easton Black, "Setting a Standard in LDS Art: Four Illustrators of the Mid-Twentieth Century," *BYU Studies* 44, no. 2 (2005): 25–80.

24. The 1963 copyright edition contained the same text as the 1920 edition but included illustrations. This reprint was widely circulated, especially by missionaries. It sported a blue paperback cover with an image of the angel Moroni. The year before, Deseret Book Company published a larger format Book of Mormon that contained the Friberg illustrations and even more photographs of Mesoamerican ruins, gold jewelry, and wall murals.

became the standard missionary scripture and was handed out by the thousands at the New York World's Fair (1964–65). LDS publications and meetinghouses made John Scott's *Jesus Christ Visits the Americas* (1969) famous by widely reprinting it. Scott places the Chichen Itza pyramid from the Yucatan prominently in his painting's background. Visual representations of ruins increasingly appeared in LDS publications, and a wide range of Mormon writers debated exactly where in the jungles of Central America could be found the ruins of Zarahemla.²⁵

Luis Petlalcalco

In the early 1970s, Luis Petlalcalco was one of millions of Mexicans with little education and not much hope for the future.²⁶ He had, however, a few things going for him. He had married well, falling in love with the daughter of a Mexican mother and German father. His wife set high standards for the family. A stint working in New York gave him a foundation in spoken English. With facility in a global language and a love for the archaeological heritage of Mexico, Luis began offering tours of historic sites near Mexico City to North American tourists. Perhaps

25. Examples of studies of Book of Mormon geography published prior to the 1970s include: Verla Leone Birrell, *The Book of Mormon Guide Book: An Internal Reconstruction of the Archaeology, History, and Religious Teachings of the Ancient Peoples of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Verla Leone Birrell, 1948); Thomas Stuart Ferguson and Milton R. Hunter, *Ancient America and the Book of Mormon* (Oakland, Calif.: Kolob Book, 1950); Dewey Farnsworth, *Book of Mormon Evidences in Ancient America* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1953); Milton R. Hunter, *Archaeology and the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1956); J. Nile Washburn, *Book of Mormon: Lands and Times* (Bountiful, Utah: Horizon, 1974); and Paul R. Cheesman, *These Early Americans: External Evidences of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1974).

26. All biographical information on the Petlalcalco family as well as quotes from their tours is based on interviews with Alma and Helaman Petlalcalco, Miguel Rodriguez Diaz, Carlos Aleman Artiz, and Arnie [Arnulfo Rodriguez Diaz] in March 2013.

most important of all, in 1959 as a young man Luis converted to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Luis discovered that the growing LDS community valued his skills as a guide. In the early 1970s, when Luis had lost his job as a guide at the sites near Mexico City, he received a call from one of the men in his ward. There was an adventurous Mormon couple coming from Utah, and they wanted to tour the Aztec and Mayan ruins. They would need a Spanish-speaking guide and driver to help them navigate the foreign country. Would he be available to show them around the area?

The trio travelled together for a month, even though Luis had thought they only wanted to see the ruins at Teotihuacan near Mexico City. Luis Petlacalco ended his trip with the gringo Mormons at the Mayan site of Tulum on the northeast coast of the Yucatan. There they saw a dramatic series of temples and stone homes lining the edge of a cliff that overlooked a turquoise blue ocean. The site was stunning and especially evocative to the young Mexican who spoke Nahuatl, the language of the natives of central Mexico. There was something that drew him to this place settled long before the Spanish had conquered.

Returning to his family in Mexico City, he described what he saw to his wife. The few tourists who were at Tulum were simply wandering around the ruins. Some had guidebooks but most were just trying to figure things out on their own. The ruins were extensive and the location beautiful. The government had made a commitment to build a tourist resort about an hour north in a town called Cancun. They were going to build hotels and an airport. One of the things the state was advertising was the resort's proximity to the major ruin of Chichen Itza. Foreigners were being told that they could lie in the sun during their snowy winters as well as visit Mayan cities from centuries ago. Luis wanted to move the family to the Yucatan and start a business guiding tourists through the Mayan ruins.

Luis's wife Luz Estella was not impressed. In the early 1970s, this part of Mexico was an undeveloped wilderness. Tulum, where Luis wanted

to move his family, had no electricity, no running water. There were no schools or churches or department stores. Luz Estella agreed with those who said that the Yucatan had nothing but “Mayas and mosquitos.” And for residents of Mexico City, Mayans were not the architects of grand ancient cities; they were tiny brown people who lived in thatched huts in the jungle. Luis should go, she concluded, but the family would stay in Mexico City. Seeing the logic of her argument, Luis left his family for the promise of steady employment as a tour guide. Every two weeks, he would get into his beat-up old car and make the twenty-six-hour drive back to Mexico City. Luis took seriously his religious commitment to serve as leader and spiritual head to his growing family.

Luis made sure that his children bore the stamp of their Mormon heritage. While his first daughter was called Julia and his first son carried his own name of Luis, most of the other children had Book of Mormon names: Moroni, Mosia, Limhi, Helaman, Alma. Daughter Ruth was named after the Old Testament heroine and only the youngest, Dayana, eluded the mark of the scriptures. “When we were little, my mother told us we had to read the Book of Mormon,” recalled daughter Alma, “so we could learn where our names came from.” Luz Estella was a strong woman who kept her children in line and managed Luis’s growing income with aplomb. They sent their children to the Latter-day Saint school in Mexico City.

The growth of Luis’s family paralleled the growth of tourism in the Yucatan, which in turn paralleled his own economic rise. In 1974, the Mexican government selected the newly formed state of Quintana Roo as the site for the nation’s first master-planned resort. Cancun, an empty spit of land wedged between a lagoon and the ocean, was to be transformed into an international tourist destination by the Mexican government.²⁷ Each year more and more high-rise hotels were being

27. Rebecca Maria Torres and Janet D. Momsen, “Gringolandia: The Construction of a New Tourist Space in Mexico,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 95, no. 2 (2005): 314–35.

built and soon the area looked like Las Vegas on the beach. During the early 1990s, a deep-water pier was built on the nearby island of Cozumel. Cruise ships now could dock, and their travelers also were looking for a diverting adventure on land. After several days of sunburns and margaritas, tourists wanted something different. A day trip to Tulum, with an hour tour of the Mayan ruins by an English-speaking local guide, fit perfectly into vacation itineraries.

By the turn of the millennium, the “Mayan Riviera” was the premier travel destination in Mexico. In 2002, almost four million stay-over visitors and two million cruise ship passengers visited the area.²⁸ After a business partnership with a fellow Mormon turned sour, Luis looked to his children to cater to the ever-growing number of tourists. All nine of the Petlcalco children would work as tour guides at Tulum, which had grown into a real town with electricity and schools. Luis agreed to build a cement house for his wife, and the family moved to Carrillo Puerto, a village ninety kilometers from Tulum.

As the number of tourists rose at Tulum, the Petlcalco guides noticed that their names were gaining attention from the tourists. More and more, after some of the Americans learned their names, they would ask their guides: “Are you Mormon?” The Church had discontinued publishing photographs of ruins in its new 1981 edition of the Book of Mormon, but Mesoamerica had long been joined to the struggles of the Nephites. Especially through visual culture, fascination with sacred geography and history had become a critical part of Latter-day Saint culture.

Performing Latter-day Saint History

Parallel to the rise of the Yucatan as a tourist designation was an upswing in Latter-day Saint interest in its own historic sites. While some sites had been renovated by the Church in the 1970s and 1980s and staffed by volunteers, vigorous efforts to fund, maintain, and staff historic

28. *Ibid.*, 315.

sites became an institutional priority in the 1990s. Just as Cancun and Cozumel were becoming popular vacation sites, Latter-day Saints were being schooled in understanding the link between material culture and spiritual experiences. Geographer Michael Madsen maintains that under the influence of President Gordon B. Hinckley, historic sites were increasingly transformed from amateur museums into “sacred spaces.”²⁹ Millions of dollars had been spent renovating Nauvoo, and in 1999, Hinckley announced the rebuilding of the Nauvoo Temple (destroyed in the mid-nineteenth century) on its original footprint. He also oversaw construction of a new temple close to the Sacred Grove, where Joseph had his visions, near Palmyra, New York.³⁰ Sister missionaries replaced local volunteers as guides through sites like the Grandin Building, where

29. Michael H. Madsen, “Mormon Meccas: The Spiritual Transformation of Mormon Historical Sites from Points of Interest to Sacred Space” (PhD diss., Syracuse University, 2003), summarized in Michael H. Madsen, “The Sanctification of Mormonism’s Historical Geography,” *Journal of Mormon History* 34, no. 2 (2008): 228–55. A more critical appraisal of the same trend is Barry Laga, “In Lieu of History: Mormon Monuments and the Shaping of Memory,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 43, no. 4 (Winter 2010): 131–54. Kathleen Flake argues that after the final end of polygamy, Mormons sought to link their “peculiar” religious identity to the visions and history of Joseph Smith. Monuments became key to establishing the memory of early LDS history. See her “Re-placing Memory: Latter-day Saint Use of Historical Monuments and Narrative in the Early Twentieth Century,” *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 13, no. 1 (Winter 2003): 69–109. For examples of Mormons using the term “sacred” to describe special sites, see the six volumes of LaMar C. Berrett, *Sacred Places: A Comprehensive Guide to LDS Historical Sites* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1999–2007).

30. “President Hinckley and the Nauvoo Temple,” *Ensign*, July 2002, <https://www.lds.org/ensign/2002/07/president-hinckley-and-the-nauvoo-temple?lang=eng>, and “Palmyra New York Temple,” *Church News*, Mar. 9, 2010, <http://www.ldschurchnewsarchive.com/articles/58961/Palmyra-New-York-Temple.html>. In 2001, a temple was dedicated near the “Winter Quarters” in Omaha, Nebraska. It sits on a hill adjacent to the cemetery and across the street from the Mormon Trail Center.

the Book of Mormon was first published in New York, and Brigham Young's home in Salt Lake City. Their presentations to visitors are now carefully scripted to reflect core Latter-day Saint values as well as Mormon history. Buildings and spaces were more than just repositories for historical information about the past. Objects and places, members were told, could evoke intense spiritual experiences.

While initially Latter-day Saints hoped that non-Mormons would visit their historic sites in order to learn more about Mormonism, it soon became clear that the vast majority of visitors were Mormons. Latter-day Saints were visiting historic sites as a part of family vacations. Such religious tourism accompanied increased interest in Mormon history, which spiked in 1997 after the sesquicentennial celebrations of the great trek to Utah. Visiting historic sites accompanied reading historical novels, watching inspirational films about the frontier, dressing children in nineteenth-century garb for Pioneer Day celebrations, and reenacting pulling handcarts to Zion.³¹ Each year, hundreds of Mormons perform

31. Historical fiction written by Mormons about their experiences begins with Susa Young Gates, *John Stevens' Courtship: A Story of the Echo Canyon War* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1909) but does not flourish until the end of the twentieth century. Examples of this genre include Samuel W. Taylor, *Nightfall at Nauvoo* (New York: Macmillan, 1971), Marilyn Brown, *The Earthkeepers* (Provo: Art Publishers, 1979), the multiple novels of Dean Hughes, and the nine-volume series by Gerald N. Lund, *The Work and the Glory* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1990–1998). In their *Standing on the Promises* series, Margaret Blair Young and Darius Aidan Gray have told the stories of African American Mormons in three novels (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000, 2002, 2003). See also, Lavina Fielding Anderson, "Fictional Pasts: Mormon Historical Novels," in *Excavating Mormon Pasts: The New Historiography of the Last Half Century*, edited by Newell G. Bringham and Lavina Fielding Anderson (Draper, Utah: Greg Kofford Books, 2006), 367–94. Two volumes of *The Work and the Glory* (2005, 2006) have been made into films. See also, *Saints and Soldiers* (2004); *Emma Smith: My Story* (2008); and *17 Miracles* (2011).

On Mormon pioneer nostalgia, see Paul L. Anderson, "Heroic Nostalgia: Enshrining the Mormon Past," *Sunstone* 5 (1980): 47–55; Eric A. Eliason, "Pioneers and Recapitulation in Mormon Popular Historical Expression," in

in historical pageants and thousands watch this theater.³² Historian Davis Bitton referred to these efforts as the “ritualization of Mormon history.”³³ No other American religious community has gone to such an extent to represent its past to its members.

Visiting the archaeological ruins in the Yucatan became part of a wider Mormon practice of visiting Church history sites while on family vacation and participating in the performance of Latter-day Saint history. For Mormons, these are emotional “testimony-building” activities that connect them with the faith, sacrifices, and accomplishments of their religious ancestors. While the pageants and historic sites were initially constructed and run by local Latter-day Saints, most are now sophisticated professional productions. After Latter-day Saints visit Salt Lake City, Palmyra, Kirtland, and Nauvoo—they look farther afield to Israel and, of course, Book of Mormon lands.

Usable Pasts: Traditions and Group Expressions in North America, edited by Tad Tuleja (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1997), 175–214; and Megan Sanborn Jones, “(Re)living the Pioneer Past: Mormon Youth Handcart Trek Re-enactments,” *Theatre Topics* 16, no. 2 (2006): 113–30. For general instructions on commemorative handcart pulls, see “Pioneer Treks,” *Youth Activities*, <http://www.handcarttreks.com/General/generalindex.html>.

32. In the United States, the LDS Church sponsors: the Hill Cumorah Pageant in Palmyra, New York; the Mesa Easter Pageant in Mesa, Arizona; the Oakland Temple Pageant in Oakland, California; the Castle Valley Pageant in Castle Dale, Utah; Manti—The Mormon Miracle Pageant in Manti, Utah; and the Clarkston Pageant—Martin Harris: The Man Who Knew in Clarkston, Utah. In 2013, it started The British Pageant: Truth will Prevail in Hartwood Green Chorley, Lancashire, England. On pageants’ cultural function, see Martha S. LoMonaco, “Mormon Pageants as American Historical Performance,” *Theatre Symposium* 17 (2009): 69–83 and Kent Richard Bean, “Policing the Borders of Identity at the Mormon Miracle Pageant” (PhD diss., Bowling Green State University, 2005).

33. Davis Bitton, “The Ritualization of Mormon History,” *Utah Historical Quarterly* 43 (January 1975): 67–85, reprinted in Davis Bitton, *The Ritualization of Mormon History and Other Essays* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 171–88.

Book of Mormon Tours

The Petlascalco guides knew how to recognize their fellow Mormons, who increasingly recognized them by their Book of Mormon names. In a land where the bikini is queen and cut-off shorts are considered appropriate eveningwear, Mormons had to cover their priesthood garments with shorts and t-shirts. Neatly groomed and often wrestling with multi-generational families, Mormon tourists were easy to spot among the vacationers. Guides and tourists each recognized the marks of Mormonism in the other. That recognition strengthened their mutual identity as belonging to a universal religious community. Key to making ruins come alive for Latter-day Saint visitors is conveying the religious convictions of the men and women who provide the tours. The Mormonism of the guides is critical to opening up the ruins to their religious potential.

Soon a list evolved at Tulum of LDS guides who were available for Mormon tourists. Mormon tourists sought tours to illuminate how the ruins connected to the Book of Mormon and believed that Mormon guides would be honest and fair with their fees. As cruise ships brought more and more tourists to the region, Mormon entrepreneurs in Utah began to organize tours and book blocks of rooms on the ships. Life was good for the Petlascalcos. As he aged, Luis began to pass more of his business to his children. They worked at the site and, most days, took home enough money to provide for their families. Not too much money, but then, not too much work.

In 1999, however, life began to change. Luis was almost retired and his son Helaman was taking over most of the tours. Two LDS couples that Helaman took on a tour of the ruins of Tulum asked to see Chichen Itza, an even more elaborate Mayan site located a two-hour drive west. Chichen Itza was the largest site in the Yucatan but had no LDS guides. The group and Helaman enjoyed their time together. At the end of the tour, one man asked Helaman for his email address. "Email?" Helaman responded, "I don't even have a computer." The Americans quickly laid

out how important it was to move beyond just selling his knowledge to the random tourist who turned up at Tulum. Helaman should start a tour company geared toward Mormon visitors to Mexico. “LDS tourists need you,” they explained. Helaman remembers that he was skeptical, but the American wives in particular stressed that their husbands were successful businessmen; their advice was worth considering.

Helaman listened patiently to the gringos, but he knew that creating a business would mean leaving his hometown of Carrillo Puerto, a sleepy town south of Tulum, and moving to the bustling city of Cancun. Helaman was experiencing what his Church leaders told him would happen if he worked hard, followed the principles of the gospel, kept the Word of Wisdom, and donated ten percent of his earnings to the Church. Faithful Mormons would prosper. Now Helaman Petlacalco was about to build his dream home in Carrillo Puerto. Starting a business that would take Mormon tourists around the Yucatan would mean forgoing living that dream for a while.

Helaman also had ethical concerns about starting a company for Mormon tourism. He was not so sure it was a good idea to use the scriptures to make money. It was one thing to respond to the needs of Mormon tourists who arrived at Tulum and another thing to focus exclusively on explaining Mayan ruins through the Book of Mormon. Would it look like he was using his religion in order to make money? Did his training for teaching seminary give him enough background to interpret not only Tulum but also Chichen Itza and Coba? After praying, he talked with his wife. “Let’s try it,” she said. “If it doesn’t work, we’ll come back to build the house.” They launched their business, Helaman Tours, in 2000.

The timing was not perfect. The Twin Towers bombings, the Great Recession of 2008, and increasing Mexican drug violence weakened the tourist economy of Cancun. However, the North American businessmen were right. Helaman Tours took off. Mormons could now search with Google using words like “tour” and “LDS” and come across Helaman’s

web page. They then could send him an email and get information back. Dates could be set and confirmed. Cell phones made it easier to contact clients when they arrived in Mexico. The Mormon population was growing, and American Latter-day Saints were increasingly prosperous. Even the promotion of a “heartland model” that places the Book of Mormon lands squarely in what is now the United States did not diminish interest in the Yucatan.³⁴

Helaman’s success in his business paralleled his increasing responsibilities at church. He served three times as branch president and four times on his stake’s high council. Holding leadership positions at church cultivated practical talents that supported small business activities. Church leaders learned how to accommodate members who were having personal or family problems, manage finances, efficiently run meetings, and negotiate with authorities in the Salt Lake City headquarters. In addition, casually mentioning his callings would reassure potential clients of his trustworthiness. While Helaman’s father, Luis, had never been financially secure enough to support his children to be missionaries, Helaman’s son Nefi (also a Book of Mormon name) was able to accept a mission call.

While most of Helaman’s brothers and sisters stayed as guides at Tulum, his sister Alma and her husband Miguel began a similar tour company in Cancun, and they are now Helaman’s major business competition. Alma Petlalcaco snaps up the returned Mexican missionaries who come back from North America fluent in English and teaches them to be guides. One of her daughters attended Brigham Young University and married a fellow student. Miguel and Alma’s children now work in

34. In recent years, proponents of a “heartland theory” have challenged the Mesoamerica theory. Rod L. Meldrum and Bruce H. Porter vigorously promote the heartland theory in books, videos, and tours. See Rod L. Meldrum, *Exploring the Book of Mormon in America’s Heartland* (Salt Lake City: Digital Legend Press, 2011) and Bruce H. Porter and Rod L. Meldrum, *Prophecies and Promises: The Book of Mormon and the United States of America* (Salt Lake City: Digital Legend Press, 2009).

their business. If Alma's comfortable Mercedes-Benz is any indication, business is good. After completing his mission and studying aviation, Helaman's son Nefi also decided to become a tour guide and begin a company. Joining with Helaman's brother Lemuel and cousin-in-law Carlos, they formed LDS Tours Cancun. The men have also held leadership positions in the ward, and in 2013, Lemuel became stake president.

The Petlascalco family exemplifies the fluid nature of religion. For them religion is not a discrete, isolated entity but rather is bound up in a web of family and economic dynamics. Commitment to Mormonism and faith in the truth of the Book of Mormon cannot be untangled from business success and church leadership. Even though there is rivalry between the siblings that causes tension in the family, there also is an unrelenting spirit of optimism that the tour companies will continue to prosper because they are doing the Lord's work. Strengthening the commitments of Latter-day Saints serves both a religious and economic good.

Fragmentary Presence

When the Petlascalco family members give tours, what do they hope to accomplish? How do they understand the ruins through which they walk? First and foremost, they carry with them the assumption of the absolute truth of the Book of Mormon. This truth is not simply a belief, but rather it is the full culmination of the experiences of an individual embedded in a family and a community. The Book of Mormon is enmeshed in the lives of tour givers who as second-generation Latter-day Saints have felt it as immediately and undeniably real. The Petlascalco family perceives the Book of Mormon as "holy"—defined by Robert Orsi as "something that is more than the sum of its social parts . . . [with] a life of its own independent of the humans out of whose imaginations, inheritances, and circumstances it emerged."³⁵ Consequently, the Book of Mormon is

35. Robert A. Orsi, "The Problem of the Holy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Religious Studies*, edited by Robert A. Orsi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 91.

not simply words in a text but it has “come to have a vivid and compelling immediacy in the present.”³⁶

This “vivid and compelling immediacy” is clearly described within the Book of Mormon itself. Before Christ can begin his teaching, the physical reality of his presence must be experienced. “Arise and come forth unto me,” he explains, “that you may thrust your hands into my side, and also that ye may feel the prints of the nails in my hands and in my feet, that ye may know that I am the God of Israel, and the God of the whole earth, and have been slain for the sins of the world” (3 Nephi 11:14). The Book of Mormon recounts how “the multitude” put their hands into Christ’s side, hands, and feet. “One by one until they had all gone forth,” the text continues, “and did see with their eyes and did feel with their hands, and did know of a surety and did bear record” (3 Nephi 11:15). It is only then, after this very physical experience of God, “did they fall down at the feet of Jesus and did worship him” (3 Nephi 11:17). When Christ visits the New World, he does not simply calm one doubting Thomas (John 20:24–29); he invites a whole people to intimately touch him so they can then “bear record.”

Just as it is in the Book of Mormon that the immediacy of touch is attached to the miraculous and not to a moral system, so it is in the Petlascalco mind. At no time during any of their tours did the family members refer to the ethical dimension of the Book of Mormon. They were not giving tours to point out how the Book of Mormon could act as a guide in the lives of Latter-day Saints. While actions within the Book of Mormon were often mentioned, they were not used to point to something beyond themselves. When Book of Mormon events were discussed, they were presented as carriers of something unique and special. Petlascalco guides were focused on the miraculous, enduring nature of the Book of Mormon narrative rather than its ability to provide guidelines for moral living. That the immediate, holy, and profoundly real character

36. *Ibid.*, 101.

of the text was stressed is not surprising. Latter-day Saints come to a site of ruins not to experience the moral or symbolic force of the Book of Mormon text but to tap into its enduring power.

What the Petlascalco family does is to bring Mormon families into a web of intimacies and associations, thus intensifying both groups' feelings about the sacred text. Obviously, this is not done through scriptural study but through listening and seeing. The Petlascalco guides speak almost continuously, and when they stop speaking, there is silence in the touring vans. The touring model is not of question and answer but of testimony. The guides speak biographically and devotionally, offering their personal history to the tourists. Before arriving at the ancient sites, the Petlascalco guides have already presented themselves as decipherers of the holy. The guides' ability to convince their guests of their authentic faith and insightful knowledge works to eliminate, perhaps for just this trip, the concerns that guests might have about the literal veracity of the Book of Mormon.

The Petlascalco guides seek to unlock the inner meaning of the sites. While they all are aware of the contributions of modern archaeology, it is their understanding of the Book of Mormon that enables them to understand the ruins in a deeper way. The Mexican guides and the American tourists both share the Book of Mormon, but the Petlascalco guides can "see" the sacred text in the ruins. "I want you to imagine yourself back in time," Carlos explains to a Mormon family from Dallas, "near one of those temples . . . round about the Land of Bountiful. That day you hear a voice that you don't understand. But that voice causes an effect that makes your body shake and your heart pierce." It is Jesus Christ whose voice "sounded in the sky" and who eventually walks among Nephites. This is the core holy event.

The Petlascalco guides are quick to point out that neither the ruins at Tulum nor at Chichen Itza are the remains of the Land of Bountiful where Jesus walked. The Maya ruins date from a much later period. The Book of Mormon also explains that prior to Christ's coming, there

were storms, earthquakes, fires, and whirlwinds that destroyed cities and deformed the face of the earth (3 Nephi 8:5–18). Whatever existed prior to the sacred moment was significantly rearranged. “If Chichen Itza, Coba, or Tulum were occupied during Book of Mormon times,” Helaman observed, “then we don’t get to see the structures. They were buried or destroyed. What you see on top was built way after the Book of Mormon times.” Both time and space disconnect the present-day viewer from the sacred time when Nephites actually touched Jesus and then went on to follow his religion. Unlike a Catholic pilgrim who can see the exact Lourdes grotto where the Virgin Mary appeared to Bernadette, Mormons cannot see the Land of Bountiful.

What Petlacalco guides offer instead is what might be called “fragmentary presence” and is more equivalent to visiting a replica shrine of Lourdes.³⁷ This is not the “real presence” that Catholics believe reside in the Eucharist and that religious historian Robert Orsi argues has been banished by modernity.³⁸ It is a trace of the sacred. At one real point in time and in space, a holy event occurred. The Nephites touched the Christ, and he went on to teach them true religion. However, the people did not stay true to that religion. Carlos explained that they “twisted the gospel,” creating other churches. This happened in both the Old and the New Worlds. “What we can find at Tulum,” Carlos summarized, “is just a few remains of the few things they preserved from the gospel. They never forgot Christianity; they just twisted and perverted Christianity. Therefore, every aspect of Mesoamerican religion can be perfectly understood from the perspective of a perverted Christianity.” Alma voiced the same sentiment: “At one time the people of Tulum had the truth. At the beginning, they had the truth but later they got mixed up.” Full connection with the holy, complete “presence” is unobtainable, but

37. For a discussion of religious replication, see McDannell, *Material Christianity*, 154–62.

38. Orsi, *History and Presence*, 37–42.

fragments and traces of the truth remain. What the Petlascalco guides do is help Latter-day Saints recognize this fragmentary presence.

Arnie, who served his LDS mission in Arkansas and works for Alma Petlascalco, stands at the Great Ballcourt in Chichen Itza and describes the bloody religion of the Maya. He points out the shapes of human skulls chiseled into walls and describes how decapitated heads and bodies would be rolled down the steps of the temple. "In this case," he clarifies, "they would participate [in the rite] by eating the flesh and drinking the blood." The Maya, it seems, had forgotten what the Lord had taught them. They had twisted the meaning of blood and flesh. "We as Latter-day Saints, every Sunday," also eat "of the body and blood, but of course [we do it] symbolically. They did it literally." The Maya and the Mormons share the truth of the presence of God, but the Maya only have a fragment of that presence. Making that fragmentary presence apparent is the goal of the Petlascalco guides. Arnie has an Idaho woman read from the Book of Mormon: "And it is impossible for the tongue to describe, or for man to write a perfect description of the horrible scene of the blood and carnage which was among the people, both of the Nephites and of the Lamanites; and every heart was hardened, so that they delighted in the shedding of blood continually" (Mormon 4:11). "As we are reading about it," Arnie reiterates, "we have the picture and then the scene right here."

Carlos and Helaman see fragmentary presence in the Maya stone statues of chacmool that dot the sites. The chacmool are sculptures of reclining figures, leaning on their elbows, with propped up knees. On their stomachs sit a disk or a bowl. The Petlascalco guides tell tourists that human hearts sacrificed to the gods were placed in the bowls. Helaman explains that the Maya believed they were "taking our broken hearts to God." And, in this, they got it partially right. They had "twisted" what Jesus had earlier told the Nephites: to no more offer up "the shedding of blood" but instead a "broken heart and a contrite spirit" (3 Nephi 9:19, 20). The same message existed in ancient Israel before it, too, was

twisted. “The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart,” sang the Psalmist, “and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit” (Psalms 34:18; see also, Psalms 51:17). And, in 1831, Joseph Smith revealed that they would be blessed who “offer a sacrifice unto the Lord thy God in righteousness, even that of a broken heart and a contrite spirit (Doctrine and Covenants 59:8). God gave the full truth, which then echoed through the religions of the Jews and the Maya and was restored by Joseph Smith.

The language that the tour guides use is visceral and embodied. While the visitors might be skeptical about the religious significance of the ruins they are looking at, the Petlalcacos are caught up in the reality of what they are describing. They participate both in an institutional Mormonism but also in a more mystical religion that comes into daily contact with special places. It is their involvement with what anthropologist Kevin O’Neill calls “affective space” that binds the Petlalcacos together with the American Mormons into a religious collective.³⁹ The physicality of the ruins and the vibrant language used to describe them and their connection to the Book of Mormon stimulate the imagination. Unlike official Church materials that tend toward the bland and disciplined, the stories of the Petlalcacos explore the terrifying aspects of religion. The Book of Mormon events happened in the distant past and so are neutralized, but through fragmentary presence a sense of the sacred violence is shared between the guides and the visitors.

To decode how the sacred past can be seen in Maya ruins is the goal of the Petlalcaco guides. Pointing at stone pillars at Tulum, Carlos reminds us “this is exactly a replica of King Solomon’s temple, with two pillars, an altar for the water container and an altar for sacrifices.” Later he describes how the “saunas” the Maya used to purify themselves connected to baptism. The Maya thought that “the maize god, the bread of life, sweated to pay for the bad works of the people.” They had a

39. Kevin Lewis O’Neill, “Beyond Broken: Affective Spaces and the Study of American Religion,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 81, no. 4 (2013): 1093–116.

memory that water would purify and clear their spiritual life, but they had distorted the teachings of the One True God on baptism. At Chichen Itza, Arnie pointed out that at the entrance to the Ballcourt “there is a stone box with a dome cover. Joseph Smith was shown by the angel Moroni where the golden plates were hidden in a stone box. Those were used as safes by the ancient Maya. They put important stuff, records, books, offerings, jewelry, valuable things in there. Just like Joseph Smith described.” For Helaman, even the local bees, which make sweet honey but have no stingers, could be explained using the Book of Mormon. When Jared and his family left Israel for the new promised land, they carried with them “swarms of bees” (Ether 2:3). Helaman speculated that those bees, in order to make the journey less problematic for the Jaredites, probably had no stingers. How else would such bees have gotten to Mexico?

The Petlascalco guides also set the iconic building at Chichen Itza, El Castillo, firmly within the orbit of Mormonism. The step pyramid is believed by archaeologists to be the Temple of Kukulkan, a feathered serpent deity related to the Aztec Quetzalcoatl. As with all the Mesoamerican gods and goddesses, Kukulkan is understood by the Petlascalco guides as a twisted version of the Jesus who had visited centuries earlier. Every year at the spring and autumn equinoxes, thousands of tourists descend on Chichen Itza to watch the light play on the edges of the pyramid. If you look at the northwest corner of the pyramid in the afternoon light, a set of shadows forms the body of a snake connecting to its sculpted feathered head at the base. Helaman and Arnie explain that the optimal date for watching Kukulkan descend is not the spring equinox but April 6. On that day, one can see the *full* body of the snake illuminated. And why April 6? April 6 was both the date the Latter-day Saint Church was established in 1830 and the true birthday of Jesus (Doctrine and Covenants 20:1).⁴⁰ The spring sessions of general confer-

40. The *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* states: “Presidents of the Church, including Harold B. Lee and Spencer W. Kimball, have reaffirmed that April 6 is the true

ence, when the current prophet and apostles speak to the contemporary church, is also held near April 6.

Discerning fragmentary presence is not unique to the Petlacalco guides. Deciphering the world's religions to see elements of the truth—and how they reflect Latter-day Saint theology and practice—is a common endeavor of Mormon intellectuals. Hugh Nibley's analysis of ancient history assumes that gospel truth can be uncovered and recognized in disparate sources. Nibley explained that if we examined pagan texts we would discover "that all their authors possess are mere fragments which they do not pretend to understand."⁴¹ For Mormons, the truth is continually being established, rejected, and reestablished. Latter-day Saints teach that Adam in his pre-earth life was taught true religion (the plan of salvation), and he held a position of authority next to Jesus Christ. Adam and Eve continued to learn God's plan both in the Garden of Eden and more intensely after the Fall. However, the descendants of Adam and Eve became wicked and prideful. They

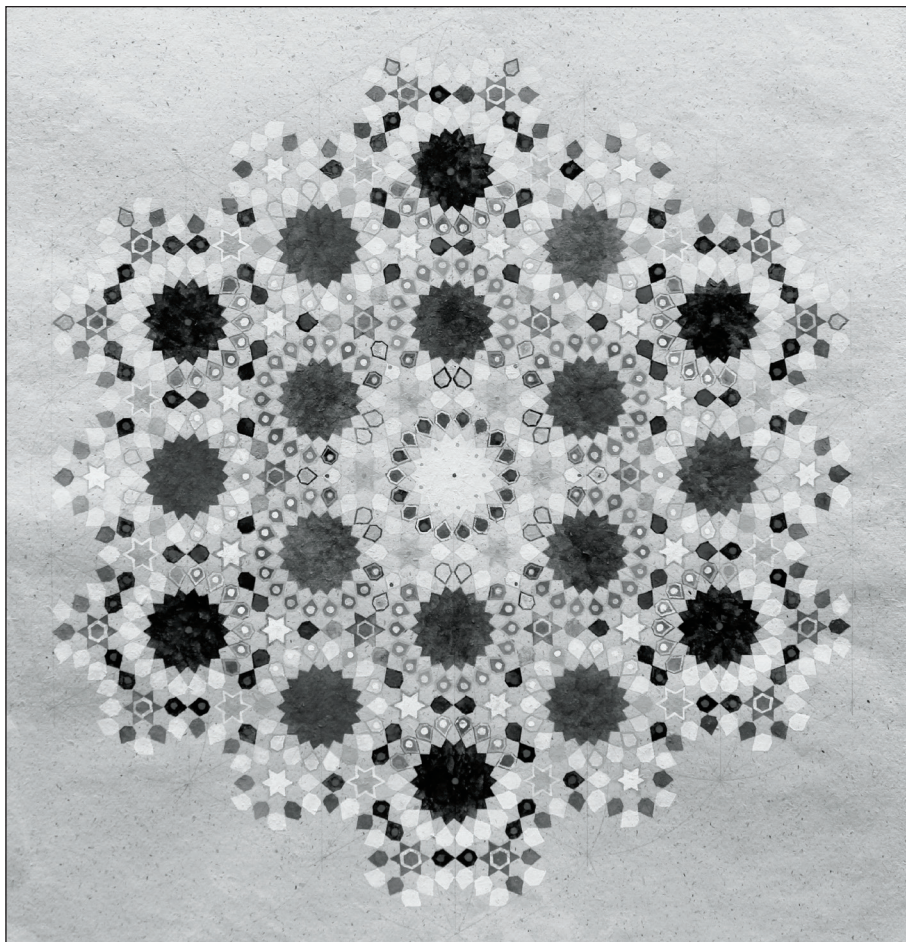
anniversary of Christ's birth, but have encouraged Church members to join with other Christians in observing Christmas as a special day for remembering Jesus' birth and teachings" (John Franklin Hall, "April 6," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, edited by Daniel H. Ludlow [New York: Macmillan, 1992], 62. Available at http://eom.byu.edu/index.php/April_6).

41. Hugh W. Nibley, "The Expanding Gospel," in *Nibley on the Timely and the Timeless: Classic Essays of Hugh W. Nibley*, 2nd ed. (Provo: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2004), 44, as discussed in Eric F. Mason, "The Saints and the Scrolls: LDS Engagement with Mainstream Dead Sea Scrolls Scholarship and Its Implications," in *New Perspectives in Mormon Studies: Creating and Crossing Boundaries*, edited by Quincy D. Newell and Eric F. Mason (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013), 169–95. For more recent explorations of Book of Mormon geography that illustrate "fragmentary presence," see F. Richard Hauck, *Deciphering the Geography of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988); John L. Sorenson, *Images of Ancient America: Visualizing Book of Mormon Life* (Provo: Research Press, 1998); and Warren P. Aston, *In the Footsteps of Lehi: New Evidence for Lehi's Journey Across Arabia to Bountiful* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994).

lost their way and would not return to the true religion until they humbly repented and other prophets appeared. Moses, for instance, taught about the Melchizedek priesthood, but the children of Israel “hardened their hearts” (Doctrine and Covenants 84:24). A similar cycle appears in the Book of Mormon. Latter-day Saints are familiar with this “pride cycle” and typically cite it to illustrate the repeating pattern of wickedness, repentance, and change—of individuals, communities, and even civilizations.

While the pride cycle warns people about the inevitability of human weakness, it can also be used to illustrate the enduring legacy of the sacred. Although people fall away from the truth and forget what they have been taught by God and his prophets, there is always some remnant of the original teaching. The holy cannot be fully forgotten. The inverse of the pride cycle could be considered a “fragmentary presence” cycle. The Petlalcaco guides, like most of those who write about Book of Mormon geography, attempt to assemble traces of a sacred past from the puzzle of ruins. They look for clues of the holy, what Robert Orsi warned would be “a wedge of unpredictability [inserted] into history and society, of the unforeseeable and unaccountable.”⁴² It is through these many ways—from naming children to starting tour companies to deciphering ruins—that one family of Mexican Mormons experiences the sacred nature of “another testament of Jesus Christ.”

42. Orsi, “The Problem of the Holy,” 103.



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"IN CHRIST ALL THINGS HOLD TOGETHER": A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE (VIA LEVINAS AND SHIMONY) ON QUANTUM ENTANGLEMENT

David Grandy

Christians regard the universe as having divine import. In the gospel of John we read: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).¹ The word *world*, having more than one meaning, might be taken to denote human society, particularly since the passage seems to zero in on human believers. Who else, we might ask, could exercise faith unto everlasting life?

It is surprising, then, to learn that, in the biblical Greek, the word for world in this passage is *kosmos*, which, like its English derivative, generally denotes the harmonious, orderly arrangement of the universe. If the verse is read with this meaning in mind, the scope of God's loving mercy broadens to include all creation, not just humankind: God's salvific aim may be vastly larger than we often imagine it to be. This is not to diminish humankind's role in God's plan, but to enlarge it. Humans alone bear the *Imago Dei* commission, and that commission expands as it is resized to cosmic parameters.²

1. All biblical references are from the New International Version.

2. Speaking of the *Imago Dei* commission, William P. Brown writes: "Human beings alone, according to the [Genesis] text, bear an iconic relation to the divine" (*The Seven Pillars of Creation: The Bible, Science, and the Ecology of*

There are two interlaced threads here that need to be drawn apart and then allowed to re-entwine. The first, just introduced, addresses God's concern for the universe. Paul highlights the cosmic significance of Christ's saving work by insisting that Christ is the "image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth. . . . He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. . . . For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross" (Colossians 1:15–20).

The work of redemption, that is, is no less comprehensive than the work of creation. These two works are, in fact, different facets of the same foundational truth—God's all-embracing love.

Similar passages are scattered throughout the entire Bible, although in the Old Testament the emphasis tends to fall on nature's propensity to rejoice in the goodness and glory of creation. This is the second thread: the cosmos is alive, in some way, to the drama of creation and salvation being played out on its stage. Humans are not the sole beneficiaries of God's mercy, nor are they alone in being able to experience that mercy and to express thanksgiving. The Psalmist exhorts us to praise the Lord, but then adds that our praise will be blended with that of the angels and, further, with the adulation of many things that we would probably regard as unmindful of God and even lifeless:

Praise him, sun and moon, praise him, all you shining stars.
Praise him, you highest heavens and you waters above the heavens. . . .
Praise the Lord from the earth, you great sea creatures and all ocean depths,
lightning and hail, snow and clouds, stormy winds that do his bidding,
you mountains, and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars,

Wonder [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010], 42). He also insists that "The world that God so loved in John 3:16 is nothing less than cosmic" (9).

wild animals and all cattle, small creatures and flying birds. (Psalms 148:3–10)

Commenting on this passage, Jeanne Kay states: “In the Psalms, hills are girdled with joy, valleys shout for joy (65:13–14), floods clap their hands, the whole earth worships God and sings praises to His name (66:1–4; 89:6).”³

While alien to modern thought, this orientation comports with the biblical sensibility that “the creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed . . . in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God” (Romans 8:19–21). The universe is not just teleological, but also, in some way, feelingly mindful of its creator’s divine purpose. This, at least, is what sacred writ suggests.

So, to take stock of the foregoing: God wishes to redeem the entire created order, not just humankind, and, what is more, that order has the capacity to rejoice in its creation and long for salvation. Nature, in brief, is caught up in the loving kindness of God’s work: in the sheer goodness of that work, which quickens in nature feelings of praise and yearnings for ultimate liberation “from its bondage to decay.”

As noted, this outlook is alien to modern thought. Who today would ascribe to nature the capacity to praise the creator and to anticipate deliverance from sin and decay? Even among Christian believers, the sentiment probably seems more poetic than literal, more soft-focus

3. Jeanne Kay, “Concepts of Nature in the Hebrew Bible,” in *Judaism and Environmental Ethics*, edited by Martin D. Yaffe (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2001), 90. Recall Mircea Eliade’s claim: “What we find as soon as we place ourselves in the perspective of religious man of the archaic societies is that the world exists because it was created by the gods, and that the existence of the world itself ‘means’ something, ‘wants to say’ something, that the world is neither mute nor opaque, that it is not an inert thing without purpose or significance. For religious man, the cosmos ‘lives’ and ‘speaks’” (*The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, translated by Willard R. Trask [San Diego: Harcourt, 1987], 165).

metaphor than hard-edged fact. But this dismissive attitude points up the vast distance between the biblical worldview and the modern scientific stance whose mechanistic metaphysics portrays nature as inert or lifeless.

In this article, I wish to challenge that metaphysics while also recovering the biblical sensibility that nature is alive to the drama of salvation unfolding in its midst. The challenge I offer is straightforward and comes from science itself—the mind-stretching realization of quantum entanglement. This realization does not, of course, imply nature’s capacity to experience God’s love and respond in kind; nevertheless, by undermining the mechanistic thesis that nature is nothing but a congeries of inert, self-contained bodies, it does clear space for other non-mechanistic understandings.

What I propose is a different reading of reality—a different “likely story,” as Plato would say⁴—but a reading that respects both experimental fact and Christian belief. To this end I first explain quantum entanglement and how it undermines the mechanistic metaphysics of classical (pre-quantum) physics. I then address Emmanuel Levinas’s belief that reality is grounded in sacrificial goodness, a view that aligns with the Christian doctrine that Christ’s passion—his redemptive act of sacrificial love—originates the cosmos and, as Paul says, holds it together: “in [Christ] all things hold together” (Colossians 1:17). They do not hold together, I argue, by means of mechanical interaction, but in virtue of Christ’s sacrificial act, the passion of which the cosmos unitarily experiences, at least in some rudimentary way that comports with the biblical sensibility that nature feels both the pain and the joy of Christ’s redemptive offering.

That offering, I will suggest, brings all things into sympathetic unity and thereby reconciles all things to one another so that reality coheres as a unitary system. The cosmos, as Paul proposes, is alive in

4. Plato, *Timaeus* (29d), translated by Peter Kalkavage (Newburyport, Mass.: Focus Publishing, 2001), 60.

Christ: it is quickened and held together by the undying efficacy of his redemptive sacrifice.

Refracted through the prism of quantum entanglement, this outlook approximates Abner Shimony's notion of passion-at-a-distance.⁵ Shimony proposes that entangled particles *feel* each other across space; their entanglement, that is, is not the result of some sort of action-at-a-distance force that connects inert bodies. What is more, the Christian perspective detailed below echoes Levinas's view that ethics comes before ontology, that goodness precedes being, for when we probe the ontology of entangled particles, we do not find determinate bodies with well-defined ontological properties. Rather we find ephemeral entities whose lack of properties, and consequent lack of ontological self-containment, affords them wide relationality with other such entities—as if nature is ecstatically caught up in the expansive goodness of some world-quickening event.

To see this expansiveness at the micro-level—that is, the entanglement of distant particles—I follow explanations of quantum entanglement offered by Euan Squires and N. David Mermin. Although the explanations are intended for non-specialists, they present “without any distortion one of the most strikingly peculiar features of the atomic world”⁶—this, at least, is Mermin's claim.⁷ The puzzle to be addressed,

5. Abner Shimony, “Controllable and Uncontrollable Non-locality,” in *Search for a Naturalistic World View*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 133.

6. N. David Mermin, “Quantum Mysteries for Anyone,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 78, no. 7 (July 1981): 397.

7. I hasten to add that Mermin's explanation is a model of physical experiment, not a description of actual experiment. Better than any other model, however, it helps one grasp the requisite points, in my opinion. Let me also note that in this article I do not rehearse the history of the idea of quantum entanglement, which begins with Albert Einstein's arguments against the Copenhagen interpretation of quantum mechanics developed by Niels Bohr and Werner Heisenberg. There are other interpretations, notably David Bohm's hidden

in my mind, has much to do with sameness and otherness, the focus we put on one thing while disregarding another thing, as if the two things—this and the other—were unrelated. Most of the time we get away with this sort of thinking, but quantum entanglement is an extreme counter-instance, or the point at which the pendulum begins to swing the other way. In his appreciation of the invasive, disruptive essence of otherness, Levinas gave us the means to make wider sense of quantum entanglement. In one way, same and other are unrelatable, for otherness cannot be scaled into sameness. In another way, however, the two are in indeterminate relation, for otherness torques sameness while slicing into it. Somewhere between these two Levinasian considerations, mutual incommensurability and mutual but unsettled relation, between what Levinas calls relation and “relation without relation,”⁸ space is opened for a Christian understanding of quantum entanglement.

Introduction to Quantum Entanglement

A very basic description of quantum entanglement proposes that two particles, having once interacted, remain interactively entangled—that is, instantaneously connected—as they move apart from each other. The surprising detail here is “instantaneously connected,” for it would seem that as the particles separate, interaction between the two would occur over time. But experiments indicate that this is not the case: entangled particles, no matter how distantly separated, remain timelessly linked.

The puzzle of entanglement is surely, at least in part, a function of the assumptions we make while describing it. In the brief description given above, for example, we assume, or imagine, self-contained (context-free)

variables interpretation and Hugh Everett’s many worlds interpretation. In this article, I follow the Copenhagen interpretation, which is the prevailing understanding among physicists and the interpretation that anticipated quantum entanglement prior to its experimental determination.

8. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, translated by Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2005), 80.

particles flying through space. We most likely further imagine space to be a separating modality, something that, as it gets between things, acts to disjoin them. Later we will have occasion to question these assumptions. For now, however, we merely acknowledge them and get on with the task of explaining quantum entanglement, bearing in mind that the descriptive terms to be employed may be partly responsible for the puzzle that falls out of the explanation.

It is not difficult to grasp entanglement in terms of same and other. As a first approximation, think of two synchronized swimmers. By what means do they stay in synchrony? Someone seeing synchronized swimmers for the first time might assume that these are identically designed and programmed robots. This explanation would trace pair synchronization to pair similarity. The swimmers are clones, both physically and programmatically, and when placed in identical circumstances, they respond the same way to bring off a synchronized pair performance. Let us call this way of explaining the similar behavior of distant entities Scenario 1. Now, if the observer were informed that the swimmers do not share the same programming and are not identically designed, she would have to cast about for a different way of explaining the synchrony. The only other way, it seems, would be to endow the figures with powers of awareness—sensory powers—beyond their physical self-containment. They stay in synchrony partly because of roughly similar, though not identical, design and programming (body selection, conditioning, and training, for example), but also because they monitor each other while performing their routine. The two swimmers, though apart, know what the other is doing in the pool.

This second way of explaining the similar behavior of entities across space we shall call Scenario 2. While Scenario 1 trades on the assumption of repetitive, self-contained similarity, Scenario 2 also posits repetitive similarity though does not wholly depend on it; some of the synchrony will depend on the swimmers' capacity to monitor one another. Or to express the matter differently, Scenario 2 rejects the notion of self-containment

and ascribes synchrony (in part) to an ongoing dialectic of same and other, each swimmer keying off the other.

Something like Scenario 2 happens in quantum entanglement, but with a surprising twist. Unlike swimmers who partly depend upon similar body characteristics to achieve synchrony, particles lack the relevant “body characteristics,” or properties, to help them bring off synchrony. They therefore, it seems, achieve synchrony solely by means of each particle’s un-self-contained (context-inclusive) openness to the other particle.

I say “it seems” because we do not, in any direct or straightforward sense, see the particles interacting instantaneously. Nevertheless, the indirect evidence, by disabusing us of the assumption that particles innately possess properties, eliminates the possibility of Scenario 1—type explanations and thereby throws us back to Scenario 2. The evidence at hand, in other words, compels explanations that cannot invoke similarity of properties because neither particle possesses the relevant properties, whether similar or dissimilar. Indeed, the particles come off as somewhat disembodied, at least with regard to the properties of interest, and this disembodiment might be seen as a kind of open expanse whereby the particles, though apart, hang together as a unity.⁹ Their entanglement is such that neither has snapped into place as a sharply located, determinate entity. This will happen only as one or the other is observed, and then, consistent with their pre-observed (but inferred) entanglement, both snap into place at precisely the same instant. Thus, each achieves individuality or selfhood and thereafter presents itself as a distinct entity

9. The qualifier in this sentence—“at least with respect to the properties of interest”—enables the point that not all properties are regarded as indeterminate prior to measurement. Definite electric charge, for example, is always ascribed to electrons, whether or not they are observed. With regard to the present discussion of quantum entanglement, the critical indeterminate property is position. Where are the twin-state particles? It is reflexive in classical (pre-quantum) physics to think of them as distinctly localized objects, but this assumption breaks down in quantum physics.

cut off from the other. Entanglement, in brief, is not a post-observational phenomenon, for the moment we look at—that is, measure—one particle, entanglement is broken as both particles become self-existing, separate entities. The strange thing is that it takes only one inquisitive glance at one particle to alter the condition of both, even though the particles may be far apart. The glance, of course, is instrumentally mediated, but we build instruments to peek into the micro-world.¹⁰

To see how this works, and how we know that entanglement is real even though we cannot directly see it, we offer the following two-part explanation. The first part (adapted from Squires¹¹) is an analogy that, if understood, will facilitate understanding of the second part (adapted from Mermin¹²) wherein the puzzle of entanglement is straightforwardly spelled out.

First Part

Imagine two people—call them Alice and Bob—locked in separate booths and not allowed to communicate in any way. Every thirty seconds each is given a card that randomly bears the number 1, 2, or 3. Upon this card each indiscriminately writes “yes” or “no” and then slips it into an envelope that is mechanically transferred beyond the booths to a team of analysts. The process is repeated many times, and when the analysts announce their findings, they note that whenever both Alice and Bob received a card with the same number, both wrote “yes” on their cards or “no.” There were no mixed responses.

10. Whether human consciousness alone collapses superposition states (as some thinkers have claimed) is a controversial question. I am not suggesting that it does, only remarking that instruments extend our observational reach in purposive ways and thereby instantiate our predilections. We choose what to observe and how to observe it.

11. Euan Squires, *The Mystery of the Quantum World*, 2nd ed. (Bristol: Institute of Physics Publishing, 1994), 183–85.

12. Mermin, “Quantum Mysteries for Anyone,” 397–408.

Other than this agreement when similarly-numbered cards were given to the two test subjects, nothing unusual seems to have occurred. Card numbers appear to have been randomly generated, and the incidence of yes and no responses was about even, indicating that neither Alice nor Bob had a bias either way. These facts, however, make the aforementioned agreement all the more striking. How could the two test subjects agree every time they were given the same number, and yet everything else indicates that the subjects are isolated from each other and that card numbers and subject responses are generated in random or unbiased ways?

One analyst proposes that whenever the subjects are given the same number, some kind of telepathic connection occurs to guide them into giving the same response. Another, however, observes that if Alice and Bob had conspired beforehand, the anomalous result is easily explained. All they need have done is to have agreed on working in unison (though incommunicado in the booths) through a given sequence of answer sets. Upon receiving their first cards, for instance, they both answer according to the schema YNY (yes for 1, no for 2, yes for 3). Thus, if both received 2, both would write “no” on their cards. To ensure the random character of their responses (an even number of yes and no responses), they would have to cycle through all possible answer sets (eight in total—six mixed and two homogenous) again and again, but this would not be difficult.

This proposal sounds eminently reasonable, but Alice and Bob heatedly deny pre-test collusion. Not surprisingly, few people believe them. Then a third analyst devises a way to test their claim of innocence. He argues that for any given trial, the probability of their answers agreeing is 50% and this probability carries through to all results. That is, about 1/2 of the results will be either YY or NN—if the test subjects are innocent.¹³ If, however, they have colluded there will be a telltale statistical

13. There are four possible answer combinations: YY, NN, YN, and NY. In an unbiased situation, like answers are as probable as unlike answers.

fluctuation away from $1/2$. To see what the analyst has in mind, we list the various possible combinations of numbers for any given trial.

11 12 13 21 22 23 31 32 33

Now, assuming collusion on Alice and Bob's part, how would they respond if their agreed-upon answer set were YNY? Aligning YNY with the combinations just listed, we get:

YY, YN, YY, NY, NN, NY, YY, YN, YY

I have highlighted the agreements, and they are not hard to count. For mixed answer sets (readers are invited to test other mixed sets), agreement will occur five out of nine times. For homogenous sets, it will occur nine out of nine times. This represents a significant statistical departure from the 50% probability that should prevail if Alice and Bob have not collaborated. So, to get to the bottom of the issue, the analysts need only compare the number of agreements with the total number of trials.

In the macro-world, we would fully expect that the test subjects' conspiracy would be exposed by a tabulated frequency of $5/9$ or higher. But this is an analogy illustrating the strangeness of quantum reality, wherein researchers, after running a similar test with particles and puzzling through similar issues, find, to their astonishment, that agreement occurs only 50% of the time. What this means is that two paired particles (whose counterparts are Alice and Bob in the analogy) are not operating from a shared answer set. Or, more generally, the particles do not each possess some common property that accounts for their identical responses when isolated from each other and subjected to identical treatment. How, then, are the two identical responses produced? Not, as I just said, on the basis of a common answer set or common property, but on the basis of the hypothesis ruled out earlier—something like a telepathic connection. If pre-test collusion is conclusively ruled out, then we must fall back on the only other conceivable explanation, even if that explanation staggers belief. Either that or come up with a third explanation, which is what I propose to do in this article.

Second Part

In the analogy, a shared answer set implies that Alice and Bob's answers will agree at least five out of nine times, on average. If, however, they are not sharing an answer set—that is, not working through a sequence of sets—agreement should occur about one-half of the time. Given enough trials, it is easy to distinguish between the two possibilities, and, paralleling the realization of quantum entanglement, analysts discover fifty percent agreement, which leaves them baffled by the agreement that invariably occurs when the subjects are given similarly numbered cards. What could possibly cause such agreement, if not shared answer sets instructing them to behave similarly (write the same answer) when given similarly numbered cards?

In quantum experiments, two particles originating from a common event are sent toward oppositely situated detectors, one on the left and the other on the right of the particles' point of origin (see Figure 1). The detectors are randomly set (and randomly re-set after every trial) to measure a particular particle property, and if the settings are identical, measurement results are identical—as indicated by flashing lights of the same color, green or red. This invariable agreement would lead us to believe that any two particles—what are called paired particles or particles in a twin state—share a common answer set. That is, they are, with regard to the property of interest, exactly alike, and this is why, when subjected to similar treatment (identical detectors set to the same measurement setting), they produce the same measurement results.

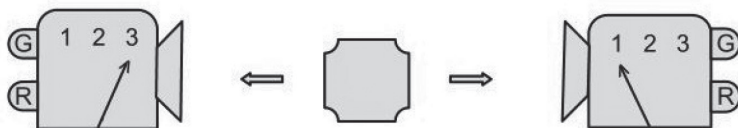


Figure 1. Paired particles are sent in opposite directions from a central emitter. The particles are measured by detectors randomly set at one of three possible measurement settings, whereupon a green or red light flashes indicating the measurement result.

This belief is merely an inference, but it seems a very good one. Will it, however, carry through to measurements where detector settings are different? To see, we must unpack the inference and test it. The detectors measure the particles at three settings, and if paired particles share common answer sets, we must list the possible answer sets and then align them with all possible combinations of settings to predict the frequency of measurement-result agreement. This may seem a tall order, but we already did this in a preliminary way while working through the analogy. What follows is just a bit more detailed.

First, the possible answer sets. Since there are three settings on the detectors, each set will consist of three answers. In quantum experiments, the answers are binary: the particle behaves one way or the other (as indicated by the green or red light in Mermin's explanation). So, we can express these answers sets exactly as we thought of them in the analogy. An answer set of YNY means that if the detector setting is 1 or 3, the particle will behave one way, and if the setting is 2, it will behave the other way. Listing the possible answer sets, we get eight in total.

YYY, NNN, YYN, YNN, YNY, NNN, NNY, NYY, NYN

We note that the first two answer sets are homogenous, and the remaining six are mixed. If paired particles share a homogenous answer set, agreement will occur regardless of what the detector settings are. For the mixed sets, it will occur 5/9 of the time, as demonstrated earlier. The reader will recall that the mixed sets, when aligned with the nine possible setting combinations (11, 12, 13, 21, 22, 23, 31, 32, 33), produce a prediction that is at odds with the prediction that obtains when we imagine the particles not sharing answer sets. In the first case, we expect at least 5/9 agreement ("at least" because once we factor in the homogenous answer sets, the probability of agreement increases); in the second case, 1/2 agreement.

Tabulating the data to determine which prediction is correct, we find 1/2 agreement, which falsifies our inference of shared answer sets. But, to

repeat what must now be an old refrain, how do paired particles produce similar results when subjected to similar treatment if they are not in some way similarly structured? With the commonsensical inference falsified, the only option available, it seems, is to posit something like a telepathic connection between the two particles, one that guides them to behave similarly in similar circumstances. This explanation, I feel, is only slightly better than the falsified inference. A much better picture—one that comports with quantum mechanics' characterization of the particles—emerges from Levinas's depiction of self-other interchange.

Levinas on Self and Other

Emmanuel Levinas proposed that otherness is irreducible to self or sameness. By rupturing sameness, the glance of the other opens the self outward and thereby keeps it from spiraling in on itself toward stasis—endless replay of the same. Put differently, Levinas felt that otherness cannot be scaled into being, at least as being had been imagined by Heidegger, Hegel, Descartes, and other Western thinkers who saw it as self-contained totality. The better model for Levinas, the one coinciding with pre-reflective experience, is being as open economy, a system invariably shattered by otherness and therefore a reality both immune to the totalizing grasp of intellectual thought and disruptive of it. In this sense, otherness is not scaled into self-same being; its metric, incommensurable with being, is originative of what Levinas called “otherwise than being.”

What has this to do with quantum entanglement? My thesis is that quantum entanglement may be understood in terms of Levinas's view of self-other interchange, and that Christ's passion is the originary instance of all such interchange. Granted, Levinas was not concerned with the interaction of elementary particles, but it is here, I propose, that some of the effects he described register dramatically. The intersection of same and other—of one thing and *another* thing—and the resulting Levinasian difference as otherness slices into sameness, show up at a

granular level to affirm his point that otherness is integral to reality. So integral, in fact, that the identity of one particle cannot be disentangled from the other. Analogously, I submit, each person's self is shot through with the otherness of other selves, despite our inclination to regard each self as a separate, self-contained, distinctly localized totality.

In principle, it would seem that every social encounter, even when strangers briefly lock eyes while passing on a busy sidewalk, should leave a mark, however tiny, on the participants—should change them, however slightly. And because social encounters are relational and reciprocal, they are instances of identity interchange, the trading of self and other as each participant takes in otherness from other participants. However, because we tend to think of ourselves as self-contained unities, we further imagine that our relations with others are merely external—like two billiard balls that, after colliding, move apart from each other essentially unchanged. This, of course, is a simile from Newtonian physics.¹⁴

14. The doctrine of external relations coincides with the mechanistic metaphysics of Newtonian science, but it is an attitude that, upon blinking away a great deal of ordinary experience, leads us astray, according to Alfred North Whitehead. For one thing, it leads us into the fallacy of simple location. "Science and philosophy," wrote Whitehead, "have been apt to entangle themselves in a simple-minded theory that an object is at one place at any definite time, and is in no sense anywhere else." But the testimony of everyday language, while "naively expressing the facts of experience," is quite different. "Every other sentence in a work of literature which is endeavouring truly to interpret the facts of experience expresses differences in the surrounding events due to the presence of some object." What this implies, concluded Whitehead, is that an "object is ingredient throughout its neighborhood, and its neighborhood is indefinite" (Alfred North Whitehead, *The Concept of Nature* [Mineola, N.Y.: Dover, 2004], 145). Thus, at a level beneath the radar of mechanistic science, events intermingle, irrespective of space and time intervals. "In a sense, everything is everywhere at all times. For every location involves an aspect of itself in every other location. Thus every spatiotemporal location mirrors the world." Further: "If you try to imagine this doctrine [the mutual immanence of all things] in terms of space and time, which presuppose simple location, it is a great paradox. But if you think of it in terms of our naïve experience, it is

Comparable tropes drawn from quantum mechanics are often messier. As we shall see, the notion that two things, having once interacted, then straightforwardly move apart from each other is thrown into question. What is more, it is hard to sustain the view that they move apart from each other essentially unchanged. Speaking of particle interactions, Giancarlo Ghirardi writes: “Practically every interaction brings with it a loss of identity of the systems that are interacting”—a loss of original identity, that is, owing to the interaction of particles.¹⁵

Analogously, I submit, the same thing occurs as humans interact.¹⁶ Further, it happens in a Levinasian way: upon rupturing self, otherness fosters a relational unity between two persons, one that survives the encounter, no matter how brief or casual. At the macro-scale of everyday experience, this survival is easily overlooked: we often feel ourselves unscathed by human interaction, particularly when it is brief and casual. At the micro-level, however, we find evidence of change. That is, we find identity interchange and indissoluble reciprocity, not self-contained entities blithely moving apart from each other. The *interaction* of the particles—that is to say, the merging of previously unrelated particles into a single event—lives on as counter-propagating particles thereafter remain entangled. The interaction, one might venture, confers on the particles a single shared identity, albeit one that lacks definite configuration or stasis.

a mere transcript of the obvious facts” (Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* [New York: The Free Press, 1967], 91–92).

15. Giancarlo Ghirardi, *Sneaking a Look at God’s Cards: Unraveling the Mysteries of Quantum Mechanics* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005), 190. Directly following this statement Ghirardi writes: “But since in the long run everything in practice interacts with everything, what emerges is a vision of the universe as an ‘unbroken whole,’ an undivided unity whose parts no longer have any identity. The theory implies a fundamentally holistic vision of the universe” (190).

16. The word “analogously” is critical here. While researchers continue to demonstrate entanglement with ever larger objects, I do not insist that quantum entanglement scales up to define human interaction. Nevertheless, something analogous occurs.

This latter proposition—the unsettled, indeterminate nature of the shared identity—affirms Levinas’s point that otherness is disruptive. It is, moreover, a response to one of the great philosophical conundrums of quantum mechanics: whether God, as Albert Einstein wondered, plays dice with the cosmos. Einstein rejected the notion of God’s playing dice; he preferred a determinate, non-chanceful universe. After Einstein’s death, however, physicists found a way to test this metaphysical preference. Thereby they discovered an entangled, indeterminate reality, a reality teeming with otherness. Observing one particle, they learned, entails observing (affecting) its distant counterpart. The two particles—the one selected for observation and the other momentarily ignored—are a single package, evidently because, in virtue of a previous interaction, the identities of both particles are indeterminately mixed. The interaction shuffles the two identities together so that neither particle emerges unscathed. That is, neither emerges as a distinct particle, cleanly localized and cut off from the other. The interactive unification of the particles persists beyond the interaction *per se*, making them a single unity even as each flies away from the other.

Same and other, Levinas might say, are interactively mixed so that neither participant moves away unscathed. Each has been indeterminately unsettled by the encounter through identity interchange; that is, through mutual exchange of otherness. In human relations, as noted, the exchange may be proportionally tiny and consequently all but imperceptible. At a finer-grained level, however, the binding power of the interaction is more in evidence than the assumed self-containment or localization of the involved participants, neither of which is separable from the other.

Why Levinas?

In the literature one frequently encounters the term “telepathic connection” or something like it to explain quantum entanglement. Insofar as this expression conjures up an image of two distinct, distantly-separated particles timelessly interacting, it is misleading. The mathematics of

quantum mechanics notates the particles as a unitary system, the two particles being *interdependently* suspended or superposed over a range of possible measurement values. When measurement occurs, consequently, the observation of either particle mathematically entails the observation of the other. But not, I submit, because the two particles are distinct, self-contained entities somehow telepathically connected across space. Rather because the particles are indeterminate to the point of leaning into each other for their delicate, co-evolving ontology.

In brief, particles prior to measurement are wave-like, and waves, classically understood, are nothing in and of themselves. Instead they borrow their reality from other things; they are the wave action of those things, and wave action suggests widely-extended, relational inclusivity rather than particulate, point-like exclusivity or self-containment. Wave action also connotes ongoing action or becoming, in contrast to the notion of particle stability, which has, until recent decades, prevailed in the West. In quantum theory, this picture is qualified and, it seems to me, deepened, by the realization that the wave associated with a particle represents the probability of finding it at a particular location. The particle, that is, is intrinsically probabilistic, at least with respect to its position (and several other properties that need not concern us here). One way of grasping quantum entanglement subsists in the realization that, prior to measurement, particles are unbounded portions of each other, not just by reason of their wide wave-like extension but, more fundamentally, by reason of their probabilistically indeterminate positions.

Although the analogy is far from perfect, this is a bit like saying that a pencil is “to the left.” To the left of what? Once the location of the second term is specified, the first term’s location—the pencil’s—is as well, the point being that each term depends on the other for the specification of its position. More generally, no object is fully self-specifying because some of its properties remain indeterminate until other objects are specified. A stock-in-trade example is motion. To ascribe motion to one thing is to relate it to another thing. All motion is relative, which means that all

motion is, at least, a two-body affair. The idea of one thing moving with only itself as a reference point is incoherent and has no place in science.

The analogy is imperfect because when it comes to things like pencils, we invariably experience them as parts of a great relational web of objects (chairs, countertops, staplers, etc.), the whole of which specifies their position, motion, and so on. They have already borrowed a great deal of reality from their environment and have stabilized to the point that we do not see them as indeterminate entities. Unmeasured particles similarly swim in a sea of borrowed—or better, unclaimed—reality, but they have not stabilized as distinct, determinate entities. Again, to call them “particles” is to misconstrue them, for that suggests local self-containment, which in turn implies that particles exist independently of each other. But if this were the case—if unmeasured particles intrinsically possess properties enabling their context-free self-existence—we would have gotten 5/9’s agreement in the aforementioned experiment rather than 1/2.

The quantum-mechanical term that best marks the profound difference between observed pencils and unobserved particles is *superposition*. A pencil is said to occupy a definite position, or to have a definite state of motion, which means that it cannot simultaneously occupy two different positions or move at two different velocities (from a given vantage point). Unobserved particles, by contrast, are probabilistically superposed across a range of position values (all mutually exclusive from a classical point of view) or across a range of velocity values. Thus, they lack the kind of definite properties that would afford them self-existence—that would give them a hard edge vis-à-vis other things. And without that edge the world cannot crystallize as an aggregation of distinct things, all separately laid out in space and time.

If we take this point seriously—that the indeterminate nature of unobserved particles militates against our presupposition of self-contained particles spread out in space and time—then we take a big step toward grasping why quantum entanglement entails spaceless, timeless

interactions. In their ontology, those particles express the very grammar of reality that quantum experiments subsequently verify. They are not self-bounded, context-free objects; instead they are diffuse, open, and unsettled or indeterminate. To borrow a thought from Levinas, they are passive—that is, expansively responsive—to the point of vulnerability. Lacking protective self-containment, they register the world.

Abner Shimony, one of the first to propose the tests that confirmed quantum entanglement, coined the phrase “passion at a distance” to express his conviction that entangled particles *feel* each other across space. The older (and still prevailing) way of thinking about entanglement is in terms of “action at a distance,” a phrase that plays to classical sensibilities by triggering the thought of two counter-propagating particles remaining instantaneously connected, notwithstanding their self-isolation. This outlook has engendered the expression “non-locality” because if the particles really are isolated from each other, each confined to a different locality, then their interaction must be “non-local” owing to its timelessness—that is, its indifference to the distance that separates the localized particles. But, as noted, unobserved particles lack properties that would secure their self-isolation or self-localization, so the proposition of action-at-a-distance contact founders on the realization that each particle is an open, unbounded portion of the other. The question of intervening space between particles, in other words, is foreclosed by ontological considerations. Neither particle has the capacity—the definite, hard-edged properties—to cut itself off from the other.

As Don Howard states in his assessment of Shimony’s proposal, “‘passion at a distance’ is all about tendency and propensity, not the concreteness whose misplacement in the realm of the physical was lamented by Alfred North Whitehead.”¹⁷ The fallacy of misplaced

17. Don Howard, “Passion at a Distance,” in *Quantum Reality, Relativistic Causality, and Closing the Epistemic Circle*, The Western Ontario Series in Philosophy of Science, vol. 73, edited by Wayne C. Myrvold and Joy Christian (Amsterdam: Springer, 2009), 3.

concreteness occurs when we concretize what, for all we really know, is merely a tendency or aspect of the world. In the eighteenth century, for example, heat was thought to consist of particles whose collective motion was fluid-like; thus, it was said that heat flowed from hot to cold bodies, independently of the atoms that composed those bodies. Researchers later realized that heat is merely the action of atoms—that is, their tendency to move more quickly as they absorb energy.

In one way, this shift in understanding parallels the shift that occurs when we switch from an action-at-a-distance interpretation of quantum entanglement to a passion-at-a-distance interpretation. The former interpretation concretizes the particles; the latter backs off from that concretization to engender a vision of reality wherein action occurs by the grace or courtesy of other things. In the latter model, however, there are no hard-edged, atom-like “other things” to receive the properties that were once said to reside in the particles, now grasped as probabilistic, wave-like tendencies. It is easy, that is, to relocate the origin of heat in the energetic motion of atoms because this relocation merely amounts to finding a new locus of concretization, the hard-edged atoms which we then take to be ontological bedrock. With entangled particles, however, there is no new locus of concretization, no new stable bedrock.

To express the matter in a Levinasian register, there is no point at which the self-other dialectic settles down or stabilizes because the evaporative boundary between self and other is a conduit for indeterminate identity interchange. Said simply, when it comes to self-other relationality, concreteness is always misplaced: there is no concrete self or other.

But, aside from this parallelism, how might Levinas help us understand quantum entanglement? My submission is that the passion-at-a-distance model of quantum entanglement reenacts Levinas’s conviction that existence is, at bottom, an ethical affair. It is not an ontological matter, a matter of distinct things in mechanical or even telepathic interaction, although this is how it might look at what Maurice

Merleau-Ponty called the second-order, scientific level.¹⁸ Rather it concerns relations, reciprocities, and, most importantly, *vulnerabilities*—this is where the phase change occurs as ontology passes into ethics. The word *passion*, that is, is not a clumsy adaptation from subjective experience, but an apt hint that subjective experience—or ethical, intersubjective experience—may be rewardingly mapped onto the deepest puzzle of quantum mechanics.

The Mapping

At issue is the word *passion*. May we lift this word out of its human context and relocate it in the seemingly alien context of quantum particles? Well, Shimony has already done this, although probably with the caveat in mind that entangled particles do not actually feel as humans do. Nevertheless, the words *feeling* and *passion* lie at the nub of his outlook and are unavoidable in its articulation. Howard, for instance, contrasts the passion-at-a-distance view with the other available options by saying: “It is neither the local causality of pushes, pulls, and central forces familiar from classical mechanics and electrodynamics, nor the non-local causality of instantaneous or just superluminal action at a distance. . . . This mode of connection of entangled systems has them feeling one another’s presence . . . but not in a way that permits direct control of one by the manipulation of the other.”¹⁹ More simply, and employing the Alice-Bob terminology used above, Richard Gill states that passion at a distance “expresses that though there is no action at a distance (no manifest non-locality), still quantum physics seem to allow the physical system at Alice’s site to have some feeling for what is going on far away at Bob’s.”²⁰

18. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, translated by Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 1999), viii.

19. Howard, “Passion at a Distance,” 3.

20. Richard D. Gill, “Better Bell Inequalities (Passion at a Distance),” *Asymptotics: Particles, Processes and Inverse Problems: Festschrift for Piet Groeneboom*, Lecture

It is a commonplace that quantum physics has debunked the scientific ideal of objectivity, which assumes that human observers may carefully step back from nature so as to leave it unaffected by their inquiring presence. Quantum entities are so delicate that even the most carefully contrived experiment introduces an uncontrollable disturbance to the system being observed. More than that, those entities are delicate in the sense that they lack certain determinate properties (like position) that would allow them to be fully free of contextual influence. Unobserved quantum reality is hence vastly more contextual and relational than the picture of reality we routinely summon up when imagining atoms, electrons, and photons.

The realization that unobserved atoms exist as they mirror context, or exist as relational crisscross points, is surprising enough; the bigger follow-on proposal posits human consciousness as an integral aspect of an atom's context. As Freeman Dyson puts it, "The laws [of physics] leave a place for mind in the description of every molecule."²¹ This statement marks quantum mechanics' uneasy relation with cognitive science—uneasy because puzzles such as quantum entanglement blur the Cartesian divide between the physical and non-physical sciences. After quoting Eugene Wigner to the effect that "it was not possible to formulate the laws of quantum mechanics in a fully consistent way without reference to consciousness," Bruce Rosenblum and Fred Kuttner write: "Nevertheless, the physics community does not accept the study of consciousness itself as part of our discipline. And that is appropriate. Consciousness is too ill-defined, too emotion-laden. It is not the sort of thing we deal with in physics. But discussion *relating* quantum mechanics and consciousness will not go away."²²

Notes—Monograph Series, vol. 55, edited by Eric A. Cator, et al. (Beachwood, Ohio: Institute of Mathematical Statistics, 2007), 138.

21. Freeman Dyson, *Disturbing the Universe* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), 248–49.

22. Bruce Rosenblum and Fred Kuttner, *Quantum Enigma: Physics Encounters Consciousness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 5. Original emphasis.

The discussion will not go away because, as the early part of this article proposed, with respect to certain properties, particles are expansively indeterminate—ontologically unsettled and un-self-contained prior to observation—that is, prior to the moment they consciously register for us as determinate objects. When we undertake the measurement of a particle, that measurement appears to trigger a particle's collapse from wave-like openness to point-like particularity, and, more than that, the collapse may be widely embrative of other (wave-like) particles owing to their ontological fragility and consequent relational vastness. By observing particles, by making them the centers of our interest, we seem to center or self-center them; we seem to endow them with properties that answer to the pinpoint, reductionistic curiosity we project into the world.

Really, this is more of an epistemological point than an ontological claim. We may assert that decisive events (measurement events) occur when particles interact with inanimate instruments, but those instruments instantiate human intentions. The cut, therefore, between sentience and non-sentience is less clear and more problematic than generally assumed. Further, although current thinking may favor the stipulation that inanimate instruments trigger the collapse of wave-like particles, we cannot know this from the point of view of the lifeless instrument but only from our own conscious point of view. Given this inevitability, it is not surprising that “discussion *relating* quantum mechanics and consciousness will not go away.”

More to the point at hand, if we allow that consciousness—so “ill-defined” and “emotion-laden,” as Rosenblum and Kuttner insist—entails subjectivity, it becomes difficult to keep words like *passion* and *feeling* out of the discussion. Further, any step toward subjectivity is a step toward the intersubjectivity of human relationships and the aspiration to ground those relationships to ethical principles. As remarkable as this proposed “ethical turn” might sound, it is a possibility that cannot be dismissed out of hand. The ontology of

self-containment, so informative of the way we imagine the world, fuzzes out at the quantum level to reveal a vast and tremulous skein of relations: a skein that seems to be observer-inclusive and therefore delicately responsive to human choice and predilection.

In brief, the following considerations suggest that quantum ontology entails and passes into ethics: the dissolution of independent objects, the concomitant descent into profound relationality, the materialization of distinct (determinate, self-contained) reality that occurs as human consciousness selectively actualizes tendencies from a vast menu of possibilities (the so-called collapse of the superposition upon observation), and the tremendous responsibility that would seem to occasion this materialization. Even if consciousness or observation does not trigger superposition collapse, the fact remains that quantum mechanics demonstrates that we are deeply participatory with nature rather than aloof from it. We are more cognate with nature than we once assumed, and this fact prompts the suggestion that nature may have, like humans, a teleological or ethical arc.

In any case, once we get around to inspecting the ontological ground of the world, we find that it is indeterminate and quivering with manifold possibility; further, we find that things are not sharply localized but instead are relationally intertwined; finally, we discover that the interest we direct toward nature appears to trigger the collapse of relational webs (superpositions) so as give us the localized objects of everyday experience and the firm ontological ground that we were seeking in the first place. Beneath this ground, however, reality appears not so much being as coming-into-being. It is still innocent of what it might yet be, still in the throes of creation. It is indeterminate or, to borrow a phrase from Genesis, mostly “formless and empty” (1:1).

This is reality before the onset of ontology, before things stabilize as ontological fact. Levinas, by valorizing the indeterminacy of human relations, gives us the world in the dawning twilight of its creation—a twilight still invasive of ontological daylight wherein things are neatly

spread out as separate objects in space and time. More than that, however, Levinas points us toward an originary event, the primal reality of which is uncurtailed by subsequent history. This event cannot be lost in history—cannot be tucked away in the past—because it initiates history and consequently cannot be reduced to what follows in its wake and what it, in fact, endows with value. This event is the immediacy of reality: the flash of pain, Levinas might say, that occasions the world's birth and that, owing to its piercing, searing immediacy, is fully felt but not in the least grasped.

By proposing that entangled particles feel one another, Shimony's passion-at-a-distance interpretation subverts, however hesitantly, the longstanding metaphysical tradition that assigns primacy to inert, unfeeling atoms, so imagined, or their constituents. And once this subversion gets underway—that is, once we allow that elementary particles might feel each other across spacetime intervals—then the ontological ground upon which pre-quantum physics was erected begins to crumble. Not only that, but feeling or passion becomes originary. According to Levinas, the primal, founding event—the ethical big bang, as it were—involves:

vulnerability, exposure to outrage, to wounding, passivity more passive than all patience, passivity of the accusative form, trauma of accusation suffered by a hostage to the point of persecution, implicating the identity of the hostage who substitutes himself for the others; all this is the self, a defecting or defeat of the ego's identity. And this, pushed to the limit, is sensibility—sensibility as the subjectivity of the subject. It is a substitution for another, one in the place of another, expiation.²³

This event, this primal expiation or substitution for another, not only founds our concern for others but obliges it as well. We exist in its wake and by its grace, as recipients of its goodness, and that goodness, while initiating history, is not reducible to it. The expiation, Levinas insists,

23. Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being, or, Beyond Essence*, translated by Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998), 15.

“burns the sacred groves in which the echoes of the past reverberate.”²⁴ Further: “To reduce good to being, to its calculations and its history, is to nullify goodness. . . . Goodness gives to subjectivity its irreducible signification.”²⁵

The inclination to see being (ontology) as foundational and exhaustive, says Levinas, is the inclination “to forget what is better than being, that is, the Good.”²⁶ It is also the inclination to forget the eruptive immediacy of the world, the blitz of newness and significance that hits us at every moment. Upon rupturing the sway of being, this quantum-like blitz newly and discontinuously enacts the Good.

“How quickly does the cloudfire streak the sky / Tremble on the peaks, then cool and die?” asked the poet.²⁷ Cooling and dying is the story of being, said Levinas, but “the primordial intrigue of time”²⁸ is bound up in the inexhaustible meaning that overflows this simple story. At every moment, expiatory goodness slices into being, exposing it to otherness and investing it with transhistorical significance. This is how “the light comes about by the instant falling out of phase with itself”²⁹ so that time, contrary to its scientific characterization, is not merely devolution toward perfect stasis or thermodynamic equilibrium. It also expresses the rapture of goodness associated with a world-originating expiatory substitution, and that rapture is always exclamatory; it does not cool and die.

24. Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 18.

25. *Ibid.*, 18.

26. *Ibid.*, 19.

27. Clinton F. Larson, “To A Dying Girl,” in *The Lord of Experience: Poems* (Salt Lake City: Promised Land Publications, 1968), 21.

28. Emmanuel Levinas, *Time and the Other*, translated by Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2008), 103.

29. Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 9.

The Levinasian rupture of being, in other words, is also rapture, a catching up or catching away to otherwise than being. This catching away to otherness, I submit, shows up in the interaction of entangled particle pairs. Neither particle determinately self-exists; rather, each is expansively open to the other, so much so that neither particle may be said to be a local entity endowed with its own properties and consequent self-identity. Indeed, as Shimony proposes, the particles are not mechanically interacting across space and time; instead they seem to be feeling or somehow interchanging with each other. Lacking the inner content, the self-content—the intrinsic properties—that would stabilize them and shelter them from context, they are enormously vulnerable to so-called outside reality or otherness (so-called because their ontological delicacy scarcely affords an inside-outside distinction). This vulnerability, I submit, accounts for their ontological vastness, but it is born of the expiatory goodness that Levinas identifies. The wounding, the outrage, the substitution, and the “passivity more passive than all patience” that attended that originary event are mirrored in the vulnerability of entangled particles—that is, in their self-less openness to each other. This is not action at a distance, the push-and-pull of distant particles, each of which is its own center of force. Rather, it is passion at a distance, a world in the throes of creation, a birth-shocked world, and therefore one in which feeling has not cooled as impersonal force to be parceled out among localized particles.

To follow Levinas, this is the “saying” of the world, not the “said.” Saying entails exposure, “stripping [the self] of every identical quiddity, and thus of all form, all investiture, which would still slip into the assignation.”³⁰ Something like this occurs as we, in the wake of quantum entanglement, vainly try to picture unobserved particles as possessing their own properties and therefore their own quiddity. No property is at hand to “slip into the assignation.” This exposure, says Levinas, is

30. Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 49.

“passivity,” or having no “shell to protect oneself,” no façade, no persona, not even a “complexion.” This is being as “de-nuding” and “vulnerability,” and the upshot of this exposure is shock and outrage that keeps being from centering itself, from self-centeredness. This “nudity more naked than all destitution” triggers being’s non-coincidence; that is, a destabilizing shudder or “diachrony of the instant” whereby otherness ruptures being so that the entire significance and tenor of reality is that of “one-penetrated-by-the-other.”³¹

Or: one substituted for the other, the world-originating expiation that Levinas insists is never intellectually processed, never tamed by cognition or reflection, never thematized. This is because the expiatory substitution is not a matter of enduring until release or redemption, but of enduring with no prospect of release—of feeling completely abandoned, but yet enduring. It accordingly involves an unselfishness unto perfect lassitude whereby the self is evaporated away. Further, because in its “burning for the other”³² the expiation burns away all basis for self-consummation and even “the ashes” or memory of its own self-sacrificing goodness, there is no risk that the always-novel expansion of reality by the grace of otherness will ever be curtailed. The secret spring of the world will always be “for-the-other,” not “for-oneself.”³³

Substitution, that is, enables the world’s signification, its meaning: alterity is the arrow of significance. It also, says Levinas, is the wellspring of temporalization. The de-phasing of the same by the other triggers the slippage of time, which may strike us as mere recurrence of the same but whose primordial intrigue is renewal or re-now-al, the exclamatory catching away and exposure of self-same being to otherness. Time thus possesses both a destructive and redemptive edge. On the one hand, it is irreversible passage into physical decline and death; on the other,

31. Ibid.

32. Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 50.

33. Ibid.

it entails the spark of otherness that, however fleetingly, lights up the living immediacy of the now.

I am proposing that quantum entanglement comports with Levinas's description of reality prior to measurement and conceptualization. This is a reality that, to some surprising and significant degree, is in the thrall of the other, whether we consider elementary particles or, as Levinas did, human beings. Said differently, this is a reality that cannot be reduced to self-contained, self-same entities that then impinge upon each other by means of external forces or relations. By *external* I mean incidental—that is, forces or relations thought to arise in the aftermath of an entity's self-existence. Such connections, which many reflexively invoke while trying to make sense of reality, have no place in Levinas's thought and little credibility in quantum physics. The better outlook assumes that an entity's relation with the world is part of the entity itself. As Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers put it, physics “now recognizes that, for an interaction to be real, the ‘nature’ of the related things must derive from these relations, while at the same time the ‘relations’ must derive from the nature of the things.”³⁴

Implicit in this understanding is the rejection of the action-at-a-distance interpretation of quantum entanglement, an interpretation that sees relation as incidental to self-existent objects. Passion-at-a-distance is closer to the mark because it implies feeling, and feeling suggests the organic interpenetration of entity and relation that Prigogine and Stengers posit. It moreover suggests primitive awareness of the world, or awareness arising from the eruptive immediacy of a world that is innocent of individual things separated by space and time. Thus, quantum entanglement is scarcely like mental telepathy, to which it is often compared, but more like feeling before it begins to contract egocentrically. That is, it is more like what Milan Kundera calls “emotional telepathy,” which answers to Shimony's notion of passion-at-a-distance.

34. Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers, *Order out of Chaos: Man's New Dialogue with Nature* (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1985), 95.

Kundera observes that where there is compassion in the sense of co-feeling there is not just ability “to live with the other’s misfortune but also to feel with him any emotion—joy, anxiety, happiness, pain.” Compassion in this broader sense is not just pity or condescending sorrow, but “the maximal capacity of affective imagination, the art of emotional telepathy. In the hierarchy of sentiments, then, it is supreme.”³⁵ This is where feeling diverges to infinity, or where, to follow Arthur Schopenhauer, compassion dissolves “the distinction between self and not-self.”³⁶ More precisely, this is the moment before that distinction takes effect. To adapt a term from modern cosmology, quantum entanglement marks a moment of inflationary feeling, an expansive, compassionate, unitarily felt moment that yet shows up as we probe the tiniest parts of reality. In the extreme instance where those parts are separated from each other and then tested for separability, they register non-separability—the primeval moment of universal feeling or passion. Lacking properties that would set them apart as parts, they exclaim the simple pre-part rapture of being.

If Levinas is right, that rapture is the ethical matrix from which the world materializes as a part-structured ontological system. But the primordial event, the rupture of being by otherness and the consequent newness or nowness of reality, never grows old, never cools and crystallizes as a system. And since that event is expiatory, it is irreducibly relational. Thus, finding one thing invariably entails finding another; measuring one particle invariably entails measuring its entangled twin. Indeed, the knife—the experimental apparatus—that would separate the

35. Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, translated by Michael Henry Heim (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), 19–20.

36. Arthur Schopenhauer, *On Human Nature*, translated by T. Bailey Saunders (Adelaide: The University of Adelaide, 2014). Web edition published by eBooks@Adelaide and available at <http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/s/schopenhauer/arthur/human/chapter1.html>.

two particles is itself drawn into their entanglement. It thereby becomes lost as a distinctive thing in the pre-part, for-the-other, relational flow of expiatory meaning.

A Christian Perspective

I have argued that the passion-at-a-distance model of quantum entanglement lines up with Levinas's belief that human experience is deeply informed by otherness. In physics, the measured particle is in the thrall of its distant, unmeasured twin, its other, and that is why neither particle is determinately self-centered prior to measurement. In human experience, otherness is similarly disruptive of self-centeredness, the complacency of which Levinas called self-same being. In virtue of otherness, then, neither humans nor unobserved particles can settle down to ontological monotony or endless replay of the same. What is more, according to Levinas, otherness springs from some world-founding, for-the-other, expiatory event, a moment of sacrificial goodness that is prior to being and also subversive of being as a self-contained, self-centered system. Keying off of Shimony's passion-at-a-distance interpretation of quantum entanglement, I have suggested that physics visits that moment of unitary passion or feeling every time paired particles are found to be unitarily entangled.

Levinas describes the expiatory event in searing detail but does not explicitly link it to a religious tradition, though his Jewishness no doubt played a seminal role in his conceptualization, or invocation, of the event. Levinas spent most of the Second World War in a Nazi prison camp as a French military officer. He thus came to know the Holocaust firsthand, particularly when upon his release he learned that his father and brothers had been shot to death by Hitler's *Schutzstaffel*. His mother-in-law, also Jewish, was sent to an internment camp just outside of Paris, and then, perhaps, farther east to a death camp. In any event, she did not return after the war. Scholars agree that these personal devastations, along with

the collective horror of the war, figure into Levinas's concern *with* the other, which transmutes into an ethical imperative of concern *for* the other. "I am responsible for the Other without waiting for reciprocity, were I to die for it," he wrote. "Reciprocity is *his* affair," not mine.³⁷

For Levinas, this personal obligation of concern for the other, even if it remains unrequited and even unto death, springs from the world itself—that is, from the expiation or substitution for the other that brings the world into existence and keeps it in exclamatory process. In the Christian tradition, concern for the other is paramount, a fact readily acknowledged by Levinas in his affirmation of Christ's description of the last judgment, wherein people are blessed or cursed according to their treatment of others. The surprising turn comes when Christ states that "whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, ye did for me" (Matthew 25:40). Reflecting on this passage, Levinas wrote:

When I speak to a Christian, I always quote Matthew 25; the relation to God is presented there as a relation to another person. It is not a metaphor; in the other, there is a real presence of God. In my relation to the other, I hear the Word of God. It is not a metaphor; it is not only extremely important, it is literally true. I'm not saying that the other is God, but that in his or her Face I hear the Word of God.³⁸

The Christian ideal of caring for others, even when that care is unrequited, springs from Christ's love, which is redemptive because it is not premised on reciprocity. "This is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins" (1 John 4:10).³⁹ The atoning sacrifice entailed the passion or agony of Christ, a

37. Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, translated Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985), 98. Original emphasis.

38. Emmanuel Levinas, *Entre Nous: Thinking-of-the-Other*, translated by Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 110.

39. Compare Levinas: "This antecedence of responsibility to freedom would signify the Goodness of the Good: the necessity that the Good choose me first before I can be in a position to choose, that is, welcome its choice. That is my pre-originary *susceptiveness*. It is passivity prior to all receptivity, it is transcendent.

passion that Isaiah portrayed as a sacrificial substitution of self for the other. "Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows. . . . [H]e was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed" (Isaiah 53:3–4). Isaiah's starkly relational language, indicating that the sacrificial victim's goodness and claim to innocence is imputed to repentant sinners, prefigures, and perhaps prompted, Levinas's belief that "responsibility for the Other . . . is more ancient than any sin."⁴⁰ It is more ancient because the sacrificial assumption of responsibility for the other, for all that seems to lie outside oneself, calls the world into existence: a world now marked by sin but whose provenance is pure and original goodness born of selfless, sacrificial love.

Christians see Christ as "the Lamb slain from the creation of the world" (Revelation 13:8). This suggests a pre-cosmic event or promissory offering, a sacrifice older than or ontologically prior to historical time. Indeed, intimations of Christ's pre-cosmic being are found all throughout the New Testament, a fact underscored by Simon Gathercole, H. C. Kammler, and others.⁴¹ Kammler wrote that "the pre-existence of Christ in Paul . . . is conceived of as *absolute, real, and personal*."⁴²

One of Paul's portrayals of Christ indicates a selfless but harrowing descent into mortality from a pre-existent state of glory or "equality"

It is an antecedence prior to all representable antecedence: immemorial. The Good is before being" (*Otherwise than Being*, 122). Original emphasis.

40. Emmanuel Levinas, *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, translated by Seán Hand (London: Athlone Press, 1990), 225.

41. Simon J. Gathercole, *The Pre-existent Son: Recovering the Christologies of Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006); H. C. Kammler, *Die Präexistenzaussagen im Neuen Testament* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1990); Terryl L. Givens, *When Souls Had Wings: Pre-Mortal Existence in Western Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Brendan Byrne, "Christ's Pre-Existence in Pauline Soteriology," *Journal of Theological Studies* 58, no. 2 (1997): 308–30.

42. Cited in Gathercole, *Pre-existent Son*, 31. Original emphasis.

with God. “[T]hough he was in the form of God,” Paul writes, he “did not reckon equality with God as a thing to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:6–8). Pre-cosmic equality with God makes sense only if Christ were, as Gathercole puts it, “the heavenly-yet-crucified Son.”⁴³ That is, if he had, in some way, already been slain as a sacrificial lamb, already allowed himself to be delivered up for the sins of a world not yet created. In his intercessory prayer, offered shortly before his betrayal and crucifixion, Jesus said: “And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory which I had with you before the world began” (John 17:5). His passion was about to begin on earth, and though it would unfold as a sequence of historical events, its reality transcends human history. Upon overflowing the separating categories of time and space by which our understanding of the world is routinely parsed, it enables our salvation from the limitations of those categories.

Christ’s pre-existent glory is not just alluded to in scripture but also described. In the book of Revelation, John sees “a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain,” standing before God’s throne. When the Lamb takes a sealed scroll from God—a feat no one else could accomplish—those around the throne fall down to worship him. John writes that “they sang a new song: You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God.” John further records that amidst this chorus he “heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand,” all uniting in joyous adoration of the Lamb and according him “praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever” (Revelation 5:6–13).

43. Gathercole, *Pre-existent Son*, 297.

To be sure, this passage may be understood as describing a future, post-mortal event, but the context anticipates events that will unfold on the earth. The scroll, after all, is routinely seen to contain “the secret purposes of God about to be revealed”⁴⁴ amid the earthly tribulations of the faithful. The new song spontaneously erupts when it is realized that God not only foreknows the calamities that will befall the faithful; more importantly, he has providentially supplied a sacrificial lamb to redeem his followers from the perils of mortality.

But the question of when the song is sung is really irrelevant: the song itself marks an event that elicits our worship “for ever and ever,” implying that the slaying of the Lamb transcends human history. If it were not transcendent, the song would die; the rapture of the moment, that is, would die, and reality would cease to be exclamatory. In Levinas’s language, stasis or self-same being would settle in. This, however, does not comport with everyday experience. Granted, we experience the dispiriting effects of aging and entropy, but we also, at every moment, experience time’s redemptive cut toward never-before-seen newness. The passion of Christ, I propose, is hidden up in this tiny redemptive cut, the newness of the present moment.

In reminding Job of his limited understanding, God asked: “Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation . . . while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy?” (Job 38:4–7). The creation of the cosmos was not merely the result of deliberative thought; the spontaneous shout of joy marked Christ’s pre-existent assumption of sacrificial responsibility for the cosmos. That shout, writes Hugh Nibley, is “the Morning-song of Creation, which remains to this day the archetype of hymns, the great *acclamatio*, the primordial nucleus of all

44. “Revelation 5,” *Matthew Henry’s Concise Commentary on the Bible*, <http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/commentaries/Matthew-Henry/Rev/Another-Angel-Casts-Fire-Earth>.

liturgy.”⁴⁵ It celebrates the moment of substitution whereby, to follow Paul, Christ, though enjoying equality with God, “emptied himself” of self by offering himself for others. And because the offering was freely and utterly given, it transcends condition and limitation. Without thought of reciprocity, of *quid pro quo*, the substitution was performed, and therein resides its transcendent saving power. The efficacy of the expiation is endless in virtue of its utter passivity or vulnerability, as Levinas puts it, or, as Paul proposes, in virtue of its kenotic self-emptiness which knows no bottom and therefore no limitation or exhaustion. Uncircumscribed by self-interest, Christ’s passion ushers in creation, which is nothing less than a sphere of otherness inviting us to share in the fellowship of his sacrificial love.

Reality is thus graced by otherness, by the for-the-other expiation of Jesus Christ. But since the expiation burns away the memory of its own goodness, its presence is self-forgotten. What, therefore, we might expect to witness as cosmic spectacle and the cynosure of all eyes, a commemorative occasion of universal praise and adoration—this, in fact, barely registers and then only fleetingly so as the expiation, unmindful of its own goodness, re-enflames the world with new meaning as if *this* were the moment of creation. I submit that we glimpse the fleeting, trace-like, for-the-other presence of Christ’s passion in the fleeting, trace-like, for-the-other reality of entangled particles. Their entanglement bespeaks innocence of self-centered being because they are not determinately self-centered; they simply lack the requisite properties. And given this lack, which is nothing less than an inability to secure themselves as independent objects, they also lack the ontological wherewithal to shield themselves from each other. Entangled particles, Levinas might say, are

45. Hugh Nibley, “Treasures in the Heavens,” in *Old Testament and Related Studies*, The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley, vol. 1 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1986), 173. Nibley adds in an endnote: “This is an unfailing part of the picture: the Hallelujah chorus with its refrain of ‘Forever and ever!’ is the closing section of almost any ritual text” (191).

fully vulnerable to each other, having no protective ontological façade, and so they exist unitarily, each losing itself in the other and ultimately, I suggest, in the expiatory birth of the cosmos. Hence, they do not exist as distinct objects but rather as occasions exclaiming the goodness and pain—the passion—of that birth.

I offer this as a Christian perspective on quantum entanglement. It is a “likely story” or plausible scenario that builds on Shimony’s passion-at-a-distance interpretation of quantum entanglement. Metaphor is a fault line that runs through scientific explanation, and the need to invoke subjective terms like *passion* and *feeling* to explain particle behavior suggests a story deeper than the one which mechanistic metaphysics affords. To be sure, we have gotten tremendous mileage out of that metaphysics, but as Alfred North Whitehead pointed out, “The narrow efficiency of the [mechanistic] scheme was the very cause of its supreme methodological success.” When, however, “we pass beyond the abstraction, either by more subtle employment of our senses, or by the request for meanings and for coherence of thoughts, the scheme breaks down at once.”⁴⁶ In the wake of that breakdown, I offer a Christian reading of quantum entanglement.

46. Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, 17.

A DOUBLE PORTION: AN INTERTEXTUAL READING OF HANNAH (1 SAMUEL 1–2) AND MARK’S GREEK WOMAN (MARK 7:24–30)

Julie M. Smith

The Gospel of Mark repeatedly echoes the Hebrew Bible: from the extensive thematic and verbal parallels between Jesus’ calming of the sea and the story of Jonah¹ to the quotation of a single line from a psalm serving as Jesus’ last words while he suffers on the cross,² intertextual allusions are frequently recognized by modern interpreters of Mark.³

1. See Joel Marcus, *Mark 1–8* (New York: Doubleday, 2002), 333.

2. Compare Mark 15:34 with Psalm 22:1.

3. See, e.g., Mary Ann Beavis, “The Resurrection Of Jephthah’s Daughter: Judges XI, 34–40 and Mark V, 21–24, 35–42,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 72, no. 1 (2010): 46–62. Beavis discusses various criteria for determining whether an intertextual reading is legitimate. As is the case with her paper, most of the criteria for intertextual readings are met in this paper, but I agree with Beavis’s conclusion (following Brodie) that, ultimately, “the detection of intertextuality is an art, not a science.” Criteria for valid intertexts met in this paper include: (1) multiple shared plot points (in order), (2) the author’s awareness of the potential source text (Mark references 1 Samuel 21:1–6 in Mark 2:25–26), and (3) similar application of the source text in other contemporaneous writings. (Josephus emphasizes Samuel’s role as a future prophet in a way not explicit in the LXX [see Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, 5.10.3]; similarly, in Pseduo-Philo (Bib. Ant. 51.2), Eli emphasizes that Samuel was prayed for by not only Hannah but also the nation. In both of these expansions on the story of Hannah, Samuel’s

This paper considers a reverberation which has, to my knowledge, received no previous exploration:⁴ I will show how Mark's story of the Greek woman echoes the interactions between Hannah and Eli in 1 Samuel 1. Hannah, in distress over her infertility, prays in the house of the Lord. But Eli, the high priest, believes that she is inebriated due to the fact that Hannah prays silently instead of vocally. Hannah then corrects Eli, who tells her to go in peace and that her petition will be granted by God. In Mark, a Greek woman approaches Jesus and asks him to exorcise her daughter. Jesus refuses via a parable: it is not right to throw the children's bread to dogs. The woman adopts and adapts his parable: the dogs can eat the children's crumbs under the table. Jesus tells her that, because of her saying, her daughter has been freed from the demon. Both stories feature a woman who struggles under the weight of a problem that threatens her progeny. Each pleads for help, is rebuffed by a male religious leader, defends herself, and is finally rewarded with what she desired. Additionally, each story functions as a turning point in its larger narrative context. This article will closely consider these similarities, highlighting the many ways in which the intertextual echo contributes to the narrative meaning of Mark's text.

Both Hannah and the Greek woman are presented as inhabiting an undesirable social location, especially in comparison with the male character in each story. Both are, obviously, female. Hannah lives away from the tabernacle and is barren and bereft. In Mark's text, the foreignness of

role as a figure of national importance is emphasized, as it is in the intertext proposed in this paper.)

4. There have been other efforts to establish intertextual echoes with this story, including a comparison with 1 Kings 17 and 2 Kings 8:7–15. See J. Duncan M. Derrett, "Law in the New Testament: The Syro-Phoenician Woman and the Centurion of Capernaum," *Novum Testamentum* 15 (July 1973): 167f. See also Dale Miller and Patricia J. Miller, *The Gospel of Mark As Midrash on Earlier Jewish and New Testament Literature* (Lewiston, N.Y.: E. Mellen Press, 1990), 196. See also Wolfgang Rolf, *The Hebrew Gospel: Cracking the Code of Mark* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2009), 44–45.

the Greek woman is emphasized through not only one but three references to her nationality.⁵ The implication is clearly unsavory. In neither story would the audience anticipate that the woman's actions would be significant, let alone that they would change the trajectory of the entire narrative. But, as we will see later on, this is precisely what happens.

Both women face similar problems: Hannah is infertile and the Greek woman's daughter is possessed by a demon. In both cases, problems with their progeny cause great distress. Each woman seeks intervention from a male religious leader whose status is significantly higher than her own. Both stories are atypical for, respectively, the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, not just because they focus on a mother but also because she is proactive in intervening for her child by seeking divine assistance. Hannah approaches the house of the Lord and prays. The Greek woman seeks aid by entering the house in which Jesus is staying and pleading with him to exorcise her daughter. Like Hannah, the Greek woman approaches the house of the Lord—the same two words for “house” and “Lord” are used in both texts.⁶ Yet Jesus is not, of course, in the temple in Jerusalem, but rather in an anonymous house in the region of Tyre. Thus one theological implication of this intertextual reverberation is that Mark is hinting that the functions of the house of the Lord are not solely fulfilled by the temple but rather by any home where Jesus is present. At this point in the narrative, this is simply a suggestion rather than a fully developed claim, although it is a theme that Mark will develop more fully later on.⁷

5. She is in the region around Tyre, she is Greek, and she is a Syrophoenician. The fact that Mark introduces Mark 7:26 with a “but,” which positions her identity in contrast to the faith and humility evidenced in the previous verse, further suggests her foreign nature.

6. Both Mark 7:24 and LXX 1 Samuel 1:7 reference the “house,” and both Mark 7:28 and LXX 1 Samuel 1:7 mention the “Lord.” Significantly, it is the Greek woman's words—by referring to Jesus as “Lord”—that make the connection; in a metaphorical sense, her words make this locale into the house of the Lord.

7. Jesus' temple action—narratively surrounded by and thus interpreted by—the withering of the fig tree, prophetically pre-enacts the destruction of the

But even at this juncture, the point is made through the intertext that an anonymous home in Gentile lands has the potential to fulfill the same function as the house of the Lord.

Next, both women are rebuked by a male authority figure. Eli⁸ accuses Hannah of drunkenness; Jesus replies to the Greek woman by saying that it is not right to hurl the children's food to the dogs. Each reproach stems from the man's misunderstanding of the woman's situation. Because, as the narrator takes great pains to note, Hannah's lips are moving but she is praying silently, Eli thinks, incorrectly, that she is drunk. Her innovative behavior led to this accusation: because she is praying silently, Eli cannot hear her prayer but rather observes behavior for which the only explanation he finds is that she is intoxicated. He literally cannot hear her. Jesus is also unable to, metaphorically speaking, hear the Greek woman's plea because her Gentile identity crowds out her humble request, as his response to her indicates. Jesus' response is not obviously incorrect in the same way that Eli's response is clearly factually wrong; nevertheless, the Greek woman will later explain that she is not a scavenging dog outside of the house but rather a household dog under the table—and thus clearly inside the house.

So Eli's statement that Hannah is intoxicated parallels Jesus' statement that the Greek woman is an outsider; neither is correct. It is

temple and thus indicates that the functions previously limited to the temple will require a new locale. Jesus makes this clearer in Mark 13. The fact that Jesus is anointed in a leper's home instead of in the temple furthers the point. Finally, the rending of the temple veil immediately after Jesus' death suggests that access to the divine presence previously restricted to the temple will now extend beyond it.

8. In some versions of the LXX, it is actually a servant of Eli—not Eli himself—who pronounces the rebuke (see LXX 1 Samuel 1:14). However, since it is Eli who first notices Hannah (LXX 1 Samuel 1:12) and Eli who responds to Hannah's statement (LXX 1 Samuel 1:17), it is apparent that the rebuke (which perhaps was placed on the lips of a servant instead of Eli to soften the harsh portrayal of Eli) represents Eli's will and will be treated as such in this article.

perhaps surprising enough that Eli, as a high priest, would be portrayed so negatively in 1 Samuel, but it is even more difficult to understand why Mark would want to show Jesus as possessing a limited understanding of the role of Gentiles. The intertextual allusion suggests a solution to this question. Note that in Hannah's story, she prays, she speaks to Eli, and then Eli announces that the God of Israel will grant her request. Hannah is thus interacting with two characters in the narrative: Eli and, implicitly, God. By contrast, the roles of God and Eli are collapsed in the Greek woman's story: she does not pray to God but rather makes a request of Jesus, assuming a prayerful posture toward him. And it is Jesus who announces on his own authority—not, as Eli does, with reference to what the God of Israel will do—that her request has been granted. Jesus thus occupies the roles of both Eli and God. By collapsing both roles into one, the text suggests that Jesus is, in effect, both God and man in Mark's story. This move is not unique to this intertext but rather forms part of a larger pattern in Mark's Gospel, where intertextual allusions feature Jesus playing not one but two roles from the Hebrew Bible: in the stilling of the storm, he is both Jonah and God; in the touching of the bleeding woman, he is both Adam and God; in the feeding of the five thousand, he is both Moses and God. Note that one of the roles into which Mark places Jesus in these intertexts always aligns him with the God of the Hebrew Bible. Thus, these intertexts contribute—subtly if repetitively—to Mark's christological portrait of Jesus. And that christology features a balance between Jesus as a limited mortal (in the Eli role) and as someone exercising divine power (in the role of the God who answered Hannah's prayer).⁹ Mark wants his audience to appreciate and balance both aspects of Jesus' identity: he is

9. In other instances, Mark advances this balanced christology: Peter's statement that Jesus is the anointed one is not denied by Jesus, but Jesus does insist in the strongest possible terms that Peter not deny the reality of Jesus' impending suffering either. Similarly, Jesus' remarkable statement that his anointing story should be told wherever the gospel is preached suggests that the anointing—which integrated an enacted identity of Jesus that both acknowledges his coming death as well as his royal, chosen status—teaches who he is.

to be understood as both son of man and son of God. So while the idea of aligning Jesus with the much-mistaken Eli¹⁰ might strike the reader as oddly inappropriate, it is a crucial component of Mark's presentation of Jesus, who is both the human bound by mortal limitations as well as the possessor of divine power.

The core of the intertextual allusion occurs with each woman's reply to the rebuff. Their statements feature some verbal parallels: when the women react to the initial rejection, both texts use the same verb and include a second verb as well. Both women's responses to the men's statements are quite similar, featuring the woman calling her conversation partner "Lord."¹¹ In this instance, the intertextual allusion can be helpful in interpreting Mark's text: it is debated whether the woman was referring to Jesus with simple respect or whether her christological understanding ran deeper, but the parallel with Hannah's usage of the word—in a situation where Hannah certainly would not have regarded Eli as divine—implies that the Greek woman's usage is more mundane and thus probably better understood as "sir" rather than "Lord."¹²

Hannah explains that, contrary to Eli's belief that she is drunk, she is in fact praying. Similarly, the Greek woman explains that the dogs can eat the crumbs under the table. In both cases, the woman adopts the man's language but tweaks it: Hannah inverts language about *taking in* drink, transforming it into a metaphor about *pouring out* spirit. The specific language of this inversion resonates with Mark's text, since Mark's previous story featured Jesus teaching that it is not what one takes in but

10. That Eli's name might be construed to mean "my God" might add a layer of irony to the way that Mark places Jesus into Eli's role.

11. Hannah says "no" before Lord; the Greek woman leads with "sir/Lord."

12. This does not preclude the possibility that Mark's audience regards "Lord" as signifying something far more significant about Jesus' identity. This, then, might be another example of Mark's penchant for irony: the woman's word choice is mundane but Mark's audience understands that it suggests Jesus' exalted status.

rather what one pours out which determines whether she is defiled. The intertextual connection is strengthened since the same words for “lips” and “heart” appear in the line from Isaiah quoted by Jesus (see Mark 7:6) as well as in the narrator’s note that Hannah’s lips moved but her voice was not heard because she spoke only in her heart (see 1 Samuel 1:13). Thus, the member of Mark’s audience who is conscious of the intertext will see Hannah as precisely the opposite of the person criticized by Isaiah and by Jesus: there is no risk that Hannah’s lips would honor God while her heart was far away. This intertextual connection guides the interpretation of Mark’s story by suggesting that the discussion of defilement and the Greek woman’s story are not two completely separate incidents, but rather that her story should be read in the light of Jesus’ teachings about defilement: the first story sets the stage for an interpretation of purity laws which will permit a Gentile woman to, metaphorically, eat bread with the children of Israel. As the Greek woman’s words will show, it is not her presumed ritual defilement which should drive Jesus’ response to her, but rather the words which come out of her that show that she is not defiled or beyond the reach of his powers.

Just as Hannah modified a metaphor, so does the Greek woman. Jesus’ words envision her as a dog—a word used in some Jewish literature to insult Gentiles.¹³ This dog is, in Jesus’ formulation, outside of the house and living as a scavenger. But the Greek woman re-imagines this dog as a member of the household under the family table who might with propriety eat the crumbs dropped by the children. This perceptual shift relies on a Gentile worldview, where dogs might be inside a home as pets or guard dogs,¹⁴ instead of a Jewish worldview where dogs are unclean

13. See Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 367.

14. See Liliane Bodson, “Motivations for Pet-Keeping In Ancient Greece and Rome: A Preliminary Survey,” in *Companion Animals and Us: Exploring the Relationships between People and Pets*, edited by Anthony L. Podberscek, Elizabeth S. Paul, and James A. Serpell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 27–41.

and therefore outside. She invites Jesus to see the world through her eyes—just as Hannah invited Eli to do the same. In a narrative where Jesus’ disciples are frequently chastised for their inability to understand or even to contemplate his parables,¹⁵ the woman’s ability to harness an insulting parable and redirect it in her favor is most remarkable.

In both stories, then, the women take up the language of the male speaker through a process of inversion: Hannah does not take in but she pours out, and the Greek woman is not asking that the bread be cast out but is content with what is dropped under the table. In both cases, the male religious leader has assumed that the woman’s request lies outside accepted cultural boundaries due to their assessment of the social space they believe her to occupy (either the drunk or the dog), but the woman’s polite but firm response reframes his assumption and inscribes her within the boundaries of social propriety. Thus repositioned, her petition merits renewed attention.

The Greek woman acts in a prophetic role: her words envision a day when Jesus’ “bread” will extend beyond the house of Israel. There may be an intertextual connection between her prophetic words and Hannah’s song, which prophesies a future day of reversals (see 1 Samuel 2:1–10), particularly if Mark or his audience understood Hannah’s reference to the raising up of an anointed one to refer to Jesus. Hannah’s song creates a parallel between the hungry person who is no longer in need and the barren woman who has children (see 1 Samuel 2:5), thus referencing the precise reversals that come to her and to the Greek woman via divine intervention. Hannah’s prophesied inversion might be read to correspond to the Greek woman’s story in another manner as well, since the Greek woman, despite her foreign background, teaches Jesus—the protagonist of Mark’s Gospel—more about the parameters of his own mission, in a most surprising inversion.¹⁶

15. See Mark 4:13, 6:51–52, 7:18, and 8:18–21.

16. There may be another surprising inversion as well: in 1 Samuel 2:36, Eli is told that if he does not intervene to stop the poor behavior of his own children, the day will come when everyone in his house will beg the Lord’s chosen servant

Each woman's words imply a theological innovation. Eli assumes that Hannah is drunk, but instead she is innovating, as is made clear by the text, through her silent prayer. Hannah thus must explain to Eli what he does not yet understand. Similarly, in Jesus' metaphor, the only way to provide exorcism to Gentiles—who are, like scavenging dogs, outside of the house—is to deny bread to the children of the house. But the Greek woman points out that the “dogs,” like herself, are not outsiders to the house but rather pets under the table; this is her innovation: a new way to view Gentiles as insiders.¹⁷ Given that Mark presents the house as a location for disciples¹⁸ who are, most literally, insiders, it is significant that the Greek woman claims that Gentiles should be understood as being inside the house. Her nuanced reading of the parable metaphorically re-enacts what literally happened at the beginning of her story, when Jesus wanted to be alone in the house, but the woman subverted his plan. Now, with the discussion over bread and dogs, she does the same thing again by showing the propriety with which dogs might be fed within the house. Further, her retort teaches that one need not deprive the children of bread in order to feed the dogs—the dogs will be content with what the children drop. She boldly adapts Jesus' parable while at the same time balancing this provocative claim with a measure of humility by expressing satisfaction with a position under the table, eating the children's crumbs, just as Hannah evinces humility through

(whom the audience expects to be Samuel, but Eli apparently does not know this) for a small task to do in exchange for bread. This action is similar to the Greek woman's approach as an outsider who begs for “bread.”

17. This new perspective may be the key to explaining a conundrum in Mark's text: why does Jesus initially refuse the woman's request when he has previously exorcised a Gentile (see Mark 5:1–20)? The answer may lie in the location of the exorcism: Jesus treated the man possessed by a legion as an outsider—there is no house in that narrative. Additionally, when the exorcised man asked to follow Jesus, Jesus did not permit him to do so. Hence, Jesus' power was accessible to the possessed Gentile, but only as long as the man remained an outsider.

18. See, e.g., Mark 1:29, 2:15, 7:17, 9:33, and 10:10.

her kind response to Eli—even referring to him as “sir”—despite his obvious error.

In each story, the woman’s relationship to food is central to the text and becomes representative of her access to divine power. When barren, Hannah was so stricken with grief that she could not eat. But later, after receiving Eli’s promise, she returns home and eats and drinks. While actual eating is not present in the Greek woman’s story, it becomes metaphorically present via Jesus’ parable, which equates the power to exorcise with food. In both cases, the woman’s crisis is represented by the inability to eat, while the relief of her need accompanies eating. Given the overarching role that food and eating play in this section of Mark,¹⁹ this connection is perhaps no surprise.

Jesus and Eli also respond to the women’s corrections of their words in similar terms: Jesus says, “because of this saying, go” and Eli says, “go in peace.”²⁰ Eli says that God will grant Hannah’s request; Jesus says that the demon has left the woman’s daughter. So at this moment in the story when a reader alert to the allusion would expect Jesus to refer to the God of Israel, he announces on his own authority that the woman’s request has been granted. Through this action, Jesus is thus narratively aligned with the God of Israel. It is highly unusual that in both stories a woman disputes the ruling of a religious leader, directly contradicts him, and is not censured but rather manages to bring him around to her perspective.

As the stories conclude, each woman returns to her home. Because both leave the presence of the religious authority with a promise but no firm evidence that her request will actually be granted, each woman

19. This section of Mark, delimited by the two feeding miracles in Mark 6:30–44 and 8:1–10, contains a high concentration of food/eating-related miracles. Nearly every story within this section concerns food and eating on either a literal or a metaphorical level.

20. Note that while the same sentiment is expressed, Eli and Jesus use different Greek words for “go.”

serves as an example of faithful trust as she leaves. The fact that the promised blessing comes not in the presence of Jesus or Eli but in each woman's own home—a home far from the locus of power and divine presence in each story—emphasizes that it is the woman (and not the male leader) whose actions are decisive in the deliverance of the blessing. Perhaps one function of the intertextual echo is to make clear this very point: just as no reader of Hannah's tale thinks that Eli is the one who makes it possible for her to have a child, the allusion to Hannah's story in the text of the Greek woman intimates that, somewhat surprisingly, it is not Jesus who exorcises the daughter but rather the woman herself. There are several other hints in the text that it is actually the woman, not Jesus, who exorcises the girl: Jesus himself attributes the exorcism not to his own power but to the woman's saying, and a chiasmic structure to the text emphasizes the point by making the woman's words central to the story. When read chiasmically, the focal point of the text is the woman's words:

- A. Jesus goes to Tyre
- B. the woman comes to Jesus
- C. the woman asks Jesus
- D. Jesus responds
- E. the woman's saying
- D.' Jesus responds again
- C.' the woman's request is granted
- B.' the woman returns home
- A.' Jesus leaves Tyre²¹

Because the past tense is employed when Jesus says that the demon has “gone out” of the girl, he indicates that the exorcism has already happened even before he spoke about it. This indication provides additional evidence for the argument that the woman's saying—and

21. Adapted from Christopher E. Alt, “The Dynamic of Humility and Wisdom: The Syrophoenician Woman and Jesus in Mark 7:24–31a,” *Lumen et Vita* 2, no. 1 (2012): 3.

not Jesus' words—caused the exorcism. The ability to cast out demons is not exclusive to Jesus in Mark: it is previously given to the disciples (although they will have trouble using it and criticize others who do). Further, this is the only case in Mark where Jesus does not speak a command to cause a miracle or does not see the person who is healed. Reading the Greek woman within this context, it is possible to interpret her words as not only potent enough to change Jesus' mind but also to cause a demon to flee. This woman is able to exercise this power on the basis of her insight into Jesus' mission. It is probably an example of Mark's penchant for irony that while the woman's words caused Jesus to change his mind about the appropriateness of his power being used to exorcise Gentiles, Jesus himself does not actually perform the exorcism in this story; rather, the words of the woman herself effect the exorcism.²² Much as Eli's statement to Hannah indicates that, despite his own lack of understanding of Hannah, the God of Israel has understood and will grant her request, Jesus' reply to the Greek woman indicates that her request has, similarly, been granted based on the woman's saying.

The reverberations of Hannah's and the Greek woman's stories extend far beyond their own personal situations: each text is a turning point in its respective narrative. Hannah's plea for a child does not reflect mere maternal desire; rather, she wants a child whom she can dedicate to the service of God for his entire life. And, indeed, Samuel's tenure changes the course of the nation's path: the entrance of Samuel onto the scene means that, instead of a lack of prophetic voice (see 1 Samuel 3:1), there is once again someone who can convey the word of the Lord to the people (see 1 Samuel 4:1). And, of course, Samuel will be the one who anoints David king and thus ushers in the peak of Israel's political kingdom. It is rather surprising that the story of David's reign begins not with David and his family but rather with Hannah and hers. It is an unexpected move by the writer, who positions the rise of the

22. Compare Mark 5:25–34, where the woman's touch is the proximate cause of the healing.

Davidic dynasty as stemming ultimately not from the story of David or his family but rather from those of Hannah and her child. Her crucial role is emphasized by the fact that her hymn and David's hymn bookend the corpus of First and Second Samuel.

Similarly, in Mark, the desire of one woman for the welfare of her progeny is not an end in itself in the narrative. Rather, the Greek woman's story serves as a turning point in Jesus' ministry. For example, immediately after his encounter with the Greek woman, he heals a deaf and mute Gentile.²³ Next, he feeds the four thousand in a story best interpreted in light of the previous feeding of the five thousand: close analysis of vocabulary and the thematic elements of the story suggest that the first feeding miracle was specifically Jewish while the second is distinctly Gentile. It is no coincidence, then, that in between these two feeding miracles, the Greek woman taught Jesus how he might share his bread with Gentiles without neglecting the children of Israel. Just as Hannah is a lynchpin in Israel's history, her desire for a child, resulting in a change of trajectory from the depravity of the era of the judges to that of open prophetic vision in Israel, a similar desire of the Greek woman for the welfare of her own child also provides a momentous impact on the narrative, namely, a shift in the trajectory of Jesus' ministry itself to include Gentiles. In both cases, the word of God is extended to people who previously did not have it. At the same time, there is an ironic inversion: Hannah's wish leads to a nationalistic political dynasty, but the Greek woman's intervention leads to the full inclusion of those outside the house of Israel. Additionally, the fact that Hannah has a son while the Greek woman intervenes for her daughter suggests that it is not only sons upon whom history might hinge; rather, a daughter might also fulfill this role.²⁴ This intertext aligns Hannah's child, the prophet

23. In the Hebrew Bible, the deaf are sometimes associated with Gentiles since they cannot "hear" God. See Isaiah 42:17–19, 43:8–9, and Micah 7:16.

24. While this is quite speculative, it is also possible that, just as Hannah's son was the one who anointed David to be the king, the Greek woman's daughter

Samuel who will anoint Israel's first king, with an anonymous Gentile daughter. In both cases, it is made clear to the audience that the women's stories are not just simple domestic tales with happy endings concerning the private struggles of one woman, but rather that the initiative of bold women can alter the trajectory of history.

is the unnamed woman who anointed Jesus in Mark 14:3–9. This reading is based on a thin wisp of a thematic hint, to be sure, but is encouraged by the fact that the anointing woman was obviously a woman of means and the Greek woman, as a Tyrian, is one of only a few characters in Mark's Gospel who has any likelihood of being wealthy.

THAT'S WHERE THE LIGHT ENTERS

Lon Young

I'm writing this from our roof, where I can see over the tops of mango trees, wet from last night's rain. Mynas swoop from palm to palm, and enough sun filters through the misty dawn to bring out the yellow of their beaks. An occasional butterfly sails high enough to daub a splotch of color onto the canvas, but this morning is a study in green: the green mangoes; the elegant plumage of coconut palms; the coconuts themselves, the smooth green-shelled ones the hired man has left to ripen after scaling the trunks the other day; the meditation hut's green tin roof, dented here and there from coconuts that crash like Indra's thunder above the heads of somnolent yogis.

But we were speaking of this monochromatic study, of things green, unripe, unready. Brush me into this canvas. Here. Sitting in the green shadows under the green awning over the roof of our green house. Three white ducks are patrolling the raked sand inside our gate. There should be a William Carlos Williams poem in here somewhere, with the morning glazed with rain as it is, and so much depending on everything else.

Cohen depends on the Tooth Fairy to find him in India, which she does, unbelievably, three times already. Lifting the pillow and placing three ten-rupee notes under his sleeping head, each bearing the likeness of Gandhi, who brings dreams of peace. And already the new teeth pushing through, each emptiness filling, slowly, inexorably. Somewhere between hole and whole.

And Stumpy, our gecko, fan-blade survivor, depending on the voodoo of cell regeneration. The brown-green bud sprouting like an onion bulb

This essay received first place in the 2016 Eugene England Memorial Personal Essay Contest.

into another tail, until we can't tell him apart from the other geckos skittering across bedroom walls in the morning and snickering behind curtains at night while our family plays Bananagrams. Tile by tile, cell by cell. Forming and reforming. This resilience, this greening grace.

So much depending on everything else.

And now I imagine our patients from the colonies reading this and I am suddenly embarrassed. I want to hide these pages, or use them for something useful. Like wrapping the stump of a leg.

Because, here's the thing: The foot never grows back. Ever.



We'd been here for two weeks when Kate Kelly was excommunicated from the Mormon Church. We didn't learn of it right away. During a violent storm one night, the internet tower in our village was ripped from its rusting anchors and hurled to the ground. For days, it lay in the schoolyard like the twisted spine of some prehistoric creature. The snapped cable encased in its vertebrae no longer pulsed with life. And just like that, we were cut off.

I found out about Kate's verdict while attending the Chennai Branch a few Sundays later.

I was pulling my Facebook feed from the building's feeble Wi-Fi as Indians were filing in for sacrament meeting. When I saw the news, a spasm of grief went through my whole body. It was hard to take the sacrament. I remembered how Jan Shipp's would take communion for Lavina after she had been excommunicated.



Today I almost snipped off Kumar's toe. We'd gone out to Polambakkam colony. Rebecca was with me, and the kids. This is the colony where Cohen first learned to haul fresh water from the well and fill up the

plastic basins we use for washing wounds. He's gotten so good at his job he finds time to chase baby goats around the colony, and that's mostly what he is doing this morning while the rest of us tend a station. A dozen patients have already rotated through our line before Kumar takes his turn: Udaya, with her luminous smile; Vignesh, who brings the stubs of his wrists together in such a gracious greeting; some patients I don't recognize have also come through, their soiled bandages removed, feet cleaned, soaked, massaged with oil to keep them from cracking. There's Saranya, whose name means to surrender, sitting with her hands folded patiently in her lap while Navamani, our Indian nurse, carves necrotic tissue from her foot. And then Kumar.

Kumar and I sit opposite each other under the shade of a tamarind—he on a folding chair and me hunched over his foot on a flimsy plastic stool. I like working under the shade of that tree. If the leaves stir I can yank off my mask and breathe clean air, knowing the stench of putrefaction is being carried off with the breeze. Kumar's foot is propped up on my knee. It's his left foot, the right having been amputated sometime before our family started coming to this colony.

Even writing about it now, hours later, I'm shaking. I can see his big toe, and then empty spaces where other toes should have been. And a blackened horn.

One of the body's responses to peripheral nerve damage is reabsorbing the minerals and tissue of the fingers and bones. Kumar's missing toes had been victims of this process. In some cases, a patient's receding nail bed will continue to push out keratinous growth, unsightly protuberances that could take any shape. When I see them, I clip them—the same as any other nail. Kumar had one of these blackened nails jutting out from his foot like a stunted rhinoceros horn. I have in my tray a specialized nail cutting tool. I've done this many times. No sweat. I set the jaws firmly around the base of the nail for a clean, swift cut and then stop cold.

This isn't a nail.

I lift off the cutting tool and examine the nail. I see it then. The tissue at the base, encircled just moments before by my steel pincers, is actually soft, living flesh.

I feel sick. That toe, if you can properly call it a toe, is *his* toe. And I nearly snipped it off.



I have grown a beard. I wear sandals and flowing, linen pants. And every time I go out to the leprosy colonies, my messiah complexion burns in the fierce sun. At the end of a long day, I climb back into the medical van and come home and every night the geckos snicker. What do I know of healing? So much depends on everything else.

I stay home on Sunday. The rest of the family has driven two hours to Chennai, but I am too upset after finding out about what's happening to John Dehlin, the host of *Mormon Stories*. Over the years, John's podcasts have introduced me to people like Terryl Givens, Carol Lynn Pearson, Greg Prince, and Joanna Brooks—committed Latter-day Saints who acknowledge the messiness of our past and present, but move forward with faith in our future. This *Mormon Stories* community carved out a space for unconventional believers, like me, who wanted to stay. So, when I learned this week that John's new stake president has summoned him to a disciplinary council, it feels personal, as if the Church is deciding whether to amputate people like us from the Body of Christ.

I am not naïve. I understand that sometimes a limb must be amputated to save a life. But amputations are always tragic, and the mortal threat must be real, not imagined. Chopping off a foot because its warty toe doesn't meet an institutional aesthetic does not constitute a mortal threat. Nor would a wise surgeon remove an organ until fully understanding how its various and sometimes subtle functions are contributing to the overall health of the organism.

I think about leprosy. One insidious feature of the disease is the permanent damage to nerve endings in the patient's extremities. The microbacterium itself, the one that causes the disease, is easily neutralized and with simple treatment poses no further risk to the patient; a leprosy patient's body is, for all intents and purposes, healthy. However, because the nerve endings have been compromised, the healthy patient becomes insensitive to the pain inflicted on parts of his or her body, such as to the feet or hands.

Let's suppose such a young woman with leprosy steps on shards of broken glass. She would not perceive the injury being suffered by her foot. And when she lifts a scorching hot lid from the cooking pot, she will not sense her palm blistering from the heat. Insensitive to wound after wound—and numb to the need for healing—her wounds become infected and sores spread; ulcers, untreated, begin to eat away at perfectly healthy tissue. Then one day, a doctor will conclude that an amputation has become necessary to save her life.

I fire up my iPad and write a blog post for the church I have loved and served. I want to tell my community back home what I have learned. I say,

John Dehlin's ecclesiastical surgeon may decide an amputation is necessary. But let there be no mistake: this excommunication, this severing of a member from the Body of Christ, represents yet another failure. A failure to be sensitive to the very real pain and discomfort some members are feeling, to be responsive to their wounds and attentive to our care-giving. A failure to view lumpy toes and unsightly moles in their proper perspective, to ensure that what we think is dead isn't soft, living flesh. We have need of thee. We have need of thee.

May we come to recognize our inherent and indivisible unity. May we come to realize that the health and well-being of a part is the health and well-being of the whole. These understandings, after all, are key insights into the nature of atonement. As the Body of Christ, may we not lose our sensitivity to the pain and wounding experienced by some of our members. And when injury leads to infection, and we worry that the

infection will spread, let us be less keen to maim ourselves. Instead of a surgeon's knife, let us liberally apply the healing balm of love.

I title my post, "That We May Be One: Healing the Body of Christ." I hit "publish" and pace back and forth until Rebecca and the kids come home. And yes, I am wearing my Jesus sandals.



Today is Good Friday. I'm thinking a lot about wholeness and disconnection, as well as the Christian promise of atonement. I don't understand the theological dynamics at play in this doctrine. Why are we cut off? Severed? What does it mean to be connected? *I am the vine, ye are the branches . . . Except ye abide in me and I in you . . . Can the hand say to the foot—or a misshapen toe—I have no need of thee?*

The Body of Christ. The Human Family.

I have seen what happens when we cast undesirables from our midst. I have pointed fingers at Indian society and at my own church. But I remember Kumar, and a thousand like him. My own doing. How vulnerable, how easily cut, severed, dismembered in a moment of carelessness.

So today I celebrate wholeness and healing. I celebrate living tissue, the vital connections between us all. I celebrate the deformed and misshapen, and the spaces where things used to be, the minerals of bones taken back into the body, reabsorbed, skin folding over the emptiness. I celebrate that moment before we almost hurt someone, when we soften our grip and take a closer look. I celebrate love and reconciliation, and Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.



They say the site of a wound becomes the place of healing. Nowhere is that more true than here, among the leprosy-affected. I have witnessed many wounds and many kinds of healing. Our family can do so little

to solve anything, really. We're powerless to overturn cultural forces, untrained in medicine, naïve about the economics of poverty. Yet we are discovering our own role in healing. And it turns out, the only qualification is the capacity to be human—*humane*—in the presence of another human.

We go to a colony and sit down on a stool under a tree and wait for a patient to take a chair opposite us and then we remove their festering bandages and we find ourselves at the site of a wound. And what we do is we laugh, we show compassion, we express love, we touch, we stand in awe. We shed any notion that we, the supposed “whole,” are bringing healing to them, the presumed “broken.” We simply share a space where healing happens. And the healing happens for us as much as for them.

Healing becomes another name for wholeness revealing itself.

There's a passage in one of Rumi's poems I like to think of when a patient sits down and presents himself for our care, and we know it's going to be bad because of the flies and we don't think we can face it without flinching. Rumi says:

Don't turn your head.

Keep looking at the bandaged place.

That's where the Light enters . . .



On Easter Sunday our family drives out to one of the most beautiful colonies with some of the most luminous patients. They have bright flowers growing there, planted just for the sake of having bright flowers. And all morning long, I can see my family—my own bright flowers—sitting with people and creating places of healing. And I see that they do not turn their heads from another's wounds. And I see Light entering, washing away shadows. This morning is filled with grace and tenderness and laughter,

and the Light reveals the goodness and the wholeness of our family, the whole human family. I am grateful to have been in such a space.

Maybe our resurrection, our regeneration, doesn't depend on genetic codes or incantations. Maybe it depends on the persistence of continuing, maimed or not, in this absurd enterprise called life. To put one disfigured foot in front of the other. Or, having none, to crawl, as I have seen many here do. To let laughter boil up from the cauldron of suffering. To let singing rise with the keening of loss. This is the resilience we see in the colonies, in our family, in the hearts of the volunteers—all of us broken, all of us whole.

And the sun filters through the mist. And the day is green and good. And the most important things find a way.

DREAMING AFTER TRUMP

Gail Turley Houston

On November 9, 2016, I remained in bed all day. The previous evening—what F. Scott Fitzgerald might have referred to as the “real dark night of the soul”—I had broken all the speed limits barreling home from Las Vegas, Nevada, madly thinking I would find safety in my home in Los Angeles if I could just get there soon enough. Having driven to Nevada to work for Hillary Clinton’s campaign on election day, I knew by the time the polls closed that it was over. A great wound opened up, and I could not nurse, let alone cure, it. Over the following weeks, the only answer seemed to be to block the festering thing out.

Then came December 3, 2016. I woke from a twelve-hour sleep in which I dreamt of Brigham Young University again. Fired from the Mormon flagship university in 1996 after six years as a professor in the English department, I have been haunted for twenty years by my BYU dreams. As with any form of syncope, time was disrupted. Thus, in this particular dream, I am trying to complete three classes at BYU so I can finally obtain my PhD, and then I can leave and start my life. In the dream mode, I have been sick for months and am far behind in my classes. I worry that I won’t be able to finish the courses or my degree. Knowing my future is on the line, I go to campus to talk to my professors so I can find out how best to finish my courses.

But on the way, I get caught up in a new museum at the edge of campus that I hadn’t noticed before. It is dedicated to women and people of color and their arts. And it is full to bursting with the most amazing sculptures and paintings. I am mesmerized by the enormity of what I’m seeing, and I fall in love with each artwork and how each is precisely arranged to lead to the next work of art, as though they aren’t only separate, discrete, and

individual but part of a larger concept together. Even more compelling, all the artists are at the museum and are freely talking about their works with the audience in a communal, almost sacramental, act.

Suddenly, I start conversing with the artists and the discussion gradually turns into a glorious opera, with everyone, artists and visitors, talking and singing about what the works mean and how beautiful they are. Yes, we are singing our love for art and for each detail of the artworks, weaving a mellifluous harmonic appreciation for the parts and the whole with our many different voices. I lose all sense of self and am totally engaged with what the artists desire to impart and with how stunned I am by so much beauty. I am almost in a trance state, vatic voices surrounding me and visions of this beauty coming forth from my own mouth.

Then I become aware of my own individuality in the midst of the humming multitude. I notice that I have a bronze lamé leather sheath on with no sleeves or collar, leaving my décolletage showing—certainly defying BYU dress standards. But I feel beautiful like the artworks around me, and I realize that I am now an artwork too, singing and talking to the artists in a performative, even decorative, way, and it is one of the most exquisite things that has ever happened to me. I cannot let go of this sublime encounter. My husband, an artist, comes to the museum to pick me up, but he also sees how beautiful the works of art are and starts conversing and singing with the artists too, becoming consumed by the presentation in the same way I am.

Then we finally leave, but we have to walk by the BYU football stadium to get to our car. The football players are practicing for the big game, which the LDS Church has told them they must win to demonstrate to the world how wonderful the LDS Church is. The players are furious and practicing in a hellhole *under* the stadium where it is all concrete and low ceilings. Bent over at the waist because the ceilings are so low, the players swear and curse and intermittently drone the scriptures by rote. It makes for a chorus of darkness and hate competing with the glorious sounds coming from the museum nearby. The reason they are

cursing is that the coach requires them to recite scriptures while they are practicing, and they revile this imposition. They need to focus on football and not be hampered with this other deadly task. They love the scriptures, but now is the time to prepare to play football.

A female football player tries to cheer the group up. She says to me, “Let’s go for a helicopter ride.” So ten or so BYU football players, students, and I climb into the helicopter. Two female football players navigate our ascension, scaling the hovering concrete and rising to a pinnacle where it is a grand thing to look down at the amazing world, and I feel so free, free, free. In my body-hugging bronze lamé leather dress I am soaring in God’s skies.

It is over in the twinkling of an eye. The two female football players set the helicopter down and drop off all the passengers but me. Then they abruptly lunge into the air and I am thrust out of the gyrating machine, hanging from the helicopter’s landing skids by one arm. I am alone in the upper firmament, with the whole world in my sights, terrified—but amazed, ecstatic. I have been gifted with freedom, exquisite freedom. I am almost to the point of bursting.

The football players finally swoop down from the sky and drop me off at the art museum. The BYU press surrounds me like bees hectoring for a quote: “It was liberating—it was terrifying.” The newspaper article instantly comes out and half of the BYU community only cares that I said “give it to me” when recalling how I felt during the helicopter ride. They are furious that I have used such a foul double entendre. The other half are thrilled by my experience and believe I must have had some kind of vision because of how luminous I looked when I alighted from the helicopter. When a reporter asks me about the supposedly vulgar comment, I say I don’t know what I said and don’t care. I add that “All I can say is it was an incredibly freeing experience, so joyful, and truly close to God, and you can’t take that away from me, and I won’t be drawn into this conversation about why I said one thing I don’t even remember saying.”



Why did I receive this dream at this particular time, after Trump? For twenty years I have had nightmares about being fired from BYU—one showed me on my knees mopping the floor in the BYU English department and begging for a job there as a janitor. In another, BYU was forcing me to eat excrement. In another, I was told that if I wanted to stay at BYU, I would have to live at the top of an elevator, where, when the door opened, I was in danger of falling ten stories down the elevator shaft, so I always had to be aware of that huge hole in my “apartment.” Dream after dream after dream of being fired from BYU.

I had been fired for my views about—of—Mother in Heaven. In 1990, the president of Brigham Young University, Rex E. Lee (who was also my mother’s first cousin), announced a glasnost of sorts: BYU privately assured me that it would now be open to hiring feminists and other progressives. With some trepidation about establishing my career at such a conservative institution, I accepted a job there as a Victorian scholar. I felt some comfort that the General Authority who interviewed me for the position allowed me to ask him about Mother in Heaven.

By 1993, the glasnost was over. BYU went on the hunt for feminists, “pseudo-intellectuals,” and homosexuals, whom Boyd K. Packer had vilified. Going up for our probationary review in 1993, feminist colleague Cecilia Farr and I were targeted; she was ultimately fired and I was severely admonished for my feminist activities. Junior professor David Knowlton was also fired from the Sociology department for his progressive views about gays. The atmosphere had become ugly—like concrete ceilings so low one had to stoop or crawl just to do one’s job. In short order, a metaphorical abbatoir occurred with the excommunication of six prominent Mormon intellectuals.

For three more years I bent over and shuffled, muttering scriptures under my breath to anyone who would listen, hoping my beautiful spiritual life would survive. In 1996, though I had published a scholarly

book, which was more than most tenured professors in the department had accomplished, I was fired for “enervating the very moral fiber of the university” with my “heretical” beliefs. BYU ultimately fired me for publically discussing praying to Mother in Heaven. Of course, believing in Mother in Heaven is not considered a sin in the LDS Church. Indeed, the BYU administration explained to me that I could believe in Mother in Heaven all I wanted—I just could not talk about praying to her in a public setting.

That interdiction had its effect on my own scholarly and spiritual path long after. I only finally felt free enough to write about Victorian women writers and Mother in Heaven after I quit attending the LDS Church. I longed for Mother. I wanted to write about her. And by 2005, after having published three scholarly books, I felt I had paid my dues and could, perhaps, write something that was a bit more personal while retaining a scholarly trajectory.

But when I completed the research phase and began writing, I still felt blocked and cramped as a writer. Interdictions and bad dreams subjugated me internally. I felt the need to be honest about my own search for a female god, but had been maimed the last time I had tried. The new book didn’t feel right to me until, in the last weeks before handing in the proofs, I spontaneously wrote out my personal belief trajectory as part of a brief afterword concerning my BYU experience—like Venus on a half-shell or Athena out of the brain of a god, the afterword came fully born, with the final version virtually unchanged from the original draft.

I had finally given myself the freedom to write about Her, and now I found, with scholar Charles Taylor, that I was always “drawn back toward the religious by inchoate inner promptings” but that my sublime creed had reformulated after I was fired from BYU. I knew I could no longer live with the dogma of the LDS Church, and yet I knew that I would always need to imagine and inhabit God in multiverse ways, which, for me, began in the LDS Church. I was born in the Church, and my own great-great-grandparents, on all sides, had been a part of the Church

since its very inception. I needed to sing with their voices about the exquisite God I knew and in thanks for the gift of so much beauty in the world. I also needed to sing with the voices of new friends and loved ones who had other dreams to prophesy.



Who could have foretold the apocalypse at hand? The nightmare of Trump that brought back the old patriarchies slouching their way to Bethlehem and the City on the Hill—our own Washington, DC? In 2017 with Hillary, I thought I would see the glass ceiling finally break and experience a kind of vindication in being a woman. But the concrete ceiling has returned. Bosch's Hell descends upon us. The tired, the poor, and the lame are rejected, the divergent, molested. I am wounded again, and it seems the only thing to do is hide and sleep the sleep with no dreams. To consort again with depression, confusion, and rage. To lose my voice—knowing I have known this nightmare before.

But a dream was given me. Or, rather, the bronze-lamé-wrapped body my God gave me generated my dreams, my soul, my visions. The lithe leather sheath fit my sinews so well, taking me on flights above the glass ceiling. And I now know that I have sung with angels and artists and shall hear their voices again.

Dreams allow reality. The gift requires my own benefactions. So that I must now awake from dreams and nightmares. It is not time for despair or sumptuous flight. Hope may be formulated, resistances created—for the God-given power to make a difference flows in my veins. Generations before me knew this. If the Apocalypse be at hand and World War III broods upon the waters, I must join the resistance. I could stay there in my vision and shield myself from the terrors of the real world. But that is not why the dream was given to me. It is time, again, to have courage.

Two Ideas

C. Dylan Bassett

1.

in counter-sense

the eye hunts out
more than what it holds

more than holding

an illumination
assuming god
now as always

plays no / part in

2.

so the sun
explains the sky
aimless in

exactitude so
cannot be seen exactly

only seen straining
the eye from what it sees

to what sees it

Not the Truman Show

R. A. Christmas

for Duane Jeffery

Imagine a world with labels on the leaves,
fossilized scripture in compacted dust,
“God Made” on hooves—where everyone believes
not out of hope or faith, but because they must.
We’d have Everest and oceans, but here and there
Heaven’s “product placements,” coyly displayed.
Nature would be a warning, not a dare.
We’d be awed and cowed by turns—but mostly afraid.
Instead, we get dinos, billions of years,
Australia, plate tectonics, Sanskrit, yurts,
chimp DNA, vestigial gills at our ears—
Mom Earth, with sweets and secrets up her skirts,
herself existent, leaving room for doubt,
our stage unstaged, where life and death play out.

Averted Vision

Joanna Ellsworth

There are no streetlights where my cottage hides
within a forest. Nights there grant a cold
permission to the stars who drag along
their lazy arc. Away from manmade glare,
those tiny bubbles pierce the blackest ink
from where they draw their strength—the darkness moves
aside for light—and dimmer stars shine most
when seen from out of sight. Just look an inch
or less away and see it scream to life
as though a thing directly viewed cannot
exist because the eye beholds it. We
are much the same. We pale, become demure
when called upon, but in our DNA
is supernova. Why? What force constrains
our gamma burst? Are we not made of stars?
Our central mass should cause accretion, pull
them—moons and planets, lovers—into us,
ensnaring them with gravity they can't
withstand. Be circumpolar stars, then. Don't
descend below a lesser body's frail
horizon. Flare if there is lightning in your skull,
or pulse with fusion in your veins, or die
to swallow worlds, and leave a hole so big,
so black, that every eye is shut and all
the streetlights ever lit are stilled. Or else,
at least, surround yourself with those who know
to see you from the corner of their eye.

The Grammar of Quench

Ronald Wilcox

The sentence of mortality ends with a period.
Dehydration rolled into one round sound: old.
If I slake my thirst, I prod my prostate to rebel.
If I desire to sin I send my soul reeling to the
Desert, deserted. If I seek the phantasm oasis
Wavering on the horizon, I sink in sands of my
Own inadequacy. Such has my existence been
Designed by Almighty God as end for man in
Single drink he seeks, *immortality*, which lies
On the sky in a horizon he stumbles towards
Daily, seeing his God as mirage or true sight,
Holding in his hand the glass of cool water
 He seeks, unending glass of Sacrament,
 Liquid he needs, incessant contentment.

Echo of Boy

Darlene Young

My son hunches into the storm in his oversized coat
to collect fast offerings, a two-hour route
because the other mother's sons stay in when it's cold.
He is mine.
His wrists

out-hang his sleeves. His hair
squirms from his well-slicked part,
and he is mine. He's out there
in the snow and I can't settle. Thirteen years old; thirteen,
the way he slides a little to the right of us on the Sunday pew,
like someone has hit "tab" on the keyboard, though still
he'll let me pull him back to drape my arm around
those slumping shoulders.

Shadow of boy.

It's snowing and he is fine out there.

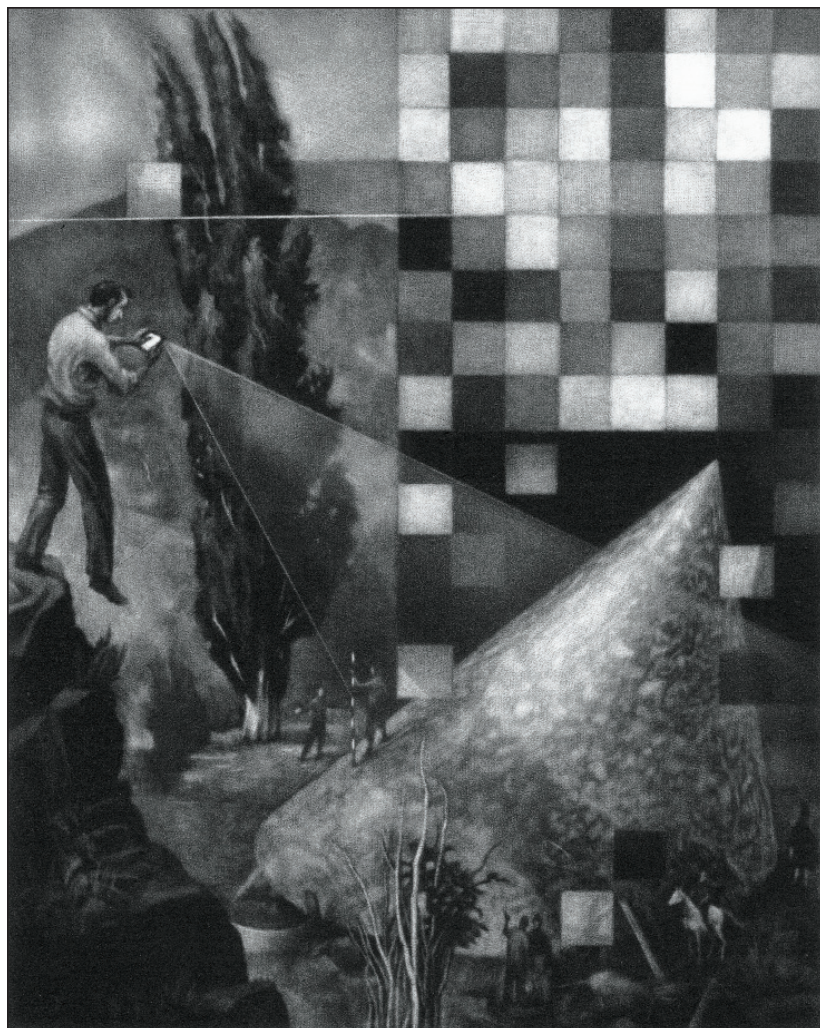
He's fine. At home

he sprawls on the couch behind those heavy eyes. Outline
of boy. Echo of boy. I tell it to him straight: "The reward
for showing up," I say, "is that you're the first one they call
next time. Find a way to be proud of that." He looks
away. Should I apologize for this burden of duty I've bred
into him, for the fact that from now on he'll leave
no ward gathering without putting away chairs? Welcome
to Mormon guilt, my son. Welcome to the wilderness.
Sometimes a suit is a front bumper, silver plating, deadweight.
Sometimes it is wings.

Those heavy-lidded eyes. Let there be a man
behind there. The still-narrow shoulders, crooked
tie. Does he slump to parenthesize the space
he'll leave when he's gone? Look
forward, son. Look forward,
mother. On the horizon
in the chalky dusk:
contrail of boy.



Robert De Groff
Relic



Robert De Groff
Cone of Vision

WHAT HAPPENED SUNDAY MORNING

Erika Munson

When Danny DiLorenzo got up to speak I was thinking about how I could loosen my tie. My mother makes me wear one, and after an hour my body fights back. I stand in front of the chapel during meetings and hold the microphone—waiting to give it to someone who’s ready to stand and bear their testimony. It’s a tricky job; you don’t want to hand a mic to a mom who’s taking out her whiny kid, or embarrass some old guy who’s heading to the bathroom. I usually scan the faces in the congregation, searching for signs of the Spirit. But when Danny stood up I wasn’t thinking about any of that. My collar felt so tight I couldn’t focus. It made it hard to breathe.

Danny was in high school but looked older. He came to church by himself and his mom—wherever she was—didn’t make him wear a tie. His little grey neck poked out of a blue work shirt. I really didn’t know a thing about him, but we were all used to his presence. You learn to accept people the missionaries drag in. The only time I’d heard Danny’s voice louder than a mumble was at his baptism last year. He came up out of the water with his white clothes sticking to him; his mouth made a happy O as he took a breath. “This is so great,” he had said, almost in a shout.

I handed him the microphone and stepped back, planting myself in the aisle. While everyone was watching Danny I could undo my collar. I slipped my thumb and finger under the knot of my tie and found the edges of the small button. I managed to hold tight and push it in and then out of the buttonhole. A gentle current of air made its way between my sweaty neck and shirt. Thank you, I prayed silently. Thank you for helping me with this little thing; for getting it on the first try while no one was looking.

Danny was speaking softly and very fast. He was talking about some calamity that God had saved him from. The morning began, he said, with his crew entering the command module of Apollo 1 for a launch simulation.

Wait a minute.

The deck, he said, was full of high-pressure oxygen. There was a funny smell. A fire broke out.

I stood still, my eyes flying around for some distraction. The big round chapel window would work; it hung like an amber moon over Danny's shoulder. When I was little, sitting squished between Mom and Dad and hurting with boredom while I swung my short legs from the pew, I would silently count the glass panes in the window like I was taking my turn at Candyland: one—two—three—four—five—six—seven.

Bishop Hansen got down from behind the pulpit and walked toward him. Danny kept talking, the story pouring out of him. The hatch was sealed, there was no way out. NASA placed a call to President Johnson. Smoke was everywhere; his spacesuit was on fire. We were burning up, Danny said, but his voice was calm.

The Bishop reached for the microphone as if it were the most natural thing in the world to stop someone mid-testimony. Danny didn't resist. He finished in a hurry, running all his words together.

"I'm just happy to be alive in the name of Jesus Christ amen."

He sat down with a little smile; his black eyes alight. As the quiet minutes ticked by (who was going to follow that performance?) Danny's face returned to its usual pasty blankness.

The bishop gave me the mic and I suppose he expected us all to carry on. But there was no way I could do that. No matter how many happy stories about God's love anyone else would tell that day, I couldn't get those doomed astronauts out of my head—banging on the glass, screaming to get out.

THE HOME TEACHER

Heidi Naylor

Bishop warned Brock Hartman ahead of time. “They’ll ask for a food order.”

He opened a desk drawer and took out a binder filled with requisitions for the storehouse.

“But they have a decent income from the state, and their rent is subsidized. Let’s help them figure out how to live on the checks they’re already getting.”

He penned information onto a page in the binder and rubbed the knuckle of one hand with the thumb of the other. The bishop’s private office, down a carpeted hallway from the noisy foyer, was too warm; his face was pale and tired. He scribbled a signature, tore a page from the duplicate beneath, pushed it across the desk.

“I can authorize this one order since they’re just starting out with you. But they get almost two thousand dollars a month, and we have working families doing fine on that. See if you can help them manage it.” He replaced the binder in a drawer.

“Oh, and Brock.” The bishop smiled. “Thanks for taking them on.” Already his shoulders rose. One burden among the many, lifted. The drawer closed with a satisfying *thock*.

At the close of priesthood meeting, Brock got the new home teaching list, the same except for this addition.

Merton (P) and Sharla (F) Petshot. 62, 64.

504 East 45th Street Trailer K

McAdam, Idaho.

208-555-6732

Brock phoned Brother Petshot, who said to call him Mert. That next Saturday, his wife Terra assembled a loaf of banana bread, a container of jam, and a decorative card with their names and phone numbers. Terra wore her summer uniform: denim skirt, sandals, a thin blouse, and Brock wished she'd put some jeans on, more buffer against the toxic incursion of McAdam air.

McAdam had parts that were okay—neighborhoods flanking the river, the new park near the Shiloh Riverside. But the blocks surrounding 45th Street had an undertow of dissolution.

There were much worse places than this. Skid Row. Pain and Wasting, the dreary district east of downtown Vancouver, BC where Brock served his mission thirty years ago, cross-streets Main and Hastings on a city map. McAdam was Pain and Wasting's little sister; a mini Compton, a wannabe Watts. It couldn't compare really, this was after all Idaho; but it was in the running. Mexican drug trade thrived in McAdam, the newspaper's crime log seemed anchored there. Residents were none too friendly—skeletal and furtive or inked up, overlarge. The only legal businesses were a decaying Laundromatic, a dismal daycare, and a salvage auto field. Ruts and potholes pitted the parking lots. Chain-link fences were tangled with weeds and fast-food wrappers; rusty washer-dryers sat like sculpture at the edges of trailer parks.

And there was Animal House, a fetid and riotous boarding kennel for dogs. The Hartmans had made use of it once for Loki, the lanky shepherd Terra brought to their marriage. Brock and Jonah left Loki there, first day of the new family's spring vacation. Jonah was Terra's son, who at twelve had become Brock's son too. In the few years since, twin daughters had been born. It was a lot of change in a little time.

Brock could easily recall how Jonah had looked that day at Animal House: bereft and bleak as Loki allowed himself to be led, tail and head drooping, and then locked into a stained, disinfected concrete slab kennel. Loki turned and watched, panting with steadfast submission, as Jonah and Brock turned away.

“He’ll be alright,” Brock said. “It’s just a few days.”

He guided Jonah with a hand touched to the boy’s back, and Jonah did not look back, though he did not hurry either. They’d walked together to the exit, as staticky Chopin wafted from speakers to counter the bark and whine and stench of a dozen dogs.

The price this twelve-year-old could pay, to have a father in his life, seemed an outsized force of feeling. But it was not a shock. Even now Brock could be stalled in his tracks by the memory of waking one morning, not long after his own tenth birthday, as Richard Hartman stood in the kitchen, making waffles. Stirring raisins into oatmeal.

“Brock-paper-scissors!” His father called from the kitchen. “Brock-and-roll, Brock-concert. You want maple syrup?”

Brock had thought he was dreaming, but the sun said different, a fuzzy, dazzling blotch through the window. Leaves behind the glass shimmered like sequins. His stomach bounced into his throat, his hands literally tingled. Mom emerged from the bedroom across the hall, later than usual; fresh and pretty, happy; he could still see her, smiling in the doorway. After breakfast, she kissed them both before she left for work. Her hand brushed Brock’s neck; it lingered on Richard’s forearm.

That Sunday, tall and tanned Richard waved at the neighbors as the family climbed into his car to go to church. He shut the door gently once Brock’s mom was seated, walked around to the driver’s seat of a car familiar only in that day’s memory: pale vinyl interior, brougham top, slender silver gearshift protruding from the steering column like a magic wand. Richard winked at Brock through the rear-view mirror.

When they reached the meetinghouse, he grinned and shook hands with people throughout the chapel. People clapped him on the shoulder, winked at Brock. “Your dad. Looking good, huh?”

Mormons could be great forgivers. And even better at helping to pick up the pieces when somebody, namely your handsome father, walked out again a few months later. The ward rallied round—with attentive

home teachers, with Boy Scouts, the dignity of callings for Brock and his mom; with expectations and steadfast friendship.

His mother even got past things. “Your dad had a way with people,” she said, with a few decades of distance. “Richard Hartman had a way with me. I couldn’t fight it, even when I tried.” She was speaking his name freely, easily. She shook her head, breathed in deeply. “I so wanted him to change.” Her eyes were steady and pale; their blue matched her quilted jacket. She lived comfortably on the pension from a long-running state job plus Social Security. Brock’s skills as a tax accountant had helped him help her. She had prudent investments, a tidy nest egg, little to worry about. He’d seen to that.

She touched his hand, her fingers dry as paper leaves.

“We didn’t fare too badly, did we? I don’t expect I’ll see Richard again, even on the other side.” Her eyes shone as she turned her face to the window. She shivered, almost imperceptibly. “I don’t want to.”

Brock was as yet unmarried. Untrammelled. *Not a forger*, his Mormon soul couldn’t help but whisper.

It’s all the style now, for women to support themselves and their children. Brock’s sense was that a man, a real man, would never cause that to happen.



He parked on the hard-packed mud outside the Petshots’ and was happy to see a car beside their trailer. A nice one, given the neighborhood. Next door, at Trailer L, a quartet of skinny mullets sat vaping. Brock walked around the car and took Terra’s hand, and she sang out her hello toward the group at Trailer L, but got nothing. They turned back to the Petshots’ home and climbed its wooden steps.

Some commotion and barking, some kitchen noise. The door opened, and Mert Petshot stood waiting in the dim light. He stepped aside to let them in.

A fish tank hummed at their left in a greenish flicker. Four metal cages stood on the far side of the room, two over two, blocking light from the window. A shadow moved inside a low, dark cage, and Terra stiffened at the shape and rise of a cleaver; in a moment, they saw it was only the mottled fur of a boxer, the flash of white at its throat. To its right was a larger, shaggy black Rottweiler. Its paws scraped against the cage as it rolled to its side.

"Beautiful dogs," Terra said. "Are they friendly?"

"If you're a friend," said Mert, and he grinned, exposing small fish-glow teeth. He gestured toward an old sofa.

"We have a pup and a grouchy cat," Terra continued, smoothing her skirt as she sat. She held tight to the ribboned loaf and the jam jar; perched at the edge of the cushion and kept her back straight.

"We have our son Jonah, plus twin girls, and with Brock here . . . I have all the wildlife I can handle!" She smiled, and when Mert said nothing, blinked her eyes at Brock.

"Mert," Brock said. "Thanks for inviting us in. We thought we'd get to know you a bit. Have you lived in Idaho long?"

"You the ones I call if I need something?" Mert asked.

"Sure," said Brock.

"Oh!" said Terra, "and we'd like to give you this." She held out her offerings.

"Got a new phone last week," Mert said. "How do I call you?"

"Take this bread my wife made, Mert," Brock said. Mert juggled bread, jar, phone; and the gifts tumbled to the floor, where Brock wondered if they'd be remembered before dogs were let loose to discover them. He tipped forward and picked up the card, showed Mert where to find the phone number.

Seeing Mert ordering his life on the phone, Brock brought up the church schedule—"The Big Three. Sacrament, Sunday school, priesthood meeting"—and they'd be delighted to see him and Sharla there. "You're part of us," he said. "You're part of the ward. Eleven on Sundays, week in week out." Mert didn't look up.

"Three hours tops," Brock kept at it. "And you find you're spiritually nourished, you really do. I'm convinced it helps to keep the Spirit with me. Church makes the whole week better."

Mert continued fingering the phone, and nobody spoke. A woman emerged from the dark hallway beyond the cages. She entered as though awakened from a dream. Her jeans were fastened with a safety pin and hung loose. She blinked in the light, and pushed the hair out of her eyes.

"Hello," she said. She removed a stack of mail from a chair and sat down. "I'm Sharla Petshot."

Terra stepped toward Sharla and introduced them. She took Sharla's offered hand, limp as a petal. "I'm pleased to meet you."

Brock lifted Sharla's hand too, for a few seconds, lank and cold, and greeted her. "I was asking your husband about his service in the military," he said.

"Got a pension from the Army," Mert said. "Plus SSI money, but people always grubbing at it. The all-holy VA's supposed to help me with my medications. But you don't get paid for an act of God."

Sister Petshot remarked on the lack of food in the house. "We heard of the Wicker program," she said. "But you can't get any products or disinfectant."

The kitchen stove could easily be seen, beneath a huge cellophane bag of popcorn and a carton of Pop-Tarts. Plastic 7-Eleven cups had toppled across burners and onto the counter.

"It can be tough," said Terra. "What can we do for you?"

"What're we supposed to eat?" Sharla's words overtook her husband's. "A groceries order from the bishop," he was saying. "I won't get pay until the 2nd." More than two weeks away.

Brock leaned forward, touched his fingertips together. "Okay. But how are you doing with your budget? Can we help you plan expenses? Maybe we can find a way to make the money last."

"I have problems," Mert began. "Didn't bishop say? There's a kind of mental illness I got. Pay rent to stay here, sometimes I can't pay. The church helps people like me."

Across the room, the dog scuffled in its cage.

They talked through the particulars of Mert's income, his rent subsidy. "If the church just gives you food, or extra money for rent, that's not helping you," said Brock. "The church is interested in helping you manage your resources."

Mert fished out his phone again. "I can't work," he said. "I got hurt."

He spoke in declarations and didn't provide details about his injuries. "The pain is impressive," he said.

"I'm sorry to hear that, Mert," Brock said, hands on his thighs. "But due to your service, to your injury, the state makes sure you have an income and some help with your house. Those are your resources. Maybe we can help you make them stretch."

Mert's head dropped. He mumbled softly to himself.

Brock started to press again, about planning. Terra laced her hand inside his elbow and pulled gently.

"What if we just did the one food order for them, Brock? That will help Mert and Sharla make it until payday. And in the meantime, we can help them figure out a budget."

When Mert heard the words "food order for them," he perked up some. Sharla watched the floor and chewed at her lip; she balled up her fist and knocked it on her knee.

Brock stood finally. "If I was to call, get the Relief Society involved," he said, "when could you go to the storehouse?"

Mert looked up. His rheumy eyes found Brock's face. "My dance card ain't that full."



"Mormon missionaries, no shit!" Clive Monson said. He began a spiky, pot-holed narrative. "My people came across the U.S. great plains. Not a few weeks but what Brother Brigham sent them on with the handcarts. They were sandbagged . . . made to move to Alberta. My great, great . . . whatever-the-hell grandfather from Bristol, England." He shaded his eyes

with his hands; turned left, then right, possibly imitating Columbus. “They read the Books of the Mormons, they helped to settle the Salt Lake Valley. *Then* they came to Cana-dee-I-O.” He laughed. “A saying my mama told me. *Jesus left his sandal straps in Salt Lake City*. She learned that when she was a girl, helped her say her s.”

This happened in Vancouver, decades ago. Young elders Brock Hartman and Scott Clubbersoll—Canadian Club—met Clive in that Pain and Wasting neighborhood, east of downtown. Clive Monson claimed a distant kinship to the apostle, now become the prophet in Salt Lake.

Clive slumped low against a blackened brick building, and his hands shook as he talked. A pigeon—they were everywhere—pecked at his shoelace. When he tried to stand, Brock helped him up, but Clive collapsed, first to his haunches, fingers clutching at the brick. Then a final breakdown onto the pavement.

“Whoa, there,” Brock said. “You want to be careful.” Canadian Club got on one side of him, Brock on the other, and they helped him stand once more. It didn’t take, and he waved them away to crouch again on the ground. Talking had worn him out. His smell followed the elders back to their flat, stayed on Brock’s hands and in his clothes.

But Clive showed enough interest to keep those elders coming back to the blackened building where he held court, and back again; as much as anything to wonder how he’d latched onto a couple shiny, clean-cut boys in double-knit Mr. Mac suits. Talking with Clive, who tried to be cheerful but quickly sunk into a silent, pervading doom, felt like slowly peeling the easy, daylight surface away from things, to reveal an abyss for which the young missionaries believed they had a useful, if not the only, ladder.

When Clive wasn’t on the street, he squatted in a flat near the gas-light district, and sure they could teach him there, no problem, after his methadone kicked in, next Tuesday. “My day at the clinic, four o’clock.”

Clive felt sorry for Americans because they had it backwards—“no on free clinics, yes on the guns.”

Canadian Club laughed at that, hands loosely on the belt of his dress slacks. “Unarmed Americans with health care?” he said, with a wink and a grin.

“That’s what you call a Canuck,” answered Brock.

Clive mentioned that he wanted to work in America someday, “due to the tax structure,” and as he looked up to catch their eyes, Brock realized the three were having an actual, back-and-forth conversation. His spirits lifted. Conversation—beyond Club’s supervisory directives—had been in short supply.



On Brock’s next visit to the Petshots, he took a ledger book and a Mason jar filled with Terra’s chili. Mert took the jar and looked around.

“You want to heat that up before you eat it,” Brock suggested. Mert walked into the kitchen and set the jar against the bag of popcorn on the stove.

“Don’t know how I’m going to make it til the 2nd,” Mert said, as he turned back. “Four days away.”

Brock dismissed thoughts of Mert attempting to heat the glass jar rather than empty the chili into a pan. “Here before you know it. What would you say to making a plan for that money, when it comes?”

He broke the neat cardboard band and opened up the ledger, where orderly lists and columns awaited smart, thoughtful accounting entries. He laid it across the top of a pet cage, elbow high.

“You put the rent money here. Then you decide how much you’ll need to spend on food. A car payment might be next.”

Mert studied his cuticles. “You bring them groceries orders we talked about?” he asked. “That first one already ran out.”

Brock said they’d get to that later. First came the figuring of SSI checks, groceries, penciled dollar amounts. He and Mert would clear some space among the animals, sit down and get to work, line upon

line. Dog food, fish food; heck, they'd get to the blessings of tithing one day. A simple matter: making a plan, executing it.

"Self-reliance," Brock said. "You have to . . . you know, you have to make the choice, work at it every day, and then, you'll see, you get accustomed to the plan. You start to rely on it. You're making a habit."

"The cigarettes," Mert said. "You know, I just gotta habit."

Brock cracked a grin. "Didn't take long, right?" He clapped Mert lightly on the back. "This habit won't take long either."

But Mert couldn't work up any interest in the ledger. "Didn't your wife want to be here, this time?" he asked.

"I figured we had the budget to talk about," Brock said. "She's busy with our girls." He walked to the sofa and sat a few minutes. He watched the dogs and touched his fingertips together, elbows on his knees.

"I get it, with the money book," Mert said, at last. He was still standing at the cage, where he fingered the edge of the ledger's vinyl cover. "Make a deal with you. You give me a order for groceries, and I'll write in the numbers."

Right.

"You'll write in the numbers," Brock said finally. "In the ledger? Or here on the food order?"

Mert stared at him. "Sergeant," he said. "I'll write them numbers wherever you say."



The young elders, Club and Brock, kept happening by the curbside on Wasting, first avoiding the alleyway near the junction with Pain, venturing closer and closer, hoping to connect with Clive. Nobody hassled them after a few times. Once a guy named Piefork brought them a bag of oranges, stepped backwards bowing after they finally took the fruit. A bookstore owner on Wasting kept their dusty, everlasting stack of Books of Mormons on her counter, beneath a tented index card labeled *FREE*. The neighborhood barber trimmed them up every three weeks

and refused their Canadian dollars: “My good deed to the preachers. Long as you bring it in washed.”

Time and persistence were with them; or, as Club said of Clive, “He’s ready. He’s golden.” And in a few weeks, the two elders were meeting Clive Monson at his flat. For portions of each day, Clive worked through scripture in a weak square of sunlight by the window there; sometimes with the missionaries present, more and more on his own. He liked the story of young Alma, changing his life.

“Brother did a shitload of damage,” he said. “Fighting against the church, against God himself.” He marked the page with his finger and looked up. “He changed, though. He came through, just like you said. He got to have his words in the book.” Clive managed a laugh, mind and body clean for the better part of this new day. “The longest chapters! Dude couldn’t shut up.”

Club didn’t miss a beat. “Compelled to share is why. Like us. We need the gospel as much as Alma did.”

Clive looked dubious at this, but he seemed attentive as the elders read aloud. He took a turn, he read verses.

For that which ye do send out shall return unto you again, and be restored . . .

Within an hour, the three men had finished with scripture for the day, and Clive gave his first prayer. *Jesus bless for bringing these brothers here.* A clotted cough, an *Amen*. Clive raised his head, turned toward a taped break in the window frame. A flatmate groaned softly in the next room, massaged by the nearness of God or narcotic.

“I’m-a find a road out of this hell,” said Clive. “See if I don’t.”



Bishop phoned Brock; kind, but firm: “Brother Mert Petshot’s called the house a few times, left a message. He and Sharla, asking for a food order,” he said. “Have you been able to work with them?”

They talked it through briefly; and the bishop's message was the same: "I really can't authorize continuing with the orders. There's a way to help them help themselves, surely."

Brock was beginning to doubt there was a way, but he made another visit. It was after dark, and the trailer's lights were dim. A filmy dust cloaked the Petshots' car; a cat scuttled beneath the back end and stared out with glowing eyes. When Brock reached the top of the three wooden steps, Mert opened the door wordlessly and stood aside.

Across the room, the ledger remained, untouched, on the dog cage. Brock mentioned the bishop asked him to stop by, see how things were going.

"Things are just not good," Mert said. "I'm out of money. I don't know. If I had gas in my car, I could stop at the store, if I had money for the store. But I can't even put the gas in my car."

"I've got ten dollars here, you can get some gas with this."

Mert fingered the bill.

"That's one piece," he said, "in a puzzle full a holes."

Below the ledger, the dogs shifted, releasing a smell like old lettuce. Fresh sweat from Brock, cigarettes from Mert. A plug of matted black on the carpet stuck to Brock's shoe.

"You wondering why I sometimes run out, ain't you," Mert said.

"Don't know what I can say to that, Mert."

"You thinking *you* would never run out like me." Mert's eyes held steady. "You and your jar a beans. I seen you with your wife. Your pretty-ass car. You ain't about to help."

Brock wanted to leave. He swallowed and coughed, employed his old and unforgotten tricks of distracting the body. He sucked in his stomach. Touched his tongue to the front of his teeth, opened his throat in a closed-mouth yawn.

He knew Mert had been dealt a tough hand. No family to speak of. His circular talk showed he was a brick or two shy upstairs. Add the Army, which—combat or no—might have been terrible, especially for

someone like him. Factor in illness, the never-explained injury. Add compelling habits, stir in everyday wearing-out.

Still, no tragedy had unraveled him that Brock could see. He'd not lost something precious, like a child; a country. Not faced down cancer, or explosives, or any real danger in the service. Baseless intuition on Brock's part, he clung to it nonetheless.

Focus on what you do have, his mother's words, singing into his thoughts. Mert had a sound mind, sound enough. Clothes on straight, buttoned up. Decent car. Expensive dogs, cigarettes, an expertise at wheedling. Income, from all-of-ours truly and other schmucks paying taxes and fast offerings. The fact was, you were looking at a real American life here—with choices.

And Sharla Petshot loved him. Managed him. There she was, moving in the darkness beyond the front room, waiting for Brock to leave and the day to return to its familiar depressing rhythm, only with more perishables in the fridge.

"Mert," Brock kept at it, trusting in firm but friendly reason. "When I run out, it's a couple factors. One, I quit watching where the money goes. I don't plan, just spend. Easy to do, because on payday, it feels like plenty of money, right?"

Mert was silent. Keep talking he'd have to cave, just to shut his home teacher up.

"Two," Brock said, "something big happens."

"A car repair, a person gets sick. Sharla sometimes doesn't feel so good, right? Happens at my house too."

Mert pulled out his phone, fiddled with it like a shrewd adolescent. Brock's pulse began to rise. He was concentrated on controlling it when Mert looked up. Sister Petshot had appeared. Same languid manner. Same green pillory robe. Lips curled in distaste.

"Tell him, Mert," she said.

"I got problems, and you have to help me," he recited simply. "The reason why I come to your church."

It was the clearest piece of communication that had happened between them.

Brock decided not to remind Mert that he hadn't *been* to church in weeks.

"My last ward? *That* was a good ward. Helped me all the time. They understood. A man like me got problems. I served my country. I belong to your church."

Smart enough. Likely competent. Opinion by me, trained and certified home teacher.

The big dog's toenails scratched at his crate, an underscore.

"I think you can make it 'til Friday," Brock said. He let himself out.



After Clive's prayer in the flat, they wiped their eyes like little girls. But Clive had a new worry to surmount. When the elders were with him, he felt he could stop using, quit the chase. But what about when they weren't there? *You globetrotters will be reassigned, get your transfer tickets like you do*, he said. *And what will I—*

This hurdle occupied the elders through a few blurred and corkscrew weeks, during which Clive alternately banished and welcomed them, showed up for meetings and then disappeared. They brought a couple members of the branch by, tried to help Clive make friends. Clive spoke with charm and clarity one day, mumbled and carried the whiff of vomit the next. He tossed his scripture into a dumpster and later fished it out; he succumbed to the needle, and next day withstood his craving another few hours. For an entire day.

"Clive," said Canadian Club, one bleak but opiate-free evening. "We can't be with you every minute. But listen." He opened his book. "'The keeper of the gate is the Holy One of Israel, and he employeth no servant there . . . whoso knocketh, to him will he open.'"

The young elders prayed, they laid hands on Clive's head and blessed him with strength of body, and then with resolve when the body failed; and for when resolve failed, they blessed him with grace.

As he prayed, his fingers tented and lightly placed, Brock thought he felt the tension leave Clive's jumpy skull. He was sure he could sense beneath his fingertips a curious mixture of softening and firming, as Clive's manic mind and body were becalmed. He thought of it for years afterward, how some sort of bad spirit had truly seemed cast away from Clive as they prayed a blessing on him—and as both he and Clive believed in that blessing—didn't they? On that cloudy, whip-wind night, they did.

They reached a week where Clive had gone three days without using; they'd been with him almost forty hours, trading sleep. Their white shirts became dingy, creased and sour from watchfulness. Clive was pale, clammy, twitchy, huddled in a blanket one moment, jittery and pacing the next. The elders sat with him on a depleted futon; one or the other followed him to the bathroom, since Clive was terrified of being left alone, even for the clunking, misbehaving toilet. He crouched and huddled in a corner of the curtain-less shower, through the water's turn to cold. Steam and mist faded as Clive's body was pummeled by the shower's icy shards.

The elders bent the rule of companionship. They took turns ferrying filthy blankets, towels, sweatpants, a tattered gray robe to and from the laundromat a few blocks away. At Woolworth, Brock bought bleach and detergent, then picked up two plastic-wrapped packages on a whim—twelve straight columns of white socks. Back at the flat, he unwrapped and folded them, glowing artifacts of a tended life. He stacked them on the kitchen counter like neat dinner rolls, rationed them to one pair per hour. Clive scraped socked hands over his ribs, his thighs, behind his knees, over his temples. When a bloody hole was worn in the cotton, Brock put a fresh pair of socks on him and tossed the ruined set onto a pile of trash. Across the room a stack of dirty towels anchored

a corner. Books and pamphlets littered the sofa, across the floor. Food wrappers, soda cans, orange peels. The elders took turns gathering it up and hauling it away.

At the end of the afternoon, Brock stood, in creased, over-worn and outsized dress pants; he paced the room as Elder Clubersoll read aloud in the low murmur Clive could tolerate. Brock turned to the broken window of Clive's flat, to the pocked, concrete-wall view. A wedge of dark shadow there, a sharp stripe of hard, days' end sunlight.

The view was small, limited; but he knew what lay beyond it. Vancouver, the chilly, gleaming city beneath pregnant clouds, cloaked in chrome and granite, bordered with the lace of a lapping shoreline. He moved closer, got a whiff of pure November cold, a glimpse of heavy sky. He felt a little better and put his face closer to that clean, clear air.

"A sharp and wondrous evening," he heard himself say. Words he never used, but sure enough, they'd come through his own voice. "Smells like it might snow."

Clive lifted his head. He stood unsteadily and walked to the window.

Brock whispered to him hoarsely. "We read about snow today. *Sins red as scarlet, and then . . . as white as snow.*" He paused and touched his fingertips to the frame. "As sifted, drifted, gifted snow." The words seemed to be coming from his mouth, but not through his mind.

Club was behind them, at the table. He looked up from his reading.

Here was the ladder, a glimmer in the darkening day. *Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in their midst.* In the silence, the glow from the window, he felt that the Lord had joined them. The scent of winter, a sweet ribbon of cold traveled into the room, a clean fragrance Brock would ever after recall and hope for.

"You don't *need* nothing, Clive." Club picked up the thread. "You don't need us. You got something better. You got the Lord Jesus Christ with you, right now. You got knocking, man. He's there."

"He's there." Clive echoed the words, in a whisper, the first words he'd spoken for hours. He stood at Brock's elbow, watching the narrowing strip of sunlight on the shadow of dusky concrete.

"I think my fever might've broke," he said weakly.

A few—very few—snowflakes found their way into the small wedge of space, drifted onto the windowsill like outsized grains of salt, conferring peace. Dignity.

Below them, around a corner was the wonderful ratty bookstore; further on, the grimy, hollow alleyway with its oily rainbows. A pink glow began to suffuse the grayness of the sky, and the tiny dots of snow skittered along, rising and falling, skipping and tumbling like children, as the weak sun behind the building held, and held longer. A slice of light, then a sliver.

They left the flat just before the light dropped for good. It was Clive's idea. "I want that bit of fresh air all around me," he said. Maybe he even felt well enough to eat. He clutched at the elders' elbows, needing some help to walk; he said the snow was piercing, the cold was an anvil inside his bones. At the diner he chewed part of a waffle and sat, motionless, pained if either elder tried to talk. They were near the faint clackety-clack of a railroad. "People going somewhere," Clive said. He picked up a pitcher of syrup, set it down again. He was too tired, almost, to lift his fork. "It's happier than it seems," he said. "Happier than it looks."

His eyes had lost their glossy, pinned weirdness. His fatigue spoke of a scraping, a hollowing and cleansing rather than the old tamped down, corrosive and chemical depletion. Eventually he managed a grin. "I'm here," he said. "I'm here. I don't mind the cold. I can *feel* it. About to shoot somebody for a cup of coffee, if I had the strength." The elders grinned back. Brock ordered him a hot chocolate.

"I'm here, elders," Clive said again when the train rumbled by once more. "I'm going somewhere myself."



Friday—Mert's payday—came and went. Sunday, no Petshots at church; but the week after, Mert called a couple more times, and once again talked Brock into a food order.

At bishop's request, Brock brought up the idea of a conservator. The state does this for people it deems incompetent, he'd said. A conservator could manage income, distribute the rent, the utilities, any debt.

Brock may have erred, explaining to Mert the incompetent part.

"Hand off my money to somebody, say, you," Mert said. "Then you parcel it out back to me. That makes as much sense as about . . . about a cocktease in a cathouse." His eyes jumped from Brock to the fish in the clotted aquarium.

"I'm a small fish in a eat-dog world. Always a bigger fish waiting at the next corner. I ain't giving my bishop your mo—" He stopped, and started again. "I won't give your bishop my money. It's my money."

Brock started to speak, and Mert rescued him.

"Save your opinions," he said. "The point is mute."

Lord help him, Brock submerged a smile.

"S my money."

"I don't want your money," Brock said. "You've earned that money, through your service in the Army. I thank you for that."

Mert's head moved like a bobble toy. Again, Brock told him, if they didn't want a conservator, a *program*, he'd be happy help with their budget for a month or two, checking in every few days. But the food orders were a thing of the past.

"Think about it," he said, over Mert's protests, as he left. "This could work real well. And only if that wasn't successful," he said. "The planning, the care with your spending. Only then would we go the conservator route."

He walked to the car and didn't look back.



Not long after Clive was baptized, Brock's time in Vancouver was up. He transferred to Victoria, a place permanently shrouded in mist, where he taught three lessons in as many months. No takers; and not long after

that, his mission was over. As the years went by, he connected two or three times with Clive, who as far as he knew, had stayed clean and kept the faith. Clive had taken a job as a shipping clerk near the Montana border. He married a First Nation woman who had a son. He played church softball. That son would be grown by now. When Brock married Terra, he sent word. He tried not to worry much, at not hearing back. In the manner of men who shared something too large for talk, they'd kept their communications few and far between.

Both had taken their time, come through some trouble. Each had married a woman with a child, a woman who needed them. Brock chose to believe that each had continued on as best they knew, with the best lights they had. Sometimes he revisited his old missionary journals, to make sure those miraculous days and weeks with Clive were real. Faith, belief . . . he'd found these to be essential, but not so durable. Choices that had to be made daily, that had to be bolstered with prayer, language, memory. With action, and thus, always in danger of faltering. You hoped there was mercy. Hope—desire, patience, meeting faith halfway—that was more constant. He hoped Clive was doing well, that he had managed to hold on to the gospel. Club too. But as to the particulars of their continued pathways, he had no information; no answers.

And no answers regarding Mert. He'd stood so many times now on the Petshots' doorstep, paperwork folded beneath a loaf of Terra's bread. He pictured Mert as a kid in junior high, sitting alone at lunch, often with nothing to eat. Slow and befuddled, picked last for everything. Not likely able to read. He saw Mert's teenaged skinny neck and bad teeth, his unwashed hair, his pants too short, his shirt always stained. His mother in bed all day drinking, sleeping. The Army waiting in the future for his warm, twitchy body, another number toward their quota. His father, of course, missing.

Brock's father had been missing too. That was of course different. He had many other advantages, a fact he was not sure he'd truly considered before this moment.

"Life's damn expensive," Mert said, on Brock's last visit, matter-of-fact. It seemed to be Mert's only answer. Sharla Petshot moved about in the shadows behind him. "I have obligations."

Gambling debts? Brock wondered. Lottery tickets? Too many fast-food dinners out?

"Mert, isn't this an obligation?" Brock waggled the food-order papers at him. "Keeping back some money so you can buy some damn food? So other people don't have to buy it for you?"

He, holding his casserole, clutching his dispensary, benevolent paperwork. His gloomy charity. He was speaking to a closed door now.



That weekend, Brock worked a full Saturday. He was driving home, going to press some juicy burgers onto the grill, spend the evening on the patio with his three pretty girls, maybe Jonah would even stick around. They'd have a tablecloth, set up on the good part of the concrete. Play games after dinner. He'd read *Are You My Mother?* with the twins. "The snort went up. It went up, up, up . . . And up went the baby bird." The girls would lift their arms with the words, get tired of it long before Brock would.

Mert called just as Brock made the turn in to his own neighborhood. Surprise, he couldn't make the rent.

"You gotta help me." The dashboard amplified his wheeze. "You're not helping me."

"Are you ready to figure out the conservator?"

"Conservative my butt," Mert growled. "I'm calling your bishop."

"Bishop will tell you the same thing I'm telling you."

"I'm calling him. You won't help me."

Brock eased up on the gas, there were kids around. You could tell the high water bills: Rookers' house, on the left, then the Siddoways', with the chevron pavers. A curve in the road, and his own place up ahead. The lawn needed tending, heat had got to the flowers; but it looked

pretty good. For a minute, he was eight, sweaty and proud, come in after cutting their scrabbled patch of grass his first time. His mom was at the stove. Brock looked into the saucepan. Orange fat in broken triangles over the surface of Bar S franks-n-beans. "I'm going to call the bishop," she was saying. Heat filmed up the sides of the pan. "I bet we can have our new home teacher baptize you."

"Mert," Brock sighed. "You do that. Go ahead, call him."

"Since *you're* not helping me," the dashboard accused. "Worst home teacher, I never had. That's all I'm saying."

"I hear what you're saying. I've tried to help you."

Cursing crackled through the dash. *Don't hang up*, Brock Hartman thought. End the call, but don't hang up on him.

"Mert—I have to say—"

"Don't preach to me. Some home teacher. You're supposed to help—"

Brock sped the car. "Conversation's over," he said, and pressed the hang-up button.

He rattled too hard into the driveway, where pink tricycles were flung in a jumble on the asphalt. Daddy was home. They were cooking out.

Last time Richard Hartman disappeared, Brock had been nearly twelve. So when the time came, Brother Thueson ordained him a deacon. He tagged along with Cleverlys on that year's father-and-son campout, and only once. Brock worked the warehouse three nights a week during high school, some double shifts during summer. Kept the job going an extra year. When he put in his mission papers, he had almost four thousand dollars, not half of what was needed; the church had to help Mom with the rest.

He was at a bad angle, but he cut the ignition and listened to the engine tick. A blonde pixie stood in the picture window, scratching her tummy under her t-shirt. She was holding a six-inch plastic horse, a look on her face like *This My Little Pony has gotten somewhat dingy, Dad*. Brock waved at her, rolled down the window to breathe. His daughter stroked the worn-out silvery mane on her pony. He watched as she looked away,

up toward some tree leaves, and sucked her thumb. Terra had painted some foul-tasting stuff on the nail, but she couldn't seem to stop.

A metallic ring from the dashboard. It rang and rang. Just past the hood, a small bird fluttered up, tracing a crooked path beyond the roofline.

Attempts to Be Whole

Scott Abbott. *Immortal for Quite Some Time*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2016. 257 pp. Paperback: \$24.95. ISBN: 9781607815143.

Reviewed by Scott Russell Morris

In *Immortal for Quite Some Time*, Scott Abbott meditates on his brother's death. That Abbott comes from a devoted Mormon family and that his brother was gay and died of AIDS is the tagline that seems to sell the book—and this review, too, apparently, as I am writing that first despite my best intentions—but really, this book is not about his brother John or about the homophobic culture of the LDS Church and many of its adherents, despite both of those being common motifs. It is about Scott Abbott. And, as all good personal nonfiction is, it isn't really about Scott Abbott either, but rather about what it means to grow up in a culture that is so overwhelmingly shaping that it “informs even your sentence structure” (89) and then to find that you no longer want to have a place in it. In the last few weeks as I've contemplated what I might say about Abbott's book and as I've discussed it with others (one of whom saw it on my couch and asked, based on the title, if it was a vampire novel), I've described it in a few ways: It is about a BYU professor who was in the thick of the academic freedom concerns at BYU in the '90s. Or, it is about a brother going through his dead brother's things and thinking about what that might mean about the two of them, both nonconformists. For those more interested in writing and less about the story, I've told them about the most interesting feature of the book: It is written mostly as a series of journal entries, but there are a lot of other voices; for example, a female critic consistently questions the stories and rhetoric in Abbott's entries, which he responds to in a separate editorial voice. There are also his brother's words, at first taken from found texts like

notebooks, letters, and book annotations, but then, toward the end, John actually speaks from the dead, directly to the narrator, though mostly to underscore the fact that he no longer has a voice, deflecting questions by responding, “You can probably answer that yourself,” and “I don’t really get to answer that, do I?” (207, 202).

Which is all to say that this is a difficult book to categorize. Even the book itself resists offering an easy categorization: “This is not a memoir,” the first line declares. “This is a fraternal meditation” (n.p.). Of course, the publishers still went with “Memoir” on the back cover (because who types “Fraternal Meditations” into Amazon?), but what these first lines are doing is setting us up for the fact that we aren’t here for the story. We’re not here for any salacious details—the details aren’t really that salacious, at least not from a worldly point of view, though we do learn that the author, while still employed by BYU no less, drinks coffee and even orders a beer at a bar, and that he wrote several damning speeches and articles about Church leadership and received damning letters and speeches from them in return. No, we’re here instead for the meditation. Or, as Abbott puts it, “This book is my own therapeutic attempt to dress John’s body, to feel the rasp of his cold flesh” (150). And though John’s cold flesh is certainly present in the book, the therapy is much more present as Abbott asks in various ways how he is supposed to respond to his brother’s death, to the rigid culture of the Church, to his mother’s faith, and to so many other little problems in a complicated life, family, and culture. Later on in the book, in response to the anonymous female critic’s charge that drinking coffee and not paying tithing will be seen as “proof . . . of your fall from righteousness” (230), Abbott replies, “That binary structure is deeply internalized in me: choices are either good or evil. And you know also that I have been trying to feel my way to a different kind of thinking” (230). Though categorizing this book’s publication genre is not what I really want to talk about, I think this passage and others would clearly place it in the category of the essay, that genre which is at the core an attempt and a trial, and also the genre

that allows for Abbott's meandering view and lack of concern for a coherence of story.

This style—multi-voiced and multi-modal—is what brings about the book's best moments and also what makes others a little less satisfying. In order to end on a high note, let's start with the few elements I found less satisfying, though complicatedly so. Because the story is not the main focus of the book, subservient as it is to Abbott's confrontation with culture versus personal identity, several elements of the plot seem less than smoothly handled. For example, though Abbott continually says he and his wife are distant from each other, he never actually talks about his wife. We eventually learn that they didn't share a bed for about ten years, but we only learn this after we learn about their divorce and after his constant mentioning that they are distant from each other, but without logistics as to what that means while still raising seven children. The other main plot point is that only at the very end of the book do we learn that as a graduate student—more than ten years before the main drama of the book—Abbott had had an epiphany that he didn't believe in God but that he would continue to raise his family in the Church. These plot problems come, I assume, from the way the book was written: piece by piece over the course of two decades, an entry here and an entry there, with the initial assumption that the book would be about his brother. There was no need to talk about his wife or his earlier epiphany in the early passages, and yet they become crucial to the way we understand much of the later discussion. When personal reveals like this are done well, it can feel like the author is becoming increasingly your friend, willing to tell you more and more of their deepest thoughts. But with these reveals, I felt put-off both times, as they completely changed the way I understood the vague references of emotional distance and his antagonism toward the Church's authoritarian leaders. The female critic—a voice I assume was added when reviewing the whole manuscript—brings up these issues, though Abbott's own editorial voice

doesn't answer them; this felt like a missed opportunity for emotional clarity that might have run through the whole book.

But this same structure that poses some story problems is also the key to the most pivotal moments of the book. One passage in particular struck me as incredibly honest and also intellectually exciting: "I can hardly write about John's desires, about the pleasures and consequences of his choices and needs, without revealing and exploring my own desires" (92). And throughout the meditations, confessions, and reflections, we learn a lot about Abbott's desires and biases: he tells us of sexual and/or violent dreams, that he struggled against his own feelings of homophobia, that he longs for a sexual and emotional connection he is not, apparently, achieving with his wife. But this slow reveal over time is most rewarding in the epilogue, the part of *Immortal for Quite Some Time* I have frequently returned to and reread in the last few weeks. The epilogue, written in 2015—three years after the last chapter and fifteen years after the journal entries stop—brings the whole book together. It focuses on Abbott's finding and translating a letter John wrote to a friend on his mission—a friend who apparently knew about his homosexual desires. John writes, "I am a man and I want to abandon myself to the pleasure of the body, of life, but at the same time my soul tells me that I must behave in another manner. How can a person live this way?" (253–54). Abbott responds in a letter of his own, addressed to his brother: "When I asked that question at perilous junctures of my life, the answer was that I could not live that way. That left, of course, the more complicated issue of how I should live" (254). Though the question is never really answered—how can it be, especially when each of us has such complicated desires and aspirations and expectations?—if the book comes to a conclusion at all, it can be summed up in a line I have already made into a poster to hang on my office door: "That we are seldom at our best doesn't invalidate our attempts to be whole" (255). That the book is fragmented and that the "characters are in flux, [and]

the voices are plural” (n.p.) shows perhaps that this wholeness is not really attainable, but that the attempt is still very worthwhile.



The History that Dares Speak Its Name

J. Seth Anderson. *LGBT Salt Lake*. Charleston, S.C.: Arcadia Publishing, 2017. 96 pp. Paperback: \$22.99. ISBN: 9781467125857.

Reviewed by Gary James Bergera

Seth Anderson’s slim book, part of Arcadia Publishing’s multi-volume *Images of Modern America* photographic series, is much more than an important new contribution to Utah and LDS history. It is a revelation—a surprising, unexpected glimpse into a past that has too long been forgotten, discarded, and de-legitimized.

Anderson’s book contains six chapters plus an introduction. The chapters are ordered chronologically as follows: “A Queer Beginning (1847–1969),” “Gay Liberation in Utah (1969–83),” “Activism in the Time of AIDS (1983–92),” “Political Incorporation and Legal Advancements (1992–2006),” “Marriage Equality, Proposition 8, and Its Aftermath (2007–2010),” and “A Queer New World (2011–2016).” Each of the chapters begins with a one-page narrative history of the period of time treated followed by a multi-page portfolio of twenty to thirty photographs of people, places, and events.

Anderson’s brief histories are both surprisingly instructive and unexpectedly subversive. In each, Anderson manages to highlight some of the most significant events in Utah / LDS LGBT history as well as to

recover portions of a shared past that underscore Faulkner's timeless observation that "the past is never dead, it's not even past." Anderson's work helps to redeem a history that speaks both to the present and to the future.

Not surprisingly, the most engaging sections of the book are the portfolios of photographs that accompany each of Anderson's introductions. Here the past comes most alive. Some of the images may be familiar to many readers. However, I suspect that the bulk of the photographs will be new. They were to me. Among the standouts, for me, are the photographs of mid- to late-twentieth-century gay and gay-friendly bars, businesses, and advertisements; the front pages of an impressive run of LGBT-oriented periodicals; the photographs of protests and other manifestations of public activism; and, of course, the people: Mildred Berryman, Kristen Ries and Maggie Snyder, David Sharpton, Becky Moss, Mel Baker, Ben Barr, David Nelson, Michael Aaron, Ben Williams, Kelli Peterson, and many, many others.

For me, the most haunting image appears on page thirty-six: a *Salt Lake Tribune* photograph of Clair Harward, his shoulders and torso covered in Kaposi's sarcoma. According to Anderson's caption, Harward "confessed to his [LDS] bishop in 1985 that he was gay and dying from AIDS, the bishop excommunicated him and told him not to return to church for fear he would spread AIDS in the congregation."

Of course, Anderson's work only scratches the surface of the history of Utah / LDS LGBT experience, much of which remains to be excavated, chronicled, published, and digested. For example, a comprehensive history of the group Affirmation: LGBT Mormons, Families, and Friends (founded 1977) has yet to be undertaken. The same may be said of the Utah chapter of Queer Nation. Even so, Anderson joins the ranks of other pioneering historians of the Utah / LDS LGBT experience, including, but by no means limited to, E. Jay Bell, Connell O'Donovan, D. Michael Quinn, Douglas A. Winkler, and Ben Williams.

Anderson's study is also an expression of the author's own advocacy. In fact, one of the photographs is of Anderson and his spouse, Michael Ferguson, who were the first couple to marry when the legal ban on same-sex marriage was lifted in Utah in December 2013 (83). Ferguson was also a plaintiff in *Ferguson v. JONAH* (Jews Offering New Hope and Healing), filed by the Southern Poverty Law Center, which found in 2015 that JONAH's claims for successful reparative therapy were "fraudulent and unconscionable."

Some potential readers may be put off by Anderson's activism and/or by the topic. For others, however, the book will serve as a revelatory introduction to a history that forms an integral part of the LDS and Utah experience.



The Garden of Enid: By a Mormon and For Mormons

Scott Hales. *The Garden of Enid: Adventures of a Weird Mormon Girl, Part One*. Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2016. 168 pp. Paperback: \$22.95. ISBN: 9781589585621.

Scott Hales. *The Garden of Enid: Adventures of a Weird Mormon Girl, Part Two*. Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2017. 169 pp. Paperback: \$22.95. ISBN: 9781589585638.

Reviewed by Brittany Long Olsen

At its core, Scott Hales's two-volume graphic novel *The Garden of Enid: Adventures of a Weird Mormon Girl* is a coming-of-age-story through a Mormon lens. Self-proclaimed weird Mormon girl Enid is a misfit who

feels equally misunderstood in her church community and at home with her single mother, a former alcoholic struggling with illness and depression. Some self-introspection and life-altering experiences lead Enid to care about other people and appreciate how much they care about her.

The Garden of Enid: Part One is a book about a confused teenager. She dutifully goes to church dances but purposefully tries to get sent home. She doesn't want to dance, but she gets offended when no one asks her. Due to the strained relationship with her mother, she turns to other parental figures in her life and then resents that she has to. She flaunts her weirdness yet fears the backlash for being too weird. Enid's experiences and thoughts ring true to the turmoil of any young woman; for the author, a father of four young kids, to be so in tune with the indecisiveness of teen girl years is remarkable.

Although Enid experiences struggles with "the big questions" surrounding her faith, the majority of her relationship with the LDS Church evolves through imaginary conversations with Church leaders such as Joseph Smith Jr., the Book of Abraham's mummy, and Eliza R. Snow. At one point, Enid praises Minerva Teichert for being "gynocentric." So is Enid's story. Her relationships with her mother, her Young Women leaders, and even other girls are the catalyst of the development in her life. It's no wonder that so many people seeing these comics online thought Enid was real, as Hales says in his preface. Hales skillfully portrays the heart of a teenage girl and helps us relate to her as Enid is learning to relate to the other women in her life. *The Garden of Enid* could be recommended reading for Young Women leaders. There's a lot to be said about a Young Women leader who recognizes that each girl is unique and cares for them in the ways they personally need.

There are two stories trying to be told in this book—one is a poignant narrative of a girl with a troubled home life who faces pressure at church but earnestly seeks to be strong in her faith. The other is the author's using his character as a vehicle for Mormon in-jokes, like personal preferences on actors in Church films or other cultural references,

some of which were only made to get the attention of someone famous on Twitter, as Hales writes in his commentary at the end of the book. The four-panel Mormon culture in-jokes pull the reader out of Enid's narrative as she converses with historical figures and makes references to obscure facts that belie the author's true age; would a modern teenage girl really know about MoTab directors from the '80s or studiously learn the Deseret alphabet?

It's obvious that Hales gained confidence in Enid's story as the book progressed: Enid evolves as a person, her life takes direction, and she makes more decisions to do good things for herself rather than simply act in rebellion to people around her.

In *The Garden of Enid: Part Two*, the Mormon jokes are far less prominent, and Enid's spiritual and social conflicts comprise the main narrative. Enid's commentary on her experiences at church is likely to be relatable to everyone who's ever been a teenager; Enid realizes that the happy-go-lucky churchgoers she's surrounded by each have their own pain and history, and she opens herself up to the possibility of real friendships and connections with them. She relies on her Church leaders and a few unexpected friends as her home life takes a turn for the worse. Though her future is uncertain, she's no longer a weird Mormon girl taking on the world alone—she has real friends to help with her doubts.

Throughout *Part Two*, Hales deftly addresses the hardships of Enid's family situation, some of which come from her conflicted relationship with her mother and others that come from members of her own church congregation. The characters in the narrative are very human, which adds, as another reviewer put it, a richness to Mormon fiction that simply can't be found in seminary films and *Saturday's Warrior*. Enid's life is often messy, but a desire for faith and understanding is the driving force behind her actions.

Visually, there's a lot that sets *The Garden of Enid* apart from most comics. Scott Hales made a very distinct choice to include the faint blue lines of his underlying sketch in the final artwork. This might suggest

that Enid as a person is a work in progress. Panels overlap each other, and the handwritten text is scrawled wherever it fits. These non-traditional stylistic choices offer readers a unique look at Enid's personality.

The Garden of Enid: Adventures of a Weird Mormon Girl is exclusively for a Mormon audience, and lifelong Mormons especially. Readers may have a hard time navigating the narrative without knowing Primary song lyrics and what EFY is like and how tortuous a "thanktimony" can be to listen to. Most Mormons will be able to relate to Enid very well, and to everyone else, she'll just be a weird Mormon girl.



Laughter, Depth, and Insight: Enid Rocks Them All

Scott Hales. *The Garden of Enid: Adventures of a Weird Mormon Girl. Parts One and Two*. Kofford Books. Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2016. 169 pp. Paperback: \$22.95. ISBN 9781589585638

Reviewed by Steven L. Peck

When I was growing up, comic strips provided part of the ontology of my world. I devoured regular comic books, graphic novels, and other bubble-voiced media, but comic strips played a different and more important role than these other closely related forms. It was in the four-paneled strip that I was first introduced to philosophical thought, political commentary, satire, and the exploration of questions rather than the explication of information toward an answer. Plus they made me laugh. There was a point being made. About life. And often about

my place in it. Comic strips were my first introduction into a weird form of deep psychology that let me explore what it meant to be me. The sign on Lucy's famous wooden stand in *Peanuts*, offering, instead of lemonade, "Psychiatric Help: 5¢: The Doctor is IN" does not seem an inappropriate way to express one of the functions these comic strips played in my life. I suppose given my age it is not surprising that it was Charles Schultz's famous comic that proved the gateway drug to my infatuation with the medium.

The form has its roots in French and German political commentary, from men like the Swiss Rudolphe Töpffer, and French caricaturists like Charles Amédée de Noé (a.k.a Cham) and Honoré-Victorin Daumier. The art form of the four-panel cartoon seems to have reached its modern embodiment in the early part of the twentieth century in America with *Pogo*, *Blondie*, *Li'l Abner* and a host of others, reaching popular audiences through syndication in newspapers. It is now a well-established form of art and entertainment.

By my lights, no one did it better than Bill Watterson in his classic comic *Calvin and Hobbes* (I am convinced that a thousand years from now, people will be learning twentieth-century English just so they can read this comic in its original language—that and watch the various *Star Trek* instantiations). Watterson spoke to universals of a moment in time and beyond. My kids love it as much as I did.

Recently, webcomics have become a noteworthy addition to the comic tradition, exemplified by *Hyperbole and a Half*, *Existential Comics*, and my personal favorite, *xkcd*.

When LDS writer and critic Scott Hales started his webcomic *Enid*, I was a fan from the beginning. Phyllis Barber in the opening of the 2017 Association of Mormon Letters conference address said, "moral and ethical values can and should be expressed in art. They appeal to our common humanity, and the more universal they are, the more we share them with Mormons and non-Mormons alike. I once asked Chaim Potok, author of *My Name is Asher Lev*, how one could write great

Mormon literature, as I thought he'd written fine literature dealing with Jewishness and its challenges. He replied simply: 'Go for the universals.'"

This is what Hales has done so superbly. *Enid* is not just about a sixteen-year-old girl, any more than *Calvin and Hobbs* was just about six-year-olds and their stuffed animals. Both turned out to be about Steve Peck and his struggles with trying to make sense of change and uncertainty. I suspect they will be about you, too. Just as *Calvin and Hobbs*, *Peanuts*, and other influential comics captured a moment of societal concerns that reaches beyond the brackets of those times, *Enid* captures something essential about Mormonism in the early twenty-first century.

Like all good comics, *Enid* plays with both shadows and light. I'm not just talking about the way it is drawn (messy, bold, sparse, and evocative). I'm talking about the way it playfully explores the quandaries and foibles of modern Mormon concerns, juxtaposed with deep questions about life's darker dimensions. For example, Enid's interaction with her mother typifies one of the most poignant explorations in the strip. Enid's mother is bedridden, depressed, and cannot function as an adult, let alone a parent. As Enid struggles with how to respond, we observe how the church in her world responds (both well and poorly). We get into some of Mormonism's current challenges, such as single parenthood, repentance, forgiveness, doubt, and the richness of its lived humanness. I don't want to give spoilers, but I remember, at the end of this particular sequence involving Enid's mother, when Hales posted these final panels online there was genuine mourning and shock expressed on social media. I was affected. This is the power of a master—of what? A keen observer of Mormon culture? Philosopher? Humorist? Satirist? Storyteller? All seem to fit. *Enid* is a powerful exploration of and comment on modern Mormonism. It is chock-full of subtle side jokes, allusions to current and historical people and events, and the cultural icons of our day. To miss it is to miss a bit of what I predict will turn out to be a vital contribution in the ongoing history of Mormon art and literature. Kofford Books has blessed us as a community by collecting these into

two volumes. I hope to see further volumes of Hales's comic so that I can continue to enjoy the insight and entertainment they bring. Plus, Enid is just so cool.



Baring Imperfect Human Truths

Holly Welker, ed. *Baring Witness: 36 Mormon Women Talk Candidly about Love, Sex, and Marriage*. Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2016. 296 pp. Paperback: \$19.95. ISBN: 9780252081781.

Reviewed by Elizabeth Ostler

We all know the Sunday School answers, but life rarely, if ever, plays out like a seminary video. So what do love, sex, and marriage look like in the lived experience of Mormon women?

Journalist, poet, and “spinster who thinks and writes a great deal about marriage” (1) Holly Welker has compiled a collection of essays that unapologetically reveals the intersection of Mormon theology, culture, individuality, and relational living in her latest book, *Baring Witness: 36 Mormon Women Talk Candidly about Love, Sex, and Marriage*.

Welker guides the reader through the complexities of relational living thematically by dividing *Baring Witness* into five parts: For Better or For Worse; Complicated Paths to the Temple (or Not Getting There at All); Divorce and Other Endings; Second Chances; and Expectations: Met, Unmet, or Exceeded. It's clear that Welker's expected readers are Mormon, but she provides enough background in the introduction and a glossary to help non-Mormons contextualize stories and decipher Mormon lingo.

The thirty-six contributors are diverse in that they were raised in different eras, cultures, wards, and families. Their education and careers vary. Some of the contributors are notable, such as Margaret M. Toscano and Joanna Brooks, but many are not. Regardless, I know these women. I see myself and women I know in their stories.

According to Welker, the title is an intentional pun. By using bare instead of bear, she asserts that this anthology is intended to expose or reveal truths about love, sex, and marriage, not to testify. She writes, “I discouraged conventional testimony-bearing in these essays. Both despite and because of Mormons’ aggressive proselytizing program, I did not want this volume to seem like some sort of Mormon missionary effort” (14). With this limitation, Welker prohibits these narratives from traveling into the familiar paths of testifying of eternal families and atonement. In so doing, she has created a place for stories that are messy. They don’t fall into the traditional narrative. They don’t resolve like a Hallmark movie at the eighty-two-minute mark.

However, there is one oversight. Neither the introduction nor any of the essays grapple with the changes happening currently in the Church regarding love, sex, and marriage. These changes are not insignificant. In 2015, Elder Russell M. Nelson pled with the sisters of the Church “to speak up and speak out in ward and stake councils,”¹ Young Women General President Bonnie Oscarson stressed that everyone who makes up a family—husbands, wives, children—are all homemakers,² and Elder M. Russell Ballard counseled women that how each structures her life is a matter of individual inspiration, not formulation: “Is it possible for two similarly faithful women to receive such different responses to the same basic questions? Absolutely! What’s right for one woman may not

1. Russell M. Nelson, “A Plea to My Sisters,” October 2015, <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/2015/10/a-plea-to-my-sisters?lang=eng>.

2. Bonnie L. Oscarson, “Defenders of the Family Proclamation,” April 2015, <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/2015/04/defenders-of-the-family-proclamation?lang=eng>.

be right for another. That's why it is so important that we should not question each other's choices or the inspiration behind them."³

Nevertheless, there are those who still adhere rigidly to cultural gender norms. And the more traditional Mormon rhetoric and beliefs about marriage, love, and sex still have a strong presence and impact in the lives of women today, as C. L. Hanson writes in "Its Own Reward": "I was raised Mormon, so it's not surprising that I grew up believing that my worth was based on my ability to attract and land a desirable man. . . . Women are explicitly excluded from the church's leadership hierarchy, so they generally derive their status in the Mormon community through their husbands and children" (200). I would have liked this collection to have included at least one essay of a woman attempting to reconcile this type of socialization with the current rhetoric.

Even so, as a collective, these essays bare the breadth of Mormon women's experiences—struggles with faith, homosexuality, infidelity, addiction, singleness, widowhood, marrying outside the faith, etc. There is no lack of courage as these women tell their truth—not the expected or acceptable truth, but the imperfect human truth. The truth that marriage isn't always happy and fulfilling. The truth that a sealing doesn't prevent heartache, resentment, frustration, and bad behavior. The truth that, for some, the sealing gives hope and perspective; it anchors a person, a relationship in the troubles of mortality. The truth that for others, it doesn't. The truth is, as Margaret M. Toscano says in her essay "Sacrifice and Sacrament," "marriage is always a crucible" (209).

The first couple of essays are in a similar tone, which led me to fear the book would not be the dynamic symphony promised. Fortunately, Welker quickly makes good on her promise. She unobtrusively ensures that the majority of the contributors' voices are distinctive and that the essays are well crafted.

3. M. Russell Ballard, "Women of Dedication, Faith, Determination, and Action," BYU Women's Conference, May 1, 2015, https://womensconference.ce.byu.edu/sites/womensconference.ce.byu.edu/files/elder_m_russell_ballard_0.pdf.

The impact of the loss of faith dominates the first two essays. In “Projects,” Heather K. Olson Beal divulges the fears and confusion that washed over her when her husband left the Church. “I assumed that our temple covenants to each other would trump everything else” (23). Beal walks us through the steps she took to grieve for her dreams and to reconcile her reality in order to cultivate happiness and connection with her husband.

Alternatively, Heidi Bernhard-Bubb in “Make It Up Every Day” writes about her guilt in leaving the Church while her husband remains active. “His fear was palpable and primal. He was worried about my soul, but more importantly, my rejection of the church felt like a rejection of our marriage” (35). Bernhard-Bubb and her husband are able to find common ground in kindness and tolerance, and their commitment to each other empowers them to figure out their marriage in the every day. “It was a crucial moment in our marriage. The moment when we stopped reaching for an ideal that no longer existed and instead turned toward the reality of who and where we were” (35).

In an exceptional essay by Kira Olson, we learn of the pain and isolation that comes with trying to live the ideal (read: 1950s housewife) and the liberation that comes from letting it go. That ideal fit Olson like a Halloween costume purchased from a drugstore. She writes with candor and humor about the duality of feeling strong in her authenticity and insecure in her inability to become the perceived ideal. “It would have been easy to blame it on the whole Mormon culture I had butted against since my Young Women’s classes” (67). All of the shoulds disappear. She has an epiphany that changes everything for her. “If my past relationships with Mormon men led me to the on-again-off-again battles with expectations throughout my life, it was Mormon women who pulled me out. I count it a great irony that one of the turning points in my perception was joining a group of women to scrapbook every week in the cultural hall of our church building” (67).

For Olson, amidst tape, paper, and scissors, the stories she made up about herself and others were confronted by reality.

Instead of beating my head against my interpretations I stepped past the Sunday smiles. I spent countless hours with a grandmother who raised five children in the church and told me *living the gospel isn't the same as going to church*. . . . I saw *possibility* instead of walls, finally. I saw success, defined by me and God, not by a stray comment on homemaking. I finally saw that as much as Mormon culture appeared to push around those who entered at their own risk, it was *me* who kept trying to jam my square-peg self into the circle-shaped image of an apparition I had created out of stereotypes and offhanded comments over the years. . . . I brought my individuality back into my life instead of just half-heartedly playing a role. (67–68)

Individuality and the need to live authentically emerge in many of these essays. Do you remember the commercial the Church produced in the '90s that told us that best friends make the best marriages? Well, what happens when that best friend is also a woman? In her essay "Best Friends," Lynne Burnett writes about falling in love with her coworker, "one of the Mormon hippie mom types . . . clad in a denim jumper and Birkenstocks" (189). A heartbreaking declaration of love ends their friendship, until they reconnect many years later. Now married, Burnett sounds like her own version of that commercial: "On the best days it's a dream come true: I'm finally married to my best friend. On the not so good days, we've cried and tried to make smoother the path we're on together" (193).

The last section of this collection appropriately focuses on expectations. Expectation is an obstacle to happiness and life satisfaction. There appears to be a correlation between the lovers' ability to reconcile expectations and the fate of the relationship. The truthfulness of this realization is a reality check. It shatters the myth of perfection and gives voice to struggle and disillusionment.

After reading this collection of essays as a nearly-middle-aged, childless, active LDS, feminist divorcee, I felt more at peace in my singleness, not because I'm not in the cauldron of marriage, because singleness is its own cauldron. It's about acceptance. Gina Colvin articulates it aptly when she writes, "In an outpouring of spiritual feeling, I breathed the

expectation of marriage away in waves of divine peace. I felt for the first time in my life that I was enough alone. In this gift I had found a contented ease with myself, a confident tranquility that with or without marriage I was enough, and I hugged the possibility of singleness and a life of solitude to me like a warm and comforting wind" (219).

The peace and ease comes from the testament that our individual journeys are uniquely our own. Letting go of the shoulds and ideals of perfectionism is necessary for healthy relationships. Let's stop with the assumptions that everyone else's life or marriage has met the ideal and recognize that we're all trying to do the best we can with what we have. As Colvin says, "while the church can supply the engineering expertise, the architecture and interior design must belong to the couple [or individual] alone" (223).



Fresh Honesty in Authentic Mormon Identity

Jamie Zvirzdin, ed. *Fresh Courage Take: New Directions by Mormon Women*. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2015. 200 pp. ISBN: 9781560852407.

Reviewed by Maxine Hanks

An optimistic title and bright red pomegranate on the cover suggest a fresh approach to perennial gender problems in Mormonism—"a feminism that is about 'cooperation and compassion.'" *Fresh Courage Take* is a positive motto for a challenging task, one modelled by Mother Eve—"to act for ourselves instead of being acted upon." The pomegranate is an ancient Jewish symbol of the forbidden fruit from the Tree of Knowledge, which represents both the shattering of stasis to enable growth, and the search for a "communal whole" that still honors the individual.

Jamie Zvirzdin's book lives up to its promises. A dozen new or underexposed Mormon feminist voices offer fresh and original insights, approaches, interpretations, intersections, and meaning making. These authors authentically claim all their contrasting and intersecting identities, especially their Mormon ones, and integrate them in unique personal ways.

Editor Jamie Zvirzdin herself is an anomaly among Mormon feminists. Far away from Utah and American cultures, she conceived this book while living in the Marshall Islands, on a "sliver of sand in the middle of the Pacific Ocean." There, she learned firsthand that many of her own assumptions about identity, gender, religion, and life, which she "had presumed were universal" were culturally constructed—"more often an American or Utahan concept." This recognition freed her from the stereotypes and limitations she had been taught, and provoked her to examine new questions.

She invited eleven other women to join her in this re-examination of self, a group she calls "our homespun quorum." Each woman articulates personal navigations and renegotiations of identity along three key axes—religion, gender, and culture. These women each redefine Mormon norms, definitions, and practices of what have been traditionally unmalleable LDS concepts—marriage, motherhood, family, race, education, and vocation. Each woman redefines her identity and life, according to her own terms, needs, desires, and realities.

This is precisely what "feminism" means—women practicing self definition. The result of these self-defining explorations is "a pluralistic feminism" ranging from "orthodox to heterodox" that exerts to "acknowledge the diversity of life." These voices include an older feminist, a woman of color, and women of varying marital status, family size, education, and vocation. Although the book doesn't include a GLIBT author, one author takes issue with Church policy regarding LGBT relationships.

What's new is that while these authors might be mainly middle-class white women you'd find in your LDS ward, these Mormons are engaging the constructs of female identity in ways that depart from the norm. They speak mostly from the norm yet confess their Other-ness—their

inner pain, marginalization, isolation, or incompatibility with the norm they are supposed to embody. They then renegotiate the norm—some from within the norm, some departing from it entirely—and in the process they deconstruct the very notion of the ideal Mormon woman, who does not exist.

These women use a strategy that is utterly Mormon—owning “personal agency” as “a fundamental principle of our religion.” It therefore follows, Zvirzdin writes, that “women cannot capitulate this basic responsibility.” These authors define “agency” as the personal *responsibility* to decide and act for themselves. In this way, these women theologically and effectively claim full personal empowerment for their own identities and lives. And they take this basic truth in “new directions” as the subtitle of the book suggests. It is a calm, centered, and personal spiritual revolution.

Retired BYU professor Colleen Whitley reminds us that historically LDS women were agents unto themselves, operating in some uniquely and truly empowered ways. She then shares her own historic struggle and quest for education, career, and empowerment against the debilitating sexism of the 1960s, ‘70s, and ‘80s—a time less friendly to Mormon women in some ways than the previous century. Her journey offers a larger window into the struggles of American women during those decades, struggles so real, yet so foreign today, that reading about it feels anachronistic. At the same time, she acknowledges real progress in the LDS Church and church culture in recent years.

Statistician Erica Ball challenges notions of limiting anyone’s potential and intelligence, based on gender, race, or class. She also challenges the dichotomizing of faith and science. “I am a woman and I do math. I believe in God and I am a scientist.” She affirms that we should not put cultural limitations on any group of people. She bases this equal opportunity on the LDS theological notion of “intelligence” as an innate spiritual reality within all people. She also links spiritual intelligence

with divine agency. In these ways, she claims that spiritual or divine intelligence as a profoundly liberating theology for all.

Rachael Decker Bailey is a “career mother” who teaches writing at Purdue University. She deconstructs the duality or dichotomy of Motherhood vs. Career by fully, equally owning the value and vocational power of both. “I want my daughters to educate themselves, to receive graduate degrees, to have the ability and training to support themselves and their families—but I also want them to understand that they are my greatest accomplishment.” She models a powerful deconstructive strategy by refusing to diminish either option of motherhood or career to any degree, but instead she owns and celebrates both to their fullest potential.

Stay-at-home mom, Karen Challis Critchfield challenges the ways that motherhood can be perceived, experienced, or mobilized to devalue and deplete women’s lives, especially when compared or contrasted with the freedom and empowerment of a career. She simply argues that success in either motherhood or career is based on the very same things—self value, confidence, setting and meeting goals, self-actualization, and finding meaning. “I was buried somewhere within me” she confesses. “I had to rediscover myself . . . I am more than ‘just a mom’ . . . many other identities.” She concludes that “it comes down to the simplicity of making yourself matter . . . Don’t sacrifice who you are for motherhood. Mommy, be you.” Either way, in motherhood or career, being yourself *IS* the success.

Carli Anderson probes her personal agency and divine potential as a single woman, which “turned out to be a source of more joy, adventure, self-awareness, contentment, and spiritual understanding than I would have guessed.” She deftly redefines the spiritual path to exaltation by differentiating inner personal progress from outer partnership progress. Valuing the inner spiritual progress of one’s own soul for itself—as the core of any kind of progress—she reveals the centrality and power of our individual, single, inner path. “When we wrongly assume that power to progress is granted only to the married, we stunt our own spiritual growth.”

Editor Jamie Zvirzdin describes her alter ego “Giselle” as the ideal Mormon woman, mother, and wife she had to dismantle in order to accept herself. “I’ve never known a woman who prayed as much” she describes the ideal. “Rarely did God fail to respond to her.” Even though “Giselle is not a real human being,” as Zvirzdin says, she was “a real enough presence in my life . . . [a] psychological taskmaster.” For Zvirzdin, her marriage to an understanding husband and her traumatic experience of childbirth, together with her study of feminist and scholarly works and her move to the Marshall Islands helped her embrace the real-life Jamie by destroying the oppressive “idealatry” of the ideal Giselle. “She was my God,” she admits. “A false one.”

Librarian and bibliophile Brooke Stoneman describes her struggle with infertility, which caused her deep grief and to “question the very nature of God.” She moved from viewing motherhood as “woman’s truest calling and most self-actualizing achievement in life,” to questioning “what true womanhood was.” She also found she had “to stop equating womanhood with motherhood . . . [as] the qualifying life event that ushers us into ‘real’ womanhood.” Along the way, she discovered that her infertility actually enabled her “to reorient [her]self based on truer principles” and “make a new social and theological space for [her]self.” Her focus changed from a life based on “the presence of a future child” or waiting “to start living a full and joyful life” to one of coming into “a place of real joy” in the present reality. Infertility also gave her a “reservoir of compassion [she] previously lacked for the challenges inundating others.”

Ashley Mae Holland is a writer who shares her honest wrestling with Mormon faith, belief, doctrine and policies. “I want to be critically minded . . . yet faith is a precious thing I don’t want to lose,” she explains. Holland deconstructs “faith crisis” by reclaiming the word “crisis” using its Cantonese symbol, which holds a dual meaning of “danger *and* opportunity.” For her, crisis means “growth, empathy, maturity” and “an opening-up to things more beautiful and complex.” She wants to offer nonmembers and shunned members her “friendship and love

without my religion's policies standing between us." She balances the "weight of discrepancies [that] seems like it will break everything" with the "countering moments of joy that make my heart burst." Ultimately, she doesn't "want questions to cancel out my ability to find peace."

Musician Sylvia Lankford is a convert to Mormonism, a faith that brought her "something missing from my knowledge of Jesus Christ." Of African descent, she encountered a starkly white church when she was baptized, without anyone "of our race at church." Even though her family saw her conversion to Mormonism as "an abandonment of my race," she knew it was "the denomination I needed to join, not withstanding our ethnicity, while also admitting that "sometimes it is hard to understand why God wants us to do one thing or another." She states that she needed Mormonism to grow, to evolve, "to gain more insight into the gospel and to progress further in life." Her faith is balanced within the paradox that "racism had such a long history I could not unravel . . . I had to trust that God would not withhold his blessings indefinitely." She also "prayed to see others of my race enter the ward, and I have been blessed to see that happen." She also found peace in healing from a difficult divorce.

Writing teacher and mother Marcee Monroe talks about needing glasses to correct her visual depth perception as a metaphor for deepening her understanding of identity. She shares how her perspectives on "domesticity" and "devotion" as well as motherhood and feminism evolved via new insight. She describes her ability to simultaneously engage both the negative and positive views of domesticity and feminism by stating, "I saw double." Embracing feminism enabled "finding myself and forging an identity." As she views life "in both eyes" she can envision "devotion" as a "deliberate choice" rather than as a diminishment of agency. She discovers "the depth of my devotion to both motherhood and feminism." She concludes, "My identity has been magnified . . . God gave me glasses."

Therapist Rachel Brown explores the "feminine wound in religion," lamenting that when growing up, "I looked to the heavens I could not

see my own face.” She wonders how the “greatest aspiration should be motherhood and have the ultimate mother missing in action.” She remembers realizing, “how could I trust this Father . . . who seemed to cast his daughters into the shadows? . . . I spent hours in the black holes of my soul.” She admires others “whose Mormonism is porous, who are able to shift and sift. Mine felt more like a choke hold. I felt I had no other choice than to believe it all. She seeks her own moments “on the mountain with God” and discovers that she is “the author of [her] own life, and the canon is open.” She admits that, “I still have a scar, but I no longer feel wounded.”

Writer and mom Camille Strate Fairbanks confesses, “I felt I had already failed as a mother the moment I became one . . . I couldn’t shake my twin demons, both the lack of excitement and the guilt.” She writes while pregnant with her first child, contemplating the pros and cons of her condition. “Women who don’t like motherhood . . . are, by our culture’s definition, Bad Women.” She notes that the “wife-and-mother destiny seemed based more on Mormon culture than actual doctrine.” As a teen, she felt that her ambitions “seemed at odds with my religion’s goals for me” so she chose “to rebel” and adopt a “‘Never Having Kids’ mantra” as her identity. However, after meeting a man she wanted to marry and making a conscious choice to have a child, she came to a new recognition. “By the church’s cultural standards, I failed long ago. The only standards left are my own.” She concludes, “There is no right way to be a mother, wife, or woman. There is only the way we are doing it.”

Fresh honesty is what gives these voices fresh courage. This collection is a needed chorus of Mormon feminist voices. Their stories of inner struggle are deeply inspiring, because in their their honest wrestlings with identity and contradiction we encounter our own. We re-live our own deconstructions, breakthroughs, and paradoxes as they are reflected in theirs. It is a comforting and confirming experience.

These voices give me a sense of refuge, renewal, and home. Fresh courage is exactly what I found and will take from this “homespun quorum.”

WHY I STAY

John Gustav-Wrathall

I was excommunicated from the Church in 1986. I am a gay man in a twenty-five-year-long relationship with my husband Göran Gustav-Wrathall. We were legally married in July 2008. Over the years, people have asked me how it is that I could consider myself Mormon if I'm not a member of the Church. What covenants are there for me to renew on Sunday morning, sitting in the pews, as I pass, without partaking, the sacrament tray to the person sitting next to me? To the extent that there is a relationship between me and God that has the Church as a context, real as it is to me, it is invisible to outside observers. That's okay. I stay because I cannot deny what I know.

God is real. Christ is real. The Spirit is real. When the Spirit is present, I know it is present. When it is gone, I feel its absence. When I obey its promptings, I have it with me. And when I disobey, I lose it. I can and do lose it on occasion. And with the Spirit, my life is infinitely fuller and richer and more peaceful and meaningful than without it, so I obey to the best of my ability. And when I lose it, I do whatever I need to do to get it back again. And one of those things is to stay active in my ward and to keep the discipline of the Church and the Gospel in my life.

I stay because God has told me that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is his church and it's where he wants me. It's where, time and time again, as recently as the last time I attended my south Minneapolis ward two weeks ago, the Spirit meets me and teaches me.

This is the text of the talk I gave at the 2017 Sunstone Symposium session "Why We Stay" at the Ray A. Olpin Student Center, at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City, on Friday, July 28, 2017. Other presenters were Robin Linkhart, Maxine Hanks, and Nathan McCluskey.

My heart is softened, the Lord shows me my weaknesses and works with me and draws me to him. At times, I have been reassured. At times, I have been corrected. I find myself renewed as I meditate on the sacrament prayer, as I make those promises in my heart, and ask for the Lord's help to keep those promises. I have had sacred experiences with my priesthood leaders, including through blessings they have given me, that convinced me of the reality of priesthood power. I have witnessed and been the beneficiary of the miraculous healing power of the priesthood. I revere the priesthood as I revere God. I have been blessed to have my fellow Saints claim me as one of their own, and care for me, and encourage me. They accept me and my husband with love and without judgment, and they trust me to find my way forward through faith and hope and love the same way as everybody else.

Are there complications and contradictions? The main one is that I feel prompted to stay true and committed to my husband. We experience all the challenges of any couple, as I've observed both among those who've managed to make their marriages work as well as those who haven't. My marriage to Göran is a school in which I learn patience and sacrifice and empathy. I learn what it is to be one with another human being. My relationship with Göran does not cause me to lose the Spirit. To the contrary I've experienced a richness of the Spirit as I've honored my commitments to him.

What does this mean? I trust that the seeming contradictions between my experience with my husband versus church teaching and policy will all work out. It will work out for me personally as long as I keep that Spirit guide in my life. In my last meeting with my stake president, he simply counseled patience. "What is time unto the Lord?" he said. I am learning patience above all. Time and life experience will grind away everything ephemeral and show what is eternal and what is not.

The older and more experienced I become, the more I am aware of my weaknesses and failings and my need for grace. I have learned how utterly dependent my happiness is on the first principles of the Gospel,

faith and repentance. Faith is not merely belief, it is allowing oneself to trust divine providence, even when one cannot see the ends toward which that providence guides us. Repentance is not merely an act, it is a posture, a way of life, an openness to learn and grow and become. When we fall, it is a willingness to pick ourselves up and start over. I am grateful for the grace God has shown me time and time again, often when I knew myself unworthy of it. This is a journey that must be renewed daily. It does not matter how far I've travelled in my journey up to this point. I will never reach my destination if I ever stop walking.

Sometimes I can barely believe I've been on this path for 12 years already. There have been a couple of moments in my journey with the Church when I have wondered how I would continue on with it. Not necessarily doubted that I would continue, but wondered as in having a sense of amazement. One of them was in the immediate aftermath of the November 2015 LDS policy on gay families.

On the afternoon of November 5, 2015 I was chatting on Facebook with other leaders of Affirmation when news of the policy began to break in social media. It wasn't until I saw copies of authenticated text from the new handbook that it really began to sink in. My initial personal reaction was not positive. I think among the first words out of my mouth were, "That's barbaric." It seemed vindictive to me. In that moment, it looked to me like revenge for the Church's stunning defeat in the Supreme Court, in *Obergefell v. Hodges*. And to me it was barbaric to use children to strike at the parents. I knew, and still know the personal situations of enough LGBT Mormons in same-sex relationships raising children in the Church to immediately grasp what impact this would have on them, not to mention the larger impact that this could have on LDS attitudes toward the LGBT community.

As I continued to reflect, there were two dominant thoughts in my mind. The first was that any hope of broadening connections between the larger LGBT community and the Church had been dashed. During my time of service as senior vice president and as a member of the

board of Affirmation I and other leaders in the organization had been working hard to broaden those contacts. We had opened up a dialogue with church leaders at all levels, and had been meeting with LDS Church Public Affairs since December 2012. We were striving to make room for LGBT Mormons to claim their faith as Latter-day Saints, as I have since my profound conversion experience in September 2005.

In September and October 2016, Affirmation conducted a survey of its membership worldwide. Based on the survey data, which looked representative of the Affirmation community that we served, over half of Affirmation members reported being active in the Church prior to the policy. After the policy that percentage dropped to somewhere between twenty percent and twenty-five percent. In a January 2016 leadership gathering in Los Angeles, Affirmation leaders expressed anger, a sense of betrayal, and even guilt for having encouraged LGBT Mormons to engage with the Church. We had observed widespread trauma among LGBT Mormons and their families.

My other dominant thought was less a coherent thought and more a sense of gnawing hurt, sadness, and doubt. If I had to put words to it I would say I was wrestling with my sense of my own place in all of this. Hadn't the Lord told me to come back to the Church? Hadn't the Lord reassured me that my relationship with my husband was blessed by him, that I should honor it and safeguard it as one of my greatest personal treasures? I was running for president of Affirmation, and had made the decision to run based on personal prayer and fasting and a clear sense that this was also something the Lord wanted me to do. How was I supposed to do this now? I remember the morning of November 6, I got up out of bed, went downstairs to kneel in our living room and pray before beginning my daily scripture study. I remember feeling heartsick, wishing that what had happened the previous afternoon had been just a bad dream.

But then I began to pray. I began to pour my heart out to the Lord, saying simply, please help me to understand. Please help me to know

what to do. And it was like a light went on. Peace flooded through me. My mind was filled with light and reassurance. And the Lord in essence said to me don't worry about this. I've got this one. And you and your husband are still okay.

It was hard for me to articulate what this personal revelation meant, because my sense of things was so counterintuitive. Most members of the LGBT Mormon community saw the policy as a giant step backwards, as a triumph of bigotry. I saw it now as a step forward. A step through. We had to go through this to get to the other side. And the other side would be very, very good.

What had we lost? We had lost some illusions about a liberal progressive evolution of church policy on this issue. I was always skeptical of that kind of a scenario. I always suspected that this issue could only be tackled head-on, in the form of listening deeply to the real stories of LGBT Mormons, followed by doctrinal searching and prayer for new revelation.

What we hadn't lost was ourselves, our stories in their depth and totality. The Church might not understand us, but God does. God sees us. God saw me and said I was okay and that I need not worry and that he had this one.

In the weeks after, I saw signs that ordinary, mainstream, believing heterosexual Mormons were really struggling with this. My bishop called me to see if I was okay. We met and talked. He told me that by his estimate at least sixty percent of the members of our ward were struggling with this. The Sunday after the policy a stranger came up to me in church and asked if I was John Gustav-Wrathall. When I told him I was, he told me that he was investigating the Church. He said to me, "I just wanted you to know that I'm with you on this one." Other members of my ward came up to me and hugged me and promised me that I was not alone.

At the end of November my mother passed away, and I spoke at her funeral. I told the story of her own personal revelation telling her

that her gay son was okay, and prompting her to accept my husband as her own son. After the funeral, it seemed like there were a procession of members of my dad's ultra-conservative Springville, Utah ward coming to me and wanting to talk about the policy, many of them with tears in their eyes.

In early December, I asked for and was quickly granted a series of meetings with church representatives and leaders in Salt Lake. I met with an apostle, and, after telling some stories of the trauma that I had observed among ordinary LGBT Mormons, I said, "On the drive up here, I was discussing the policy with my father. My father was very troubled by the term apostate. I am now defined as apostate under this policy. I told my father that I did not believe it was the Church's intention to stigmatize me or others in my situation. The concept of apostasy is simply used to draw a line between what the Church currently understands as doctrine and what it does not. Was I correct in what I told my father?" The apostle's response was that what I had told my father was exactly right. It was clear to me that in his willingness to meet with me there was a desire to engage, to draw in and include despite very difficult doctrinal understandings. After writing about this meeting in a blog post in *Times & Seasons*, I was accused by some of lying about having met with church leaders. The disbelief was proof of what I already knew about the situation, namely that it is more complex, and our leaders recognize it as more complex, than labels like "apostate" are widely understood to imply.

Yes, there has been defensiveness. There has been retrenchment and doubling down and an intensification of anti-LGBT attitudes in some quarters of the Church. But there has been an opening up as well, an opening up and a deepening of dialogue. For good or for ill, this is an issue that the Church can only move through, not back or away from.

The policy did create genuine trauma for LGBT Mormons. And it has been a duty of mine as president of Affirmation to make space for people to distance themselves from the Church. But I believe that some

of us are called to stay, and the Lord has a very important role for us as part of his plan to move us not away from or around but through.

My testimony has never required members of my ward to “be nice” to me. Nor has it required that the Church treat me as equal. It has nothing to do with the membership of the Church somehow collectively holding correct beliefs about everything. It doesn’t piss me off when somebody says something stupid in Sunday School or priesthood meeting. My testimony doesn’t require an aesthetically pleasing account of Church history. As an historian, I like my history messy, by the way. I like it human and real. The hand of God is more recognizable in that kind of story. I don’t know what to make of the Book of Mormon, other than to say that it is the most spiritually powerful and transformative text I’ve ever encountered. For me, the jury is out as far as Book of Mormon historicity goes. I haven’t been satisfied by the critics that it’s a fraud, but there are certainly aspects of the text that are puzzling if we want to try to take it literally (which the text itself somewhat demands of us). I suppose that’s fundamentally no different from any foundational scriptural text that exists anywhere. But I certainly know that the Book of Mormon is true in the way that is most meaningful to me, which is in the reading and the application of it.

For me the Church is not true “in spite of” the flaws of its members, “in spite of” our individual and collective missteps. It is true in them. It is true in our bearing with one another through them. The scriptures are more or less an archive of human error and divine correction. The trueness of the Church is in having an authentic relationship with a living God who is drawing us into a more god-like life. That’s what priesthood, at its core, is about. That kind of relationship, which demands the discipline of priesthood, necessarily involves us making both individual and collective mistakes, and requiring correction. I’m not sure God’s plan works any other way.

So I’m here, I’m queer, I’m Mormon. Get used to it.

In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.



Robert De Groff
Ears to Hear

REFLECTIONS

Robert De Groff

In 1517, hand-pulled woodcuts, engravings and etchings were the *only* techniques available to quickly disseminate images and ideas to a worldwide audience. They were the internet of their day. But in case you haven't noticed, a lot has changed in 500 years.

We take it for granted that we can now make (or take) images and scatter them across the world in a fraction of a second. If for some strange reason we want put text or an image on paper rather than on a screen, it's just as easy. Just click "print" and the paper slides out of the box, the words or images magically attached. All effort has evaporated. Surely our age must be the culmination of a movement that started over 500 years ago when the internet was very slow and was made up of woodcuts, metal type, engravings, couriers and horses.

And yet . . . while things have undoubtedly gotten easier, have they gotten quantitatively better? I recently had the pleasure of examining a pristine impression of Albrecht Dürer's engraving *Adam and Eve*, made in 1504. It depicts the first couple in ideal proportions and is so skillfully engraved with a million tiny flicks of the burin that you can almost feel the divine breath heaving under Adam's muscular chest. It looks as if it could have been made yesterday. It is an astounding print, unequalled in the intervening 513 years. No sophisticated digital process can reproduce the effect of seeing this engraving in person.

While I don't claim to be another Dürer, I do use exactly the same process that he used. I don't do this just to prove that I can do it or to revive an obsolete technology just to show how obsolete it is. (Few of us would trade in a mountain bike for a velocipede!) I use Dürer's technique because it is still the most versatile, luscious and expressive

linear printmaking technique that we have. In short, though we have many newer techniques, we don't have any better techniques.

Look at any contemporary process—ink jet, offset lithograph, an ultra-high resolution smartphone screen, anything—with a magnifying glass. All modern processes are made up of broken points of some kind. When you look closely, every single digital image becomes a flat ghost of a grid, a sophisticated but disjointed and lifeless mosaic.

Now look at a genuine engraving with a magnifying glass. I think you will be struck by the sheer physicality of the image. Lines don't dissolve into broken dots! They remain lines no matter how many times you magnify the image. The paper itself bears witness to the immense pressure needed to print an engraving in the embossed edge on all four sides. The lines in an engraving range from thin, spidery lines the thickness of a human hair to thick worms of ink rising above the paper. The slightest change in pressure of the engraver's hand corresponds to variations of width and thickness of every printed line. The ink isn't flat, but sculptural, alive, much more so than even a pen and ink drawing.

For me, turning off all digital devices and using the tools of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century internet lets me make tangible analog multiples that can be spread all over the world, but retain the intimate sculptural physicality that is so lacking our image-saturated world.



ISLAMIC ART AND THE LDS FAITH

Lisa DeLong

My first encounter with Islamic art was a photograph of the Alhambra: architecture transfigured by light, into light. It expressed a spiritual reality in a way I had not seen before.

As I began researching this and other jewels of architecture and craftsmanship, I became interested in how the art and architecture of Islam acted as a direct extension of the faith. There seemed to be no separation between the life of belief and the life of action. Both sacred and secular buildings were inscribed with words of scripture, something that recalled a time in LDS history when our community buildings—not just the temples—carried the inscription “Holiness to the Lord.”

Eventually, I found myself at The Prince’s School of Traditional Arts in London, where I began to study principles of design as viewed from a traditional perspective. Several of my courses were taught with reference to the Islamic world, where many of the traditional crafts are still being practiced by living artisans.

The arts of the Islamic world are frequently demoted and dismissed as “merely decorative” or as somehow lesser than the fine art traditions of the West. This dismissal is based on a profound misunderstanding of the purposes and application of art in Islamic culture.

Islamic art is founded on three visual languages: the calligraphic, the biomorphic, and the geometric. The knowledge of how to apply these languages within the crafts is handed down within an apprenticeship system. Each of these disciplines requires decades to master.

Calligraphy is the art form considered to have the most direct connection to revelation: the scribe works directly with the word of God as revealed to the prophet Mohammed. There are many different scripts, each requiring adherence to specific laws of proportion. The ink is ideally made from the soot gathered from mosque lamps, which are perpetually surrounded by the prayers of the faithful as the oil burns. The mastery of calligraphy requires not only consummate skill and discipline within a tradition, but a profound knowledge of scripture and hadith (sayings of the prophet Mohammed).

In the biomorphic language, floral and foliate elements are highly stylized. A “realistic” depiction of a rose shows only the essence of a particular bloom seen from a specific vantage point at a fixed point in time, whereas a stylized bloom reveals something regarding the essence

of all roses in their most divine manifestation. Biomorphically adorned also alludes to the beauties of paradise and specifically to the Tree of Life. The floral language adapts to the constraints of the medium, but certain principles always govern its forms. The composition always has an origin or focal point, such as a vase, seed, roots, or cloud from which the rest emanates. All growth moves outward from this point, unfurling and spiralling in a symphony of leaves, buds, and blossoms. This acknowledgement of an origin for a foliate composition is an acknowledgement of the Source, of the Origin, of the Divine.

The biomorphic and geometric languages are complementary and inseparable. They echo the organic and crystalline aspects of Creation. Their proportions and forms are intended to reflect the Divine ordering of the cosmos. In *The Need for a Sacred Science*, Dr. S. H. Nasr writes, "This order is, moreover, related to an incredible harmony which in the technically musical sense pervades all the realms of nature from the stars to subatomic particles. The proportions of the parts of animals and plants, of crystal structures or of the planetary movements, when studied mathematically from the point of view of traditional or Pythagorean mathematics, reveal the presence of a harmony pervading all orders of the universe. It is as if the whole cosmos were music congealed into the very substance of things, which not only have their existence according to the laws of harmony but also move and live according to the rhythm of that cosmic dance."¹

The third visual language in Islamic art is geometry. Geometry's presence is implicit within the art and architecture of civilization, perhaps most conspicuously in edifices built for worship. It governs decorative elements and organizes spaces of human activity, endowing art and architecture with sacred significance and directing heart and mind to the Creator.

1. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Need for a Sacred Science*, SUNY Series in Religious Studies (New York: SUNY Press, 1993) 120.

Meditation on the circle and its expression of the oneness of God lie at the heart of Islamic geometric pattern. Circles are drawn with compasses, a tool which combines both rest (the fixed central point) and activity (the inscribing of the circle's circumference). This echoes the layout of sacred sites where a temple or shrine serves as the fixed point around which the rest of human activity centered.

The circle is closely associated with wholeness as it is entirely self-contained and generated by movement centered around the navel of a single point. In all cultures, the circle is considered a symbol of the Divine, the heavens, and all things celestial. It is associated with eternity, completeness, truth, inclusion, governance, and perfection. All points on the circumference exist in a unified relationship to the center. It is a perfect symbol of unity and wholeness. The circle operates as a limitation, an enclosure, a boundary, and a protection. In the King Follett Discourse, Joseph Smith likens the eternal spirit of man to the ring from his finger: neither have a beginning and both continue one eternal round.

The square is likewise considered a symbol of earth. The Brethren of Purity, a group of Muslim philosophers based in tenth-century Baghdad, discuss the four-fold nature of the created world, and ascribe various groupings of four in nature to God's intention and creation: the four physical natures, which are hot, cold, dry, and moist; the four elements which are fire, air, water, and earth; the four humours, the four seasons, the four cardinal directions, the four winds, and the four directions.

In architecture, the circle and square are manifested in three dimensional form as the cube and the sphere. These two shapes do not tessellate without a transition: to set a dome on a square structure requires an architectural transition. This transition is most commonly octagonal. The octagon thus occupies a symbolic space which mediates between heaven and earth. There is an architectural inevitability to the use of this shape as it allows the volume of the square base to transform beautifully into the realms of the heavenly spheres. It is both structurally logical

and aesthetically pleasing. This geometric symbolism of transition finds great expression in the Islamic arts.

For a Latter-day Saint, rich inspiration can be found in the processes that lead to the beautiful geometric patterns of Islamic art and architecture. No matter how complex or simple the design, the discipline of constructing a pattern begins with the use of a compass. Its point punctures a navel into the center of the paper and the composition is circumscribed, divided, and beautified. Layers of pattern merge and diverged, creating microcosm and macrocosm, reconciled one to another in harmony and unity.

CONTRIBUTORS

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