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# DIALOGUE

a journal of mormon thought

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# DIALOGUE

a journal of mormon thought

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### Letter to the Editor

In my review of J. Seth Anderson's LGBT Salt Lake (Summer 2017 issue, pp. 189–91), I neglected to identify one of the most important pioneers of Mormon LGBT studies at work today. Duane E. Jennings, past president of Affirmation, is a longtime activist whose recent two-volume publication, *Stumbling Blocks and Stepping Stones: Including Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersex Children of God in the LDS Plan of Salvation* (at <https://www.stumblingblocksandstepping-stones.com>), is the most ambitious, comprehensive work on the subject to date.

—Gary James Bergera, Salt Lake City





# AUTHORITY AND PRIESTHOOD IN THE LDS CHURCH, PART 1: DEFINITIONS AND DEVELOPMENT

Roger Terry

The issue of authority in Mormonism became painfully public with the rise of the Ordain Women movement. The Church can attempt to blame (and discipline) certain individuals, but this development is a lot larger than any one person or group of people. The status of women in the Church was basically a time bomb ticking down to zero. With the strides toward equality American society has taken over the past several decades, it was really just a matter of time before the widening gap between social circumstances in general and conditions in Mormondom became too large to ignore. When the bomb finally exploded, the Church scrambled to give credible explanations, but most of these responses have felt inadequate at best. The result is a good deal of genuine pain and a host of very valid questions that have proven virtually impossible to answer satisfactorily.

At least in my mind, this unfolding predicament has raised certain important questions about what priesthood really is and how it corresponds to the larger idea of authority. What is this thing that women are denied? What is this thing that, for over a century, faithful black LDS men were denied? Would clarifying or fine-tuning our definition—or even better understanding the history of how our current definition developed—perhaps change the way we regard priesthood, the way we practice it, the way we bestow it, or refuse to bestow it? The odd sense I have about priesthood, after a good deal of study and pondering, is

that most of us don't really have a clear idea of what it is and how it has evolved over the years. Many women, even though they want to be supportive of their leaders, feel varying degrees of distress and pain over the mere mention of priesthood. They know they are being left out of something important, and they know that this signals unequal treatment, regardless of how the institutional Church portrays it, but perhaps they, like most of us men who "hold" the priesthood, don't really grasp what it is, particularly if we compare the modern Mormon conception of priesthood with certain scriptural or historical clues. And this may partly explain why the two sides of this encounter often seem to be speaking past each other and are unable to find any common ground. Perhaps some clarification about this issue's basic vocabulary might improve our collective communication and might help us find a path forward, because this issue is not going to go away, even if it has temporarily slipped into the shadows. But when it becomes more public again, if both sides just dig in their heels, the Church and its individual members will be poorly served. So, this pair of articles is intended to lay a conceptual foundation on which more productive communication might take place.

Over the space of several years, I have come to view authority in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as something quite different from what I previously assumed it to be. Primarily this is because I started seeing distinct differences between the concept of priesthood and the larger notion of authority. Growing up Mormon, I simply assumed the two were the same, and this perception is quite common in the Church.<sup>1</sup> But as I will explore in detail in this article, priesthood and authority are

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1. See, for example, Dallin H. Oaks, "The Keys and Authority of the Priesthood," Apr. 2014, <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/2014/04/the-keys-and-authority-of-the-priesthood?lang=eng>: "We are not accustomed to speaking of women having the authority of the priesthood in their Church callings, but what other authority can it be?" The assumption behind this statement is that in the LDS Church priesthood and authority are the same thing.

quite distinct ideas, especially in ancient scripture, with authority being a much broader and more general concept. Authority can be a difficult topic, and inadequately understood authority can be problematic on multiple levels, but the unique Mormon definition of priesthood creates a structure that complicates rather than simplifies matters related to authority. In this article, I will address the question of what priesthood is, but first we need to establish a context for understanding priesthood, so let's step back and look at the nature of authority in general.

### Two Sources of Authority

I hate to do this, and some readers will probably never forgive me for beginning this investigation like a really bad sacrament meeting talk, but let's look at the dictionary definition of authority. Merriam-Webster includes the following: "power to influence or command thought, opinion, or behavior," "persons in command," and "convincing force." Synonyms include "influence" and "power."<sup>2</sup> These definitions subtly suggest two distinct types of authority or power: individual and institutional. And this is an important point because it is difficult to understand what, exactly, authority is without also understanding how a person gets it. If authority is primarily the power to influence or command thought, opinion, or behavior in other people, how do we get this power? We often assume it can just be given by someone who occupies a higher position in an institutional hierarchy, but I'm not convinced that the power to influence others' thoughts and opinions is simply a capacity that can be transferred from one person to another like a hundred-dollar bill or a shiny badge. I think it's much more complicated than this. So let's look more closely at the two primary sources of authority.

Individual authority manifests itself in two different ways. Some people, because of their unique attributes, possess a certain power

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2. Merriam-Webster, s.v. "authority (*n.*)," accessed Feb. 16, 2018, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/authority>.

(often referred to as charisma) to influence others. Their words, their bearing, and their ideas project “a convincing force.” This would be a consensual form of authority, granted by those who accept another person’s influence.<sup>3</sup> And this sort of power cannot be given through institutional channels. Either you are born with it or you develop it, but it involves personal qualities, not organizational standing. The opposite of consensual authority, of course, would be authority that an individual claims and maintains by force or manipulation. This type of negative authority may influence other people’s thought and opinion if they are susceptible to evil or are easily deceived, but it is more liable to control their *behavior*, often through threat or fear. Between these two poles, however, are various degrees of personal influence, including the confidence some people exude that permits them to be domineering without attracting followers or admirers.

Institutional authority is another matter altogether. Some people occupy positions of “command” because of their skill (or perhaps good fortune) in negotiating the paths of organizational hierarchy, thus landing themselves in stations where they are able to use the weight of institutional power to command or at least direct those who occupy lower echelons of the organizational chart, usually maintaining compliance by threat of organizational punishment or expulsion. Other persons, who may not possess this sort of skill or luck, are often

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3. It should be noted that this sort of personal authority can be used for either righteous or evil ends. Lucifer certainly possessed and possesses this sort of influence to shape the thoughts and behavior of others, as have many evil individuals in mortality. But even though Lucifer wields great influence among his followers, his authority is dependent on the will of his followers. Many years ago, when temple presidents sometimes instructed patrons in the temple and answered questions about the ordinances, I sat in such a session in the Provo Utah Temple. Someone raised a question about Lucifer’s claim to possess “power and priesthoods.” The temple president responded that Lucifer does indeed have priesthood, but it is a priesthood granted him by his followers. This principle is not official doctrine, but it rings true. For without followers, any person’s authority would be empty and meaningless.

granted a degree of institutional authority anyway by those who rank above them in the organizational hierarchy. Their success in advancing within the hierarchy, however, is dependent on how well they please (or perhaps deceive) those who have granted them authority.

Organizations themselves are generally the fruit of a charismatic leader's influence. Once the founder of the institution has moved on or has died, authority in the organization usually becomes routinized and is based either on heredity (in a family business, for instance, or in a patriarchal religion) or on some form of legal and orderly framework (a corporation, for example) that the charismatic leader established before his or her departure.

This view of authority has significant overlap with the writings of German social and economic theorist Max Weber, who identified three "pure types" of legitimate authority: rational ("resting on a belief in the legality of enacted rules and the right of those elevated to authority under such rules to issue commands"), traditional ("resting on an established belief in the sanctity of immemorial traditions and the legitimacy of those exercising authority under them"), and charismatic ("resting on devotion to the exceptional sanctity, heroism or exemplary character of an individual person").<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, Weber used Joseph Smith as an example of charismatic authority: "Another type [of charismatic leader] is represented by Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism, who may have been a very sophisticated swindler (although this cannot be definitely established)."<sup>5</sup> Weber may not have known what to think of Joseph Smith, but he was particularly interested in what happens "with the death or decline of a charismatic leader. Charismatic authority is 'routinized' in a number of ways according to Weber: orders are traditionalized, the staff or followers change into legal or 'estate-like' (traditional) staff,

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4. Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, edited by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, translated by Ephraim Fischhoff and others (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978), 215.

5. Weber, *Economy and Society*, 242.

or the meaning of charisma itself may undergo change.”<sup>6</sup> Weber would undoubtedly have been interested in the transition of the LDS Church from a charismatic “new movement” to a unique combination of traditional legitimacy and legal-rational bureaucracy in which charisma plays a sporadic and unpredictable role.

It is important to point out in this context that Joseph Smith established at least two distinct paths by which authority became routinized after his death: the hereditary patriarchal priesthood and the institutional, hierarchical Melchizedek Priesthood. And the latter was not specifically enough defined, leaving the door open for two competing institutional claims—hence the confusion that reigned in the aftermath of his assassination. He also left sufficient room for a rogue charismatic claim to authority that arose outside these two typical channels.

### The Savior’s Authority

In light of the distinctions outlined above between individual (or charismatic) authority and institutional (or routinized) authority, it is interesting to note that the Savior’s authority during his earthly ministry was almost exclusively individual, not institutional, and it was consensual, not claimed by force or threat or deception. He did declare a certain authority as God’s Son—which established a patriarchal line of authorization and perhaps even implied some sort of eternal though undefined organization—and he based his own mandate upon the frequent declaration that he came to do his father’s will.<sup>7</sup> These declarations were important, but people followed him not because of these claims; they followed him primarily because of a personal or charismatic influence. The manner of his teaching, “as one that had authority” (Mark 1:22),

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6. Dana Williams, “Max Weber: Traditional, Legal-Rational, and Charismatic Authority,” <http://danawilliams2.tripod.com/authority.html>.

7. See, for instance, Matthew 26:39; Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42; John 5:30, 6:38; 3 Nephi 11:11, 27:13; Doctrine and Covenants 19:24.

and his deeds—healing illnesses, raising the dead, and miraculously controlling physical matter—strengthened people’s perception of the authority he claimed.

It is noteworthy, I believe, that even though Jesus spoke of his own or his father’s kingdom, and though he may indeed have laid the foundation for the church his followers expanded after his death, the Gospels are strangely silent about any effort on the Savior’s part to establish anything more than a minimal formal organization. Indeed, he insisted that his kingdom was not of this world (see John 18:36), and his recorded actions appear to support this declaration. He went about doing good, preaching a radical new doctrine, healing the sick, and irritating the entrenched and apostate power structure of the Jewish religion, but he did not focus much energy or many resources on establishing a rival organization. He ordained twelve apostles (or emissaries—those who were sent forth), gave them authority (not ever identified in the Bible as *priesthood*) to act in his name (primarily to preach and to heal), and commissioned seventy others as missionaries to teach his doctrine, but we read nothing, for instance, of Jesus establishing congregations of believers or erecting any sort of formal power structure.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, his

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8. The account in John 21, which describes how the apostles “go a fishing” at the Sea of Tiberius after the Savior’s death and resurrection, suggests that they assumed their duties in the ministry were completed. There was apparently no formal organizational structure that they felt obligated to assume control over, no official priesthood hierarchy such as Joseph Smith erected in the early 1830s, no network of congregations that demanded their attention—in essence, no “church.” Jeffrey R. Holland, taking what he calls “some nonscriptural liberty,” concurs with this basic assumption: “In effect, Peter said to his associates, ‘Brethren, it has been a glorious three years. . . . But that is over. He has finished His work, and He has risen from the tomb. He has worked out His salvation and ours. So you ask, “What do we do now?” I don’t know more to tell you than to return to your former life, rejoicing. I intend to “go a fishing.”’ And at least six of the ten other remaining Apostles said in agreement, ‘We also go with thee’” (“The First Great Commandment,” Oct. 2012, <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/2012/10/the-first-great-commandment?lang=eng>).

instructions to the apostles recorded in Matthew 20:20–28 (which we will look at shortly) suggest the exact opposite of a *power* structure. If he established any sort of formal organization, it should probably be described as a *service* structure.

Similarly, in the Book of Mormon, when Jesus visited the people at Bountiful, he taught them some fundamental Christian principles, commissioned twelve disciples, gave them authority (once again not identified as *priesthood*) to baptize and administer the sacrament, but the record does not indicate that he established any sort of formal hierarchical structure. Although Alma<sub>1</sub> had established a church among the people at the waters of Mormon and expanded it in the land of Zarahemla and surrounding regions, this church apparently disintegrated in the thirtieth year after Christ's birth (see 3 Nephi 6:14), and its successor was not organized until after Jesus had ascended into heaven a second time. In 3 Nephi 18, Jesus mentions his church twice, but as a future entity (see vv. 5, 16). It is not until 3 Nephi 26:17–21 that we read of the twelve disciples teaching and baptizing the people, “and they who were baptized in the name of Jesus were called the church of Christ.” This is the first mention of an organized church after the Savior's initial appearance, but it seems the disciples were unsure what to call this group of baptized believers, so they prayed for this information, which brought another appearance of Jesus, who told them to “call the church in my name” (3 Nephi 27:7). The record does not indicate that Jesus himself organized this church, but that his disciples did this after he had ascended to heaven.

In a similar manner, but with significant differences, the apostles in the Old World set up not an institutional “church” such as we have today (which would have been conceptually impossible at that date) but several “churches” (Greek *ekklesia*, assembly, likely small congregations of believers) in various cities during their post-Pentecostal missionary journeys, but the apostles apparently did not engage in any sort of



intricate or hierarchical institution-building.<sup>9</sup> Geographical distance, communication limitations, and persecution probably restricted the extent to which they could establish a complex organizational structure. After the apostles were gone, however, the bishops of the various congregations formed regional synods to resolve doctrinal and policy disputes. Eventually, a council of bishops throughout the Roman Empire coalesced, which gave rise to what we now know as the Catholic Church, with its sprawling power structure, transformed sacraments, and Hellenistic creeds.<sup>10</sup>

This institutional structure for Christian authority endured and evolved for centuries, but in the middle of the past millennium the Reformation created several other avenues and definitions of religious authority, most of them rejecting the formal hierarchy and power channels of Catholicism. Since I haven't spent much time investigating authority in the Catholic or Protestant spheres, I won't have much to say about them. Authority in Mormonism is quite enough to tackle for one article (even divided into two fairly lengthy parts). To see how the Lord seems to view authority, its purpose, and its bounds, let's look at two passages of scripture, one from the New Testament and one from the Doctrine and Covenants.

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9. A Catholic explanation of the difference between bishop, priest, and deacon provides some interesting detail about how the early "churches" were organized. According to Ignatius of Antioch, writing in about AD 110, every church recognized three offices—bishop (*episcopos*), priest (*presbuteros*), and deacon (*diakonos*)—and without these three offices a group could not be called a church. In the apostolic era, these three terms were somewhat fluid, with Paul, for instance, referring to himself as a deacon (2 Corinthians 3:6, 6:4, 11:23; Ephesians 3:7) and Peter referring to himself as a "fellow elder" (1 Peter 5:1), elder being an equivalent name for priest. According to Hippolytus (ca. AD 215), a deacon was not ordained to the priesthood ("Bishop, Priest, and Deacon," Catholic Answers, accessed Feb. 16, 2018, <https://www.catholic.com/tract/bishop-priest-and-deacon>).

10. An approximately similar process occurred in the Orthodox Church.

### Not as “the Princes of the Gentiles”

After the mother of James and John had approached the Savior and inappropriately requested that her sons sit on Jesus’ right and left hand in his eternal kingdom, the other apostles were understandably indignant. But Jesus set them straight. He explained that even though the “princes of the Gentiles” exercised dominion and authority over their subjects, it was not to be so among his disciples. His kingdom was different.

Whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister;

And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant:

Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many. (Matthew 20:26–28)

Even on the surface, this is a startling statement. It runs counter to the attitudes regarding authority we generally see in the world, and even sometimes in the Church, where hierarchy, formal titles, reverence for position, and the act of presiding have become crucial concepts. Some LDS practices, when we consider them, seem to run counter to what the Savior was trying to teach his apostles. For instance, high councils that are assigned seats according to seniority or whose members must exit the room in that same order are enshrining the very sort of pecking order Jesus prohibited among his original apostles. In our sacrament meetings, we are also very careful about serving the bread and water to the “presiding authority” first. Not only can this get confusing for the deacons when visiting authority figures are in attendance, but for some reason it is difficult to imagine Jesus insisting that he be the first served. If the account in Matthew 20 is accurate, he would probably insist on being served last, and not because last is the place of honor.

Although the Savior was very clear about his own authority and the fact that he was always in charge—preaching, inviting, commanding, reprimanding, forgiving, sending, and so forth—his instructions to his apostles seem specifically to forbid any sort of ranking system

among them (except perhaps an inverted ranking, where those with the most authority were to serve rather than rule). If we can draw a lesson from this, it is perhaps that we are not to use authority in the Church as the world uses it. This is expressly forbidden. President David O. McKay translated this same idea into a modern context: “We cannot run the Church like a business.”<sup>11</sup> This may seem obvious, but business philosophies, practices, and structures are so pervasive in our modern organizational world that they tend to be difficult to circumvent in the Church, at both the individual and the institutional level.

### “No Power or Influence”

Expanding on the central principle pronounced in the Savior’s brief reprimand of his apostles, Joseph Smith was very explicit in the revelation/commentary published in Doctrine and Covenants 121 about the use of priesthood authority and how it differs from worldly authority:

Behold, there are many called, but few are chosen. And why are they not chosen?

Because their hearts are set so much upon the things of this world, and aspire to the honors of men, that they do not learn this one lesson—

That the rights of the priesthood are inseparably connected with the powers of heaven, and that the powers of heaven cannot be controlled nor handled only upon the principles of righteousness.

That they may be conferred upon us, it is true; but when we undertake to cover our sins, or to gratify our pride, our vain ambition, or to exercise

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11. Gregory A. Prince and Wm. Robert Wright, *David O. McKay and the Rise of Modern Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2005), 150. This remark came in the context of the correlation movement and the organizational changes the Correlation Executive Committee was proposing for the Church, which included, according to Ed Kimball, son and biographer of President Spencer W. Kimball, “applying management practices that were standard in the American business world” (Edward L. Kimball, *Lengthen Your Stride: The Presidency of Spencer W. Kimball* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2005], 249).

control or dominion or compulsion upon the souls of the children of men, in any degree of unrighteousness, behold, the heavens withdraw themselves; the Spirit of the Lord is grieved; and when it is withdrawn, Amen to the priesthood or the authority of that man. . . .

We have learned by sad experience that it is the nature and disposition of almost all men, as soon as they get a little authority, as they suppose, [that] they will immediately begin to exercise unrighteous dominion. . . .

No power or influence can or ought to be maintained by virtue of the priesthood, only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned;

By kindness, and pure knowledge, which shall greatly enlarge the soul without hypocrisy, and without guile. (D&C 121:34–37, 39, 41–42)

Hidden in plain view in this inspired commentary is an insight about priesthood that is not well understood. If we truncate verse 41 before it runs off into the list of qualities a leader should employ in exercising priesthood authority, a very important lesson comes suddenly into focus: “No power or influence can or ought to be maintained by virtue of the priesthood”—period. A man cannot maintain power or influence over somebody simply by virtue of the fact that he holds the priesthood or occupies a priesthood office; nor should he try because if he does, he loses the *power* of the priesthood. As the prophet made abundantly clear in verses 36 and 37, the priesthood of God is powerless if held over someone else’s head. Priesthood power and influence (here undoubtedly meaning authority exercised in an institutional setting) come only as a consequence of long-suffering, gentleness, meekness, love unfeigned, kindness, and pure knowledge (in other words, the spirit of serving and ministering the Savior was trying to teach his apostles during his earthly ministry). People will not follow if they are pushed, coerced, controlled, threatened, or manipulated. Those being ordered about may *comply*, but they will not *follow*. Stated another way, individuals become leaders not merely because they occupy a position of presumed authority, even if that office is granted by divine directive. They become leaders only

because others willingly follow them. Leadership is entirely dependent on the willingness of the followers. Mormons are known, by and large, for their obedience to authority. Indeed, sometimes we are rightly accused of being blindly obedient. But sometimes that obedience is more a passive compliance with edicts from authoritarian figures than an active following that leaders have earned by their behavior. In this light, true priesthood leadership always considers the rights, desires, development, well-being, free will, and autonomy of the followers first. Terryl Givens refers to this paradoxical idea of priesthood as “power with no compulsion.”<sup>12</sup>

### Authority by Consent

This idea adds a new wrinkle to the standard LDS definition of *priesthood*. Priesthood is more than just an abstract agency granted by the Lord to speak or act in his name. It is also authority sanctioned or consented to by peers. Unless a person in a position of authority has the consent or approval of those over whom he or she exercises authority, then that authority lacks power—in essence, it is meaningless or empty. And this idea becomes even more significant when we understand that the modern Church, as it was initially established, was both a theocracy and a democracy. For instance, we read in one of the earliest revelations to the Church: “*All things shall be done by common consent in the church, by much prayer and faith*” (D&C 26:2, emphasis added). In other words, authority in the Church is not just an institutional authority granted to leaders through approved priesthood channels; it is also a *consensual* matter, contingent upon the approval of the rank-and-file members. We also read, “No person is to be ordained to *any* office in this church, where there is a regularly organized branch of the same, without the *vote* of that church” (D&C 20:65, emphasis added). These verses suggest

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12. Terryl L. Givens, “Paradox and Discipleship,” *Irreantum* 11, nos. 1–2 (2009): 39.

that, at least in theory, the Church is not just a top-down, authoritarian hierarchy. Indeed, the very name of the Church suggests as much. It is the Church of Jesus Christ, but it is also the Church of the Latter-day Saints. The name is a dual possessive. Sometimes we just assume it is the Lord's church and that's all there is to it. But it appears that he expects something more of us.

This notion of consensual authority is central, I believe, to the whole framework of eternity of which we are a part.<sup>13</sup>

### Priesthood as an Abstract Idea

Charles Harrell has pointed out that the LDS Church is unique in the way it regards priesthood. Rather than being tied exclusively to the fact of being a priest, in modern Mormonism priesthood has become an abstract idea. It is a generalized power or authority.<sup>14</sup> To illustrate what I mean, let me suggest that it is theoretically possible (although institutionally inconceivable in today's Church) to bestow upon a young man the Aaronic Priesthood without ordaining him to the office of deacon,

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13. I explore this idea in detail in my article "The Source of God's Authority: One Argument for an Unambiguous Doctrine of Preexistence," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 49, no. 3 (2016): 109–44.

14. Charles R. Harrell, "*This Is My Doctrine*": *The Development of Mormon Theology* (Draper, Utah: Greg Kofford Books, 2011), chapter 17. Interestingly, the LDS definition of priesthood as abstract authority does appear in the four-inch-thick *Webster's* unabridged dictionary, but it is limited only to Mormon usage: "3: the authority to speak and administer in the name of the Deity given in the Mormon Church by ordination; *also*: the body of those so ordained including those of the Aaronic as well as the Melchizedek orders" (*Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language, Unabridged* [Springfield, Mass.: Merriam-Webster, 1993], s.v. "priesthood"). For a history of how this definition evolved, see Gregory A. Prince, *Having Authority: The Origins and Development of Priesthood during the Ministry of Joseph Smith* (Independence, Mo.: Herald Publishing House, 1993).

teacher, or priest.<sup>15</sup> In the official (though not rigid) language used when laying hands on the recipient's head and granting either the Aaronic or Melchizedek Priesthood, the *bestowal* and the *ordination* to office are two distinct elements, although this was not always the case. In essence, although this never happens today, it would be possible to give someone the abstract authority without placing him in a particular institutional category (office or quorum). The authority is seen as separate from the office.<sup>16</sup> The authority is certainly separate from any particular calling in the Church, such as bishop, high priests group leader, or deacons quorum secretary. Until a couple of years ago, for instance, I did not hold a priesthood calling (I was a Primary teacher), but I still “held the priesthood” and could exercise it by giving health blessings or dedicating graves or performing other acts that were unrelated to a particular institutional position.

Significantly, this view of priesthood as an abstract authority is not present in ancient scripture, which is probably why it also does not exist in the Roman Catholic, Orthodox, or Protestant universes. In the Bible, if you had priesthood, you were a priest. And in ancient Judaism, you became a priest through heredity, not through formal ordination. Indeed, the word *ordination* does not appear at all in the Bible, and the

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15. While it is theoretically possible to separate these two acts in today's Church, it wasn't prior to at least 1900, and perhaps even 1919, when Joseph F. Smith's *Gospel Doctrine* officially proposed the distinction. Nor was it possible in the Book of Mormon (see Moroni 3:1–3). See a complete discussion of this change in William V. Smith, “Early Mormon Priesthood Revelations: Text, Impact, and Evolution,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 46, no. 4 (2014): 43–46.

16. Gregory A. Prince, *Power from On High: The Development of Mormon Priesthood* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1995), 48–50, raises the question of why the nine priesthood offices we currently recognize became offices when others, such as high council, did not, even though they met all the obvious requirements. “In attempting to define the rationale behind the nine offices now recognized by the Utah church, one is thus constrained by historical irregularities” (49).

word *ordain(ed)* is never used to signify the bestowal of priesthood authority or office.<sup>17</sup>

### The Ancient Meaning of Priesthood

The modern LDS usage of the word *priesthood* is a linguistic anomaly. In dictionaries, including Noah Webster's 1828 dictionary, there are two traditional definitions of the word: "the office or character of a priest" and "the order of men set apart for sacred offices; the order composed of priests."<sup>18</sup> This is in keeping with the typical definitions of other "-hood" words. *Parenthood*, for instance, is the condition or character of being a parent. *Neighborhood* is an order or group of people composed of neighbors. These follow a pattern that makes linguistic sense. But *priesthood*, as a type of authority that can be given to people, falls well outside the normal definition of "-hood" words.

A mother, for instance, would never claim to "hold the motherhood" or to "have the parenthood." A group of neighbors would never say that they "hold the neighborhood." Other churches do refer to bodies of priests as "the priesthood" as do Mormons, but this is a collective term, not an ethereal "something" a person can be given, something that can be held (or withheld). Thus, in LDS usage, *priesthood* is a word that has been wrenched from its historical and linguistic roots and given a meaning not present in any other context, even in ancient LDS scripture.

On the surface, the relationship between *priest* and *priesthood* may appear to be some sort of chicken-and-egg enigma. Which came

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17. See Kevin Barney, "Ordained," *By Common Consent* (blog), June 1, 2014, <http://bycommonconsent.com/2014/06/01/ordained>. Some verses can be read with the modern meaning (1 Timothy 2:7; Hebrews 8:3), but this is what Barney calls a presentist reading, misapplying current definitions of terms to ancient contexts.

18. *American Dictionary of the English Language*, 1828 ed., s.v. "priesthood (*n.*)," accessed Feb. 16, 2018, <http://webstersdictionary1828.com/Dictionary/priesthood>.



first? In Mormon dogma, the answer is obvious. According to Bruce R. McConkie, for instance, “Priesthood is power like none other on earth or in heaven. It is the very power of God himself, the power by which the worlds were made, the power by which all things are regulated, upheld, and preserved.”<sup>19</sup> In other words, God held the priesthood and then gave it to men, who were made priests. But simple linguistics gives us a different answer. In terms of word development, *priesthood* is obviously derived from the root word *priest*. There couldn’t be the concept *priesthood* until there were actual priests, just as the concept of *parenthood* could not exist prior to the existence of the word *parent*. God certainly had authority before the world was framed, but it is doubtful it was called *priesthood*. Regardless of the language, the term signifying the state of being a priest would have to be dependent on the prior term describing the priest himself. Why would God refer to his authority as *priesthood*? That makes no sense. He could call it *godhood* or some other term derived from his nature and station and being, but even that does not make linguistic sense. *Godhood* is the state or condition of being God, not some abstract form of authority.

Thus, *priesthood* (and its equivalent terms in other languages) is likely an earthly term, derived from the word *priest*, which came into existence at some point in human history to describe those called to represent God. If we accept the biblical account, this office is first mentioned in Genesis 14:18, referring to Melchizedek. In the modern LDS Church, however, it is common for individuals who are not priests to “hold the priesthood” (deacons and teachers, for instance), which is linguistically confusing and only makes sense to us because we have separated the term *priesthood* from its historical context and given it new meanings.

Most Latter-day Saints would probably be surprised to discover that the word *priesthood* appears only eight times in the entire Book of Mormon, all of them in the book of Alma—once in Alma 4:20, where

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19. Bruce R. McConkie, “The Doctrine of the Priesthood,” Apr. 1982, <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/1982/04/the-doctrine-of-the-priesthood?lang=eng>.

Alma<sub>2</sub> delivers the judgment seat to Nephihah and confines himself “wholly to the high priesthood” (the office of high priest over the church), and seven times in Alma 13, each instance employing again the term *high priesthood*, referring to those who “became high priests of God” (Alma 13:10). Melchizedek is specifically mentioned as having “received the *office* of the high priesthood” (Alma 13:18) but not merely “the priesthood.” I will return to the historical notion of high priesthood later in this article, but for now let me say that although I am a high priest in the LDS Church, Alma certainly would not have considered me a high priest, which to him would have been the religious leader of either the entire church or a regional subdivision of it. He certainly wouldn’t have understood how a person like me could be a high priest without even occupying any sort of “priestly” position (I now serve on the high council, which is a priesthood calling but not technically a “priestly” position). I am also quite certain that the high priests he was referring to in Alma 13 did not include today’s thousands upon thousands of LDS high priests. Alma would not recognize the priesthood as Mormons define it today. Indeed, nowhere in the Book of Mormon do we read of just “the priesthood,” meaning a general abstract authority bestowed upon all male members of the church or even a select few. We don’t even read of “priesthood” as the condition of being a priest. Priesthood in the Book of Mormon is always the “high priesthood,” the fact of being a high priest.<sup>20</sup> By contrast, the word *priesthood* appears 125 times in the Doctrine and Covenants and there mostly takes on the specialized

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20. The book of Abraham presents an interesting mix of definitions. Usage of *priesthood* in this book is somewhat vague, but, in my opinion, most instances in the text itself reflect the ancient definition of the term, which lends weight to the argument that it is an ancient text. The captions for the facsimiles, however, most definitely reflect modern usage.

meaning described above, although some of the early revelations had to be revised in 1835 to reflect this new and evolving meaning.<sup>21</sup>

Obviously, what we understand as priesthood in twenty-first-century Mormonism was not a familiar concept among the Book of Mormon peoples. Nor was it familiar to descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the Old World before Jesus' birth or to Christians during and shortly after his mortal ministry. Thus, the word *priesthood* appears only nine times in the Old Testament, all referring to the descendants of Aaron or, more generally, the Levites. *Priesthood* appears only seven times in the New Testament—five times in Hebrews 7 and twice in 1 Peter 2.<sup>22</sup> Not once does this word appear in the Gospels, and if it did, it would probably refer to the religious leader of the Jewish people, the high priest (similar to its usage in the Book of Mormon), or to the priests who served in the temple at Jerusalem, including Zacharias, father of John the Baptist. Sometimes we have a tendency to read into ancient

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21. See Smith, "Early Mormon Priesthood Revelations," 1–84, especially 8–9, 12–13, 39–43, 63 n. 15, and 64 n. 17; Prince, *Having Authority*, 39–40, 51–57.

22. A Catholic commentary on why the Greek word for priest (*hiereus*) is not used in the New Testament (with two exceptions) explains that to the early Christians, who were primarily Jews, it would have been absurd to refer to Jesus or his apostles as priests, because they were not Levites, who were the only ones who could be priests among the Jews. This is why the Greek term *presbuteros* was used instead. Interestingly, this commentary makes the following statement: "It is okay for Jesus to be a high priest because he was not a priest of the order of Aaron but of the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 6:20), an order which was older than the Aaronic one (7:1), which did not require a special genealogy (7:3), which was superior to the Aaronic order (7:4–10), which was prophesied to arise again one day (7:11; cf. Psalms 110:4), and which required 'a change in the law as well. . . . For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests' (7:12–14)" (Catholic Answers Staff, "Why Doesn't the Greek Word for 'Priest' in the Letter to the Romans Appear in the Bible More Often?," Catholic Answers, Aug. 4, 2011, <https://www.catholic.com/qa/why-doesnt-the-greek-word-for-priest-in-the-letter-to-the-romans-appear-in-the-bible-more-often>).

texts our current understanding of terms. This skews our perception of what Christianity was like in its earliest days or how God's people practiced their religion in Old Testament times. But clearly, the ancients' understanding of *priesthood* was different from our conception today.

In the Book of Mormon, none of the prophets is said to have the priesthood generally. Alma<sub>2</sub> confined himself to the high priesthood, meaning he gave up the office of chief judge and devoted all his time to being high priest over the church, but he wouldn't have claimed to "have" or "hold" the priesthood. His father, Alma<sub>1</sub>, began baptizing at the waters of Mormon, claiming simply that he had "authority from Almighty God" (Mosiah 18:13), not priesthood. And there is no evidence that he received this authority by the laying on of hands or by ordination. In fact, the circumstantial evidence argues specifically against it. Later, we read that Alma<sub>1</sub>, "having authority from God, ordained priests" (Mosiah 18:18). Interestingly, because Alma<sub>1</sub> had been a priest in King Noah's court, he could have claimed at that time to "have" priesthood or to be part of the priesthood, the body of priests, but only because of his position in the government of Noah, not because of the authority he received from God. A question that comes up now and then in LDS lessons on the Book of Mormon is how Alma<sub>1</sub> "received the priesthood." I've heard it hypothesized that he received the priesthood directly from God through the laying on of hands. But the record says no such thing (you'd think it would not omit such a glorious manifestation), nor does it require such an interpretation. This is simply an example of reading our modern concept of priesthood back into the ancient record. The more correct answer would be that Alma did not receive the priesthood from anyone because priesthood was not something people "received" in the Book of Mormon. Alma received authority from God, just as the record states, and he may have received such authority simply by word of mouth or by a manifestation of the Spirit, commissioning him to act as an agent of God.

After Alma's group of converts arrived in Zarahemla, King Mosiah gave Alma "authority over the church" (Mosiah 26:8), but again, this is not identified as priesthood, which had a very restricted meaning among the Nephites. This phrase means simply that he received permission from the king to lead the church within Mosiah's political realm. Earlier, when Abinadi was preaching to King Noah and his priests, including Alma, the record states that Abinadi "spake with power and authority from God" (Mosiah 13:6). Nowhere does the Book of Mormon identify this general authority from God with the specific word *priesthood*, although anachronistically we assign this label to the authority these men did obviously have. That Mormon did not make this connection is probably significant. Authority and priesthood were two distinct concepts in the Book of Mormon; we have conflated them in the modern Church.

Similarly, in the Old Testament, no prophet is directly associated with *priesthood*, although a few, like Samuel, do offer sacrifices. Descendants of Aaron *are* the priesthood, and, according to the LDS Bible Dictionary, "the presiding officer of the Aaronic Priesthood was called the high priest. The office was hereditary and came through the firstborn among the family of Aaron."<sup>23</sup> This is the modern LDS explanation, which, contrary to our present understanding, places the office of high priest under what we now consider the lesser priesthood. To the ancient Hebrews, however, the priests as a body would have been the priesthood, and the high priest was part of that priesthood, its highest-ranking member. The terms "Aaronic Priesthood" or "Priesthood of Aaron" never appear in the Old Testament, nor does the term "Melchizedek Priesthood." The prophets, as mentioned, were not said to have priesthood, although they obviously had authority. They were messengers of the Lord who spoke his word and recorded it and sometimes performed miracles in his name. Interestingly, the Old Testament identifies five different

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23. Bible Dictionary, "High priest," 659.

women as prophetesses. As with the prophets, they are not said to have priesthood (or even “priestesshood”).

In the New Testament, *priesthood* is never explicitly mentioned at the calling of the apostles or the “other seventy” (Luke 10:1) who were sent out, nor is it mentioned in connection with bishops or deacons. These individuals had authority, perhaps even a commission from the Lord, although it is possible they were simply chosen by their fellow saints, but any authority they had is not identified as *priesthood*. The more general term *authority*, however, appears thirty-two times in the New Testament (twenty-two in the Gospels), only twice in the Old Testament, and forty-three times in the Book of Mormon. So *authority* was an important concept in ancient scripture (except apparently the Old Testament), but *priesthood* was a much more restricted idea, referring specifically to the fact of occupying the office of priest, and particularly of officiating in priestly rituals. And this is how it is still primarily used in the non-LDS Christian world.

### Modern Usage

The fact that the modern Mormon understanding of priesthood does not appear in ancient scripture, including ancient LDS scripture, has bearing on the current debate about ordaining women to the priesthood. One of the common defenses offered for retaining the current priesthood prohibition is that women were not ordained to the priesthood in the Bible or Book of Mormon. This may or may not be true,<sup>24</sup> but by this same reasoning one might well ask, does the absence of the

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24. It has been argued that women served as deacons or deaconesses, a particular type of church official, in the New Testament church and in subsequent years as the church evolved. See, for instance, Ann Nyland, “Women in Bible Ministry—Phoebe the Deacon and Presiding Officer,” Dec. 14, 2008, <http://ezinearticles.com/?Women-in-Bible-Ministry---Phoebe-the-Deacon-and-Presiding-Officer&id=1787659>. Of course, as mentioned earlier, deacons may not have been part of the priesthood.

modern definition of priesthood in these books therefore invalidate it? The Church would certainly answer no. Thus, the absence of an idea or convention in ancient scripture does not necessarily prevent us from accepting it in modern times. Indeed, the practice of banning black men and boys from the priesthood had a stronger scriptural precedent (although murky and dubious) than does the practice of denying women this opportunity (see Abraham 1:25–27). Prior to 1978, some interpreted these verses in the book of Abraham as *positive* proof in the case of denying priesthood to blacks, whereas all we have regarding women is *negative* proof, the purported absence of a practice being interpreted as incontestable evidence that it should never happen, but this negative proof is by no means as convincing as we often portray it to be.

Regardless, the scriptural/historical meaning of *priesthood* (as opposed to the modern LDS definition) can be seen clearly in mainstream media descriptions of the pre-1978 priesthood ban. “Blacks could not be priests,” stated a 2012 *Atlantic* article,<sup>25</sup> and this exact wording appears in numerous other articles from various publications. Most non-Mormons would not understand the concept of “holding” the priesthood, since priesthood to them is not something one can hold, and therefore they do not use this uniquely LDS construction. Stephen Webb, a Catholic scholar who became fascinated with Mormonism before his untimely death in 2016, describes the Mormon priesthood and contrasts it with priesthood in mainstream Christianity:

Mormonism accepts the absolute sufficiency of Jesus’ blood atonement on the cross and rejects the need for a special class of priests set apart for performing sacred rituals.

Nevertheless, they have priests! Yet, as one might expect, their understanding of the priesthood fits no previous categories. Churches typically

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25. Edward J. Blum and Paul Harvey, “How (George) Romney Championed Civil Rights and Challenged His Church,” *The Atlantic*, Aug. 13, 2012, <http://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2012/08/how-george-romney-championed-civil-rights-and-challenged-his-church/261073>.

have a priesthood only if they have sacred rituals to perform, like the transformation of the bread and wine into the real presence of Jesus Christ. The priests who perform the Eucharistic transformation are thus heirs of the priesthood that performed the animal sacrifices in the Jewish temple. Mormons have a priesthood, but they do not treat the Eucharist, which they hold in their churches and not their temples, as a sacrificial ritual. . . . Rather than signifying expertise in performing rituals, the priesthood is a symbol of God's promise to grant believers an exalted and divine status in the afterlife. Instead of being a specially trained group set apart from other believers, Mormon priests are at the forefront of where the whole church should be heading. Mormonism thus follows Protestantism in democratizing the priesthood but follows Catholicism in associating the priesthood with increasing intimacy with Christ.<sup>26</sup>

Webb offers an outsider's view of the Mormon priesthood, perhaps not understanding entirely the sometimes confusing connection between priesthood and ordinances, but he does make a significant point: priesthood in both Judaism and Christianity is generally a specialized and separate order that exists for the sole purpose of performing sacred rituals. This is why most Protestant denominations do not have priests. I'm not sure, however, that Webb completely grasps the unique, abstract nature of Mormon priesthood. Still, this difference between the ancient notion of priesthood, which persists in the Catholic Church, and the Mormon conception is significant because, in modern Mormonism, priesthood as *the right to preside* is as significant as its capacity to officiate in rituals, which we refer to as ordinances. This seems also to be a modern development. Although some ancient prophets, such as Moses and

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26. Stephen H. Webb, *Mormon Christianity: What Other Christians Can Learn from the Latter-day Saints* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 150. Toward the end of this quotation, Webb is referring to the Protestant notion of a "priesthood of all believers," where "every individual has direct access to God without ecclesiastical mediation and each individual shares the responsibility of ministering to the other members of the community of believers" (*Webster's Third New International Dictionary*).



Enoch, did lead the people, most prophets did not preside over any sort of hierarchical organization. They taught, called people to repentance, performed occasional miracles, and spoke for God. Think of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, Elijah, Jacob (Nephi's brother), Abinadi, Samuel the Lamanite, and others. None of these prophets could be said to *preside* in the way we think of it today. They also could not be said to "hold" the priesthood. In modern Mormonism, however, we have combined several disparate notions from ancient scripture in creating a priesthood that is necessary not only for officiating in sacred rituals but also for being a prophet and for presiding in a hierarchical organization. Because the idea of presiding is so central to modern LDS priesthood practices, I will return to it in the sequel to this article. For now, though, let us merely conclude that in Mormonism we appear to have appropriated a word and assigned it meanings that it did not previously have. This affects almost everything we do in the Church.

### The Development of *Priesthood* Usage in Modern Mormonism

As might be expected, the modern Mormon definition of *priesthood* did not appear immediately with the establishment of the Church (or with the visit of John the Baptist). Just as the notion of priesthood as a form of authority does not appear in the Book of Mormon, it is likewise absent from Joseph Smith's earliest revelations. Indeed, I find it quite surprising that the word *priesthood* does not appear at all for well over a year after the organization of the Church. It is noticeably absent from the "Articles and Covenants" (now Doctrine and Covenants section 20). In other words, Joseph Smith did not invoke priesthood authority at all in organizing the Church. Even the instructions for performing baptism that now appear in Doctrine and Covenants 20 do not mention priesthood, merely the words "Having been commissioned of Jesus Christ" (v. 73). But these words are the result of later editing. The earliest extant

version of the “Articles and Covenants” contained this sentence: “And the manner of baptism & the manner of administering the sacrament are to be done as is written in the Book of Morman [*sic*].”<sup>27</sup> By the time this document was transcribed into Revelation Book 1, however, excerpts from the Book of Mormon had been added to provide the wording for these ordinances, including this: “And the way of Baptism is to be ministered in the following manner unto all those who Repent whosoever being called of God & having authority given them of Jesus Christ shall go down into the water with them & shall say calling them by name having authority given me of Jesus Christ I baptize thee in the name of Jesus Christ the Father & of the Son & of the Holy Ghost amen.”<sup>28</sup> No mention of “priesthood,” but a recognition that “authority” is needed.

The first appearance of the word *priesthood* in the revelations does not come until what is now Doctrine and Covenants section 68, received on November 1, 1831, more than a year and a half after the organization of the Church, where we find the following statement: “behold & lo this is an ensample unto all those who were ordained unto this priesthood whose mission is appointed unto them to go forth.”<sup>29</sup> Nothing earth-shattering there.

A search through the earliest Church documents reveals that the first instance of *priesthood* appears on October 1, 1831 in the minutes of a meeting: “Br Joseph Coe & William W. Phelps were ordained to the High Priest hood under the hand of Br. Joseph Smith jr.”<sup>30</sup> The usage here

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27. “Articles and Covenants, circa April 1830 [D&C 20],” *The Joseph Smith Papers*, n. 27, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/articles-and-covenants-circa-april-1830-dc-20/1#full-1257920176035385574>.

28. Ibid.

29. “Revelation Book 1,” *The Joseph Smith Papers*, 113, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/revelation-book-1/99>.

30. Matthew C. Godfrey, Mark Ashurst-McGee, Grant Underwood, Robert J. Woodford, and William G. Hartley, eds., *Documents, Volume 2: July 1831–January 1833*, vol. 2 of the Documents series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed.

is identical to that found in the Book of Mormon. Coe and Phelps, in other words, were ordained high priests. In a meeting held October 25, 1831, the minutes include a list of men “ordained to the Highpriesthood.” That this refers to being ordained a high priest is plainly evident from the lists that follow—of men being ordained elders, priests, teachers, and deacons. After the lists, we find the following text:

Br. Joseph Smith jr. said that the order of the High priesthood is that they have power given them to seal up the Saints unto eternal life. And said it was the privilege of every Elder present to be ordained to the Highpriesthood. . . .

Br. Sidney Rigdon said it was the privilege of those Elders present to be ordained to the High Priesthood . . .

Conference adjourned until 8 o’clock A.M. on 26th. . . .

Br. Signey Rigdon then made certain remarks on the privileges of the Saints in these last days. Remarks to those who were ordained to the High priesthood last evening, saying that the Lord was not well pleased with some of them because of their indifference to be ordained to that office . . .<sup>31</sup>

At this point in time, there was no concept of priesthood as an abstract authority encompassing various offices. There were only offices, and two of these were “priesthood” and “high priesthood” (priests and high priests). This is further attested by a revelation received on November 11, 1831, which, after significant alteration in 1835, became part of what is now Doctrine and Covenants 107. A portion of that revelation, in the earliest extant copy, reads as follows: “Also the duty of the president over the priesthood is to preside over forty eight priests & set in council with them & to teach them the duties of their office as given in the covenants And again the duty of the president over the office of

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Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, Richard Lyman Bushman, and Matthew J. Grow (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2013), 71.

31. Godfrey, et al., *Documents*, Volume 2, 80, 82, 85–86.

the Elders is to preside over ninety six Elders & to set in council with them & to <teach> them according to the covenants And again the duty of the president of the office of the High Priesthood is to preside over the whole church.”<sup>32</sup> Note the parallel usage of “priesthood,” “Elders,” and “High Priesthood.” Elders were not part of the priesthood or high priesthood. Priests *were* the priesthood, and high priests *were* the high priesthood. This was still true on January 28, 1832, as seen in the minutes of a meeting held in Independence, Missouri: “Names of Elders present who were ordained to the H.P.H. . . .” followed by “Names of Elders who were not ordained to the H.P.H.”<sup>33</sup> In other words, elders could be ordained to the high priesthood, in which case they became high priests, or they could remain unordained to the high priesthood, but either way, elders were not part of the high priesthood. As yet, there was nothing called the Melchizedek Priesthood.

The first mention of Melchizedek regarding priesthood came in February 1832, with the vision that became Doctrine and Covenants 76: “they are they who are priests and kings who having [received?] of his fulniss and of his glory and are prists of the most high after the order of Melchesadeck which was after the order of Enoch which was after the order of the only begotten son.”<sup>34</sup> This usage is similar to how it appears in the Bible: “Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec” (Hebrews 6:20). Interestingly, if you combine these two references, Jesus becomes a high priest after the order of himself, and so does Melchizedek, which looks like some sort of circular puzzle.

In September 1832, with two revelations that are now combined in Doctrine and Covenants 84, the offices of elder and bishop became “appendages belonging to the high priesthood” and the offices of teacher

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32. Ibid., 135. For a thorough discussion of the various revelations that now make up Doctrine and Covenants 107, see Smith, “Early Mormon Priesthood Revelations,” 1–84.

33. Ibid., 163.

34. Godfrey, et al., *Documents*, Volume 2, 186.

and deacon became “appendages belonging to the lesser priesthood.” As late as June 1833, there was still some fluidity in the terminology. In a description of the plat of the City of Zion (in Missouri), we find both “the high and most holy priesthood after the order of Melchisedeck” and “the high priesthood after the order of Aron.”<sup>35</sup> The two divisions were becoming clearer, but both were referred to as “high priesthood.” Eventually, an April 1835 revelation that became part of Doctrine and Covenants 107 makes further changes: elder was now an office in what was called the Melchizedek Priesthood, and teachers and deacons became offices in what was called the Aaronic Priesthood.<sup>36</sup>

### Implications for Priesthood Restoration

Although the header to section 13 of the Doctrine and Covenants (which purportedly gives the words John the Baptist spoke to Joseph and Oliver when he restored the Aaronic Priesthood) is dated May 15, 1829, the text of this section was actually extracted from Joseph’s 1838 history, so it was composed long after the event. John is reported here to have declared: “Upon you my fellow servants, in the name of Messiah, I confer the Priesthood of Aaron . . .” (D&C 13:1). As indicated above, however, the Aaronic Priesthood was not a concept in 1829 or even 1832. Indeed, *priesthood* did not seem to be on Joseph’s radar at all, even though the word appears in one book in the Book of Mormon, referring only to individuals who are high priests. So I suspect that the wording of section 13 is anachronistic, recasting John’s words in a later vernacular.

In Joseph’s 1832 history, he describes the experience this way:

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35. “Plat of the City of Zion, circa Early June–25 June 1833,” in *Documents, Volume 3: February 1833–March 1834*, edited by Gerrit J. Dirkmaat, Brent M. Rogers, Grant Underwood, Robert J. Woodford, and William G. Hartley, vol. 3 of the Documents series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, edited by Ronald K. Esplin and Matthew J. Grow (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2014), 127–30.

36. See discussion in Smith, “Early Mormon Priesthood Revelations,” 15.

(firstly) he receiving the testimony from on high secondly the ministering of Angels thirdly the reception of the holy Priesthood by the ministering of—Aangels to administer the letter of the Law <Gospel—> <—the Law and commandments as they were given unto him—> and in <the> ordinances, forthly a confirmation and reception of the high Priesthood after the holy order of the son of the living God power and ordinances from on high to preach the Gospel in the administration and demonstration of the spirit.<sup>37</sup>

The usage here appears to be consistent with the time frame in which it was written: no mention yet of the terms Aaronic or Melchizedek; the angels as yet unidentified; a subtle shift in referring to the priesthood as something that may be received, but likely referring to two different offices, the second “after the holy order of the son of the living God”; and a yet undeveloped sense of what the two types of priesthood were designed to do.

So what did John actually restore, and what words did he use? I suspect that Joseph’s 1844 account might be more accurate in this sense than some of his earlier descriptions: “I saw an angel & he laid his hands on my head & ordained me to be a priest after the order of Aaron.”<sup>38</sup> If John’s words reflected this description, it would partially explain why Joseph would have no real concept of *priesthood* after receiving from the angel the authority to baptize. So, I suspect that the Baptist, rather than declaring that he was conferring the priesthood of Aaron on Joseph and Oliver, more likely stated that he was ordaining them priests after the order of Aaron. The concept of priesthood as an abstract authority that could be conferred came later.

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37. Joseph Smith, “History, circa Summer 1832,” *Joseph Smith Papers*, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-circa-summer-1832/1>.

38. Joseph Smith, Sermon, Mar. 10, 1844, recorded by Wilford Woodruff in his journal, in *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph*, edited by Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook (Orem, Utah: Grandin Book, 1991), 327.

Now, what about the second visitation? Among LDS historians, a popular venture is to try to answer the question, “When did Peter, James, and John restore the Melchizedek Priesthood?” Various answers have been proposed, some of them relying on anachronistic evidence. But this may actually be what we might call a trick question, along the lines of “How many of each kind of animal did Moses take with him on the ark?” By trick question I mean a question to which there is no possible answer. Based on the usage of terms as described above and the evolution of the idea of priesthood, whatever Peter, James, and John did in 1829 or 1830, it is very likely they did not “restore the Melchizedek Priesthood.” Melchizedek Priesthood was not a concept either in biblical times or in modern times before about 1835, and the notion of priesthood as a thing that could be restored was linguistically impossible in the earliest years of the Restoration. Indeed, as mentioned above, the word *priesthood* appears to have been totally absent before the autumn of 1831.

It is apparent in the Bible (with Philip, in Acts 8) that a greater authority is needed to give the Holy Ghost than to baptize. The Book of Mormon is less clear about this, but Jesus did give his twelve disciples specific “power” to give the Holy Ghost (3 Nephi 18:36–37). How this was to occur, however, is a bit murky. The day after Jesus first appeared and gave them this power, the disciples baptized each other, and the Holy Ghost “did fall upon them” without any sort of separate ordinance or ritual. Likewise, in describing centuries later how the people in the church were baptized, Moroni simply explains that “after they had been received unto baptism, and were wrought upon and cleansed by the power of the Holy Ghost, they were numbered among the people of the church of Christ” (Moroni 6:4). Thus, it appears that the concept of a dual priesthood, two orders that referred back to Aaron and Melchizedek, was derived from a biblical and not a Book of Mormon framework.

According to William V. Smith, this development occurred in April 1835 with a revelation Joseph received: “The text of the April 1835 revelation takes the form of a lecture, settling different questions, establishing

terminology and the ordering of offices, and appealing to both Old Testament and New Testament–related narratives, a tradition with Joseph Smith, as well as combining several revelatory threads.”<sup>39</sup> This revelation now appears as Doctrine and Covenants 107:1–57, and, significantly, the latest edition of the Doctrine and Covenants now gives the appropriate time frame for the various portions of section 107, although it does not detail the significant edits that introduced new terminology.

The important point here, though, is that most accounts of the restoration of the Aaronic and Melchizedek priesthoods, all of which come from later dates, impose anachronistic linguistic formulations on earlier events in such a way as to give the impression that two distinct authorities were conferred upon Joseph and Oliver, and that they were called the Aaronic Priesthood and the Melchizedek Priesthood. Early Church documents, however, suggest that this was not possible. Whatever commissions or ordinations Joseph and Oliver received from angelic ministrants, it was only later that they came to be understood as the conferral of specifically named priesthood authorities.

### Priesthood Keys

Continuing with the theme of terms we assume we understand but maybe don’t, let us look at a rather nebulous term that over time has grown in importance in the LDS lexicon: *priesthood keys*. First, though, let me point out that the concept of priesthood keys exists only because of the unique LDS definition of priesthood. If priesthood meant simply the state of being a priest, we would have no such thing as keys. Keys exist only because priesthood has become an abstract principle, a generalized authority. Keys unlock this authority so that it can be used in various ways.

So, what exactly are priesthood keys? According to Bruce R. McConkie, “*The keys of the kingdom* [which may not be the same as priesthood

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39. Smith, “Early Mormon Priesthood Revelations,” 19.



keys] are the power, right, and authority to preside over the kingdom of God on earth and to direct all of its affairs.”<sup>40</sup> Joseph F. Smith taught that every man ordained to the priesthood has authority, but “it is necessary that every act performed under this authority shall be done at the proper time and place, in the proper way, and after the proper order. The power of directing these labors constitutes the keys of the Priesthood.”<sup>41</sup> The *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* defines priesthood keys as “the right to exercise power in the name of Jesus Christ or to preside over a priesthood function, quorum, or organizational division of the Church. Keys are necessary to maintain order and to see that the functions of the Church are performed in the proper time, place, and manner.”<sup>42</sup> Robert Millet and his coauthors explain that “the keys of the priesthood are the right of presidency.” They also point out, “While such persons as the Sunday School president, the Relief Society president, the Primary president, the Young Women president, and the Young Men president all have the right to inspiration and divine guidance because of the responsibility they bear, they do not hold keys.”<sup>43</sup> This last statement again tosses us into murky definitional waters. Most presidents of auxiliary organizations in the Church do indeed preside, as their title suggests, but they apparently preside without keys, which indicates that keys are not really necessary in order to preside, except in priesthood functions.

The notion that the presiding officer in a ward or branch of the Church holds the keys pertaining to the performance of ordinances in that unit was apparently not understood as late as 1838. Often in

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40. Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 411, italics in original.

41. Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine: Selections from the Sermons and Writings of Joseph F. Smith*, 5th ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1919), 136.

42. Alan K. Parrish, “Keys of the Priesthood,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, edited by Daniel H. Ludlow, 4 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 2:780.

43. Robert L. Millet, Camille Fronk Olson, Andrew C. Skinner, and Brent L. Top, *LDS Beliefs: A Doctrinal Reference* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2011), 361.

the early Church, teachers were specifically assigned to preside over congregations, so that high priests, elders, and priests could travel and preach. Therefore, teachers presided, even though they did not have sufficient authority to baptize or bless the sacrament, which suggests that they also did not possess priesthood keys regarding the performance of ordinances in the branches over which they presided.<sup>44</sup>

### Did Keys Exist Anciently?

Joseph Smith is reported to have taught that “the fundamental principles, government, and doctrine of the Church are vested in the keys of the kingdom,”<sup>45</sup> and “the keys have to be brought from heaven whenever the Gospel is sent.”<sup>46</sup> If this is true, we might well ask why there is no mention of this concept in any ancient scripture, including the Book of Mormon. Not only does the term *priesthood* appear very infrequently and then only in a very specialized usage in the Bible and Book of Mormon, but the word *key* appears even less frequently in ancient scripture. *Key* appears only one time in the entire Book of Mormon and, interestingly, occurs in the setting of Jerusalem, referring to the treasury of Laban (1 Nephi 4:20), which makes me wonder if this is a technology that the Lehites did not take with them to the promised land (even though Nephi was a *Wunderkind* of world-class proportions). The word *key* appears only two times in the Old Testament, once as a literal device to open a door (Judges 3:25) and once as a figurative expression: “the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder” (Isaiah 22:22). Similarly, this term, in singular or plural form, appears only six times in the New Testament, all of them used figuratively—“the key of the bottomless pit”

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44. Prince, *Power from On High*, 52–53.

45. Joseph Smith Jr., *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, edited by B. H. Roberts, 2nd ed., 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1971), 1:338 (hereafter cited as *History of the Church*).

46. *History of the Church*, 3:385–88.

(Revelation 9:1; 20:1), “the keys of death and hell” (Revelation 1:18), “the key of David” (Revelation 3:7), “the key of knowledge” (Luke 11:52), and “the key of the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 16:19). This last reference is the only one even loosely associated with priesthood keys, where Jesus is telling Peter he will build his church upon “this rock” and give him “the key of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven,” suggesting that this key involves making earthly acts valid in heaven. Of course, this key is never directly connected to priesthood in the New Testament, for Peter is never said to have priesthood. This reference, however, is probably where Joseph Smith came upon the idea of priesthood keys, even though this notion is far from clear in Matthew’s account. In contrast to the infrequent use of the word *key(s)* in ancient scripture, it appears sixty-three times in the Doctrine and Covenants, referring to the keys of the priesthood, of the kingdom, of patriarchal blessings, of the ministering of angels, of mysteries, of spiritual blessings, of salvation, and so forth, all usages being figurative.

This disparity in usage raises an obvious question. Could it be that mention of figurative keys is an indication of how prevalent literal keys might be in the society in question? A literal key opens a lock, generally on a door. That is its function. This sort of *lock* is mentioned only four times in the Old Testament, all in the book of Nehemiah. *Door(s)*, by contrast, is mentioned 198 times. In the New Testament, we find no *lock(s)*, although *door(s)* is mentioned thirty-eight times. Could it be that most doors in ancient Palestine did not have locks and therefore had no keys either? As mentioned, the word *key* appears only once in the Book of Mormon, referring to Laban’s treasury, which understandably would have had a door and a lock. But the word *lock* does not appear in the entire Book of Mormon, and *door(s)* appears only eight times. One of these instances is a quotation from Isaiah (2 Nephi 16:4), so it tells us nothing about Nephite society. Another is from the Savior’s

New World version of the Sermon on the Mount (3 Nephi 13:6), about praying in secret with the door shut. Of the remaining six instances, two refer to prison doors (Ether 7:18; Alma 14:27), two refer to tent doors (1 Nephi 16:10; Mosiah 2:6), one refers to the doors in the Jaredites' barges (Ether 2:17), and one is a figurative usage: "Yea, even at this time ye are ripening . . . for everlasting destruction; yea, and except ye repent it will come unto you soon. Yea, behold it is now even at your doors" (Helaman 8:26–27). From evidence in the book itself, the only doors among the Nephites that would probably have had locks and keys were prison doors. There is no direct evidence that the Nephite homes even had doors, although the verse in Helaman suggests they did. But nowhere do we read that those doors had locks or keys. Considering the scarcity of literal doors and the absence of locks in the Book of Mormon text, it is not surprising that the concept of figurative keys, especially keys to priesthood power or to salvation, likewise does not appear in the record. The figurative usage of words has little or no meaning where the literal usage is rare or totally absent. It should be mentioned, however, that the Book of Mormon does not include any other metaphor that might correspond to our modern concept of priesthood keys. Certain individuals had authority from God, although not a generic priesthood, and they did not apparently require keys or any other metaphorical device to use authority themselves or give it to others. Alma<sub>1</sub> and his descendants presided over the church, but none of them is said to have exercised priesthood or keys.

Whenever I hear someone refer to priesthood keys existing in the ancient world, I can't help but imagine a fictitious encounter between a modern Mormon theologian and Adam. Assuming Adam could understand English, if the theologian were to ask him whether he held priesthood keys, his likely answer would be, "What are keys?" His follow-up answer might be, "What is priesthood?" Physical keys were invented in ancient Egypt and Babylon, but these keys were made of wood, as were locks, and were both bulky and weak. Keys and locks made from

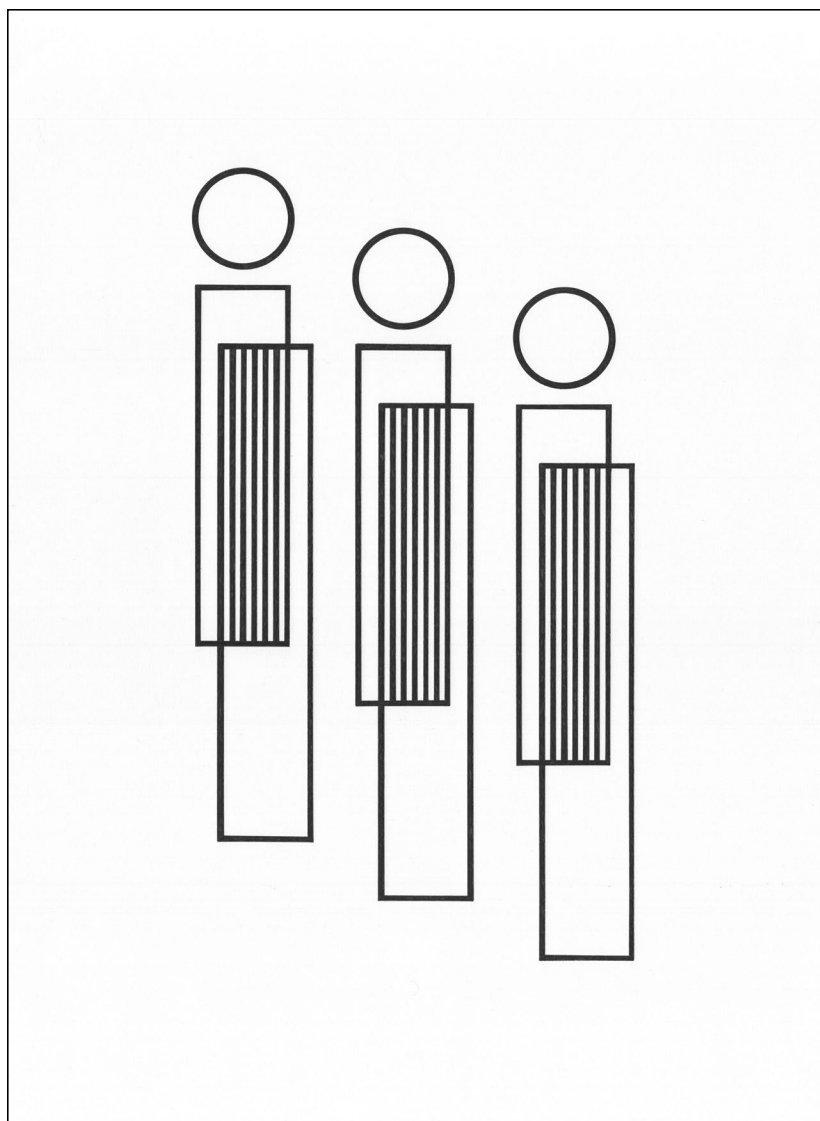
iron and bronze were invented in ancient Rome, which enabled them to be smaller and stronger. But Adam and the early patriarchs would not have been acquainted with physical keys and therefore would have had no understanding of figurative keys.

So if the ancients had no abstract concept of priesthood similar to the LDS notion of priesthood today, and if they had no figurative concept of keys connected to priesthood, where did this idea of priesthood keys come from? Michael Quinn suggests that “the doctrine of ‘the keys of the priesthood’ (and the related ‘keys of the kingdom’) became central to the question of presidential succession.”<sup>47</sup> The concept of presiding, of being at the pinnacle of a power structure, requires some sort of mechanism for maintaining order. Priesthood keys serve that function in Mormonism. But hierarchies have existed and continue to exist without any concept like priesthood keys. As long as established patterns of granting authority and providing for orderly succession are in place, organizations can and do thrive. As an aside, it is interesting to note that the presence of priesthood keys did not prevent multiple relatively credible claims to succeed Joseph Smith after his death. So apparently this concept was not widely understood (or perhaps not understood the way we view it today) prior to Joseph’s death.

This brings us to a good stopping point for the first article in this two-part series. In the sequel, I will examine several ideas that flow from the concepts discussed here, including ordinances, quorums, priesthood bans, and non priesthood authority in the Church.

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47. D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1994), 16.



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# THE WORD OF WISDOM IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN MORMONISM: PERCEPTIONS AND PRACTICE

John E. Ferguson III, Benjamin R. Knoll, and  
Jana Riess

Brigham Young University made headlines in 2012 for a series of controversies that would be, to say the least, unusual on most college campuses: a student-led push for the university to sell caffeinated beverages at student vending locations. Although a staple throughout the United States, caffeinated sodas had long been restricted from sale at BYU due to “lack of demand,” according to university officials.<sup>1</sup> Five years later, however, caffeinated soda was, at last, approved for sale on BYU’s campus. This was part of a larger conversation in which many in the LDS community expressed the belief that caffeine, from its association with coffee and tea, was either forbidden by doctrine or in a nebulous state of permissibility, leading to an official clarification that “the [C]hurch does not prohibit the use of caffeine.”<sup>2</sup> This controversy ultimately arose

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1. Bob Mims, “Holy Brigham Young (University)! Caffeinated Sodas Allowed on Mormon Church School’s Campus,” *The Salt Lake Tribune*, Sept. 21, 2017, <http://www.sltrib.com/news/2017/09/21/reversing-decades-old-policy-byu-sells-caffeinated-drinks-on-campus>.

2. Peggy Fletcher Stack, “OK, Mormons, Drink Up—Coke and Pepsi are OK,” *The Salt Lake Tribune*, Sept. 5, 2012, <http://archive.sltrib.com/article.php?id=54797595&itype=CMSID>. The day after this pronouncement was made, the Mormon Newsroom revised the statement slightly to clarify that the Word

from Mormons' interpretations of the Word of Wisdom, originally conceived as advice for Joseph Smith's followers to live cleaner, purer, healthier lives. Obeying what later became section 89 of the Doctrine and Covenants has evolved into a key identifying cultural marker for Latter-day Saints.

While refraining from coffee, tea, alcohol, tobacco, and other harmful drugs is widely acknowledged to be a highly visible component of Mormon religious practices, there has been little previous research conducted regarding patterns of Word of Wisdom adherence within Mormon communities. Using original data collected in the fall of 2016 by the Next Mormons Survey (NMS), we present a comprehensive overview of rates of Word of Wisdom adherence among American Mormons as well as the degree to which contemporary Mormons view the Word of Wisdom as central to their religious identity.

### Historical Development in Word of Wisdom Interpretation

Originally received in February of 1833, the Word of Wisdom is believed by the LDS Church to be a revelation to Joseph Smith regarding the appropriate dietary regulations for pure, healthy living.<sup>3</sup> The text forbade the consumption of tobacco, hot drinks (which have been generally interpreted to mean coffee and tea based on Joseph Smith's clarifications "five months after he gave the revelation"), and some forms of alcohol.<sup>4</sup> It also cautioned against the overconsumption of meat while advocating for the use of "wholesome herbs," fruit, and grains (D&C 89:1–14). However, scholarship on early practices indicates that Mormons' observance of

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of Wisdom "does not mention the use of caffeine." See Mormon Newsroom, "Mormonism in the News: Getting It Right," Aug. 29, 2012, <https://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/mormonism-news--getting-it-right-august-29>.

3. Thomas G. Alexander, *Mormonism in Transition: A History of the Latter-Day Saints, 1890–1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986).

4. Alexander, *Mormonism in Transition*, 274.



the Word of Wisdom in the nineteenth century was far less of a focal point than it later became, despite the Word of Wisdom's later being declared a firm commandment by President Lorenzo Snow on May 5, 1898, following the precedent set by "a statement from Brigham Young that the Word of Wisdom was a commandment of God."<sup>5</sup> Early Mormons eschewed drunkenness, for example, but did not entirely abstain from alcohol. Wine was served at Mormon weddings in the 1830s, at religious gatherings in which the Saints practiced speaking in tongues, and as part of the sacrament in church meetings.<sup>6</sup> Historian Laurel Thatcher Ulrich has chronicled the fact that "a jug seems to have been essential equipment" at Winter Quarters in the 1840s.<sup>7</sup> When he was president of the Church, Brigham Young himself did not always adhere to the Word of Wisdom's counsel. He maintained his habit of chewing tobacco until 1848, when he decided to quit the habit, and abstained successfully until 1857, when a painful toothache drove him to seek pain relief in chewing once again. He finally kicked the habit for good in 1860. In a sermon in March of that year, though, Young did not demand total abstinence from other brethren: he advised any men with a tobacco habit merely to "be modest about it," not spitting in public or taking out "a whole plug of tobacco in meeting before the eyes of the congregation." Rather, they were to go outside and avoid sullyng the parlors of Zion. "If you

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5. Ibid. It should be noted that there is evidence disputing whether Brigham Young declared the Word of Wisdom to be a commandment. See Robert J. McCue, "Did the Word of Wisdom Become a Commandment in 1851?" *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 14, no. 3 (1981): 66–77.

6. Robert C. Fuller, *Religion and Wine: A Cultural History of Wine Drinking in the United States* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996), 61–66.

7. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A House Full of Females: Plural Marriage and Women's Rights in Early Mormonism, 1835–1870* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2017), 165.

must use tobacco, put a small portion in your mouth when no person sees you,” he advised.<sup>8</sup>

Two generations later, Mormon leaders’ understanding of the Word of Wisdom had tightened considerably. In fact, interpretations over how and to what extent the provision should be interpreted and adhered to shifted with each new influx of Church leaders and General Authorities, with little resembling the uniformity of the modern interpretation until the early twentieth century.<sup>9</sup>

The turning point came with the broader national movement for Prohibition, which the LDS Church joined only after a near-decade of internal controversy during the 1910s. In 1921, adherence to the Word of Wisdom officially became a requirement for admission to the temple as part of a general transition into the new realities of Prohibition. Shortly after Prohibition was enacted, Church leaders strove to create similar official sanctions against tobacco use, linking it to “swearers, crooks of all kinds, ‘bums’ and prostitutes.”<sup>10</sup>

After Prohibition ended—which Utah’s vote ironically ensured by ratifying the Twenty-First Amendment—the LDS Church strove to maintain the same social proscriptions against alcohol and tobacco and expand them to exclude other substances. Specifically, Frederick

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8. Leonard J. Arrington, *Brigham Young: American Moses* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 312. For a contrasting account regarding early Mormon observance of the Word of Wisdom, see Paul Y. Hoskisson, “The Word of Wisdom in Its First Decade,” *Journal of Mormon History* 38, no. 1 (2012): 131–200. Drawing on primary documents and other contemporary accounts, Hoskisson argues that strict observance of the Word of Wisdom was expected of members during the Kirtland period but then relaxed after the Saints relocated to Nauvoo.

9. Thomas G. Alexander, “The Word of Wisdom: From Principle to Requirement,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 14, no. 3 (1981): 78–88.

10. See Jed Woodworth, “The Word of Wisdom (D&C 89),” *Revelations in Context*, *Church History*, June 11, 2013, <https://history.lds.org/article/doctrine-and-covenants-word-of-wisdom?lang=eng>, accessed April 21, 2017, and “Tobacco and Religion,” *Improvement Era* 26, no. 5 (1923): 472–73.

Pack of the University of Utah wrote in 1917 that Mormons should not drink Coca-Cola because “its physiological effect is very much the same as that of tea or coffee,” a position that earned support from Church officials in the 1920s.<sup>11</sup>

Nearly a century later, the current official interpretation of the Word of Wisdom is found in the Church’s handbook of instruction:

The only official interpretation of “hot drinks” (D&C 89:9) in the Word of Wisdom is the statement made by early Church leaders that the term “hot drinks” means tea and coffee. Members should not use any substance that contains illegal drugs. Nor should members use harmful or habit-forming substances except under the care of a competent physician.<sup>12</sup>

The above policy reflects some of the confusion that members may have regarding the Word of Wisdom, including questions about the status of caffeinated drinks and certain drugs, such as marijuana, which some could interpret as a “wholesome herb.” And the handbook guidelines have historically said nothing about decaffeinated coffee, prompting the First Presidency to respond in the late 1960s and early 1970s to a series of letters from local leaders who had inquired about Sanka, the main brand of decaffeinated coffee at that time. “The use of a beverage from which the deleterious ingredients have been removed would not be considered breaking the Word of Wisdom,” the First Presidency instructed a Provo stake president in 1969. “This would include Sanka coffee, and a temple recommend should not be denied to those drinking Sanka coffee.”<sup>13</sup> Other letters offered the same advice, sometimes identically worded.

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11. Frederick J. Pack, “Should Latter-Day Saints Drink Coca-Cola?” *Improvement Era* 21, no. 5 (1918): 432–35.

12. *Handbook 2: Administering the Church*, 21.3.11, § Word of Wisdom, <https://www.lds.org/handbook/handbook-2-administering-the-church/selected-church-policies/21.3?lang=eng&r=1#213>.

13. LDS First Presidency, “Letter to President A. Harold Goodman of the BYU Fifth Stake,” Feb. 12, 1969. Copy available for download at <http://religionnews>.

Within the past few years, the future of the observance of aspects of the Word of Wisdom has become less clear. Commentators have recently claimed that the growth of the LDS Church into a more global organization, as well as shifting domestic perspectives, might create a change in how the Word of Wisdom is observed and interpreted going forward. There is a growing list of inconsistencies between current interpretations of the Word of Wisdom and prevailing cultural norms in many countries, which often puts LDS missionaries in “awkward dilemmas.” These include contradictory views regarding the use of alcohol in cooking certain dishes, customary drinking of tea, and the consumption of caffeinated sodas in regions where it is the most accessible liquid that is safe to drink.<sup>14</sup>

Whether as a result of these pressures or not, the LDS Church has issued several statements in recent years clarifying the Church’s position on various implicit or assumed proscriptions in the Word of Wisdom. In addition to the 2012 clarification from Church leaders that caffeinated sodas are not proscribed by the Word of Wisdom, the Mormon Newsroom also issued two statements in 2016 regarding the use of medical marijuana.<sup>15</sup> The general guidance has been that medical marijuana is

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com/2017/09/25/hello-most-mormons-actually-do-drink-caffeinated-soda/. A nearly identical letter was sent to Curt Bench of Salt Lake City on October 17, 1966, from Claire Middlemiss, secretary to LDS President David O. McKay. Middlemiss states that President McKay had directed her to provide Bench with the same answer that the Church had provided to others who inquired about decaffeinated coffee: “that the drinking of Sanka is not in violation of the Word of Wisdom.” The letter to Bench goes further in saying that “Sanka, being 97 percent caffein [*sic*] free, is not considered harmful, and there is no objection to anyone’s using it as a warm drink.” Copy in Curt Bench’s possession.

14. Peggy Fletcher Stack, “Will the Word of Wisdom Ever Change?” *The Salt Lake Tribune*, Mar. 26, 2017, <http://local.sltrib.com/online/WoW>.

15. Robert Gehrke, “Mormon Church Elaborates on Reasons for Opposing Medical Marijuana Bill,” *The Salt Lake Tribune*, Feb. 16, 2016, <http://archive.sltrib.com/article.php?id=3532772&itype=CMSID>.

acceptable provided that it is used legally and by prescription, creating a shift in how many observers have interpreted what falls under the purview of “wholesome herbs.” The quickly shifting legal status of marijuana has thus led to a perceived instability in whether marijuana and other grey-area substances are entirely forbidden by the Word of Wisdom.

What seems clear is that modern-day interpretations of the Word of Wisdom as a whole emerged more out of the broader social and political controversies of the early 1920s than the original understandings and practices regarding Joseph Smith’s teachings and have become a focal cultural marker for members of the religion and outsiders alike.

### Previous Research on Word of Wisdom Observance

In contrast to the growing body of historical analyses of the Word of Wisdom, relatively little analysis exists regarding the modern behavior of Mormons and their adherence to the Word of Wisdom. Some scholars have looked at narrow subsections of the Word of Wisdom’s prohibitions and their influences on individuals’ health and lifestyles, particularly college-aged Mormons’ general levels of abstinence from alcohol and tobacco, as well as some other dietary practices.

An analysis of college-aged Latter-day Saints conducted by Rick Jorgensen in 2006, for instance, observed the behavior of a sample of BYU and Utah Valley University students, including both prescriptive and proscriptive aspects of the Word of Wisdom.<sup>16</sup> The study found a widespread consensus regarding what fell under “strong drink,” such as alcohol, tea, and coffee, but found a more even divide regarding whether energy drinks and nonalcoholic beer qualified as strong drinks; only a minority found soft drinks to fall under this category. The sample

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16. Rick B. Jorgensen, “Not by Commandment or Constraint: The Relationship Between the Dietary Behaviors of College-aged Latter-day Saints and Their Interpretation of the Word of Wisdom” (PhD diss., Brigham Young University, 2008), <http://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2699&context=etd>.

population also identified hot drinks in keeping with the definitions previously established. The study also asked college-aged Mormons about what fell under the prescriptive purview of “wholesome herbs” and found a sharp divide regarding whether to include dietary supplements, while 6 percent interpreted substances such as marijuana and opium to be wholesome herbs. The vast majority of respondents (87 percent) interpreted illegal drugs to be prohibited by the Word of Wisdom, with their interpretation of illegal drugs and the Word of Wisdom correlating strongly with their own history of usage.

Scholars have also looked at Mormons’ relationship with alcohol as subsets of larger data on drinking and religion. In a study published in 2007, Michalak et al. found that Mormons have the highest rate of abstention and ex-drinkers within a religion, with Mormons being only 13 percent likely to consume alcohol, lower than any other religious group included in the study.<sup>17</sup> At the same time, Mormons also had a three-to-two ratio of heavy drinkers compared to moderate drinkers, second only to the Church of God and Baptists, implicating habits of binge-drinking or alcoholism among Mormons who do drink. The authors are careful to note that when the rate of heavy drinkers among all Mormons (3.2 percent) is compared against the national average (5.2 percent), Mormons still have lower levels of alcohol consumption across the board. Michalak’s team also theorized that higher levels of religiosity lead to higher rates of abstention for individuals.

Michalak’s findings about religiosity and abstention also echo the 2004 analysis by Heaton, Bahr, and Jacobson, who found that use of alcohol, cigarettes, and drugs was negatively correlated with being LDS.<sup>18</sup> Among

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17. Laurence Michalak, Karen Trocki, and Jason Bond, “Religion and Alcohol in the U.S. National Alcohol Survey: How Important Is Religion for Abstention and Drinking?,” *Drug and Alcohol Dependence* 87, no. 2–3 (2007): 268–80.

18. Tim B. Heaton, Stephen J. Bahr, and Cardell K. Jacobson, *A Statistical Profile of Mormons: Health, Wealth, and Social Life*, Mellen Studies in Sociology, vol. 43 (Lewiston, N.Y: Edwin Mellen Press, 2004).

high school seniors nationally, for example, marijuana use was 18 percent versus 8 percent of LDS high school seniors. Among those with weekly church attendance, the differences were even greater, with religiously-active LDS teens far less likely than other teens to use alcohol, marijuana, tobacco, or illegal drugs. Related to this research are the findings of three BYU professors that LDS high school seniors have significantly lower rates of having drunk alcohol, used marijuana, or smoked cigarettes than high school seniors nationally.<sup>19</sup>

Scholars have also drawn parallels between Word of Wisdom observance and quantifiable health benefits. Ray Merrill, Gordon Lindsay, and Joseph Lyon's 1999 study compared tobacco-related cancer rates in Utah to the national averages, finding that Utah bears a significantly lower level of such cancers than the rest of the United States. The authors attribute this discrepancy to the influence of the LDS Church and the Word of Wisdom. Furthermore, research published by Monika Sandberg in 2007, at the time a graduate student at BYU, showed that LDS females are less likely to turn to "substance" use in response to "negative emotion" than non-LDS females, with "intrinsic religiosity" functioning as a better predictor for women's use of substances than other religiosity scales.<sup>20</sup>

### Observance of the Word of Wisdom: A Fresh Look

As shown, existing analyses of Word of Wisdom adherence among contemporary American Mormons are somewhat spotty. Our current objective is to present, for the first time, a nationally-representative overview of self-reported observance of the Word of Wisdom by self-

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19. Bruce A. Chadwick, Brent L. Top, and Richard J. McClendon, *Shield of Faith: The Power of Religion in the Lives of LDS Youth and Young Adults* (Provo and Salt Lake City: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, in cooperation with Deseret Book Company, 2010).

20. Monika Sandberg, "Eating and Substance Use: A Comparison of Latter-day Saint and Non-Latter-day Saint College Females" (PhD diss., Brigham Young University, 2007), <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd/1394>.

identified Mormons and former Mormons in the United States.<sup>21</sup> Our data comes from the 2016 Next Mormons Survey (NMS) administered by Jana Riess and Benjamin Knoll. This is an online survey collected by the survey firm Qualtrics using a panel-matching technique to identify and survey populations of interest in the United States. In our case, they sampled 1,156 self-identified Mormons and 540 former Mormons in the US. The survey was in the field from September 8 through November 1, 2016 and is representative of American Mormons and former Mormons nationally. (More information about the NMS can be found in the appendix at the end of the article.) To our knowledge, the NMS is the most extensive collection of Mormon attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors collected to date by independent or academic researchers.

To measure Word of Wisdom observance rates specifically, respondents were asked, “Have you ever consumed any of the following substances at any time in the last six months?” Our survey measured current and former LDS members’ usage of caffeinated sodas and/or energy drinks, non-herbal tea, alcoholic beverages, coffee, decaffeinated coffee, marijuana, tobacco, psychedelic substances, other illegal drugs (“heroin, cocaine, etc.”), and Postum (a coffee substitute). As we might expect, usage rates among current and former Mormons differ significantly and therefore will be analyzed separately.

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21. The LDS Church defines its members and former members by their status on official membership registration rolls, regardless of their level of activity and social or emotional attachment to the faith. In contrast, public opinion researchers of social topics such as religion must rely on survey respondents to describe their own demographic characteristics and are not usually able to independently verify the accuracy of these self-reported responses. In our case, we allowed respondents to self-select into the survey based on the nature of their identification with Mormonism. This means that “current Mormons” and “former Mormons” in our survey are those who *say* they are Mormons (or once were) regardless of their current status on the LDS Church’s membership rolls.



### *Current Members: Overall Word of Wisdom Observance Rates*

The most straightforward way we can examine patterns of Word of Wisdom adherence is by analyzing how many members are “squeaky clean” observers of the Word of Wisdom. In other words, how many Mormons reported that they have not consumed non-herbal tea, alcohol, coffee, tobacco, marijuana, psychedelics, or other illegal substances (including heroin and cocaine) in the last six months? Our survey results reveal that 45 percent of self-identified Mormons in the US said “no” to each of these substances.<sup>22</sup> Another 22 percent said “yes” to only one of them and 15 percent said “yes” to two. The rest (about 17 percent) said “yes” to three or more. It seems that fewer than half of American Mormons faithfully observe a literal prevailing interpretation of the Word of Wisdom by avoiding each of the substances most commonly understood to be prohibited.

When examining only Mormons who describe themselves as “very active” (regardless of frequency of church attendance) 60.5 percent of survey respondents reported that they avoided each of the substances prohibited by the Word of Wisdom. This decreases to 30.4 percent of those who say that they are “somewhat active” and 15.9 percent of those who say they are “not very active” or “not at all” active. Slightly more than half (52.9 percent) who attend church every week say that they avoid each of the substances listed above compared to 26.2 percent of those who attend once or a few times a month and 13.9 percent of those who attend seldom or never. Most interestingly, only 61.8 percent of current temple recommend holders say that they have not consumed

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22. We did not include the consumption of caffeinated soda/energy drinks in this part of the analysis given that it has generally been accepted as not violating the Word of Wisdom in recent years by Mormon leaders, as described previously. If caffeinated soda/energy drinks are included, this drops to 18 percent of self-identified Mormons who report having abstained from each of these substances in the last six months.

any of the substances forbidden by the Word of Wisdom in the last six months. This is especially noteworthy because Mormons are required to report to an ecclesiastical leader that they are faithful keepers of the Word of Wisdom in order to qualify for a temple recommend. This suggests that either a high number of Mormons are dishonest in the recommend interview process or that they are interpreting the Word of Wisdom with more nuance than one might expect by a large minority of active, temple recommend–holding Mormons.

There are also significant trends and patterns regarding specific substances prohibited by the Word of Wisdom. Our survey data shows that about two-thirds of current Mormons report having consumed caffeinated soda in the last six months (62.2 percent), while about a third report consuming coffee (35.2 percent). Nearly a quarter of current members report consuming alcohol (24.9 percent) or non-herbal tea (24.7 percent). Our findings on alcohol are consistent with the data recorded in the General Social Survey as analyzed by Heaton et al., who found that 27 percent of LDS respondents reported that they drink alcoholic beverages, as opposed to 71 percent nationally.<sup>23</sup> Nearly 17 percent of Mormon respondents in the NMS smoked or chewed tobacco, which is slightly higher than the GSS result of 13 percent. About one in ten (9.7 percent) consumed marijuana. Fewer than one in twenty Mormons report ingesting psychedelics (3.2 percent), while slightly more have used other illegal drugs such as cocaine or heroin (5.1 percent).

Interestingly, coffee alternatives such as decaffeinated (13.9 percent) or Postum (3.6 percent) have lower rates than regular coffee (35.2 percent). This is surprising because Postum has been deemed acceptable by LDS leaders.<sup>24</sup> The significantly higher rates of Mormons consuming fully

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23. See Heaton, Bahr, and Jacobson, *Statistical Profile of Mormons*.

24. LDS First Presidency, "Letter to President A. Harold Goodman of the BYU Fifth Stake," Feb. 12, 1969. Copy available for download at <http://religionnews.com/2017/09/25/hello-most-mormons-actually-do-drink-caffeinated-soda/>.

caffeinated coffee over these more acceptable alternatives is suggestive of the survey's larger finding that a number of current members have recently used substances explicitly prohibited by the Word of Wisdom as interpreted by modern LDS leaders.

### *Patterns in Word of Wisdom Observance*

One obvious explanation for the third of Mormons who report having had a cup of coffee in the last six months or for the quarter who have consumed alcohol or tea might focus on activity rates. After all, not every Mormon is active or holds a current temple recommend, the latter of which requires that individuals affirm that they “keep the Word of Wisdom” in the temple recommend interview process (although the interviewer does not at that time spell out what adherence would mean). While we reported earlier the proportion of active, church-going Mormons who report full and strict adherence to the Word of Wisdom, Table 1 shows the proportion (in percentages) of self-identified Mormons in the NMS who report consuming various individual Word of Wisdom substances by their self-reported level of activity, their temple recommend status, and how often they attend church. Very active or somewhat active Mormons comprised 87 percent of the self-identified Mormons in the survey, so this data can be considered generally representative of self-identified American Mormons as a whole. It is clear in Table 1 that all three measures showed that higher levels of religiosity correlate with higher levels of Word of Wisdom adherence.

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Table 1: Word of Wisdom Adherence and Religious Activity

	Caffeinated Sodas / Energy Drinks	Non-Herbal Tea	Alcoholic Beverages	Coffee	Decaffeinated Coffee/Sanka	Marijuana	Tobacco	Psychedelics	Other Illegal Drugs	Postum
<b>"Very active"</b>	58.1	18.8	12.9	21	12.5	7	11.4	2.9	3.5	5.4
<b>"Some-what active"</b>	62.2	29.1	34.6	47.1	14.5	11.6	22.4	3.8	7.1	1.4
<b>"Not too active"</b>	76	37	42.5	64.9	24.4	17.1	24.1	2.2	8.2	1
<b>"Not at all active"</b>	82	49.3	59	62	10.3	14.6	27.5	5.2	5.2	1.8
<b>Current TR holder</b>	57.8	18.3	10.9	18.4	10.2	5.4	10.1	2.9	3.2	4.2
<b>Not Current TR holder</b>	67.5	29.4	37.3	50.1	17.4	15.1	25.9	4.3	7	3

	Caffeinated Sodas / Energy Drinks	Non-Herbal Tea	Alcoholic Beverages	Coffee	Decaffeinated Coffee/Sanka	Marijuana	Tobacco	Psychedelics	Other Illegal Drugs	Postum
Convert Mormon	54.7	29.5	29.1	39.9	18.3	13.1	19.8	4.9	7.2	5.7
Born in the Church	67	21.7	22.3	32.2	11.1	7.6	15	2.2	3.7	2.3
Attend church at least once per week	57.7	20.8	17.5	27.4	14.3	7.4	12.5	2.7	3.1	4.3
Attend church once or twice per month	67.5	24.5	43.6	50.3	10	10.2	28.6	5.7	8	0.8
Attend church rarely or never	80	43.5	47.2	51.4	14.9	20.3	29.5	4.1	8.4	2.3

The self-reported “activity” measure tends to show the widest range of usage rates for each substance. In general, the data show that as self-

reported activity decreases, the rate of usage increases. This trend is particularly strong regarding the explicitly-forbidden substances found in the Word of Wisdom. In a comparison of members who self-identify as “very active” and those who said they were “not at all active,” there is a 46 percent increase in the number of members who have consumed alcohol in the past six months, a 40.9 percent increase in coffee consumption rates, and a 30 percent increase in drinking non-herbal tea.

Despite the lower rates of consumption among more active members, the fact that between ten and twenty percent of “very active” members report consuming coffee, tea, tobacco, or alcohol signals that there is a disconnect between prevailing interpretation of the Word of Wisdom and day-to-day practices of American Mormons. This disconnect becomes even more prevalent among members who are “somewhat active,” wherein almost half reported drinking coffee within the last six months, over a third drinking alcohol, and almost a quarter consuming tobacco in some form. All told, at least a substantial minority of “active” Mormons have broken their Word of Wisdom observance within the last six months. While the Word of Wisdom may be central to popular concepts of Mormon social identity, it appears to be far less central to members’ day-to-day lives.

Another cultural marker of Mormon orthodoxy and orthopraxy is whether the member holds a current temple recommend. In order for members to obtain a temple recommend, they must, among other things, declare their faithful observance of the Word of Wisdom. As such, temple recommend holders should (theoretically) have nonexistent rates of usage of these prohibited substances. Our survey results show that most temple recommend holders are indeed keeping the Word of Wisdom, but not all; between ten and twenty percent of temple recommend holders report that they consumed tea, coffee, alcohol, or tobacco in the last six months. This would suggest a number of possible interpretations. It is possible, for example, that a minority of temple recommend holders are not fully truthful in recommend interviews. Alternatively, these recom-

mend holders might consider themselves to be “keeping the Word of Wisdom” so long as they avoid these substances most of the time and do not consider an occasional indiscretion a violation of the “spirit” of the Word of Wisdom. It is also possible that these active, temple recommend–holding members simply interpret the Word of Wisdom more loosely or metaphorically than official Church guidance would mandate.

Our study also noted a difference between converts and lifelong Church members. Except for caffeinated beverages, converts reported higher rates of usage than members born into the Church by a margin of roughly 7–10 percent across each category. This distinction suggests that converted members may have greater difficulty abstaining from prohibited substances than members who were born into the Mormon culture and grew up with less exposure to alcohol, coffee, tobacco, and other drugs. It may also imply that early exposure and socialization is particularly influential in later observance of doctrinal practices like the Word of Wisdom.

Current members’ frequency of religious service attendance shows a similar general trend regarding Word of Wisdom observance. With most of the explicit Word of Wisdom prohibitions (non-herbal tea, coffee, alcohol, and tobacco), there is a significant difference between members who attend services weekly or more and those who attend once or twice a month. Except for tea, the differences in consumption of these main substances between weekly attendees and those who attend once or twice a month ranges from 16 to 23 percent. These larger shifts in usage drop off when comparing members who attend once or twice a month and those who attend a few times a year or less, with margins shrinking to 3.6 percent, 11 percent, and 0.9 percent for alcohol, coffee, and tobacco. In contrast, the consumption rate of non-herbal tea spiked between these two groups, with an increase of 19.1 percent. Nonetheless, it appears that about one in five regularly-attending Mormons in the United States have recently consumed coffee, tea, or alcohol.

A notable exception to this pattern is consumption rates of Postum, which advertises itself as “an alternative choice for those with religious dietary restrictions such as members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and Seventh-day Adventists.”<sup>25</sup> Postum has been viewed for generations as a safe, caffeine-free alternative to coffee for observant Mormons. Overall, the numbers were small for Postum consumption, with only 3.6 percent of respondents saying they had consumed it. In both the “activity” and temple recommend status measures, Postum usage increased among members with higher activity or with a temple recommend. The increase indicates that very active members may also subscribe to a letter-of-the-law reading of the Word of Wisdom.

Table 2: Word of Wisdom Adherence and Demographics

	Caffeinated Beverages	Non-Herbal Tea	Alcoholic Beverages	Coffee	Decaffeinated Coffee/Sanka	Marijuana	Tobacco	Psychedelics	Other Illegal Drugs	Postum
<b>Millennial</b>	57.6	26.7	28.9	39.3	18.2	17.3	22.7	6.7	7.2	3.4
<b>Generation X</b>	65.3	23.4	29.8	40.4	14.5	6.9	17.7	2.2	6.7	3.7

25. Brandon Judd, “5 healthy alternatives to coffee: Postum back on the shelves,” *Deseret News*, Jan. 10, 2013, <https://www.deseretnews.com/top/1236/2/Per-5-healthy-alternatives-to-coffee-Postum-back-on-the-shelves.html>.



	<b>Caffeinated Beverages</b>	<b>Non-Herbal Tea</b>	<b>Alcoholic Beverages</b>	<b>Coffee</b>	<b>Decaffeinated Coffee/Sanka</b>	<b>Marijuana</b>	<b>Tobacco</b>	<b>Psychedelics</b>	<b>Other Illegal Drugs</b>	<b>Postum</b>
<b>Baby Boomers/ Silents</b>	64.1	23.8	14.5	24.1	8.1	4.1	9.0	0.3	0.6	3.8
<b>Male</b>	59.9	26.2	29.2	39	18.2	13.5	22.1	5.4	7.4	3.7
<b>Female</b>	64.3	23.5	21.2	31.8	10.1	6.4	12.2	1.3	2.9	3.5
<b>White</b>	64.4	24.8	24.1	34.1	13.4	9.2	17.3	3.3	4.7	3.5
<b>Nonwhite</b>	46.9	24	30.5	42.6	17.4	13.6	14	3.1	7.5	4
<b>Income less than \$50,000</b>	31.9	26.1	24.2	36.6	12.1	12.2	21.8	4.3	5.6	3.9
<b>Income \$50,000- \$100,000</b>	62	25.8	23.9	33.9	18.3	7	11.3	1.3	4.1	3.1
<b>Income more than \$100,000</b>	57.7	18.2	29.7	33.8	9.33	8.3	14.5	4.7	5.4	3.9
<b>Less than college degree</b>	62.9	27.7	26.5	36.7	135	11.5	20	3.6	5.8	3

	Caffeinated Beverages	Non-Herbal Tea	Alcoholic Beverages	Coffee	Decaffeinated Coffee/Sanka	Marijuana	Tobacco	Psychedelics	Other Illegal Drugs	Postum
<b>College degree</b>	60.2	16	20.3	30.9	14.7	5.5	10.3	2	1.2	1.6
<b>Post-graduate degree</b>	62	24.9	24.9	34.9	14.7	7.7	12.32	3.7	8.3	10.3
<b>Lives in Utah</b>	71.6	20	12.2	22.1	6.3	5.5	9.1	0.9	2.9	3.1
<b>Does not live in Utah</b>	58.5	26.6	30	40.4	16.9	11.4	19.4	4.2	5.9	3.8
<b>Democrat and leaners</b>	59.5	31.3	36	52.6	18.2	14.8	23	5.7	6.5	6
<b>Independent</b>	60.77	24.4	27.8	30.7	9.2	14.1	17.8	6.1	6.7	2.6
<b>Republican and leaners</b>	64	21.1	18.2	26.3	12.4	60	13.2	1.3	3.9	2.4

Table 2 shows us that notable trends also exist among various demographic subgroups of Mormons when it comes to Word of Wisdom observance. In particular, a Mormon's level of education and whether or not the member lives in Utah is associated with a wider

range of Word of Wisdom adherence. Mormons with a college-level education report lower rates of usage than either their less-educated or more-educated counterparts. Current members with less than a college education and those with post-graduate education had similar, and higher, rates of usage than did members who identified as college graduates. Except for decaffeinated coffee, this pattern was evident for each of the Word of Wisdom substances. This pattern suggests that the unique experiences that members attain in their undergraduate careers may encourage better patterns of observance, or perhaps a particular series of life events, such as going from a mission into an undergraduate degree program directly into the workforce, encourages more strict patterns of observance.

Table 2 shows that geography also makes a difference. Across the board, Utah Mormons are less likely than non-Utah Mormons to have consumed any of the substances in question except caffeinated sodas, which is actually 13 percent higher among Utah Mormons than non-Utah Mormons.<sup>26</sup> Utah is clearly unique when it comes to the LDS Church, given that the Church's headquarters is located there and that it has by far the largest concentration of Mormons of any US state. It may be that the greater density of Mormons, and thus a greater concentration of religious homogeneity, provides a broader base for mutual support and accountability to maintain adherence to the Word of Wisdom. As previous research has demonstrated, social environment and relational networks can be very important factors influencing a person's religious behavior, even if the individual's own belief system is the most important factor.<sup>27</sup>

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26. These relationships remain even after statistically controlling for level of church attendance.

27. Carol Madsen Cornwall, "The Determinants of Religious Behavior: A Theoretical Model and Empirical Test," in *Latter-Day Saint Social Life: Social Research on the LDS Church and Its Members*, edited by James T. Duke (Provo: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1998), 345–72.

*Further Patterns in Word of Wisdom Adherence*

Table 3 reports the percentage of Mormons who reported consuming a particular Word of Wisdom substance in the last six months that also reported consuming another particular substance in the same time period. The table should be interpreted as follows: the numbers in each cell indicate the proportion of people who said “yes” to the substance in the column who also reported saying “yes” to the substance in the row. For example, the second column of the third row shows us that 28.8 percent of those who said yes to caffeinated sodas also said yes to non-herbal tea.

Table 3: Rates of Joint Consumption of  
Word of Wisdom Prohibitions

% who say yes to COLUMN who also say yes to ROW.	Caffeinated Beverages	Non-Herbal Tea	Alcoholic Beverages	Coffee	Marijuana	Tobacco	Psychedelics	Other Illegal Drugs
Caffeinated beverage		72.4	72.6	70.3	59.8	72.8	50.0	64.4
Non-herbal tea	28.8		41.7	41.4	44.2	39.0	62.2	51.7
Alcohol	29.1	42.0		52.8	60.2	59.5	60.5	62.7
Coffee	39.8	58.9	74.7		56.3	72.3	67.6	74.1

% who say yes to COLUMN who also say yes to ROW.	Caffeinated Beverages	Non-Herbal Tea	Alcoholic Beverages	Coffee	Marijuana	Tobacco	Psychedelics	Other Illegal Drugs
<b>Marijuana</b>	9.3	17.5	23.5	15.5		31.8	60.5	53.4
<b>Tobacco</b>	19.7	26.6	40.3	34.6	54.9		64.9	67.8
<b>Psychedelics</b>	2.6	8.0	8.0	6.1	20.4	12.3		30.5
<b>Other illegal substances</b>	5.3	10.5	12.8	10.6	27.7	20.5	47.4	

We can see from Table 3 some additional distinct patterns in Word of Wisdom adherence. In general, non-adherents tend to split into two primary groups: those who consume legal substances and those who consume illegal substances. In other words, Mormons who report consuming one legal Word of Wisdom substance were more likely to also consume other legal substances and those who said they had consumed one *illegal* Word of Wisdom substance were more likely to also partake of other illegal substances.

Specifically, of the members who said they consumed coffee in the last six months, a little over half (52.8 percent) reported drinking alcohol, about two-fifths (41.4 percent) said they drank non-herbal tea, and about a third (34.6 percent) said that they smoked or chewed tobacco. Of those who drank alcohol, three-quarters (74.7 percent) reported drinking coffee, about 40 percent consumed either tea or tobacco, and roughly a quarter (23.5 percent) used marijuana. Of the various legal substances,

it seems that those who drank coffee and tea were least likely to report consuming the other substances, followed by alcohol and then tobacco.

In contrast, members who consumed marijuana, psychedelics, or other illegal drugs showed a higher rate of using other prohibited substances. Among marijuana users, about 20 percent also used psychedelics and 28 percent used other illegal drugs. The small number of Mormons who used psychedelics had higher rates of consuming marijuana and other illegal drugs—about 61 percent and 47 percent, respectively. Those who used other illegal drugs followed the psychedelics users' trend, with about 53 percent using marijuana and 31 percent consuming psychedelics. These patterns provide context to the possible thought processes of Mormons who consume these substances, who either defer to legal substances or prefer illegal substances but are less likely to consume products from both groupings.

We can also infer patterns of preferred substances among Word of Wisdom non-adherents. In general, coffee consumption, although found in higher rates among drinkers and smokers, is less indicative of using alcohol and tobacco, while the inverse is true for alcohol and tobacco. The same is true for the "illegal substances" grouping. Marijuana usage alone is comparatively less likely to predict members' usage of other substances, while the presence of psychedelics and other illegal drugs tends to correlate with marijuana usage. In other words, if members violate the Word of Wisdom but stay within the "legal" category, our data indicates that coffee and tea are generally more common than alcohol or tobacco. If members cross into illegal usage, though, marijuana becomes the more "acceptable" option.

That non-adherence tends to sort into these two key categories—legal vs. illegal consumption—suggests an additional important point. When Mormons chose to violate the Word of Wisdom, it does not seem to become an "all or nothing" affair. The majority of those who consumed coffee, tea, or alcohol did *not* also report consuming marijuana, cocaine, heroin, or psychedelics. It would not be fair, then, to assume

that coffee, tea, or alcohol function as gateway drugs to crack and heroin for Mormons, just as they do not function in that way for the majority of the American population.

### *Attitudes Toward the Word of Wisdom Observance*

So far, we have detailed patterns of Word of Wisdom observance rates among American Mormons, but what do Mormons *think* about the Word of Wisdom and how it relates to their religious identity? The NMS presented respondents with a variety of statements representing important “cultural markers” of Mormons in American culture and asked them to indicate “how important is each of the following for being a good Mormon?” When it comes to “not drinking coffee and tea,” 37.5 percent of American Mormons said that it is “essential” to being a good Mormon. Another 31.6 percent said that it is “important but not essential,” 18.1 percent said it is “not too important” and the remaining 12.8 percent said it is “not at all important.” In other words, less than half of American Mormons view the prohibition against coffee and tea as an indispensable component of Mormon identity and nearly a third said that it is of low importance.

In contrast, attitudes toward alcohol and Mormon identity are much stronger. When it comes to “not drinking alcoholic beverages,” 57.2 percent said that this is “essential” to being a good Mormon, with another quarter (25.3 percent) saying that it is “important but not essential,” and the remaining 17.5 percent opining that it is either “not too important” or “not at all important.” Just as consumption rates differ among Mormons between coffee and alcohol, so do attitudes about the centrality of both to Mormon identity. It seems that while many Mormons might shrug their shoulders at a member of their ward indulging in an occasional Starbucks latte, drinking a weekend margarita would be met with much stronger disapproval.

Further interesting patterns are evident in opinions about the centrality of Word of Wisdom observance to Mormon identity. Whether or

not a Mormon views Word of Wisdom observance as “essential” or not does not much depend on their personal income, gender, level of education, or convert status. However, a number of other things *do* matter.

Table 4: Patterns of Word of Wisdom Adherence and Mormon Identity

	% who say not drinking coffee/tea is “essential” to being a good Mormon	% who say not drinking alcohol is “essential” to being a good Mormon
<b>Millennial</b>	31.2	46.0
<b>Generation X</b>	31.7	52.2
<b>Boomer/Silent</b>	51.8	76.3
<b>Live inside Utah</b>	49.2	70.0
<b>Live outside Utah</b>	32.9	52.1
<b>Attend church at least once per week</b>	42.9	63.4



	% who say not drinking coffee/tea is "essential" to being a good Mormon	% who say not drinking alcohol is "essential" to being a good Mormon
Attend church less than once per week	22.4	39.7
Democrat and leaners	25.5	40.2
Independent	32.3	59.3
Republican and leaners	45.2	66.2
White	39.3	60.1
Non-white	25.0	37.1
Consumed coffee in last six months	16.9	40.4
Did not consume coffee in last six months	48.7	66.3

	% who say not drinking coffee/tea is "essential" to being a good Mormon	% who say not drinking alcohol is "essential" to being a good Mormon
<b>Consumed alcohol in the last six months</b>	18.8	27.2
<b>Did not consume alcohol in the last six months</b>	43.7	67.1

Table 4 shows us that younger Mormons are much less likely to define Mormon identity by Word of Wisdom observance than are older Mormons. Less than half of Millennials view avoiding alcohol as essential to Mormon identity, and less than a third think the same about coffee/tea, compared to three-quarters and half of the Boomer/Silent generation, respectively. Mormons who live inside Utah are about 20 percent more likely to view Word of Wisdom observance as essential compared to non-Utah Mormons. As we might expect, levels of church attendance also make a difference, with more active Mormons viewing the Word of Wisdom as more essential. As with observance rates, we again see a partisan difference. Mormon Democrats are about 20 percent less likely than Mormon Republicans to view Word of Wisdom observance as essential to Mormon identity. We also see a similar pattern for non-white Mormons compared to white Mormons. In sum, those most likely to link Word of Wisdom

observance to Mormon identity are older, religiously active, politically conservative, white, Utah Mormons.

It is noteworthy that among Mormons who adhere to the Word of Wisdom's prohibition on coffee, less than half (49 percent) consider this abstention to be essential to Mormon identity. Similarly, only two-thirds (67.1 percent) of alcohol abstainers view teetotaling as essential to Mormon identity. Even among Mormons who faithfully adhere to the Word of Wisdom, there seems to be a good deal of leeway in the degree to which they consider coffee, tea, and alcohol consumption as integral to Mormon identity.

It may also be helpful to compare the centrality of Word of Wisdom observance to Mormon identity with other Mormon "cultural markers." This is how many Mormons say that each cultural marker is "essential" to being a good Mormon:

- 85.0 percent – believing Jesus Christ is the Savior
- 64.1 percent – a belief in a literal appearance of God to Joseph Smith
- 63.0 percent – obeying counsel of LDS prophets and General Authorities
- 60.6 percent – working to help the poor and the needy
- 60.4 percent – attending church regularly
- 57.2 percent – not drinking alcohol
- 57.1 percent – believing that the LDS Church is the only true church
- 48.9 percent – having regular Family Home Evening
- 37.5 percent – not drinking coffee/tea
- 28.2 percent – not watching R-rated movies

Apparently, in the minds of contemporary Mormons, there is a strong consensus that a "good Mormon" believes in the divine role of Jesus Christ. A little less than two-thirds of Mormons think that church attendance, helping the poor and needy, and belief in the divine role of Joseph Smith and current leaders are essential to Mormon identity. Abstaining from alcohol is a little less central, roughly equivalent to believing in the

unique status of the LDS Church as the only true church. Only about a third of Mormons today see abstinence from coffee, tea, and R-rated movies as central to Mormon identity.

Of course, it is one thing to consider Word of Wisdom adherence in the abstract. What if it were one of your own children who decided not to follow the guidelines of the Word of Wisdom? We asked Mormon respondents to indicate how “saddened” or “disappointed” they would be if their children (or hypothetical future children) engaged in a series of activities that would put them at odds with prevalent Mormon cultural expectations. These include not serving a mission, cohabitating before marriage, leaving the Church, coming out as gay/LGBT, as well as not observing the Word of Wisdom.

Nearly half (44.7 percent) of American Mormons said that they would be “very saddened/disappointed” if their children did not faithfully observe the Word of Wisdom. Another third (36 percent) said they would be slightly saddened/disappointed, and only 19.3 percent said that it would not sadden or disappoint them. (This is nearly identical if limited only to those who have actually had children.) These figures change to 53.8 percent, 34.1 percent, and 12.2 percent, respectively, for those who attend church services at least once a week. For each of these, the strongest predictors are level of church activity and political partisanship. The more frequently someone attends church and the more politically conservative someone is, the more disappointed they would be if their children were not to keep the Word of Wisdom (and vice versa).

It is again helpful to compare how the Word of Wisdom ranks along other violations of Mormon cultural expectations in terms of causing parental disappointment. This is the percentage of Mormons who said that they would be “very” saddened or disappointed if their children:

- 56.5 percent – openly criticized the LDS Church
- 48.4 percent – came out as gay/LGBTQ
- 48.4 percent – became inactive/left the Church
- 46.5 percent – cohabitated with partner outside of marriage
- 44.7 percent – did not faithfully observe the Word of Wisdom
- 43.4 percent – did not raise their own children as Mormon
- 42.0 percent – did not marry in the temple
- 28.9 percent – married someone from a different religion
- 28.1 percent – did not attend seminary/institute
- 24.3 percent – did not serve a full-time mission
- 19.9 percent – did not go to a church school like BYU

It seems that for Mormon parents, having a child who does not keep the Word of Wisdom is roughly as heartbreaking as cohabitating before marriage, going inactive or leaving the Church, identifying as gay/LGBT, or not marrying in the temple. The Word of Wisdom is even more important to Mormon parents, it seems, than going on a mission or attending seminary/institute. At the same time, less than half of Mormons say that they would be very disappointed if their children chose not to keep the Word of Wisdom. This increases to only slightly over half (53.8 percent) among Mormons who attend church faithfully every week.

To summarize: roughly half of Mormons think that following the Word of Wisdom is essential to being a good Mormon (although this varies depending on the specific substance) and roughly the same proportion would be very disappointed if their children did not keep the Word of Wisdom. About another third think the Word of Wisdom is important, but not essential, to Mormon identity and would be only slightly disappointed if their children chose not to keep it. The other 20 percent (or so) do not put much weight on the Word of Wisdom either in the abstract or for their own children. This last group includes around 10–15 percent of all those who attend church services faithfully every week.

Word of Wisdom Adherence among Former Mormons

Table 5: Comparison of Word of Wisdom Adherence among Current and Former Mormons

	Caffeinated Beverages	Non-Herbal Tea	Alcoholic Beverages	Coffee	Decaffeinated Coffee/Sanka	Marijuana	Tobacco	Psychedelics	Other Illegal Drugs	Postum
Current Mormons	62.2	24.7	24.9	35.2	13.9	9.7	16.9	3.2	5.1	3.6
Former Mormons	77.7	40.3	61.7	75.7	16.1	18	35.1	4.3	6.4	0.9

As a final analysis, we can compare Word of Wisdom adherence rates between current Mormons and former Mormons. Table 5 confirms the conventional wisdom that former members of the Church tend to be more likely to consume substances that are implicitly or explicitly prohibited by the Word of Wisdom. While the consumption of decaffeinated coffee is relatively close between the two groups, former members drink alcohol, drink coffee, and consume tobacco at rates more than twice those of current members. In all, only 8 percent of former Mormons continue to live the full Word of Wisdom by reporting that they have not consumed tea, coffee, alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, psychedelics, or other illegal substances in the last six months.

Interestingly, former Mormons drink alcohol at about the same rates as the general US population. Where 62 percent of former Mormons reported drinking alcohol in the last six months, about 56 percent of the US population said that they have had a drink the last month and 70 percent in the last year.<sup>28</sup> In contrast, former Mormons report consuming tobacco at a higher rate than the national average. According to the same national study, about 20 percent of Americans have smoked or chewed tobacco recently compared to about a third of former Mormons. Gallup reports that 64 percent of Americans drink a cup of coffee a day, compared to 74 percent of former Mormons who drank coffee in the last six months.<sup>29</sup> While this is not an apples-to-apples comparison—and the wider range in time in which former Mormons drank coffee compared to the nationwide sample likely inflates the relative magnitude of the former Mormons' consumption rate—there is some evidence that former Mormons drink coffee and alcohol at rates comparable to the broader American population.

## Conclusion

In *The Book of Mormon* Broadway musical, a memorable sequence depicts a “Spooky Mormon Hell Dream” where Elder Price experiences a nightmare full of evil: Genghis Khan, Jeffrey Dahmer, Adolf Hitler, and . . . dancing cups of coffee. While of course satirical, it conveys something about how Mormonism is perceived in contemporary

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28. Jonaki Bose, Sarra L. Hedden, Rachel N. Lipari, Eunice Park-Lee, et al., “Key Substance Use and Mental Health Indicators in the United States: Results from the 2015 National Survey on Drug Use and Health,” Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality, Department of Health and Human Services, 2016, [https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/NSDUH-FFR1-2015/NSDUH-FFR1-2015.htm#alcohol01](https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/NSDUH-FFR1-2015/NSDUH-FFR1-2015/NSDUH-FFR1-2015.htm#alcohol01).

29. Lydia Saad, “Americans’ Coffee Consumption Is Steady, Few Want to Cut Back,” *Gallup News*, July 29, 2015, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/184388/americans-coffee-consumption-steady-few-cut-back.aspx>.

American culture, as well as how Mormons perceive themselves and their practices. Contrary to popular perceptions, though, it seems that coffee consumption is not universally shunned in Mormonism. Moreover, there is a wide variety of practices, opinions, and beliefs when it comes to Mormon observance of the Word of Wisdom, even among active, faithful members.

Some Mormons directly question the internal logic of which substances are prohibited and which are not: “I have reached a point where I feel that the way the Word of Wisdom is interpreted is very arbitrary. I have no idea when they started to interpret the ‘hot drinks’ thing as coffee and tea, but it seems so arbitrary to me. In many respects, drinking coffee is healthier than drinking caffeinated soda. I try to eat healthy and live a generally healthy life, which is important for a spiritual and practical perspective. But I don’t feel that a sort of one-size-fits-all code makes sense.”<sup>30</sup> Elsewhere, communities of active Mormons are meeting up surreptitiously at coffee shops. As one group member put it: “I actually tried coffee recently, because my BYU . . . professor, and I trust him, says there’s nothing in it that’s bad for you. There’s a really nice coffee shop down the street, and a lot of BYU students go there. We don’t rat each other out. I know a group that goes [once a week].”<sup>31</sup>

Then there are many Mormons who reflect traditional interpretations of the Word of Wisdom: “The way I think about the Word of Wisdom is that it’s really about us obeying a law that we feel God has given to us through a prophet, because it’s a show of our love for God and our obedience. There are certain things we’re asked to do in the Word of Wisdom that maybe don’t seem that important. Is drinking coffee going to keep you out of heaven? No. It’s going to keep you out of the temple,

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30. Penny, 25, telephone interview with one of the authors, July 14, 2017.

31. K.C., 19, telephone interview with one of the authors, Feb. 27, 2017.



but not heaven.<sup>32</sup> Those spiritual reasons are paramount.”<sup>33</sup> Others are like Elaine, who, after years of struggling with bipolar disorder, credits her successful managing of her mental illness, in part, to faithful observance of the Word of Wisdom: “I think it has probably saved my life from addiction. I have such an addictive personality, and with my mental illness history, there are so many times that I have looked at someone drinking a glass of wine and thought, ‘Holy moly, if I didn’t have the Word of Wisdom that would be me, and it would be a huge problem. I would not be able to stop.’”<sup>34</sup>

The survey results we present here shed much additional light on how the Word of Wisdom is understood and practiced in contemporary American Mormonism. These results are, to our knowledge, the most comprehensive and representative analysis of Word of Wisdom observance of contemporary Mormons and former Mormons in the United States conducted by independent researchers to date. A quantitative analysis of the 2016 Next Mormons Survey reveals that Word of Wisdom adherence is somewhat less than ideal from the perspective of orthoprax Mormonism. Only about half of current Mormons report that they have assiduously avoided every clearly prohibited Word of Wisdom substance in the last six months. This increases only to around 60 percent when it comes to active members or even temple recommend holders.

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32. It is interesting to compare the interviewee’s response with the orthodox LDS belief that temple ordinances are required for entrance to the highest level of the celestial kingdom. Either the interviewee is drawing a very fine distinction, opining that coffee consumption might allow for someone to enter a degree of heaven (“degree of glory”) or perhaps the interviewee does not ultimately believe that temple ordinances are literally necessary for entrance to heaven. Either way, this reveals something noteworthy about the role of the temple in contemporary orthodox Mormon belief.

33. Chrissy, 33, telephone interview with one of the authors, Sept. 18, 2017

34. Elaine, 35, telephone interview with one of the authors, Sept. 29, 2017.

Our survey findings show that coffee is the most popular “prohibited” substance among American Mormons, with about a third of Mormons reporting drinking coffee in the last six months. Alcohol and tea, for their part, are consumed by about a quarter of self-identified Mormons. We also found that, as one might expect, levels of activity, church attendance, and temple recommend status are the strongest predictors of Word of Wisdom adherence, although levels of education, age, and geography also play a role. The analysis also showed that even Mormons who choose not to adhere to the Word of Wisdom exercise discretion when it comes to which substances are legal and which are not. A strong majority of Word of Wisdom violators still refrain from marijuana and other illegal drugs.

Perhaps most importantly, the NMS revealed that Word of Wisdom adherence plays a smaller role than might be expected in defining Mormon identity among Mormons themselves. Despite the fact that Word of Wisdom compliance is required for a temple recommend, which orthodox Mormons believe permits them to receive the highest levels of salvific ordinances, there is no strong consensus among Mormons themselves that Word of Wisdom compliance is essential to “being a good Mormon” (although a majority would say that it is, at least, “important”). This is the case even for active members.

This has significant implications for how the Word of Wisdom will shape Mormon identity in coming years and decades. Even among active members, younger Mormons are less likely to adhere faithfully to the Word of Wisdom and are less persuaded that it is an essential component of Mormon identity. What will happen when they begin to occupy significant positions of power and influence in Mormon decision-making circles at local, regional, and global levels? If nothing else, the history of how the Word of Wisdom has been read, interpreted, and practiced, combined with patterns in how it is practiced today, strongly suggest that its meaning and importance will likely shift over time—just as it has shifted since its beginnings in 1833.

## Appendix: The Next Mormons Survey

The Next Mormons Survey (NMS) was in the field from September 8 to November 1, 2016, though the majority of responses were collected during September. In all, 1,156 self-identified Mormons were included in the final sample, as well as 540 former Mormons, for a total of 1,696 completed surveys. The current Mormon sample has a standard survey margin of error of  $\pm 3$  percent and the former Mormon sample has a margin of error of  $\pm 4$  percent. The survey design and question wording received approval from Centre College's Institutional Review Board (IRB) on September 1, 2016.

Responses to the NMS were collected via the online survey firm Qualtrics, which uses a "panel matching" technique to acquire sufficient responses. Surveyors can specify a variety of demographic or response quotas to increase the representativeness of the survey respondents to the population of interest. Research has shown that online samples from reputable firms such as Qualtrics produce samples that are comparable in representativeness to randomized telephone surveys.<sup>35</sup> Online panel-matching surveys are becoming increasingly common in high-quality, peer-reviewed scholarly research, including research on Mormon public opinion.<sup>36</sup>

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35. See Courtney Kennedy, Andrew Mercer, Scott Keeter, Nick Hatley, Kyley McGeeney, and Alejandra Gimenez, "Evaluating Online Nonprobability Surveys," *Pew Research Center*, May 2, 2016, <http://www.pewresearch.org/2016/05/02/evaluating-online-nonprobability-surveys>, and Miliakiela S. J. Heen, Joel D. Lieberman, and Terance D. Miethe, "A Comparison of Different Online Sampling Approaches for Generating National Samples," UNLV Center for Crime and Justice Policy, Sept. 2014, [https://www.unlv.edu/sites/default/files/page\\_files/27/ComparisonDifferentOnlineSampling.pdf](https://www.unlv.edu/sites/default/files/page_files/27/ComparisonDifferentOnlineSampling.pdf).

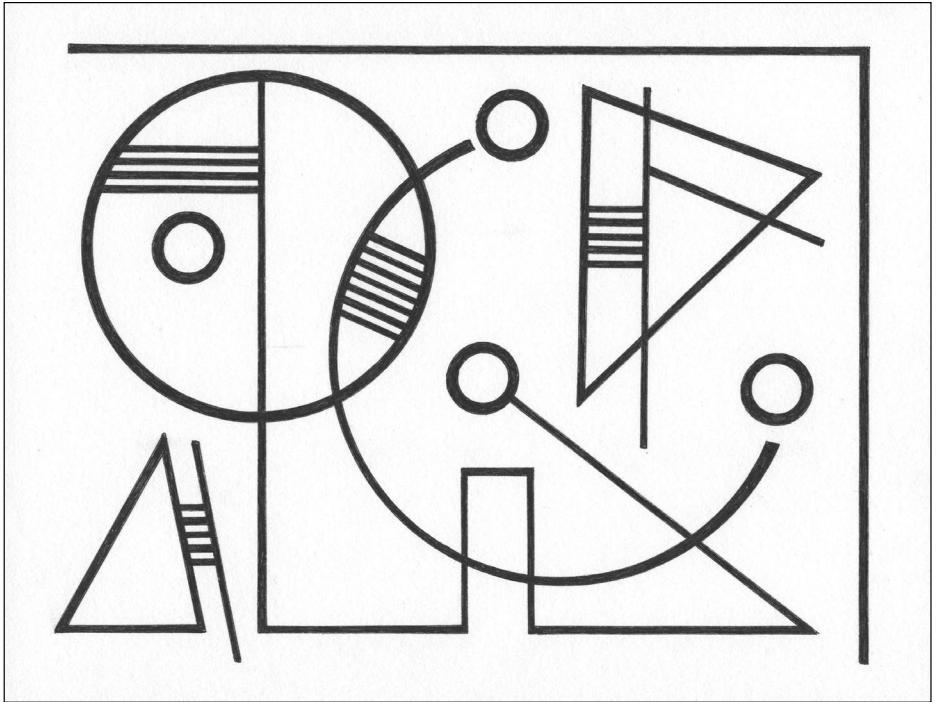
36. For example, David E. Campbell, John C. Green, and J. Quin Monson gathered a representative sample of Mormon respondents using an online panel-matching approach from YouGov in *Seeking the Promised Land: Mormons and American Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

After data collection was completed we found that the NMS achieved representativeness on nearly all major demographic and socioeconomic categories when compared to the 2014 Pew Religious Landscape Study (which used a random telephone-dialing collection method). The only notable exceptions were that the NMS oversampled women compared to men, those with a college education compared to those with a high school education, and younger individuals compared to older. In terms of income, race/ethnicity, and geographical residence, however, the two surveys were virtually identical and certainly within the margin of sampling error. For the former Mormon sample, the NMS did an even better job of approximating demographic and socioeconomic distributions in the wider population (as indicated by the 2014 Religious Landscape Study). The only two categories where the NMS differed appreciably was that it substantially oversampled women compared to men and those with a college degree compared to those with a high school education.

It is important to note that these sampling differences are extremely common in public opinion survey research. When this happens, researchers can create “post-stratification sample weights” that help minimize potential biases in the survey results due to disproportionate sampling of one group over another. In other words, we can statistically correct for these sample biases to a large extent by artificially inflating the weight of the responses from groups that were undersampled in the survey while artificially contracting the weight of the responses from the groups that were oversampled, in direct proportion to the degree to which they were over- or undersampled in the survey. Assuming that there are correlations with the particular survey question and a demographic or socioeconomic factor like age, education, gender, etc., this procedure increases our confidence that our survey findings are representative of the wider population of interest. We emphasize that this is a regular best practice among public opinion survey researchers and has consistently been shown to increase the accuracy and representativeness of survey results. It is a methodology routinely employed by virtually every reputable

survey firm including Pew Research Center, Gallup, Economist/YouGov, and the Washington Post.

With these data weights applied, our survey results match those of the 2014 Pew Religious Landscape Study in terms of standard demographic and socioeconomic categories, differing by an average of less than  $\pm 2$  percent, well within the commonly-accepted margin of error of  $\pm 3$  percent in most public opinion polling. We note as well that the majority of our weighted survey results for key religious and political attitudes/behaviors also approximate those found for current and former Mormons in the 2014 Pew Religious Landscape Study, or are within the standard margins of sampling error. We thus argue that the results we report herein are representative of the wider Mormon and former Mormon populations in the United States within the standard margins of error (3 percent and 4 percent, respectively) for public opinion survey research.



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# THOMAS AQUINAS MEETS JOSEPH SMITH: TOWARD A MORMON ETHICS OF NATURAL LAW

Levi Checketts

In opposition to Christian traditions that teach human guilt as a result of original sin, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints teaches that humans “will be punished for their own sins, and not for Adam’s transgression.”<sup>1</sup> Unlike the Lutheran *simul justus et peccator*, wherein human beings are thoroughly sinful and saved only by God’s mercy, Mormons believe that human agency is responsible for human sinfulness and that the same agency is required to do good works for which we are ultimately judged.<sup>2</sup> This is not to say that human beings “earn” their salvation but rather notes that we have a more active role

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I write this paper as an outsider of sorts: I was raised in the LDS faith and later left and became Catholic. One might claim that my advocating natural law owes to a bias toward the tradition I have adopted, but I suggest that it is more probable that I joined the Catholic Church rather than a Protestant denomination because of the similarities between Mormonism and Catholicism, some of which include favoring a hierarchical structure, apostolic lineage, priesthood authority, the sacraments (including baptism, confirmation, communion, ordained priesthood, and sacramental marriage), and a tendency to look beyond the Bible for answers to theological questions.

1. Articles of Faith 1:2. See also Robert L. Millet and Gerald R. McDermott, *Claiming Christ: A Mormon–Evangelical Debate* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press, 2007), chapter 7 and Robert L. Millet and Gregory C. V. Johnson, *Bridging the Divide: The Continuing Conversation between a Mormon and an Evangelical* (Rhinebeck, N.Y.: Monkfish Book Publishing, 2007), 43.

2. See Millet and McDermott, *Claiming Christ*, 187.

in both our guilt and our redemption. In other words, while “works righteousness” do not merit salvation, they are a necessary component of Mormon discipleship.<sup>3</sup> As such, the question of ethics is crucial for Mormon religious life. Unfortunately, while other traditions such as the Catholic Church have systematized moral theological teachings, Latter-day Saints yet lack a systematized ethic.

In this paper, I analyze some attempts to form a Mormon ethical method and propose a different method based on Thomistic natural law theory. This method has been eschewed by some writers in the Mormon tradition,<sup>4</sup> but I contend that this is due primarily to misinterpretation or overly narrow interpretations of the natural law. Other authors have offered ethical methods based on utilitarianism or deontology, both of which may be attractive theories of ethics for society but do not adequately capture what a theory of ethics directed toward salvation would entail. I propose a theory for Latter-day Saint personal ethics that can be utilized in the concrete messiness of everyday life—one that, while thorough, is yet flexible enough to adapt to new situations while remaining tethered to fundamental theological principles.

### Why an LDS Ethic?

Doctrine and Covenants 88:38–39 reads, “And unto every kingdom is given a law; and unto every law there are certain bounds also and conditions. All beings who abide not in those conditions are not justified.” Furthermore, the third article of faith says that salvation is contingent upon “obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel.” This provides ethical discussion in Mormonism with an edge that it lacks in August-

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3. “Works righteousness” is a phrase associated with Lutheran theology. Luther polemicized the works righteousness mindset of then-current Catholic popular theology which suggested doing good things earns one’s salvation. I use the term “works righteousness” as this is the vocabulary employed by Luther.

4. See, for example, Courtney Campbell, “Social Responsibility and LDS Ethics,” *Sunstone* 9, no. 2 (1984): 13.



tinian Christianity: over and against the *sola fides* approach of Martin Luther, Mormonism emphasizes morality's importance for salvation.<sup>5</sup> For many Protestants, ethical questions are secondary: salvation tends to be either contingent on faith alone, in the Lutheran vein, or is predetermined, in the Calvinist vein.<sup>6</sup> For Mormons, however, ethical questions are primary. Ethics ought to be an important issue for Mormons for no less a reason than that Latter-day Saints believe that their very salvation requires good moral living.<sup>7</sup>

The problem emerges, however, when we seek to articulate what that moral living means. "[T]he laws and ordinances of the Gospel" may be the ultimate standard, but unless every particular ethical question is divinely answered, individual Latter-day Saints will need a way of dealing with personal moral dilemmas. A doctrine of continuing revelation does allow for many new problems to be addressed through divine inspiration, but the question of the personal still persists. To put it in more concrete terms, we must ask whether the laws and ordinances of the gospel can inform the average faithful Latter-day Saint in how to vote in elections in her country, how to act in business matters, what she owes both to society at large and to specific individuals within society, and how to better herself. Many of these issues are addressed in official Mormon teaching, but two risks inevitably present themselves. The first is that an ethic that is specific enough to dictate the very concrete details of a

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5. Soteriology and eschatology in Mormon teaching are different than they are in mainstream Christian teaching. The question of degrees of glory are important in their own right but are not essentially different from teleological concerns about the afterlife present in other traditions.

6. See Martin Luther, *On Christian Liberty*, translated by W. A. Lambert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 41 and John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, translated by Henry Beveridge (Orlando, Fla.: Signalman Publishing, 2009), III.21.1, Kindle.

7. I am aware that this statement is controversial and that several LDS writers, including Robert Millet, deny this claim as absolute, though often concede to it partially. See Millet, *Claiming Christ*, 187.

person's life will likely not fit all persons. Thus, a teaching that may be perfect for the LDS Church in Utah may not fit in Uganda or South Korea. Here we may note Paul's own admonition to the Corinthian Christians to practice different dietary habits based on their dinner companions (1 Corinthians 10:27–29), an admonition that recognizes the sensitivity of different social contexts for personal moral behavior. The second risk is that this becomes a set of rules, a checklist whereby Latter-day Saints feel they must meet the bare minimum to inherit eternal life, a notion that goes against Jesus' teaching of going the extra mile (Matthew 5:41).

When we consider the issue of ethics in Mormonism, we find two obstacles that have prevented much serious scholarship till now, but also two reasons why such scholarship is necessary. The first obstacle is that there tends to be an air of distrust for intellectualism within Mormonism. A distrust for "doctors and lawyers" and the "philosophies of the world" erects a practical boundary around ethical systems that come from outside the LDS tradition.<sup>8</sup> The second obstacle is the hierarchical structure of the LDS Church.<sup>9</sup> An emphasis on the authority of the prophet first and foremost demotes the importance of personal moral decisions to the periphery. The first reason why ethics are necessary is to provide a more thorough account of sin. While there are many sins listed and discussed within Mormon teaching, questions, for example, of how one uses her money or whom one votes for (and why) are also questions that require personal discernment. The second reason is to promote positive moral development. Ethics is not simply interested in the bad we do; it also seeks to explain what good we ought to do as well.

A more thorough discussion may be warranted, but this should suffice to show that there is a need for at least a stand-in ethical system

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8. See Willard Richards, et al., "The King Follett Discourse," *Times and Seasons* 5 (Aug. 15, 1844): 614, and, more recently, Bonnie L. Oscarson, "Defenders of the Family Proclamation," Apr. 2015, <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/2015/04/defenders-of-the-family-proclamation?lang=eng>.

9. See Articles of Faith 1:5 and 1:6.

for Mormons. Latter-day Saint doctrine places great emphasis on doing good, but there needs to be a satisfactory way of discerning what good is to be done. While Latter-day Saints believe in continuing revelation, it is unlikely that a universal revelation, provided it lays down laws instead of moral methods, will be able to address every contingency. Mormons therefore need a moral method that will allow them to personally understand what actions they ought to take and what actions they ought to avoid.

### Other Views

There have been previous attempts to suggest an ethical method for Mormons to follow. Some authors, like Courtney Campbell, approach methodology under the aspect of social ethics. Others, like E. E. Eriksen and Blake Ostler, examine multiple views and attempt to weigh the merits and flaws of each view.<sup>10</sup> Still others, like Kim McCall, champion one type of ethical model over others.<sup>11</sup> In this section, I examine Ostler's discussion of a utilitarian ethic (which he ultimately rejects) and McCall's arguments for a Kantian theory of moral action. I choose these two particular systems because of their prevalence in broader ethical discussion outside of the LDS Church.<sup>12</sup> I explore the main ideas

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10. E. E. Eriksen, "Moral Criteria," in *Perspectives in Mormon Ethics: Personal, Social, Legal and Medical*, edited by Donald G. Hill (Salt Lake City: Publishers Press, 1983) and Blake Ostler, "Moral Obligation and Mormonism: A Response to Francis Beckwith," *FairMormon*, <http://www.fairmormon.org/perspectives/publications/reviews-of-the-new-mormon-challenge/moral-obligation-and-mormonism-a-response-to-francis-beckwith>.

11. Kim McCall, "What is Moral Obligation in Mormon Theology?," *Sunstone* 6, no. 6 (1981): 27–31.

12. See, for example, H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self: An Essay in Christian Moral Philosophy* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 55. See also Truman G. Madsen, "Joseph Smith and the Problem of Ethics," in *Perspectives in Mormon Ethics*, 34.

of their arguments and suggest the strengths and weaknesses of these approaches in light of Mormon teaching.

Blake Ostler provides only a short proposal for the use of utilitarianism for Mormon ethics. The thrust of his argument is essentially that utilitarianism is teleological—it favors reaching a particular goal (i.e., happiness) and so is the Mormon approach to ethics. Ostler also notes that utilitarianism is flexible and not bound by hard and fast rules, making it more conducive to a faith tradition with an open canon.<sup>13</sup>

This argument for utilitarianism is insufficient, however, because utilitarianism also has features that contradict LDS belief. One may see this in even a less obvious challenge from this theory: the preference of the populace, which correlates to maximizing happiness for the greatest number, is supported by Mosiah 29:26, “It is not common that the voice of the people desireth anything contrary to that which is right.” However, the narrative arc of the Book of Mormon tells us that utilitarianism has a dark side: in the books of 3 Nephi, Ether, and Mormon, the majority of the people turned away from God toward wickedness. Maximized happiness (or pleasure) must be subordinated to God’s ways, otherwise it potentially leads to unjust or wicked outcomes. Mormons only need recall the persecution of the early Saints by the majority will of their non-LDS neighbors to see the potential for abuse in utilitarian reasoning.

A more important objection is that utilitarianism is, by nature, theologically agnostic. The formal principle of utilitarianism according to John Stuart Mill is the maximization of pleasure and the minimization of pain.<sup>14</sup> This means that what determines the moral quality of an action is only the result it yields in terms of how many people are pleased or harmed, and to what extent this is the case. This parallels what the Spirit says in 1 Nephi 4:13, “It is better that one man should

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13. Ostler, “Moral Obligation,” under the heading “An LDS Utilitarian Ethic?”

14. John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1879), 9.

perish than that a nation should dwindle and perish in unbelief,” but it presents a bigger problem in terms of personal ethics. One may claim that better consequences abound when a person donates her money to charity rather than to tithing, spends two years working for a service organization rather than serves a mission, marries a non-Mormon rather than marries in the temple, or relaxes on the weekends with a bottle of wine rather than observes the Word of Wisdom. Utilitarianism admits of no objective standards other than maximizing pleasure, so the commands of God are irrelevant. Furthermore, should someone try to observe all of the commandments while pursuing utilitarianism, one’s intention, either to do good or evil, has no bearing in moral evaluations, so repentance and atonement for the evil one has intentionally committed are meaningless. Because of the emphasis placed on the plan of salvation in the LDS Church, an ethic of utilitarianism is inadequate for Mormon theology.

McCall proposes a Kantian, deontological approach to ethics. He first argues that divine command ethics are insufficient for Mormons because Latter-day Saints believe that human beings are co-eternal with God: God is not the ultimate authority over moral action as an eternal being. McCall contends that this is the case because human beings are *deus in potentia*, meaning that the moral standards that fall upon us similarly fall upon God.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, teleological ethics are insufficient because they are contingent upon our individual desires and thus do not hold universal force.<sup>16</sup> He thus argues that a “universal law” morality is

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15. McCall, “Moral Obligation,” 29. The anti-divine command position is also supported by Madsen’s reading of Joseph Smith’s teachings in Madsen, “Joseph Smith and the Problem of Ethics,” 32. Stephen Webb clarifies this by noting that God’s materiality in Mormonism subjects him to the eternal law as well; see *Mormon Christianity: What Other Christians Can Learn from the Latter-day Saints* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 200. The scriptural basis for this position would be found in texts such as Doctrine and Covenants 130:20, Abraham 3, and others. This position is also noted below.

16. McCall, “Moral Obligation,” 30.

appropriate for Mormons because “obedience is the first law of heaven.”<sup>17</sup> Obedience to this law will be crucial, but the intention of obedience is more important than the actual result of my attempt at obedience. This means that my motivation for acting becomes the main factor in judging the moral content of my actions, and these actions will be moral if, as Kant says, “I could also will that my maxim [the generalization of my action] should become a universal law.”<sup>18</sup> This is a workable ethic for Mormons, McCall believes, because it focuses on intention and responsibility: each person’s guilt is dependent upon how well he lives up to the universal moral law that all, even God, are bound to.<sup>19</sup>

McCall’s emphasis on intention is well placed, but the problem with the universal is precisely that it ignores the particular. We can see two particular instances in Holy Writ where this is problematic. The first is one I referenced above, namely, Nephi’s being commanded to slay Laban. A good Mormon ought to hold that what Nephi did was right—without slaying Laban Nephi would never have obtained the brass plates, the descendants of Lehi would have “dwindled in unbelief,” and there would be no Book of Mormon. Nephi clearly could not have willed his maxim to be a universal law, as 1 Nephi 4:10 tells us that Nephi “shrunk and would not that [he] might not slay [Laban].” The second example is the case of Abraham’s being asked to sacrifice Isaac in Genesis 22. About this problematic incident, Søren Kierkegaard wrote that in this Abraham exhibits the act of faith wherein “the single individual now sets himself apart as the particular above the universal.”<sup>20</sup> The faithful

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17. Ibid.

18. Immanuel Kant, *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysic of Morals*, translated by Thomas Kingsmill Abbott (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1895), 12. Available at <http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/5682/pg5682-images.html>.

19. McCall, “Moral Obligation,” 31.

20. Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, translated by Alastair Hannay (London: Penguin Books, 1985), 84.

Christian cannot condemn what Abraham did, for it was commanded by God, but we cannot consider such a thing to be universalizable.

It might be the case that any other Christian can take Kant's moral theory as a viable moral theory for her faith (though this might still be problematic if she believes in divinely inspired ethical norms), but the Latter-day Saint cannot because of his belief in continual revelation.<sup>21</sup> The ninth article of faith declares that Mormons believe that God "will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the Kingdom of God." God may yet reveal moral commands that would fail to meet Kant's standards of rational autonomy and universalizability. An example of this would be plural marriage set forth in Doctrine and Covenants 132. This marriage is understood as being the "new and everlasting covenant" (verse 4), which is required for obtaining the highest degree of glory in the celestial kingdom (verse 20). Eternal marriage is, therefore, a moral command for Latter-day Saints, but *plural* marriage, which God may command (verse 35), could normally never be universalizable due to the obvious problems of sexual demographics.

Kantian deontology is also problematic for the question of personal revelation. Joseph Smith taught that personal revelation is necessary for individual salvation.<sup>22</sup> Latter-day Saints rely upon God for personal instruction, but personal revelations, by their very nature, cannot be universalized. The woman who feels prompted to take the long drive home from work and is able to help an injured person cannot will her maxim to be a universal law—should all people always take the long route home from work they may be late for supper, they will waste gas and pollute the air, they may be late picking up their children, et cetera. This ethical behavior is not negligible either: for many Mormons, rely-

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21. Kant himself refutes any connection between revelation and morality in his work when he states that no moral "imperatives hold for God's will or for any holy will" (*Fundamental Principles*, 19).

22. *Teachings of the Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2007), 129.

ing on the promptings of the Spirit is essential to knowing how to live their lives. Of course personal revelation cannot be formulated into an ethical method without theological problems, but this does illustrate the problem with a Kantian ethic in Mormonism: many ethical actions that the faithful Latter-day Saint follow are believed to be highly personalized promptings from God—promptings that could not, by their very nature, be made into universal laws.<sup>23</sup>

McCall and Ostler, in providing differing views on a Mormon ethic, illustrate the difficult nature of the problem at hand.<sup>24</sup> Both of them highlight important necessary elements for an ethical method: the importance of intention rather than merely consequences, an orientation to eternal happiness, a degree of changeability to accommodate new revelation, and a universal underlying principle. An adequate Mormon ethic, it seems, would need to be able to address all of these issues at once. For these reasons, as I explain below, a Thomistic theory of natural law is a better fit for Mormon ethics than the ones previously examined.

### Toward a Mormon Natural Law

The term “natural law” has been used by various authors in various ways in philosophy: the Stoic tradition is viewed as a form of natural law thinking as is the Catholic scholastic tradition, and modern philoso-

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23. Promptings from God to perform certain actions should not be confused with divine command theory: a personal revelation is not necessary for eternal law, though it may be an instantiated revelation of that law, nor can it be systematically formulated into a theory, though it might be accommodated into one, as explained below.

24. Ostler also repeats much of McCall’s argument in the section titled “A Duty-Based LDS Ethic” and proposes a love-based ethic in his penultimate section, “An LDS Theory of Ethics in Alignment with the Gospel of Christ.” I neglect to mention this because his deontological arguments rely largely on McCall and his proposed theory of ethics is not one that can be made into a method very easily, though it is worth noting that this notion is very popular among Catholic thinkers such as Max Scheler, Ed Vacek, and Jean-Luc Marion.



phers such as Thomas Hobbes and Samuel Pufendorf refer to a natural law.<sup>25</sup> In the contemporary world of ethics, natural law is championed by such thinkers as John Finnis, Germain Grisez, Russell Hittinger, Jean Porter, and H. L. A. Hart.<sup>26</sup> In this context, it may be difficult to know “which” natural law theory to adhere to. There may be good reasons to follow one or another, but it is worth noting that the approach of many modern thinkers, such as Finnis and Grisez, attempts to be free of either religious or philosophical understandings of humanity while others, such as Hobbes or Hart, conceive of “natural law” merely as survival tactics. I propose that a natural law theory appropriate for Mormons must adequately fit the task of Mormon ethics and must succeed where other methods have failed. Thus, these modern approaches fail to be adequate for Mormon morality because Mormon ethics requires a theological grounding and the ultimate goal of happiness. Because of the requirements of this task, I choose for this paper the theory presented by Thomas Aquinas, an Italian Dominican friar who lived in the mid-thirteenth century. Aquinas is perhaps the most important person theologically for Catholics, though he also stands as one of the greatest medieval philosophers.<sup>27</sup> Aquinas does not actually say a great deal explicitly about the natural law—he only dedicates one out of 303 “questions” in his moral treatise in the *Summa Theologiae* specifically to this topic, but many Catholic moral theologians read all of his moral writing as his theory of natural law.<sup>28</sup> An important obstacle to note moving forward in this paper is that Aquinas’s work fits specifically within the Catholic Church and therefore will not completely fit within Mormon theology.

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25. See Howard P. Kainz, *Natural Law: An Introduction and Re-Examination* (Chicago: Open Court, 2004).

26. *Ibid.*, chapter 4.

27. Aquinas’s influence is clear in the thinking of modern thinkers such as Pope Leo XIII, Jacques Maritain, Jean Porter, Alasdair MacIntyre, and others.

28. See, for example, Jean Porter, *Nature as Reason: A Thomistic Theory of the Natural Law* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2005).

I will not, then, presume that Mormon theology needs Thomism, but I do suggest that many of the ways Aquinas approached ethics from a theological perspective are consonant with Mormon teachings.

There are numerous commentaries and summaries of Aquinas's thought available, so for the purpose of this paper, I will only outline a few important notes about his view of the natural law.<sup>29</sup> Aquinas defines natural law as a type of law, which he defines as "nothing else than an ordinance of reason for the common good, made by him who has care of the community, and promulgated."<sup>30</sup> The natural law itself is a human manifestation of the eternal law, which is "nothing else than the type of Divine Wisdom, as directing all actions and movements," or in other words, God's reason and will for all things, including human action.<sup>31</sup> Human beings all have the natural law "imprinted" on their souls by virtue of being made in the image of God and having the gift of rationality, by means of which we are able to personally access the natural law.<sup>32</sup> The particular way the natural law is manifest may differ from person to person based on particular circumstances, but the general, universally binding precepts are "good is to be done and pursued, and evil is to be avoided."<sup>33</sup> Additionally, we may note that the natural law has as its aim human happiness, functions within the human conscience, and requires the development of virtues, all concepts that I discuss below.<sup>34</sup>

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29. Regarding the moral thought of Aquinas, I would recommend Stephen J. Pope, ed., *The Ethics of Aquinas* (Washington: Georgetown, 2002). In particular, the reader may wish to consult Clifford G. Kossel, S.J., "Natural Law and Human Law" in this volume for a helpful summary of Aquinas's natural law.

30. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, translated by Black Friars (Claremont, Calif.: Coyote Canyon Press, 2010), Prima Pars Secundae Partis, question 90, article 4 (Ia IIae, Q90, A4), Kindle.

31. Ibid., Ia IIae, Q91, A2; Ia IIae, Q93, A1.

32. Ibid., Ia IIae, Q91, A2; Ia IIae, Q94, A6.

33. Ibid., Ia IIae, Q94, A4, A2.

34. Ibid., Ia IIae, Q90, A2; Ia IIae, Q94.

There are numerous aspects of Aquinas's thought that will be incompatible with good Mormon thinking. Aquinas, after all, was writing in a thirteenth-century Roman Catholic context. However, the essential points of his theory are compatible with Mormon thought. This paper notes these connections, and as such will look at four major aspects of Aquinas's natural law that may help us think more clearly about how to approach ethics for Mormons: the underlying universal principles of the natural law, the particular applications of the law for individual persons, the teleological nature of Aquinas's ethics, and finally his reliance on virtue within his overall theory. These elements, Truman Madsen notes, are crucial for a Mormon ethic as well.<sup>35</sup> Thus, in discussing each of these topics, I explicate Aquinas's position and demonstrate parallels in the Mormon tradition. Before we begin this project, however, it is worth noting that some authors have asked whether natural law is a fitting ethic for Mormonism and concluded that it is not.

Both Ostler and McCall dismiss Thomism, though I think they do so unfairly. Ostler, for example, admits that Joseph Smith's view is similar to a Thomistic ethic but suggests that whereas Smith thinks morality brings us to perfection, Aquinas does not.<sup>36</sup> This is a great mischaracterization of Aquinas's thought: Aquinas builds his ethic on the assumption that doing good leads us to happiness in God and that human morality can be perfected through the grace of God.<sup>37</sup> McCall's critique is a bit more nuanced and is two-pronged: on one hand, he argues, teleological ethics suggest selflessness as a means to a selfish end, and on the other, the ends are arbitrary and ethical norms are "mere suggestions of prudence."<sup>38</sup> The first objection seems sound, but assumes a great deal about happiness

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35. Madsen, "Joseph Smith and the Problem of Ethics," 32–33, 36, and 39.

36. Ostler, "Moral Obligation and Mormonism," under "An LDS Theory of Ethics in Alignment with the Gospel of Christ."

37. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia IIae, Q5, A1; Ia IIae, Q67, A6.

38. McCall, "Moral Obligation," 30.

and intention that does not follow. Aquinas emphasizes that the intention behind an act is prior to the act itself, meaning that being selfless in order to be selfish is really simply being selfish.<sup>39</sup> Selflessness to achieve selfish ends fails to result in selflessness, and thus cannot achieve the end of morally-based happiness whatsoever. McCall's second objection only holds if we lack a metaphysical base for our ethical method, but both the Thomistic account of natural law (based in Catholic theology) and our Mormon ethics are based on metaphysically rich theological groundings. Thus, though there may be problems with Thomistic natural law, the problems are not the ones McCall and Osler suggest.<sup>40</sup>

The first element of natural law that may aid Mormon ethics is the element of a moral principle that, while universal, is thin enough to account for different circumstances. Aquinas thinks that "as regards the general principles [of the natural law] . . . truth or rectitude is the same for all, and is equally known by all."<sup>41</sup> The general principle of the natural law, as mentioned above, is "good is to be done and evil is to be avoided.' All other precepts of the natural law are based upon this."<sup>42</sup> Aquinas posits that there is a universal guiding moral principle located in the eternal law, or the divine reason of God, a principle that

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39. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia IIae, Q18, A6.

40. Louis Midgley similarly makes the case against Catholic Thomistic natural law in "The Search for Love: Is Zion to Be Built on a Natural Morality or on Prophetic Revelation?," in *Perspectives in Mormon Ethics*. Briefly, his arguments tend to fall apart because he alleges that Catholic theology is not based in conscience (50), requires no revelation (53), is not about love (54), and allows no condemnation of those who refuse to do good (57). Some of these may be based on particular interpretations of Aquinas, but Aquinas himself has a different position from all of these supposed faults. The first issue, that of conscience, is presented in this paper, but the answers to the others may be found respectively in Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia IIae, Q91, A4; Ia IIae, Q65, A2; IIa IIae, Q33, A2; and IIa IIae, Q66, A7.

41. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia IIae, Q94, A4.

42. Ibid., Ia IIae, Q94, A2.

is accessible to any person, but this does not immediately dictate specific concrete norms. He claims, “As to the proper conclusions of the practical reason, neither is the truth or rectitude the same for all, nor, where it is the same, is it equally known by all.”<sup>43</sup> Thus, Aquinas’s natural law does have a universal moral norm as its base (do good and avoid evil), but the particular way this universal is carried out will differ from case to case and will need to be contextually specified.

We already saw the need for a thin universal precept above, but the parallel between Thomistic and Mormon thought can be drawn out further. Doctrine and Covenants 130:20 states, “There is a law, irrevocably decreed in heaven before the foundations of this world, upon which all blessings are predicated.” Truman Madsen shows through the teachings of Joseph Smith that this irrevocable law is instantiated differently in particular situations: “Then there are two sorts of ‘principles’ or ‘laws’: 1. Self-existent laws to which God himself is subject. 2. Instituted laws (in harmony with the first)—those he ‘saw proper’ to establish to enhance the advancement of others.”<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, “the Prophet taught that laws or principles are adapted to various times, places, circumstances, and persons.”<sup>45</sup> This means, then, that there exists a foundational universal moral principle upon which all concrete moral principles are based, though these are contingent. Moral rectitude is not founded upon mere universal principles, independent of external factors, but rather on the

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43. Ibid., Ia IIae, Q94, A4.

44. Madsen, “Joseph Smith and the Problem of Ethics,” 32. It is important to note that the Mormon conception of an eternal law and Aquinas’s are somewhat different. The understanding of eternal law that Madsen and McCall refer to is a precept that God himself is subject to. The understanding of Aquinas is that the eternal law is nothing other than God’s will. This represents an interesting theological difference between the two religions but one that we do not have space to explore. This also means that while God reveals important norms for individuals, these laws are subject to a greater eternal law. See also Webb, *Mormon Christianity*, 200.

45. Madsen, “Joseph Smith and the Problem of Ethics,” 33.

particular way the universal law is situated in a given case. Aquinas argues that the goodness or wickedness of an action must be evaluated in light of what the act itself is, the circumstances surrounding the act, and the intention of the agent.<sup>46</sup> The moral evaluation of a given act is incomprehensible without noting contingencies in circumstances. It would seem, then, that a good Mormon ethic will also acknowledge both the underlying presence of a universal law and the fact that this law must be applied in concrete situations according to all relevant factors, a notion that is essentially natural law theory.

What we have thus far, however, is too thin of a morality to do much good, and if the contingent factors of person, time and place, and specific action alone are taken into consideration, we might easily find ourselves espousing moral relativism. But the agent's intentions must be pure. Aquinas notes that for an act to be "good" it must be good in intention, the act itself, and the circumstances.<sup>47</sup> However, he also argues that the conscience is the most important aspect of the act, and so an agent is morally obligated to follow even a conscience that is errant or misguided.<sup>48</sup> The conscience, then, is a sort of a "trump card" for moral reasoning: any particular act carried out in good conscience is morally excusable, though not necessarily morally good. Catholic moral teaching draws this thought out further in the Vatican II document *Gaudium et Spes*: every person "has in his heart a law written by God; to obey it is the very dignity of [humanity]; according to it he will be judged. Conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of a man. There he is alone with God, Whose voice echoes in his thoughts."<sup>49</sup> Our consciences, the very essence of why we make the moral decisions we do, are communion with

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46. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia IIae, Q18, A4.

47. Ibid., Ia IIae, Q19, A6 ad1.

48. Ibid., Ia IIae, Q19, A5.

49. Catholic Church, *Gaudium et Spes: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1965), 16.

the divine: in following our conscience, we follow God's particular will for us. A good Catholic, if he follows his conscience, cannot do moral wrong by natural law, though he may even defy the official teachings of the church or other social norms.

The notion of conscience as communication with God has clear resonance with the principle of personal revelation within Mormonism and is connected to the notion of "godly sorrow" (2 Corinthians 7:10), an important part of genuine repentance: Alma 42:29 states, "Let your sins trouble you, with that trouble which shall bring you down unto repentance." The heart of ethical matters for Mormons is, and *must* be, founded upon a sense of the holy, communication with the divine, and spiritual attunement. Mormons "must come to assurance on ethical matters, as on all others, through the wisdom of those who 'take the Holy Spirit for their guide.'"<sup>50</sup> This is not exactly the same as a Catholic teaching, but it is not entirely at odds either. Both positions maintain that personal ethical acts must be evaluated by judging what God is telling the agent. The primary difference here is that a Catholic moral agent will likely act "according to her conscience," while the Latter-day Saint moral agent will "follow the Spirit." Furthermore, when it comes to guilt, Mormons and Catholics may agree that a troubled conscience is a good thing for repentance, and both Mormons and Catholics practice individual private confession of sins as part of the process of repentance.

If Aquinas's thought is heavily dependent upon a notion of a divinely-created law and the adherence to divinely-inspired conscience, we should not be surprised that all of his ethical thought is rooted in his theological beliefs. For this reason, Aquinas's ethics are teleological: for Aquinas, all moral actions come from a person's "reason and will," which drive us toward "the end and the good."<sup>51</sup> The *end*, or goal, that human beings pursue in their moral actions is happiness, which can

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50. Madsen, "Joseph Smith and the Problem of Ethics," 47.

51. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia IIae, Q1, A1.

only be perfectly realized through “the vision of the Divine Essence,” a vision that we do not receive in this life.<sup>52</sup> In other words, the purpose of ethics for Aquinas is eternal happiness with God. Because our end is in God, Aquinas believes that our nature, which is primarily rational, is one that conforms with the will of God. In turn, the natural law “is nothing else than an imprint on us of the Divine light” which every person has by virtue of being a rational being made in the image of God.<sup>53</sup> Every moral obligation, therefore, is derived from the question of what we can derive from our “respective inclinations to [our] proper acts and ends.”<sup>54</sup> Thus, the way that God created us, as well as what God created us for, i.e., to be unified with God for eternity, which is nothing else than eternal happiness, provides the basis for moral action.

Aside from specific theological differences, this view shares much with Mormon thought. We have already established the teleological requirement of Mormon morality—a good ethic for Mormons will be based upon the achievement of eternal happiness through proper moral living, or, as Doctrine and Covenants 130:21 says, “And when we obtain any blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated.” We may even expound this further. Madsen explains that for Joseph Smith, “the ‘ought’ . . . cannot be separated from the ‘is.’”<sup>55</sup> The reality of human existence must yield some sort of ethical norms, but those norms are based on an understanding of what it is we yearn for. Madsen suggests “the joy of the perfected person, eternal joy, is akin to Divine joy,”<sup>56</sup> and this joy is to be contrasted to a utilitarian “pleasure” or deontological duty. Moral action brings about our happiness in an eternal sense and is based upon the types of beings we are—beings who

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52. *Ibid.*, Ia IIae, Q1, A8; Ia IIae, Q3, A8.

53. *Ibid.*, Ia IIae, Q91, A2.

54. *Ibid.*

55. Madsen, “Joseph Smith and the Problem of Ethics,” 30.

56. *Ibid.*, 36.



have something of the divine in us. Our moral action, then, will be the type of action that makes us more like God, will be based on our godly natures, and will bring us happiness in eternity.

The notion of becoming God is not a notion that has enjoyed much prominence in Catholicism, but Thomistic natural law does emphasize a progression in moral character toward godliness through cultivating virtue.<sup>57</sup> Virtues, for Aquinas, are “habits,” which are character traits related to a being’s nature that are “primarily and principally related to an act.”<sup>58</sup> A virtue is “a good quality of the mind, by which we live righteously, of which no one can make bad use” and, in the case of grace-infused virtues, “which God works in us, without us.”<sup>59</sup> The function of virtues is to shape our character: they are good qualities that we develop that make us more like God. Rather than simply prescribing the bounds of moral behavior, they encourage us to pursue moral excellence. Thus, a woman who develops the virtue of justice, for example, will be a just woman: her character will be that of someone who is just and fair. Furthermore, in order to develop any one virtue completely, all other virtues must be developed as well; the godly character that a person develops through the habituation of virtue is one that must incorporate all aspects of virtue.<sup>60</sup> A truly virtuous person is not simply temperate, nor is she merely courageous: she must have temperance and courage, moderated by the virtue of justice and informed by the virtue of practical wisdom. The development of virtue is so necessary for Aquinas’s ethic that he devotes the entire second half of his work on

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57. The concept of “theosis” or divinization is common within Eastern Christianity. Aquinas refers to the goal of the union of our intellect with God but places primary emphasis on “the vision of the Divine Essence” (or the “Beatific Vision”); see Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia IIae, Q3, A8. See also Dante Alighieri, *Paradiso*, Canto XXX and *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1028.

58. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia IIae, Q49, A3.

59. *Ibid.*, Ia IIae, Q55, A4.

60. *Ibid.*, Ia IIae, Q65, A1.

morality to specific questions related to virtue. Virtue is so crucial for no other reason than because it is through the development of virtue that we are able to draw near to God.

Virtue also fits into a Mormon moral theory. Lorenzo Snow said, “As [humans are] now, God once was; as God is now [humans] may be.”<sup>61</sup> If our eternal happiness depends upon morality, and our eternal happiness is in being like God, then our morality should direct us toward sharing the same characteristics as God. Morality cannot, then, be reduced merely to action; it must incorporate behaviors and characteristics that make it easier to be good and more difficult to do evil. To reach the end of being like God “is not simply to avoid spontaneous or habitual wrongdoing, it is to replace the *desire* for wrong . . . with the disposition or desire for good.”<sup>62</sup> Virtues are primarily “in reference to act,” or are “operative habits,” that is, they incline us to act in good ways rather than evil ways.<sup>63</sup> Finally, virtues are part of the thirteenth article of faith, as Latter-day Saints believe in “being honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous and in doing good to all [people].” Aside from the explicit mention of virtue, this is a list of virtues: honesty, chastity, truth, and beneficence are all listed by Aquinas as virtues.<sup>64</sup> “Being” these things means precisely developing them as characteristics, having them as part of our nature or personality. The ethical method of cultivating certain qualities that make it easier for us to do good and that help us to become like God is a form of virtue ethics, one that, per Aquinas, can be integrated into a larger ethical method based on natural law, at least insofar as these virtues will enable us to more easily follow the dictates

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61. Lorenzo Snow, *Teachings of Lorenzo Snow*, edited by Clyde J. Williams (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft Publishers, 1984), 1.

62. Madsen, “Joseph Smith and the Problem of Ethics,” 39 (emphasis original).

63. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia IIae, Q55, A2.

64. Ibid., IIa IIae, Qq 31, 109, 145, 151.

of our consciences (or the promptings of the Holy Spirit) and help us avoid violating divine promptings.

A Thomistic natural law theory will be useful, though certainly not complete, for a Mormon ethic. In Aquinas's thought, moral actions are based on a thin moral principle rooted in our nature as divinely created beings with rationality (universal), the adherence to which brings about happiness (teleological), through the development of a good moral character (virtue), which is actualized through good acts chosen through discernment (conscience/practical wisdom/the promptings of the Holy Spirit), which yields particular judgments for good acts for particular persons in particular circumstances. As the work of Truman Madsen reflecting on the teachings of Joseph Smith shows, these components are central elements of Mormon theology and as such must be taken into consideration in thinking about LDS ethics.

## Conclusion

Mormon scripture holds that God continues to reveal important truths pertaining to the salvation of humanity. This may not mean that God determines willy-nilly the content of moral law,<sup>65</sup> but it does mean that human understanding of essential moral principles is subject to God's revelation pertaining to the eternal law. In other words, the words of the modern-day prophets and scriptural texts provide the first source of any principle of ethics. However, in the concrete, complex, and multivalent nature of people's lives, there arise moral questions to which there are no ready answers in Holy Writ.<sup>66</sup> Neither should we expect that a thorough, particular, revealed, and universal morality is possible because of the reality of the variety of concrete experiences and social contexts. Whom one should vote for, how she should manage her finances, whom

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65. See McCall, "Moral Obligation," 29.

66. See James M. Gustafson, "The Place of Scripture in Christian Ethics: A Methodological Study," *Interpretation* 24, no. 4 (1970): 430–55.

she should marry, how many children she and her spouse should raise, what occupation she should pursue, and other such real questions have important moral weight to them, but the answers to each of these questions will be dependent largely upon the particular relevant details at stake in such questions. It seems inexpedient for one prophetic leader to individually direct seven billion persons on how they should make decisions.

Deontological and utilitarian ethics may be fine for broad social thinking, but they do not fit well within a Mormon theological background. Kantian deontology ignores the eudaemonistic function of Mormon moral thought as well as the contingencies both in general and personal revelation. Utilitarianism ignores any overarching moral principle—whatever is perceived as broadly morally acceptable, or whatever yields greater pleasures, is necessarily morally good. A Mormon moral theory must incorporate the universal as well as the particular and the consequential as well as the intentional.

A natural law ethic of the sort that Aquinas put forth incorporates these elements while simultaneously stressing moral development and progression and the interaction between the divine and the human. In a Mormon context, a natural law ethic would articulate general and specific norms for Latter-day Saints living in particular cultural locations while adhering to the central tenets of Mormon faith. It would encourage the development of godly virtue and sensitivity to the promptings of the Holy Ghost. A Mormon natural law ethic would recast ethical issues not in the light of “Is this a sin?” or “Is there prophetic teaching about this?” but “Does this help me be more like God?” and “Does performing this action cultivate in me an attitude that is more conducive to receiving the guidance of the Holy Ghost or less so?” A Mormon natural law ethic not only is conducive to Mormon teaching but provides a solution whereby moral discussion can go beyond lists of “oughts” and “ought nots” to particular progressions toward divinity.

# REMEMBER ME: DISCURSIVE NEEDLEWORK AND THE SEWING SAMPLER OF PATTY BARTLETT SESSIONS

Stacey Dearing

In her diary entry for March 20, 1848, Patty Bartlett Sessions (1795–1892) recorded an unusual note: she had begun to work on her sewing sampler, an item she had not touched for thirty-eight years. She writes simply, “commenced to finish my sampler that I began when I was a girl and went to school.”<sup>1</sup> Traditionally, decorative embroidery samplers both showed a young woman’s mastery of needlework and indicated that she was prepared for a genteel marriage.<sup>2</sup> Since sewing samplers were

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1. Patty Bartlett Sessions, *Mormon Midwife: The 1846–1888 Diaries of Patty Bartlett Sessions*, edited by Donna Toland Smart (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1997), 110. Some scholars refer to Sessions as simply Patty. Though it is sometimes more awkward, I have chosen to refer to her as much as possible by her surname, as is common scholarly practice when discussing authors. I also refer to her as Sessions, rather than Parry, her surname at the time of her death, because Sessions was her name when she sewed the sampler, and Patty Bartlett Sessions is the name scholars and critics universally employ. For simplicity, I refer to her husband as David rather than Mr. Sessions, though I appreciate that the nomenclature is not parallel.

2. Younger girls would create marking samplers, which were primarily used as reference tools for recording letters and stitches, while older girls would create more decorative, complex patterns intended for display in the family home. In *A Gallery of American Samplers: The Theodore H. Kapnek Collection* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1978), Glee F. Krueger notes that samplers were “originally a cloth used to practice stitches and stitch combinations” that would be kept

usually created by unmarried girls, in 1812 Patty Bartlett put away her unfinished sampler when she married twenty-two-year-old David Sessions.<sup>3</sup> While she had begun her sampler as a sixteen-year-old girl in Maine, Sessions did not finish her sampler until she was fifty-four years old and living in the Utah territory, where she had settled as an early member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which she joined in 1833.<sup>4</sup> For Sessions, as with many girls who learned embroi-

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rolled up with other sewing materials (7). For more on when young women created sewing samplers see Jeanmarie Andrews, "Virginia Samplers," *Early American Homes* 29, no. 3 (1998): 14; Bianca F. Calabresi, "'You Sow, Ile Read': Letters and Literacies in Early Modern Samplers," in *Reading Women: Literacy, Authorship, and Culture in the Atlantic World, 1500–1800*, edited by Heidi Brayman Hackel and Catherine E. Kelly (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 79–104; William Huntting Howell, "Spirits of Emulation: Readers, Samplers, and the Republican Girl, 1787–1810," *American Literature* 81, no. 3 (2009): 497–526; and Jennifer Van Horn, "Samplers, Gentility, and the Middling Sort," *Winterthur Portfolio: A Journal of American Material Culture* 40, no. 4 (2005): 219–48. For more on needlework as a class-inflected activity, see Van Horn, and also Maureen Daly Goggin, "An *Essamplaire Essai* on the Rhetoricity of Needlework Sampler-Making: A Contribution to Theorizing and Historicizing Rhetorical Praxis," *Rhetoric Review* 21, no. 4 (2002): 309–38; Beverly Gordon, "Spinning Wheels, Samplers, and the Modern Priscilla: The Images and Paradoxes of Colonial Revival Needlework," *Winterthur Portfolio: A Journal of American Material Culture* 33, no. 2–3 (1998): 163–94; and Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *The Age of Homespun: Objects and Stories in the Creation of an American Myth* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001).

3. Donna T. Smart, "Patty Bartlett Sessions (1795–1892): Pioneer Midwife," in *Worth Their Salt: Notable but Often Unnoted Women of Utah*, edited by Colleen Whitley (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1996), 1–12. Patty and David married without her parents' permission, for which offense she was disinherited. Smart notes that though they later made up, her parents, Enoch and Anna Hall Bartlett, did, in fact, disinherit Patty Sessions, which "Patty later reported with a hint of bitterness" ("Patty Bartlett Sessions," 2).

4. In 1833, at the age of thirty-eight, Sessions joined The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. She was baptized in 1834, though her husband and three children, Perrigrine, Sylvia, and David Jr., did not convert until 1835. In the face of Mormon oppression, the family relocated west multiple times before

dery, the sewing sampler was a socially acceptable site of self-expression where opinions and feelings could be depicted and displayed.<sup>5</sup> Through samplers, women like Sessions were able to sew their own approbation or dissent without rendering themselves vulnerable to public censure. In other words, samplers function as a circumspect site for testing ideas as well as stitches and patterns.

Recently, scholarship on sewing samplers has become significantly more popular; each successive article encourages future scholars to both recover extant needlework and to more closely examine already discovered artifacts. In 1989, Rozsika Parker argued that scholars should read samplers as works of art rather than as mere crafts. Since then, scholars have increasingly analyzed needlework, including Sessions's sampler, as artistic works, discursive texts, and/or rhetorical objects.<sup>6</sup>

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establishing a permanent settlement in the Utah territory. The Sessions family moved from Maine to Missouri to Illinois, then to the Salt Lake Valley in September 1847. Sessions finally settled in Bountiful, in the Utah territory. In total, Sessions moved her home seven times.

5. Because she finished her sampler so late in her life, Sessions's case is certainly unusual. It is not, however, unique. Aimee E. Newell documents at least 103 samplers created by women over the age of forty in the antebellum period. Focusing primarily on samplers from New England, she argues that middle-aged women took up their needles in response to industrialization and the changing roles for women in the nineteenth century; see Aimee E. Newell, *A Stitch in Time: The Needlework of Aging Women in Antebellum America* (Columbus: Ohio University Press, 2014). See also Aimee E. Newell, "'Tattered to Pieces': Amy Fiske's Sampler and the Changing Roles of Women in Antebellum New England," in *Women and the Material Culture of Needlework and Textiles, 1750–1950*, edited by Maureen Daly Goggin and Beth Fowkes Tobin (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2009), 51–68.

6. See Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (New York: Routledge, 1989). For a history of the sewing sampler dating back to 400–500 BCE, see Laurel K. Gabel, "A Common Thread: Needlework Samplers and American Gravestones," *Markers: Annual Journal of the Association for Gravestone Studies* 19 (2002): 18–49. Scholars such as Parker, Ulrich, and Goggin initially engaged in recovery work, arguing that women's

Thus far, criticism of Sessions's needlework has largely fallen into two camps: first, Sessions's biographer, Donna Smart, reads the sampler alongside Sessions's extant diary, viewing the artifact primarily as a memento. Second, feminist scholars, including Laurel Thatcher Ulrich and Aimee E. Newell, have employed a material culture framework to read the sampler as a discursive text recording Sessions's life and interests. This essay argues that, in addition to being a memento and serving as a repository of her interests and lessons, Sessions's sewing reveals how she adapted generic sewing patterns to create more personal and idiosyncratic expressions of self. Sessions's sampler, among other things, expresses her dissatisfaction with her marriage. After she and her husband David converted to Mormonism, he took two additional wives; he was married to Rosilla Cowen from 1845–1846, then to Harriet Teaples Wixom from approximately 1849 until his death in 1850. By manipulating marriage motifs, Sessions expresses her frustration with her husband's frequent absences, inattention, and plural wives. As a result, the sampler records some of the growing pains caused by polygamy in the early LDS Church. Moreover, the sampler—which depicts a hierarchy of values that prioritize hard work—also establishes the pride Sessions felt at being the primary source of income for her family. By focusing on the symbolism in Sessions's embroidery, this essay makes

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textile artifacts were worthy of critical attention and consideration. Since then, scholars have begun to explore needlework in increasingly complex and interesting ways. For instance, multiple scholars have focused on the intersection of class and needlework, arguing that in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, samplers became a status symbol, signifying the culmination of the elite, “finished” female education. See for instance, Howell, Ulrich, and Van Horn. Another branch of sampler scholarship by scholars such as Gabel explores how embroidery patterns influenced other artistic forms, such as gravestone designs. In contrast, other scholars focus on colonial revival samplers from the late-nineteenth to early-twentieth centuries; see, for example, Gordon, “Spinning Wheels,” and Paula Bradstreet Richter, “Stories from Her Needle: Colonial Revival Samplers of Mary Saltonstall Parker,” *Dublin Seminar for New England Folklife Annual Proceedings* 24 (1999): 212–32.



a case for recognizing the manifold interpretive possibilities posed by symbolic needlework. In other words, it is the sewing itself, not just the circumstances of its construction, that makes her sampler meaningful.

Many of the features of Sessions's sampler initially appear to be conventional motifs; however, this does not mean her sampler is without interesting significance. Many young women, including Sessions, employed well-known sampler conventions in order to compose meaningful embroideries. Common motifs on Sessions's sampler include borders, five lines of brightly colored alphabets and numbers in print and cursive, a couple dressed in wedding garb, flowers, trees, and animals, including a dog, horse, rooster, and deer or hart.<sup>7</sup> Samplers also typically include at least one verse, though two or more are common.<sup>8</sup> At the bottom center of Sessions's sampler is the primary "text," a verse in four lines:

The mind should be inured to thought  
The hands in skilful labours taught  
Let time be usefully employed  
And art and nature be enjoyed.<sup>9</sup>

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7. See Ulrich, *Age of Homespun*, 405 for a description of the sampler. For more on common sampler motifs, see Mildred J. Davis, *Early American Embroidery Designs* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1974). Because it was so difficult to obtain supplies, pattern designs in early America differed from those in England. Davis argues that though patterns were heavily influenced by Europe, the fact that early Americans had "to make do with what was available" resulted in uniquely American designs with their own conventions and motifs (14, 18). For examples of American embroidery patterns, see also Mildred J. Davis, *Embroidery Designs 1780–1820* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1971).

8. According to Ulrich, by 1730, 60 percent of samplers contained at least one verse that can often be classified as belonging to one of three categories: expressing thanks for education, glorifying God, and addressing future children (*Age of Homespun*, 441 and 116).

9. I have copied the spelling as it is on the sampler. Where it is unintelligible in pictures I have relied on the transcriptions provided by Ulrich and Smart. As noted, these transcriptions are not perfect, though for the most part they both

Though most samplers contain many of these seemingly generic motifs, each individual sampler nevertheless displays the preferences of the creator/author, and even the most apparently conventional samplers employ symbolism that can be read discursively (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. The Sewing Sampler of Patty Bartlett Sessions. Photo courtesy of Suzanne Brown Anderson.

While informed by and engaging with accepted conventions, the process of individualization makes samplers a site of self-expression. Sampler designs were influenced by the teachers of embroidery schools, where students like Sessions would copy motifs from a master set pro-

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concur on wording and spelling. I have left errors in the spelling in the diaries so long as the meaning is clear. My edits to clarify meaning are in brackets.

vided by a teacher.<sup>10</sup> Despite relying on patterns, most girls chose the colors, pattern arrangement, and verse(s) to be included on a sampler.<sup>11</sup> As a result, samplers, as pieces displaying a student's mastery of a wide variety of stitches, can be compared to written essays displaying a student's mastery of course content. Like essays, each sampler will have similar component parts, yet will also still be a unique production of the student-author.<sup>12</sup> Thus, even the most seemingly generic verse, such as the second verse found on Sessions's sampler, "Patty Bartlett is my

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10. Because Sessions's diaries from her youth have been lost, scholars and biographers have not been able to determine the school where Sessions learned embroidery. Such gaps in the record are all too common with sewing samplers. In "'On Needle-Work': Reassessing the Culture of Schoolgirl Samplers," *Charles Lamb Bulletin* 162 (2015): 89–99, Rosanne Waine notes how frustrating needlework can be to analyze because, as with other material objects, there are so many questions that cannot be answered as to authorial intention and provenance.

11. Because students worked with the same motifs, samplers can often be traced back to their school of origin. For instance, Van Horn creates a sampler genealogy by tracing pattern motifs as they appear in samplers over multiple generations, with the Galligher school as the origin point (229). For an exceptional example of two nearly identical samplers that nevertheless reveal self-expression and individualization, see Howell 514–15. For more on specific sampler schools, such as the Stivours School, see Ethel Stanwood Bolton and Eva Johnston Coe, *American Samplers* (Boston, Mass.: Thomas Todd Company, 1921). For information on Mary Balch's school in Providence, Rhode Island, see Betty Ring, *Let Virtue Be a Guide to Thee: Needlework in the Education of Rhode Island Women, 1730–1830* (Providence: Rhode Island Historical Society, 1983), 112–17.

12. There were once more than four hundred embroidery stitches commonly employed in needlework, suggesting that even "generic" samplers could exhibit a wide range of diverse stitches and that samplers, indeed, could display a needleworker's mastery of the craft. Goggin observes that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, samplers included thirty-six different stitches on average, though by the nineteenth century only about twenty stitches appeared in each sampler. The number of stitch types continued to decrease until the cross-stitch became the dominant stitch in samplers; the decrease in types of stitch reflects the changing cultural role of samplers, as they were used less often as private tools and more commonly as decorative objects (Goggin, "Essai," 324).

name and with my needle wrought the same A.D. 1811,” is unique in every rendition as each student will stitch her own name.<sup>13</sup> Sessions’s sampler, is of course, unusual in that her identifying verse continues with a mid-life update: “1848 recommence again this 54th yr of my age.” The sampler is also marked with her married name, “Patty Sessions.” While Sessions’s sampler is certainly exceptional because she continued the project later in her life, the needlework was already discursive when she began the project at sixteen.

The seemingly conventional imagery in samplers is, in fact, what allowed women like Sessions to encode potentially subversive messages in a manner that is, nevertheless, circumspect. Heather Pristash, Inez Schaechterle, and Sue Carter Wood observe that needlework enabled women to compose messages that were “deeply controversial, or in direct conflict with authority” in a form that would be legible only to viewers who are extremely familiar with the symbolism in play.<sup>14</sup>

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13. Goggin asserts that such identifying verses began to appear in samplers in the mid-seventeenth century: “The first of these shows up on a 1655 sampler . . . on which the needle worker embroidered ‘Ann Fenn is my name and with my hand I made the same’” (*Essai*” 321). That Sessions’s verse, almost two hundred years later, is so similar suggests that the wording of these verses had become generic and conventional.

14. Heather Pristash, Inez Schaechterle, and Sue Carter Wood, “The Needle as the Pen: Intentionality, Needlework, and the Production of Alternative Discourses of Power,” in *Women and the Material Culture of Needlework and Textiles, 1750–1950*, edited by Maureen Daly Goggin and Beth Fowkes Tobin (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2009), 15. See also Susan Burrows Swan, *Plain & Fancy: American Women and Their Needlework, 1700–1850* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1977). Swan argues that needlework “allowed [women] to express themselves in an almost completely male-dominated society . . . and, indeed, in many instances [needlework is] the only concrete evidence of their endeavors” (12). See also Merry Cox, “Foreword,” in *Sampler Motifs and Symbolism*, edited by Patricia Andriele and Lesley Rudnicki (East Aurora, N.Y.: Hillside Samplings, 2003). Cox argues that samplers provide a “glimpse of the past,” including information about early modern women which is largely absent from official, published texts. A note on terminology: Pristash, Schaech-

Sessions's sampler exemplifies this argument, as the possible messages she encoded in the marriage scene continue to resist definitive interpretation. The discreet indications of female voice that can be gleaned from sewing artifacts reveal, as Joy Ritchie and Kate Ronald argue, that women throughout history have used any "available means" to "invent a way to speak in the context of being silenced and rendered invisible as persons."<sup>15</sup> Often lacking the authority to publish or speak publicly, women marked household linens in order to reveal their ownership of those items and to confirm their existence to posterity.<sup>16</sup> By viewing sewing pieces as discursive texts, we find that women have never been completely silent. Where there are gaps in female histories, alternative texts such as sewing samplers can fill the void.

### Sewing Symbolism and Discursive Multiplicity

Though Sessions's sampler has been the focus of some critical attention, by considering the symbolism in play I suggest an alternate interpretation of her embroidery to that which is currently dominant—i.e., that the sampler is primarily a memento recording things Sessions enjoyed.<sup>17</sup>

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terle, and Wood argue that needlework functions as "epideictic rhetoric" or a "rhetoric of display" that "highlights the skill or artistry of a speaker over the development of an argument that will convince its audience" (14–15). In other words, needlework is always already rhetorical. See also Maureen Daly Goggin, "Stitching a Life in 'Pen of Steele and Silken Inke': Elizabeth Parker's circa 1830 Sampler," in *Women and the Material Culture of Needlework and Textiles, 1750–1950*, edited by Maureen Daly Goggin and Beth Fowkes Tobin (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2009), 31–49; in this text Goggin refers to needlework and other sewing textiles as "text/iles" (36). In contrast, I choose to simply refer to needlework artifacts as texts to indicate their rhetorical nature.

15. Joy Ritchie and Kate Ronald, eds., *Available Means: An Anthology of Women's Rhetoric(s)* (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press, 2001), xvii.

16. See Ulrich, *Age of Homespun* for more information on marking.

17. Not all Sessions scholars engage with the sampler. See for instance, Elizabeth Willis, "Voice in the Wilderness: The Diaries of Patty Sessions," *The Journal*

Because the meaning of symbols is often slippery across time and cultures, it can be difficult to establish a definitive meaning for a given embroidered image. Furthermore, as Patricia Andrlé and Lesley Rudnicki observe in their compendium of American and European sampler symbolism, over time “general awareness of symbolism may have diminished. With the proliferation of designs in pattern books and those motifs copied from other samplers, it is questionable whether or not the sampler maker was aware of the significance of a motif or if it was used for merely decorative purposes.”<sup>18</sup> Despite these challenges, however, scholars can and should interpret symbols on samplers. The fact that this genre of sewing is formulaic suggests that the symbolism would have been known by many sewing instructors, who would have passed on the knowledge to female students. Andrlé and Rudnicki trace the meaning of many dominant sampler motifs back to biblical symbolism, suggesting that devout Christian needleworkers, such as Sessions, would have been familiar with the meanings ascribed to particular motifs. Indeed, part of the purpose of Andrlé and Rudnicki’s book is to make the symbolic code of embroidery legible to modern needleworkers so that they may choose “symbolism appropriate to the theme that they are employing or the occasion they are commemorating with their sampler.”<sup>19</sup> Given

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of *American Folklore* 101, no. 399 (1988): 37–47. In this piece, Willis does not reference Sessions’s sampler at all, instead focusing exclusively on Sessions’s diary. In other cases, parts of the sampler have been interpreted in ways that, I contend, are not fully supported by a close examination of the text. For example, Smart transcribes the first line of the verse as “The mind should be *inbred* in thought” rather than “The mind should be *inured* to thought” (“Patty Bartlett Sessions,” 11, emphasis added). Two meanings are thus ascribed to the verse: Sessions’s original wording, *inured*, suggests that thought must be learned or endured—that it is something a mind becomes habituated or accustomed to. Smart’s misquoted wording, *inbred*, suggests that thought is inherent or natural.

18. Patricia Andrlé and Lesley Rudnicki, *Sampler Motifs and Symbolism* (East Aurora, N.Y.: Hillside Samplings, 2003), 10.

19. Andrlé and Rudnicki, *Sampler Motifs*, 10.

that these authors see the discursive potential of modern samplers, it is reasonable to believe that samplers from earlier centuries are likewise intentionally employing symbolism to convey a theme or message. By drawing on Andrie and Rudnicki's sampler symbolism dictionary, on Hope B. Werness's *The Continuum Encyclopedia of Animal Symbolism in Art*, and on the nineteenth-century language of flowers, I interpret the symbolism on Sessions's sampler, and I argue that the consistency in her choice of symbols corroborates my reading.<sup>20</sup> However, I also acknowledge that, as with any discursive texts, there are multiple possible interpretations of Sessions's work. Thus, rather than offering a definitive interpretation of the sampler, I encourage further scholarly engagement with this, and other, embroideries.

I argue that Sessions's sampler conveys a sense of her priorities and feelings in adulthood and that her rhetorical choices regarding motifs, size, and color show how she manipulated the form to temper her messages. Many scholars, including Smart, have argued that the images depicted represent things Sessions enjoyed and that "some of her passions are expressed in the laden fruit trees, flowers, and animals that decorate the center section."<sup>21</sup> The main verse has also drawn significant critical attention; Smart focuses on the verse, positing that it "even more passionately describes her philosophy and, in truth, what made Patty work."<sup>22</sup> Newell pushes this interpretation further, noting that the verse "seems to reflect her older stage of life, cherishing the

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20. Hope B. Werness, *The Continuum Encyclopedia of Animal Symbolism in Art* (New York: Continuum, 2004). For more on the language of flowers, see Beverly Seaton, *The Language of Flowers: A History* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995) and Marina Heilmeyer, *The Language of Flowers: Symbols and Myths* (New York: Prestel, 2001).

21. Smart, "Patty Bartlett Sessions," 11. Ulrich and Newell also assert that the sampler functions as a memento. While I agree with this claim, I also think that the sampler deserves a closer reading to explore what the text is memorializing.

22. Ibid.



value of industry and counseling an appreciation of hard work, art, and nature.”<sup>23</sup> While I agree with Smart and Newell that Sessions likely enjoyed the images depicted, the motifs and text on the sampler also suggest deeper possible meanings.

For instance, the verse reveals a great deal about Sessions’s personality and priorities throughout her life. The first line of the verse, “the mind should be inured to thought,” suggests that intelligent thinking is a learned activity, not natural to all human beings equally but something that should be sought. The next two lines, “the hands in skilful labours taught / let time be usefully employed,” argue that hard work is important; this straightforward message is unsurprising, as Sessions was, indeed, an incredibly hard worker. Shortly after her marriage to David, Sessions began taking in weaving work to supplement the family income; before long “she had all the weaving she could do ‘fetched from ten to twelve miles.’”<sup>24</sup> With her weaving skills Sessions was able to create “a lasting home industry, one that provided a lifelong means of income and self-fulfillment.”<sup>25</sup> Sessions was also industrious in other fields. In addition to her knitting, midwifery, and weaving she raised her family, gardened, and sold fruits and vegetables. Sessions was widely known as a midwife;<sup>26</sup> legend has it she delivered a reputed three to four thousand babies.<sup>27</sup> Once in Utah, she raised an orchard and several gardens on her

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23. Newell, *Stitch in Time*, 163.

24. Ulrich, *Age of Homespun*, 404.

25. Donna Toland Smart, “Introduction,” in *Mormon Midwife: The 1846–1888 Diaries of Patty Bartlett Sessions*, edited by Donna Toland Smart (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1997), 10.

26. While accompanying her midwife mother-in-law, Rachel Stevens Sessions, on a delivery, Sessions realized that the frail Rachel was not going to arrive at the birth in time, so she ran ahead and delivered the baby, thus beginning her career as a midwife. See Ulrich, *The Age of Homespun*, 404.

27. Smart notes that based on the available records, it is unlikely that Sessions delivered nearly that many babies. “Since by actual count of her diaries in the



property. She both employed, and sold produce to, her neighbors. She was a shrewd businesswoman and a wise investor. Smart summarizes Sessions's business acumen, arguing that she was "an economic producer" and that she "was an industrious member of her community's workforce, harder working, more productive, and more successful than many of her male contemporaries."<sup>28</sup> Sessions's pride in her work ethic is written on her sampler for visitors to see.

However, the verse on the sampler reveals that hard work and learning were not Sessions's only priorities. She also valued leisure activities. The last line of her verse, "and art and nature be enjoyed," emphasizes pleasure rather than work or learning. Through this line Sessions suggests that appreciating art and nature is important but that such luxuries should come after learning and work—hence its place in the final line of the verse. The hierarchy she has created provides a means of interpreting her priorities: learning, work, fun. The verse may also explain why she chose to complete her sampler: after working hard for thirty-eight years and building a new home in Utah, she wanted something artistic to enjoy that would commemorate her life, celebrate her values, and decorate her home.

The verse is not the only part of the sampler that portrays Sessions's values; the animals depicted supplement the verse by highlighting Sessions's work ethic, faith, and pride in a socially acceptable—even humble—manner. First, the horse represents "masculinity; vitality; pride" or "ardor."<sup>29</sup> From what we know of her history, Sessions clearly

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years between 1848 and 1866 she delivered 484 babies (223 girls, 207 boys, 25 miscarriages, and 29 not identified as to sex), and considering even omissions and errors, a figure near 4,000 seems unlikely. Of course, prior to 1846, Patty had practiced midwifery for thirty-four years, so how can we know for sure?" ("Patty Bartlett Sessions," 258 n. 2).

28. Smart, "Introduction," 6 and 10.

29. Andrie and Rudnicki, *Sampler Motifs*, 39. Werness corroborates this interpretation, arguing that the horse is "generally a symbol of power, social status,

possessed a strong power of endurance. Fueled by her religious passion, she established seven homes as her family moved progressively west with the Mormons. She also provided for her family through her midwifery, orchards, and weaving. Sessions's ardor, strength, and vitality were defining features that allowed her to care for her family. In addition to the pride and strength represented by the horse, the rooster represents "vigilance [and] pride."<sup>30</sup> Similarly, the dog represents "loyalty and protection."<sup>31</sup> These qualities can be understood as maternal, especially considering her protective role as a mother. Furthermore, her sense of loyalty to her husband is especially relevant, as she stood by him despite his neglect. Because three of the main animals depicted represent pride, we can infer that the images were chosen intentionally. Sessions used the animals to display her sense of honor for her accomplishments in a socially acceptable manner through needlework.

The final animal on the sampler, the deer or hart, signifies another aspect of Sessions's life that she was proud of: her faith. However, because Sessions worked on her sampler at two different points in her life, pre-marriage and in her post-marriage middle age, the deer has multiple

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and nobility, as well as being linked with war, physical prowess, and bravery" (*Continuum Encyclopedia*, 220). While these terms are not explicitly related to pride, they are all largely character aspects that someone would be proud of.

30. Andrie and Rudnicki, *Sampler Motifs*, 23. Werness notes that cocks "connote watchfulness, courage, virility, prescience, and reliability. Negative symbolism includes pride, arrogance, and lust" (*Continuum Encyclopedia*, 89). The existence of negative symbolism suggests another element that may be in play in Sessions's sampler, i.e., that she was crafting a warning against being overly prideful.

31. Andrie and Rudnicki, *Sampler Motifs*, 27. If the dog had been depicted as chasing the deer (with or without hunters), this would have represented the soul pursuing evil (Andrie and Rudnicki, *Sampler Motifs*, 27). Sessions's dog and deer face each other from opposite sides of the sampler. According to Werness, "Christian iconography linked the dog with imagery of the Good Shepherd, and the dog became an EMBLEM [*sic*] of the faithful and morally vigilant clergy" (*Continuum Encyclopedia*, 139). Though Sessions was a layperson, she was certainly vigilant in her faith.

possible meanings. In needlework deer often represent the “wisdom of God: gentleness; pride and manliness; solitude” and “Christ as the love of God on Earth.”<sup>32</sup> In Sessions’s sampler, all of these interpretations are legitimate possibilities. First, religion was always important to Sessions. Before she converted to Mormonism she belonged to the Methodist Church, which she joined at the age of twenty-one in 1816. As with her family’s later conversion to Mormonism, Sessions was the first in her family to convert. Given her passion for religion, she very likely intentionally included a depiction of God’s wisdom, or of Christ, in her sampler. Second, “solitude” seems logical, as Sessions was often separated from her husband. Especially after the couple arrived in the Utah territory, David would either stay out tending the crops or would live primarily with one of his plural wives. As a result, Sessions was often lonely—a message that is reinforced by her marriage imagery in the center of the sampler. Third, initially seeming least likely, “pride and manliness,” is also a legitimate interpretation of the deer. There are two ways pride and manliness can be interpreted: that she was hoping to find a proud and manly husband, or that she was expressing her own pride in her accomplishments. As she began sewing before her marriage, Sessions might have imagined the deer as representing the ideal qualities she hoped to find in her future husband. However, Sessions may also have been aware that her motivation, in addition to her intellectual and spiritual strength, made her an exceptional person.

Sessions’s pride and sense of her own significance were not without cause. Her life was certainly remarkable, as she was one of the earliest settlers in the Utah territory and was friends with key Mormon figures such as Brigham Young and Joseph Smith.<sup>33</sup> She was also viewed as

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32. Andrie and Rudnicki, *Sampler Motifs*, 37. Werness further explains that “In the Old Testament, the hart pants for water just as the soul longs for God; stags symbolize the soul thirsting for salvation” (*Continuum Encyclopedia*, 131).

33. Smart argues that Sessions records her friendship and meetings with key Mormon figures such as Joseph Smith and Brigham Young with pride in her

exceptional by the Mormon community, as she fulfilled a prophecy two days after arriving in the Salt Lake Valley in 1847. In her diary she records,

put Lorenzo Youngs wife Harriet [Harriet P. Wheeler] to bed with a son [Lorenzo Dow, Jr.] the first male born in this valley it was said to me more than 5 months ago that my hands should be the first to handle the first born son in the place of rest for the saints even in the city of our God I have come more than one thousand miles to do it since it was spoken.<sup>34</sup>

The prophet may have been making a safe bet; after all, is it really surprising that Sessions, a popular midwife, would deliver the first Mormon baby in the Utah territory? Nevertheless, the diary clearly shows that Sessions felt the import of the prophecy and of her role in it. She may, therefore, have worked a sense of pride into her sampler, regardless of her age, when she stitched the deer.

Though the dog, deer, and horse represent masculinity, pride, and ardor, because she stitched the animals in shades of brown the potentially boastful messages are tempered; though Sessions was expressing ideas that can be interpreted as conceited, her color choices indicate that she was, at worst, circumspectly violating social norms. The color brown signifies “humility, poverty [and] renunciation.”<sup>35</sup> Sessions’s apparent awareness of sampler conventions and symbolism allowed her the space to compose a text that is full of pride, yet, because of the medium and color choices, the tone of the sampler is modest rather than arrogant. The argument could be made that the color choice is insignificant, as all of the animals are, in fact, brown in real life. However, not all of these animals are, necessarily, brown. The dog, horse, and rooster could have been realistically depicted in several other colors. By choosing to

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diaries. Her importance in the community can be seen through the conference several key Church leaders convened in her home in 1836 to discuss plans for the “gathering of the Saints” (Smart, “Patty Bartlett Sessions,” 3).

34. Sessions, *Mormon Midwife*, 99. Brackets inserted by Smart.

35. Andrle and Rudnicki, *Sampler Motifs*, 24.

stitch the animals in brown, Sessions softens the imagery to render it more socially acceptable. Though she privileges images that convey her sense of loyalty, pride, and vitality, Sessions is, as we will see with her manipulation of marriage motifs, careful to ensure that her sampler is never too radical or rude.

### Anti-Marriage Motifs: Polygamy and the Young Couple

Perhaps the most interesting image in the sampler is, as Ulrich notes, the young couple. Because the sampler provides little direction for the eye, the viewer's gaze is initially drawn to the center of the piece: the husband. The young man is placed in a garden setting full of lively animals and colorful plants. With his bride dressed in white just to his left, this appears to be, as Ulrich notes, "pastoral embroidery," but it is not, as she suggests, "a celebration of conjugal happiness and rural life."<sup>36</sup> The female figure towers over her male partner, suggesting that the power in the relationship is held by the wife, not by her husband.<sup>37</sup> If we assume the two figures represent Sessions and her husband David, the emphasis on the female figure seems appropriate considering what is known of their relationship. Through the marriage imagery on her sampler, Sessions expresses her profound dissatisfaction with her husband's behavior.

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36. Ulrich, *Age of Homespun*, 405.

37. In 1848, when Sessions finished her sampler, she was David's only wife. Sessions's struggles with polygamy unfortunately did not end after David's death. In December of 1851, Sessions married her second husband, John Parry, who eventually took a younger second wife named Harriet. Smart summarizes Sessions's feelings toward her husbands, arguing "Patty's attitude toward her husbands was respect, devotion, and acceptance of their faults. Although she felt 'bad' that she had not been consulted earlier about their taking plural wives . . . she dismissed that complaint with merely a mention" ("Patty Bartlett Sessions," 7). As the sampler shows, however, Smart's interpretation does not fully capture the complexity of Sessions's feelings about David's polygamy.

One reason that the male figure may be smaller than the female figure is that David, among other flaws, was frequently absent. As a result of these absences Sessions might, unsurprisingly, not have viewed him as the most significant—and therefore the “largest”—person in her life. For example, in 1848 David lived with Sessions for about half of the months of May and June, spending the rest of the time away at the family farm. She records in her diary on May 13: “Mr. Sessions come home from the farm been gone a week goes again to morrow.”<sup>38</sup> He returns a few days later, staying from May 18 through May 30. He then leaves for the farm again “to keep the crickets off of the crop.”<sup>39</sup> He did not return until June 22, and though the date of his departure is not listed, he clearly left again, as Sessions notes his return on July 1.<sup>40</sup> While David was gone, Sessions carried a considerable workload. She was left alone to care for her daughter-in-law, Mary Sessions, and the grandchild Mary had recently birthed. On Tuesday, May 9 she writes, “I now have to take care of Mary and her babe and do the rest of the work her breasts very sore and her babe very troublesome I have been up 2 and 3 times a night with it ever since it was born.”<sup>41</sup> She also had to worry about a leaking roof, repeated frosts destroying her garden, and lost cows. In addition to all this, Sessions delivered thirteen babies in May and June.<sup>42</sup> Considering her heavy workload, it is likely that Sessions considered herself to be the keystone holding the household together while David was away seeing to the crops.<sup>43</sup> Sessions’s pride in

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38. Sessions, *Mormon Midwife*, 112.

39. *Ibid.*, 113.

40. *Ibid.*, 114–15.

41. *Ibid.*, 112.

42. *Ibid.*, 112–15.

43. It is also significant to note that though she married John Parry in 1851, he did not live with her consistently either. Once she arrived in the Salt Lake Valley Sessions maintained her own independent home. Smart observes in her introduction to Sessions’s diaries that “both of Patty’s husbands died at her

her ability to manage on her own, without David's presence, is expressed through the prideful imagery on the sampler, as well as through the size disparity between the human figures.<sup>44</sup>

Not only was Sessions's marriage complicated by her husband's long absences, but David's polygamy also caused considerable conflict. Though Sessions was a devout Mormon, she was nevertheless unhappy when her husband took plural wives.<sup>45</sup> David married his second wife, Rosilla Cowen, on October 3, 1845. In her diary, Patty Sessions records the emotional fallout that occurred after David married Rosilla.<sup>46</sup> At first, Rosilla remained behind in Nauvoo with Patty's adult son Perrigrine and his wives, while David and Patty travelled to the Salt Lake Valley. Rosilla travelled later with Perrigrine's family, arriving in Utah on June 22, 1846,

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home, where they seemed to gravitate when they were ill" ("Introduction," 25). Sessions provided a living for herself, and her husbands often turned to her for physical, spiritual, and financial support. While she may have loved and been loved by her husbands, Sessions's marriages resist conventional gender norms; though she was committed to her husbands, she had complicated relationships with them.

44. While some might speculate that David may simply have been shorter than his wife, suggesting the depiction is factual, it is also possible that the size difference between the two figures is symbolic. Either way, the depiction was intentionally composed by Sessions.

45. Sessions was one of Joseph Smith's plural wives, though the arrangement appears, in this case, to have been largely symbolic. In her diary she writes, "I was sealed to Joseph Smith by Willard Richards March 9 1842 in Newel K Whitneys chamber Nauvoo for ^time and all eternity^ Eternity and I and if I do not live to attend to it myself when there is a place prepared I want some one to attend to it for me according to order Sylvia ^my daughter^ was present when I was sealed to Joseph Smith" (*Mormon Midwife*, 276). Historian Richard Abanes argues that Sessions's note that her daughter was also present means that Sylvia was also sealed to Smith and that they were both his wives. See Richard Abanes, *One Nation Under Gods: A History of the Mormon Church* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 194.

46. Though, as I have noted, I prefer to refer to Sessions by her surname, I have opted to use her first name in this section for clarity.

four months and ten days after Patty and David.<sup>47</sup> In her diary, Patty expresses at best mixed feelings toward Rosilla. She writes, “I came home found Perrigrine and family and Rosilla there we was glad to see each other. . . . I feel as if I should be happy but alas they are not and sorrow fills my heart.”<sup>48</sup> The construction of this entry is interesting for a few reasons. First, Sessions identifies her son, his children, and his wives as family, thus isolating Rosilla. Then, when expressing her unhappiness, she separates herself from her feelings. Rather than being “but alas I am not” happy, she writes “alas they are not” happy, presenting her feelings as though they belong to someone else. By distancing herself rhetorically, Sessions is able to isolate the feelings that bring her into conflict with her husband, as he presumably loves Rosilla and is happy to see her. Sessions’s unspeakable feelings seem to be expressed through the size of the couple in her sampler instead.

Sessions’s unhappiness upon Rosilla’s return is understandable; suddenly her husband, whom she had to herself for four months, was spending most of his time with Rosilla. To add insult to injury, Rosilla did little of the housework, leaving Sessions to pick up the slack.<sup>49</sup> However,

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47. Sessions, *Mormon Midwife*, 34 n. 16, 56.

48. *Ibid.*, 56.

49. Rosilla was sick for a period in late July and early August 1846. After she recovered, she refused to work or even to eat with the family even though she could. Over a two-week period in August, Sessions records multiple times that she tried to convince Rosilla to eat with the family, but she notes with evident frustration, “Rosilla wants to cook and eat by herself I will not let her when she can eat with the rest of us and is well” (*Mormon Midwife*, 62). Over a week later she writes, “we have had another talk with Rosilla she says she will not receive any advice from me she will do as she pleases & she will not come into the tent nor eat with us again” (*Mormon Midwife*, 62). Ultimately, even David got exasperated by Rosilla’s behavior, which contributed to her decision to leave Utah and return to Nauvoo in December. The rift between David and Rosilla hinged, in large part, on her refusal to work. Sessions records on 5 October 1846 that “I make her many ofers [*sic*] and so did he but she said she would not except [*sic*] of any for she would not come in to the tent nor go to



what seems to have bothered Sessions the most was that David treated her harshly and largely abandoned her in favor of Rosilla. In a series of entries from early July 1846, Sessions records her agonizing treatment after Rosilla's arrival. She writes, "Thursday ^9^ I have slept but little [blotted out: Mr Sessions has said many hard things to me] I feel as though my heart would burst with grief."<sup>50</sup> Sessions's misery continues for several days, and she notes every day that David was hard on her and that she was barely able to eat or sleep. On Saturday and Sunday, July 11–12, she records with difficulty, "I [blotted out: slept alone]^ eat my breakfast but I am so full of grief that there is no room for food and I soon threw it up I can only say I feel bad [blotted out: lay alone part of the night] Sunday 23 I feel some better he has promised to treat me well [several entries stricken out and ink changes color: I lay alone]."<sup>51</sup> Despite David's promises, he and Rosilla did not begin to treat Patty well. For example, on Sunday, August 2, 1846 she records how David and Rosilla stranded her after inviting her to accompany them to the river. In her diary she recalls, "Mr Sessions took Rosilla and ^asked^ me to go to the river then took her and waided [sic] across the river left me on this side was gone 2 or 3 hours."<sup>52</sup> In light of such treatment, Sessions's frustration and pain are certainly understandable. After months of struggling with Patty, Rosilla apostatized and returned east in December of 1846. However, even when Rosilla finally left, things were not instantly better for Patty. On November 29, David stayed with Rosilla one last time; when he returned the next day, Sessions writes that he "did not speak

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work any where else he then told her she must suffer the consequence for he was not able to maintain her in idleness and he should say no more to her" (*Mormon Midwife*, 63).

50. Sessions, *Mormon Midwife*, 58. Brackets and notes inserted by Smart.

51. Ibid. Brackets and notes inserted by Smart.

52. Ibid., 60.

to me when he came home.”<sup>53</sup> Three days later, on December 3, Rosilla left for Nauvoo.<sup>54</sup> Sessions does not specify if David was speaking to her again, though at the very least we know someone informed her of Rosilla’s departure. Regardless of when David and Patty got back on speaking terms, her sampler, completed almost two years later, shows she had not forgotten how David and Rosilla had treated her.

Indeed, the marriage imagery at the center of the sampler depicts a tumultuous relationship at best. Though the scene appears to be Edenic, and though the nature imagery surrounding the couple seems to create an elegant pastoral scene, the motifs on the sampler suggest Sessions was still dealing with the aftermath of David’s marriage to Rosilla. For instance, the orange tree, a classic marriage motif, represents “virginity because it bears fruit and flowers at the same time. It represents the virgin as both virgin and mother.”<sup>55</sup> If sewn before her marriage, the virginity imagery represents Sessions’s “ripeness” for matrimony: She was ready to bear children—the fruit of her union. If sewn later in her life, the virgin mother imagery is still appropriate, especially after David married Rosilla. After his second marriage, David did not share Sessions’s bed regularly, leaving Sessions feeling lonely. Shortly after Rosilla arrived in Utah in 1846, Sessions writes on August 1, “I still feel very lonsome [*sic*],” and her feelings of loneliness continued to grow as David withdrew from her.<sup>56</sup> Sessions notes David’s hurtful inattention again on November 4, 1846, a few weeks before Rosilla leaves forever, writing that “he has lain with her three nights [...] I go to bed know not

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53. Ibid, 67.

54. Ibid.

55. Andrie and Rudnicki, *Sampler Motifs*, 52. According to Heilmeyer in *The Language of Flowers*, “oranges are associated with the bride at a wedding,” and the plant’s white flowers “are symbols of virtue, chastity, and innocence” (88).

56. Sessions, *Mormon Midwife*, 60.

what to do.”<sup>57</sup> Sessions may have considered herself to be in a pseudo-virginal state, already a mother but no longer sexually desired. She thus becomes a virgin-mother figure, nurturing her children, grandchildren, and community, but lacking any passionate consummation. Sessions may have felt isolated both in her sexual roles and in her familial roles. As a result of her tumultuous relationships, the orange tree motif may have continued to resonate with her over the nearly forty years she carried and created her sampler.

In addition to the orange tree, Sessions manipulated many other marriage motifs, suggesting that her marriage was problematic both before and after David married Rosilla. Indeed, what is most surprising about the couple on the sampler, besides their sizes, are the things they are not doing. If they were holding hands, or were holding a wreath between them, the figures would represent a bride and groom, marriage, and marital fidelity.<sup>58</sup> Yet the couple is clearly not holding hands, and the wreath is above them and off to one side rather than being held between the couple. In fact, the wreath is almost as large as the male figure and looms oppressively over his head. Similarly, if the male figure were holding a dove, it would likewise indicate marital fidelity.<sup>59</sup> In Sessions’s sampler, however, the dove is depicted as flying away from the couple, suggesting that the fidelity she expected to find had departed. Rather than depicting the female figure as a dutiful bride holding her husband’s hand, her hands are empty at her sides, and next to her is a flowering plant, which represents “the symbol of life; Mother Earth [or] Mother Nature.”<sup>60</sup> Though the female figure is clad in white, suggesting a virgin bride, this is not a typical marriage scene.<sup>61</sup> By rearranging standard

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57. Ibid., 65.

58. Andrie and Rudnicki, *Sampler Motifs*, 32.

59. Ibid.

60. Ibid.

61. Ibid., 24.

motifs, Sessions uses her sampler to reveal the flaws in her marriage. Perhaps unable to speak openly about her dislike of polygamy, or about her dissatisfaction with her husband, Sessions turned to sewing as a tool for communicating transgressive truths.

### Conclusion: Filling the Silences

Sessions's sampler reveals her hierarchy of life priorities, displays her conflicting sense of pride and humility, and reflects her troubled relationship with her husband. Yet we cannot know for certain when she stitched each element. Though Newell makes an interesting argument that the top of the sampler was sewn when Sessions was a girl and that everything under her note about recommencing the sampler in 1854 came after, there is no concrete account detailing which elements Sessions stitched at any time, or any changes she may have made to the original pattern.<sup>62</sup> As a result, we cannot, for instance, argue that when she began her sampler the male figure was larger than the female and that she changed it later. Such a reading is insupportable. Nor can we argue that she added particular images later in her life rather than when she originally started the project as a teenager. Whatever the date of any actual motif, we can conclude that in 1848 when Sessions completed her sampler, she approved of the images. The gendered imagery, evidence of religious fervor, her sense of pride in her exceptionalism, and her critique of her marriage were intentionally part of her final product. Sessions intelligently, knowingly, and subtly manipulated standard sampler conventions to create a representation of her life on the linen.

Yet, despite her avid pen and prolific needle, Sessions is often still silenced through misrepresentation by the scholars who are attempting to recover her voice. Overlooking Sessions's needlework texts completely, most scholars focus exclusively on her journal, which, while an important text, does not convey the full narrative. For example, Elizabeth Willis

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62. Newell, *Stitch in Time*, 161–62.

argues that “although it would be impossible to define the precise impulse that led Patty Sessions to end her journal, hers is clearly a gradual shift toward speechlessness” because her diaries end several years before her death.<sup>63</sup> Indeed, many scholars interpret the end of Sessions’s diary as the end of her life.<sup>64</sup> However, the diary and extant needlework function as complementary documents recording Sessions’s life even after she stopped writing.

Unfortunately, little is known about the last four years of Sessions’s life besides a family anecdote about her final days: she knitted socks but made so many dropped stitches and errors that her family members unwound the yarn each night. Sessions therefore knit the same yarn over again each day.<sup>65</sup> Newell argues that her family unraveled the yarn because they “respected her work” and realized that highly flawed projects would be very difficult and frustrating for Sessions to knit.<sup>66</sup> Even if her family’s gesture of undoing was well founded, it is, at the very least, editing and revising the Sessions archive. I contend that her family’s actions actually function as an all-too-common act of textual erasure. Because socks are less likely to be kept as family heirlooms, especially poorly knit ones, Sessions is effectively silenced. Because women often worked, and composed, in media that was functional rather than fancy, many artifacts do not survive because they wear out or are discarded after their purpose is fulfilled. Yet Sessions was not consumed by silence; she simply changed mediums, privileging knitting over writing. Considering Sessions’s sewing as readable text allows us to find her voice even after her diaries end. Sessions’s diary and needlework are two forms of writing that worked toward the same goal: to record her life.

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63. Willis, “Voice in the Wilderness,” 46.

64. Ulrich inadvertently misdates Sessions’s death as 1888, the year her diary ended, not the actual year of her death in 1892 (*Age of Homespun*, 407).

65. Sessions, *Mormon Midwife*, 10.

66. Newell, *Stitch in Time*, 35.

After her death, Sessions's son Perrigrine found one last piece of needlework hidden inside W. Beach's *The Family Physician*, a medical book from Sessions's personal library.<sup>67</sup> The loose cross-stitch reads "Remember Me." Here is an insight into Sessions's motives for writing her diaries and finishing her sampler that should not be overlooked: to be remembered. This second embroidery suggests that Ulrich, Newell, and other scholars are not far off the mark; Sessions's sampler is a memento, or what Newell calls a life review, but it was also an intentionally constructed text incorporating a variety of messages.<sup>68</sup> Placed in the context of her life, needlework, and writing, Sessions's sampler shows her hope for the future but also reflects pieces of the disappointing reality of her marriage.

As discursive texts, samplers provide valuable and often unequaled insights into female experiences, opinions, and thoughts. Through Sessions's sampler, we can see how needlework can both reinscribe and resist cultural norms, and how sewing, as Maureen Daly Goggin notes, has always "been a significant cultural practice of meaning-making."<sup>69</sup> Girls and women expressed their opinions about life, marriage, politics, religion, and the world through samplers because they were unable to write about such things more explicitly elsewhere. Because samplers were viewed by a limited audience, women could incorporate images, texts, and ideas that may have been considered subversive if composed or published in a more public form.

Reading Sessions's sampler allows scholars to glimpse how women have historically composed needlework while also exposing how they negotiated the perceived limitations inherent to employing genteel, domestic skills rhetorically. After all, needlework compositions, which were largely confined to domestic spaces, could only reach a limited audi-

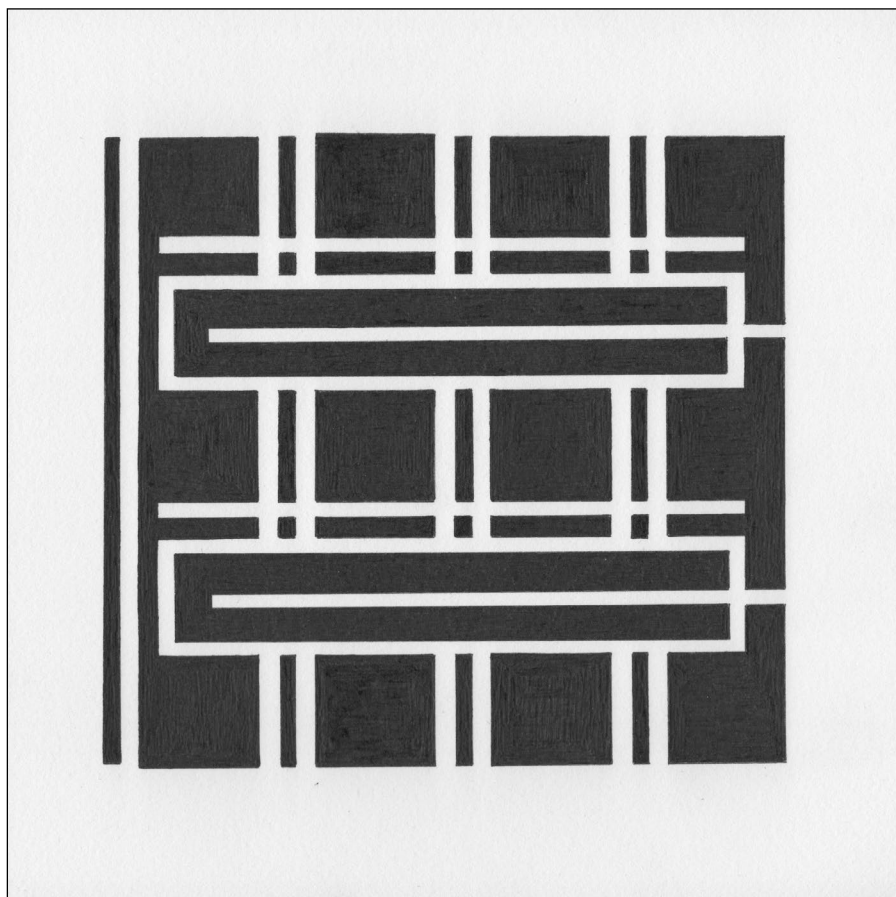
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67. Sessions, *Mormon Midwife*, 394.

68. Newell, *Stitch in Time*, 164.

69. Goggin, "Essai," 312.

ence and were required to function within specific generic constraints. Yet the fact that these texts would not be widely distributed is what made them safe sites of expression for women. Because sewing samplers and other needlework would be safely restricted to the sewing kit or the sitting room, women could freely express their thoughts—whether mundane reflections on piety or critiques of their spouses—without the risks publication entails. In other words, while women have historically used needlework as a medium through which to express sentiments they could not speak or publish in other forms, all needlework is not, necessarily, overtly subversive, nor were all women engaged in needlework attempting to disrupt social and gender norms. Rather, sewing offered women a space for self-expression that, no matter the content, would still be considered appropriate. In this case, Sessions recorded her dissatisfaction with her marriage in her sampler, and the form of the composition mitigated the subversive potential of the text by reinscribing it within domestic spaces and practices. Sessions did not seek to upset Mormon values, nor did she seek to upend conventional gender norms. She did, however, wish to express her feelings about herself, and her husband, through needlework. By using her sampler as more than a memento or a tool of learning, she created a beautiful discursive artifact that could express her feelings and be appreciated by future generations. Her sampler offers unparalleled insights into how Sessions sought to construct meaning out of her life and reveals how needlework enables women to express themselves. Ultimately, her needlework has been rhetorically effective, as scholars do, indeed, remember her.



Daniel Hall Bartholomew  
Sanctum Sanctorum  
ink on paper, 8 in. x 8 in.



## SPARE THE ROD

Russell Arben Fox

*Remember thy congregation, which thou hast purchased of old; the rod of thine inheritance, which thou hast redeemed; this mount Zion, wherein thou hast dwelt.*

—Psalm 74:2 (KJV)

At 7 a.m. on a Monday morning, I talked with Death on a mountain.

IT'S HARDLY A MOUNTAIN. IT'S BARELY A HILL.

*I'm writing this, and so I can call it a mountain if I want. Besides, I'm from Wichita, Kansas; a sudden forty-foot-elevation hill is a genuine geographic landmark.*

SO YOU'RE NOT EVEN GOING TO PRETEND THAT YOU'RE NOT THE AUTHOR HERE.

*Nope.*

IN THAT CASE, I SHOULD CONGRATULATE YOU ON FINDING THE RIGHT FONT FOR MY VOICE.

*Thanks. I had to hunt around for the html code for it.*

I APPRECIATE YOUR ATTENTION TO DETAIL. WILL ANYONE UNDERSTAND THE REFERENCE?

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This piece originally appeared as a blog post published on By Common Consent on October 17, 2016, <https://bycommonconsent.com/2016/10/17/spare-the-rod/>.

*Among the people who might actually read all of this, all the way through, namely my extended family? Probably not; I'm not sure any of them are Pratchett readers. But I'll put this up on a blog, and probably plenty of those readers will appreciate it.*

THAT'S GOOD TO KNOW. TO RETURN TO MY EARLIER POINT, YOU SHOULD MAKE IT CLEAR THAT YOU'RE NOT, IN FACT, ON A MOUNTAIN, WHATEVER YOU MAY WANT TO CALL IT, BUT RATHER AT THE TOP OF A HUGE PILE OF DIRT IN THE MIDDLE OF A VACANT LOT ACROSS THE STREET FROM YOUR HOTEL.

*It's been here long enough that it's covered with sagebrush, tumbleweeds, brome grass, and wild mullein. It's practically part of the natural landscape by now.*

YOU COULDN'T REMEMBER ALL THOSE NAMES. YOU HAD TO LOOK THEM UP LATER, WHEN YOU FINALLY GOT AROUND TO WRITING THIS.

*But I recognized the plants; I saw them all the time growing up around here. I just couldn't remember what they were called.*

The same thing happened the previous night, while at the viewing for my father's body. A few hundred people came, and it seemed as though every person whose face I could dimly recognize remembered my name: old family friends, Scout leaders, congregation members, people from the neighborhood. No one showed any disappointment that I usually couldn't quite place them, but I was disappointed with myself all the same, for two hours straight. It's September 26, 2016, and I'm back at my boyhood home of Spokane (now Spokane Valley), Washington. Yesterday my six brothers and I, with the invaluable help of our oldest sister's husband Michael, who knows the funeral business inside and out, dressed my father's perfectly healthy seventy-three-year-old dead body in his temple clothes. Today, he'll be buried.

*Ok, Death, I'll start. You've surely had this pointed out to you hundreds of billions of times over the millennia, I know, but I'm going to mention it*

*again: do you realize just how unfair, how nonsensical, how—and I do not say this lightly—UNJUST your labors often are? Taking life away from man strong enough, healthy enough, to awaken every weekday morning before 5 a.m. to play eighteen holes of golf before putting in a full day's work? A man in better physical shape at age seventy-three than practically all nine of his children and all fifty-seven of his grandchildren? A man with no history of heart trouble? A man with a wife of fifty-one years who struggles with pain, depression, arthritis, and more, whom he has built his later years around supporting? A man neck-deep in financial entanglements he was trying to straighten out for his posterity? A man with an older sister who has survived multiple strokes, yet keeps on going? A man dying of a massive heart attack, which hit without warning, while playing golf, with a shopping list in his pocket and e-mails he'd already sent that morning from his phone awaiting reply? How random can you get? A Death Eater hitting him with an Avada Kedavra curse is almost more believable than what actually happened.*

YOU'RE ANGRY.

*You make people angry! Good grief, you made his younger brother, my Uncle Chuck, one of the sweetest, quietest, most retiring, least aggressive and least critical men I've ever known, actually upset with God!*

HE WASN'T REALLY UPSET WITH GOD.

*Oh is that so? That's surprising; I thought you'd be experienced enough to know that it's not especially helpful to go around telling people they're misunderstanding their own feelings!*

I'M OLDER THAN ANY HUMAN COULD EVER BE, AND THUS I CAN SPEAK WITH AN AUTHORITY OF EXPERIENCE TO A DEGREE THAT NONE OF YOU CAN. BESIDES, YOU KNOW I'M CORRECT.

That's true, I do know it. Uncle Chuck wasn't really angry—he admitted as much in his tearful, beautiful prayer that ended the family visitation with Dad's corpse before his funeral, really the most moving part of that whole dreadful day. I'm not really angry either. Some people might genuinely feel

anger over a death, seeing it as some sort of betrayal, a violation, an act of vindictive harm. But for us, for all us Foxes I think, the angry “whys” were an expression of loneliness, of fear. Fear and doubt about what it’ll mean to live our lives, to take care of Mom, to raise our kids, to continue in the faith, to “keep on keeping on” as Dad would always say, without Dad actually *being here*, as he always has been. He was such a constant presence, such a competent resource, such a confident and charismatic—and commanding—patriarch. He was a better man than I, better than Chuck, better than anyone I’ve ever known. That may be rude thing to say, and probably both improvable and irrelevant, but it would be ridiculous to pretend that I believe anything otherwise. He was the giant whose shoulders I stood upon, the rock and raw material that my life’s choices have been carved out of. Even those choices that resulted in my taking a path distant from my father’s preferences were laid with cobblestones that I retrieved from streams he had first forged. As different as I was from him, the innumerable ways in which I took my bearings from him put all our small, particular differences to shame. Or so it seems today.

I have a book with me on the mountain, a book about grief and grieving by Melissa Dalton-Bradford, given to me by a dear friend before we got on the plane a day and a half ago. I’ve been reading out of it continually, book-marking a few passages. This is one, from near the end:

“Fear not” is a divine injunction straight from God. God Himself, whose sufferings outstrip all the accumulated sufferings of the infinitude of creation, greets us with those words . . . “Fear not” is God’s steely, conquering command: “Fear, be not! Fear, be gone!”

To exorcise fear, God floods the darkness of this world with His blazing presence. And wherever His presence is, not only can fear not remain, but confidence, peace, contentment, wholeness, strength, and light—all cousins of joy—can flourish. Does the pain of the loss disappear? No. Does my yearning for my son cease? No. Not in the least. But what does happen is that alongside—or better, from within—the pain and

yearning comes a sense of being loving upheld by God. The terrifying free-fall of fear ends, just in time, in His hands.<sup>1</sup>

I NOTE THAT YOU'RE NOT INCLUDING THE AUTHOR'S REFERENCE TO THE "WEeping GOD."

*Yeah, I'm kind of conflicted on that point.*

DO YOU THINK GOD DOESN'T SHARE YOUR SORROW OVER THE FACT THAT IT WAS TIME FOR ME TO COLLECT YOUR FATHER?

*I think—I hope—He does. I'm just not sure it's helpful to imagine God's sorrow through such human, ordinary imagery as tears.*

DO YOU DISREGARD THE STORY OF JESUS, THE INCARNATE GOD, WEEPING BEFORE LAZARUS'S TOMB IN THE PRESENCE OF MARTHA AND MARY?

*Not at all. But does that story suggest that Jesus was "sad"? As in, distraught, unhappy, wretched, bitter, depressed? I can't relate to that, I'm afraid. Jesus was showing empathy, because He is the perfect empathizer. And yes, I suppose that means that He was moved by the bitterness, the unhappiness, which Lazarus's death occasioned, and to be so moved, if I'm not going to reduce God to some wholly instrumental being, must mean that He truly experienced some emotion that intruded upon Him, that overcame Him. But that's all wrapped up in the mystery of an omniscient God who nonetheless suffers for and with us, the mystery of the atonement. I'm not really comfortable with such a presumption of weakness, of subjectivity, being extended into His mystery. God feels compassion, that I am certain of. But whether He is, Himself, a subject to those feelings, I doubt. The firmness expressed in this passage—"steely, conquering command," "blazing presence"—thus feels more true to me.*

YOU LIKE A STRONG GOD. LIKE HOW YOUR FATHER WAS STRONG.

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1. Melissa Dalton-Bradford, *Collected Voices: For the Grieving and Those Who Would Mourn with Them* (Sanger, Calif.: Familius Publishing, 2014), 228–29.

*Don't psychoanalyze me on this point, Death. I can quote Paul, Augustine, Luther, even Neuhaus or McConkie to back me up.*

THOSE PEOPLE WOULD HAVE STRONGLY DISAGREED WITH EACH OTHER ON MANY POINTS, ESPECIALLY THE LAST TWO OF THEM.

*But they would have all agreed on the most important thing: that God is complete and that His love and instructions for us are perfect, not a work in process.*

DO YOU EVEN BELIEVE THAT?

*I'm not sure what I believe. All I know is that, as much as it runs against many of my political and moral dispositions, I've never been able to help suspecting that it might be true all the same.*

THAT WHAT MIGHT BE TRUE?

*That God has only one, sole revealed Kingdom on earth, and that therefore every other kingdom, every other family, every other marriage or relationship or personal standard of behavior or collective set of goals or construal of reality that stands apart from that kingdom, is simply wrong. Wrong, and therefore something you ought not bring into your life. That's what my father believed was true—no, that's what he knew was true, and I'm not confident enough in my own doubts to be certain that I can discount someone else's certainty. Especially when so much evidence supported him. His own successes in business, in church, in his family—he attributed them all to his obedience, to his commitment to the modern Mormon order of things, to the scriptures and prayer and holding firm to the iron rod.*

I WONDERED WHEN THAT WOULD MAKE AN APPEARANCE.

*You can't think about my father without thinking about it. Or at least I can't.*

BUT ISN'T IT THE CASE THAT JIM FOX BECAME MORE HUMBLE, MORE FLEXIBLE, MORE OPEN-MINDED AS THE YEARS WENT BY? IT'S NOT AS

THOUGH THERE WASN'T CONTRARY EVIDENCE TO HIS CONVICTIONS IN HIS OWN LIFE, EXAMPLES THAT PUT ASTERISKS BESIDE HIS TRACK RECORD.

*I reject that way of putting things, Death. That's a way of framing the question that assumes from the outset that all those Iron Rodders, all those orthodox and obedient Mormons, just aren't as humble, or flexible, or open-minded—all good things!—as we Liahonas are. The whole explosion in the Mormon blogosphere over those videotaped meetings with church leaders a few weeks back, with the Mormon senator who is described as "church-broke"—so many people who said that was appalling, who insisted that submitting completely to the authority of the church is a denial of one's agency. My basic sympathies are on their side, and yet ... are they just reading a different New Testament than I? One where Paul doesn't start off the Book of Romans describing himself as a "slave" to Jesus Christ? The one where submitting, becoming meek and humble and childlike, isn't the constant refrain of the prophets and of Jesus Himself?*

YET YOU DISPUTE THAT READING.

*Only as the only valid one. The scriptures include many voices—for every sin-obsessed Romans there's a service-oriented James, for every law-focused Deuteronomy there's a grace-hinting Micah, for every confident Nephi there's a haunted Jacob. Just because I can read one part of the canon against another doesn't mean that there's something necessarily invalid about a reading that disagrees with what my basic sympathies want to be correct. Because they might not be. Dad was absolutely "church-broke," through and through—and he had a great life, one that resulted in a huge amount of good being done in the lives of many. Can I really say with confidence that it wasn't his "church-brokenness" that enabled that? No, I can't. I may doubt it, I may question it, my basic disposition may point away from that conclusion, but I can't dismiss the possibility. The Liahona critique of the Iron Rod is too easy.*

SO YOU'RE HAUNTED BY HIS STRENGTH, AND THE FACT THAT HIS STRENGTH MAY HAVE BEEN GROUNDED IN HIS OWN DETERMINED SUBMISSION TO WHAT HE WAS CONFIDENT WAS TRUE.

*Basically.*

ALL OF THAT WOULDN'T STOP YOU FROM, FOR EXAMPLE, POINTING OUT THAT HE WAS RARELY MEEK AND HUMBLE AND CHILDLIKE IN THE WAY HE WENT ABOUT DOING ALL THOSE GOOD THINGS.

*No, Dad wasn't a particularly humble person. But he was someone who would always listen to what you had to say and treat you with respect. No, he wasn't at all flexible on those things he was certain were revealed truth—but he was very flexible on anything he assumed wasn't, and you'd be surprised at what that included. And open-minded? If you mean by that "likely to change one's mind," then he wasn't that, especially when it came to politics—but if by open-mindedness you're suggesting compassion, acceptance, and love, then I'm sorry, but my father's willingness to serve and help others, regardless of their situation, knew almost no bounds.*

ALMOST.

*Well, yeah. I mean, Mother Teresa he wasn't. But neither am I.*

YOU SOUND PRETTY DEFENSIVE ABOUT ALL THIS, WHICH IS ODD, CONSIDERING THAT YOU'RE ONLY ARGUING WITH YOURSELF.

*It's an argument I've been having with myself for decades, and I've gotten very good at it. Even with Dad's death, it may not end.*

I had woken up early this morning with a headache—a headache that will continue and worsen throughout the day, getting the point where I have trouble holding up my corner of my father's casket as we carry it to the grave, and I end up having to flee all the reminiscing and photo-taking at the luncheon after the funeral and throw up back at the hotel. At the moment, I was sipping a hot chocolate, hoping that the heat and caffeine hit, combined with the Excedrin and the cool just-post-dawn



breeze that whips around me as I stand at the top of the mound across the street from the hotel nearly the whole extended family is staying at, will help my head. It won't, but hope springs eternal. Finishing the hot chocolate, I realize I need to pee. Looking around, I find a steep, perhaps seven-foot-deep depression on the top of this man-made, weed-covered hill, and I slide down in to relieve myself.

AN ESSAY ON YOUR FATHER'S DEATH AND YOUR OWN EFFORTS TO DEAL WITH IT, AND HERE YOU ARE WRITING ABOUT URINATION.

*People are always confusing orthodoxy with piety, confusing strictness with humorlessness, confusing having high expectations with being straight-laced and puritanical. Don't tell me you do that too?*

SINCE YOU'RE WRITING MY WORDS, YOU'LL HAVE TO ANSWER THAT QUESTION.

*Okay, fine, sometimes they do go together, but it's not like we Liahona Mormons, we doubters and cynics and questioners, don't often fulfil our own ugly stereotypes—condescension, indecisiveness, superficiality—as well. When I'm honest with myself, I can see that I grew up in an environment that mostly put the lie to all the typical accusations lobbed at True Blue Mormons. My Dad wasn't a Puritan, he wasn't Javert: he was fun. That warning about "loud laughter" in the temple ceremony? Never a problem in our house. Irreverence, earthiness, even bawdiness was more common than not. The man loved his Rook games, his water-skiing, his movies, his Louis L'Amour novels, his grilling, his ABBA and Neil Diamond and Frank Sinatra, and most of all his golf. Sure, the discipline was harsh sometimes; harsher than I've ever been willing to make use of on my own children, that's for sure. But it was limited to, comparatively speaking, only a very, very few rules. Some matters in the family could never be questioned, and some conflicts became downright ugly at times, especially as the family grew and mixed with others and produced another generation of its own ... but for the most part ours was a loose, loving family, where the expectations,*

*as iron-clad as they may have been, were few in number. Dad never called it this, but we were a family attended by grace, by the sort of blessed, even irreverent, confidence that conviction brings.*

DOES CONVICTION ACTUALLY BRING BLESSINGS?

*I don't know. Personally, I suspect not.*

YOU THINK GRACE, MIRACLES, BLESSINGS, ALL THE REST—YOU DON'T THINK THERE'S ANY WAY TO AFFIRMATIVELY BRING THEM INTO YOUR LIFE. THEY COME, OR NOT, AS GOD WILLS IT, RIGHT?

*Mostly, yes.*

AND YOUR FATHER DISAGREED?

*Very much so. He held to obedience, to the promises entailed by his broad reading of Ether 12 and D&C 82. Obey and endure and stay confident, for the knowledge and rewards will invariably follow.*

SOUNDS SOMEWHAT PURITAN TO ME.

*But he never experienced, or communicated, any of the salvation panic that was a constant in Puritan culture. He was never panicked at all, really. And he passed that ease on to us. Maybe it was hard to work out a willingness to obey, to identify with that willingness to obey, but the obedience—the church attending, the calling accepting, the tithing paying, the blessing giving, the meeting running, the service performing, etc.—itself? That came easy, gracefully, without angst or stress, like business dealings or public speaking or anything else.*

EXCEPT IT DIDN'T FOR YOU.

*Well, some of it did.*

BUT NOT THE “OBEDIENCE BRINGS FOR BLESSINGS” PART.

*No, that didn't, at least not entirely. And maybe it didn't entirely for any us; I don't really know. Maybe I'm not the only one who feels like I'm*

*always faking it, always aspiring toward something I'm not even sure I believe in, but kind of want to believe in, or feel like I ought to believe in, nonetheless. Maybe we're all in the same boat, just assuming that Dad's confidence and conviction and ease with obedience would come, well, easily to us, eventually, if we could just get things right.*

A LOT OF "WE" AND "US" THERE—ARE YOU ACTUALLY TALKING ABOUT ALL YOUR SIBLINGS?

*Of course.*

I'M NOT SURE YOU ARE. LOOK AT YOUR LANGUAGE—RUNNING MEETINGS, DEALINGS IN BUSINESS, AND SO FORTH. THE PRACTICES YOU'RE ASSOCIATING WITH YOUR FATHER'S CONFIDENCE AND GRACE ARE, IN AMERICAN MORMON CULTURE, OVERWHELMINGLY MALE ONES.

*Well, they don't have to be.*

BUT THEY MOSTLY ARE, NONETHELESS. DON'T FEEL BAD; I'M NOT TRYING TO CATCH YOU OUT. AFTER ALL, YOU'RE A MALE, RAISED IN A HOME THAT WAS VERY MUCH A PATRIARCHAL, MALE-DOMINATED, PRIESTHOOD-DEFINED UNITY. YOUR SISTERS MIGHT SEE ALL THE THINGS YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT IN CONNECTION WITH YOUR FATHER AND HIS IRON-RODNESS SOMEWHAT DIFFERENTLY.

*Maybe—but honestly, in listening to their language, in seeing the value they found in my father's life, I kind of doubt it.*

YOUR SPOUSE AND YOUR SISTERS-IN-LAW, THEN.

*Well, okay, sure. Coming into a family where certain key beliefs and practices were firmly modeled (and sometimes disciplinarily enforced), but which a great deal else was simply allowed to go on automatic, to follow an unwritten order, if you will, was not easy. Some of the sisters-in-law struggled with it more than others; some struggle with it still. None, though, I think, discredit its power, or its value.*

BUT YOU YOURSELF DISCREDITED IT, SOMETIMES. YOU TOOK YOUR WIFE'S SIDE, AND STOOD AGAINST YOUR FATHER, IN THE MATTER OF NOT HAVING CHILDREN RIGHT AWAY AT THE VERY BEGINNING OF YOUR MARRIAGE, AND THAT DISCREDITING CONTINUED FOR THE NEXT TWENTY-THREE YEARS.

*Because, when conflicts arose, my first allegiance is to my wife. And besides, sometimes I thought Dad was wrong.*

A REASONABLE DECISION. SO WHY DO YOU SOMETIMES FEEL DEFENSIVE ABOUT IT?

*Because I only thought he was wrong; I didn't know it. I still don't know it. And now I probably never will. His decisions, his determination—as much as I couldn't share in, couldn't agree with so much of it, it always haunted me, was always something that I would return to him and talk about, again and again. Until now.*

It's beginning to be late in the morning; the long shadows of the rising sun are shortening. There will be a funeral today, and my headache isn't going away. I look around from my perch on the mountaintop

[EXCUSE ME, DIRT PILE.]

and scan the surroundings of Spokane Valley. I can see quite a bit over the roof of the hotel across the street: nearly a dozen water towers, highway on-ramps and off-ramps, and hills covered with trees. Above them all, a few miles to my north, I can see Fox Hill, the property my father bought back during one of the family's economic upswings (which were always inevitably followed by downswings). On the bluff at the southern edge of that hill, stands the green-roofed log cabin my father had built, envisioning it as a compound that children and grandchildren (and eventually great-grandchildren) could treat as a home away from home, a center-point for family reunions and memories through the decades. It looks, from this distance, like part of the natural shape of the hill that spreads out beneath it. Like a huge brown and green

rock, surrounded by scrubs, pine trees, and prairie grass. That home won't go anywhere, at least not anytime soon, I know—Mom, and all the children, are committed to making sure of that. But nothing lasts forever, as much I want it to. I miss him already, very much. Over the past week, I've found myself weeping in big, gasping bursts, shocking myself by how much it hurts. I suspect that this will be a terrible day, that between my headache and my tears, I'm going to be a wreck. Just a couple of months ago, when I was last visiting Fox Hill for a reunion, I awoke with a headache, and I went wandering the trails around the homestead. It helped. I wish I could do that now.

DO YOU FEEL HOMELESS?

*No. I have a home; Melissa and I have a family, and we've made a place for ourselves in Wichita.*

THAT'S NOT WHAT I'M TALKING ABOUT.

*You're talking about a heimat, a place of origin, the place where, as Robert Frost put it, "when you have to go there, they have to take you in."*

APPROXIMATELY, YES.

*Well, then still no, I'm not homeless. Dad may be gone, but Mom remains, the family remains, all the memories and places are still there, and they'll all still be open to everyone one of us. But yes, things will be different. The conversations will be different. And the arguments that I have in my head? Well, they'll change. They'll change a lot.*

DO YOU FEAR THAT CHANGE?

*Everyone fears change.*

NOT EVERYONE.

*Well, sure, some people like being wanderers, loners, discoverers, disconnected individualists. Our culture makes heroes out of them; our politics and economy celebrates outsiders and disruptors; the whole world,*

*in sometimes seems, is ruled by cosmopolitans who prize the abstract, the theoretical, the mathematical, and make little place in their hearts for the homely. Not me. I may not be a total homebody, but I always want to know in what direction my home lies, and what's waiting for me there.*

YOU'RE NOT A ROLLING STONE.

*You know that Dylan's song is expressing pity and contempt for people who found themselves living such a life, don't you?*

A LIFE WITHOUT BELONGING, WITHOUT IDENTITY, WITHOUT PLACE.  
AN UNSETTLED LIFE.

*Yes. The prospect of losing that is a fearful thing. I guess I'm scared of what's going to end with Dad's passing. I'm fearful of what it'll mean for me, for my family, for Mom, for all us Foxes. I'm not scared of the old homestead being sold or the reunions changing or anything like that, I think; I'm just ... worried we'll lose our way home. Or that I will, at least.*

IF YOU DON'T MIND ME SAYING, THAT SOUNDS A LITTLE WEAK.

*But I am weak; I know that! I feel myself to be subject to changes and structures and needs and forces and people and sins that are beyond me, beyond my reach, and after years of praying about them and philosophizing about them, I no longer feel impelled to interrogate why they oppress me and not others, why I understand them the way I do when others do not. That's just my lot in life, my thorn, my burden, my struggle. And perhaps my blessing. Another thing that differentiated me from Dad, I guess.*

IT MAKES YOU DEPENDENT, IN A WAY HE NEVER WAS.

*Not on people, but he was on God. And that's something we all should be. That's one thing I can do right, one thing I can do like Dad: grasp hold of and plea for the support of God.*

WHOSE TEACHINGS AND DOCTRINES AND AUTHORITY YOU CONFESS YOU DOUBT AND STRUGGLE OVER AND OFTEN FEEL UNCERTAIN

OF, HOWEVER MUCH YOU REMAIN COMMITTED TO THIS COMMUNITY THAT YOU'VE INHERITED, AND WHICH YOU HOPE THEY ARE WOVEN INTO.

*Yes, I doubt. But I hope too. Better doubt and hope than fear. Holding on to my doubts is a way of holding on to that which I think, I hope, that just maybe, sometimes, I am able to believe. Fear is what causes you to stop holding on, stop trusting, stop hoping, entirely.*

I AGREE.

*Well, I'm delighted to hear that, at long last. I wanted to have this essay finished weeks ago.*

YOU FIRST HAD TO FIGURE OUT WHERE YOUR ROD WAS, OR WHERE IT WOULD BE, PERHAPS.

*No Death, there you're wrong. It hasn't gone anywhere. I just ... needed to find a new way to talk about it. To argue with it, I guess.*

WHICH IS YOUR WAY OF HOLDING ON TO IT, I SUPPOSE.

*You got it, sir.*

That evening, after the funeral, after the tears, after the headache had mostly burned itself out, nearly all the siblings—eight brothers and sisters and spouses, with one family opting out to spend time with their own newest grandchild, Dad's first great-grandchild, whom she will never know—gathered for a late meal. We took over a private room at a restaurant, and we ate and joked and laughed and pondered the future. I was still a little light-headed, but happy. I wished Dad could have been there to charismatically command us, as he'd always done before. I wish our rod could have been spared. But he did his work well, and he truly, grandly, loved every minute of it. If we want to continue to feel the direction provided by his work within us, we might as well do the same.

But there is another part of us ... that will look around for love. It might only glance at first, eyelids low, fearing what it will or will not find. But

in time, it will scavenge like a beast dying of hunger. It will yowl to the empty clouds and bray across the flat horizon for love. It will howl from the bottom of its lungs rendered rigid and brittle from cold. It will limp and then collapse and then belly-crawl for love.

And there, right there, love will be.

Right there, next to us, will be love holding out its everyday arms. Its stranger or next door-neighbor or school-administrator-made-brother arms.

Right there on the hinge we will find it so that, instead of closing our eyes and waiting to die of the cold, we fall into the radiant reach of love. And we are held.<sup>2</sup>



James Russell “Jim” Fox, February 11, 1943–September 19, 2016. *Requiescat in pace*.

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2. Dalton-Bradford, *On Loss and Living Onward*, 82.



# STILL MAKING SENSE OF SUFFERING: RUMINATIONS ON THIRTY-FIVE YEARS WITH MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

Marilyn D. White

My article “Making Sense of Suffering” was published in *Dialogue’s* Summer 1992 issue. It detailed my journey of coping with multiple sclerosis. At the time of its publication, I was working for *Dialogue* as an editorial assistant, back when Ross and Kay Peterson were at its helm. As I reflect back on that experience, the thing that stands out most clearly is a profound answer to a prayer the day after the MS diagnosis was confirmed in 1988—although I had been experiencing symptoms as early as 1983 before MRI machines were used for diagnostic purposes. MS is a very complicated illness because, although they share many things in common, every sufferer has a unique manifestation. My 1992 essay explained it this way:

While there is controversy about the cause, MS is a disease of the central nervous system where the fatty coating of insulation around a nerve cell (the myelin sheath) is gradually destroyed—causing paralysis, numbness, and/or impaired sight, speech, hearing, and balance. A demyelinated nerve fiber cannot carry impulses to and from the brain.<sup>1</sup>

Above all else, I am still here! While the disease has forced me to adapt to painful losses, I have survived and argue that I am stronger because of experiences with MS. MS is considered to be an autoimmune illness

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1. Marilyn D. White, “Making Sense of Suffering,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 25, no. 2 (Summer 1992): 110.

where a body's own immune system attacks itself. The National MS Society website clarifies further. Here is a snippet:

An exacerbation of MS (also known as a relapse, attack, or flare-up) causes new symptoms or the worsening of old symptoms. It can be very mild, or severe enough to interfere with a person's ability to function. No two exacerbations are alike. . . . In the most common disease course in MS—called relapsing-remitting MS—clearly defined acute exacerbations are followed by remissions as the inflammatory process comes to an end.<sup>2</sup>

In 1988, I was just beginning a very severe exacerbation that started with balance problems, but over the next several months would cause vision problems, loud ringing in both ears, dizziness, and slurred speech. The confirmation of my diagnosis came to us by phone on February 5, 1988, my daughter Shannon's eleventh birthday. The next day I was alone for a short while in the kitchen. Quoting again from my essay:

Not only was my right leg completely numb, but the dizziness and loss of equilibrium had begun. I was alone at the kitchen table—confused, depressed, and ill. I prayed that I would be able to cope with whatever came but wanted some relief, too—or at least an indication that the Lord had not abandoned or betrayed me. When I finished the prayer, an unusual sensation filled my body, and I felt the symptoms lift. My leg felt whole, and the dizziness stopped. I walked around the room normally for a moment.

While I was marveling that this had happened, an even stronger impression consumed me. I sat back down. Somehow, intuitively but inexplicably, I knew that this absence of symptoms would only last for a few minutes, that it was strictly a gift to let me know the Comforter was near. I felt a caution, too, that almost bordered on rebuke, that I should not ask inappropriately. When we agreed to come into mortality, we accepted that conditions would not always be easy. I wept and silently said another prayer of gratitude for the knowledge that the Lord

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2. "Managing Relapses," National Multiple Sclerosis Society, <https://www.nationalmssociety.org/Treating-MS/Managing-Relapses>.

was with me no matter what I experienced in this life. In only about five minutes, the symptoms returned. I have analyzed—perhaps even overanalyzed—this experience. Was I part of the “wicked and adulterous generation” that seeks for a sign? Was my motive pure? Was I seeking for a sign or just some comfort? Besides, can we really ask “inappropriately” for relief? Aren’t we supposed to “ask and it shall be given,” or are there some things in life we should just accept as gracefully as possible even though life is not fair or easy? How do we know when we’re asking for too much? Should we know God’s will *before* we ask? I have no answers, only more speculation and more questions. I do know that I received a sign and witness of God’s love, a very personal and sacred experience for me.<sup>3</sup>The knowledge and comfort received from this supplication has shaped my faith ever since. I believed that God had not abandoned me and He knew the desires of my heart. The optimism and faith conveyed in that 1992 article is still valid, but much has gone on in the twenty-five ensuing years to keep me pondering and reevaluating. I have constantly had to be flexible and adapt at each level of decline. For many years, I was considered to be in the exacerbating/remitting category. Now I am in a wheelchair—although it will be comforting to others with MS to know that only 25% of people with MS end up in a wheelchair. Now with disease-modifying drugs, I am hopeful that percentage will be much less.

It was fortuitous that my husband, Lee, was transferred by his employer AARP to Seattle, Washington in 1995. The Pacific Northwest is an ideal location for MS sufferers. It has an extremely high percentage of MS patients and some of the best physicians and therapeutic regimens in the country. My daughters were aged twenty, eighteen, fifteen, and my son was seven. I was still walking with just a slight limp. If someone didn’t know me well, I could keep my diagnosis hidden. Not so anymore.

I was still driving, but had switched my frequent form of working-out from bicycling to snorkeling at a pool three minutes from home in a picturesque state park. We also surmised that the exercise provided in

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3. Ibid, 112.

the five-level home we purchased would be good for me. My mother-in-law was more prescient when she toured the house later and said to her son, “What the hell were you thinking?” By March of 1996, I bought my first manual wheelchair for long distances only, and the house soon got two chair lifts to access three levels of the house.

For my life with MS, 1997 proved to be a pivotal year. My coordination sharply slipped and I crashed the car from the garage into the family room level and spent a night in the hospital. At that point, I started using car modifications and learned how to drive with hand controls. I drove four different modified cars until, fortunately for others, I gave up my license in May 2003.

Before the end of 1997, I had three major exacerbations and had three hospitalizations getting infusions of prednisone each time. The swift decline was terrifying, but the FDA had given approval for three disease-modifying drugs known as the ABC drugs—Avonex, Betaseron, and Copaxone. (Now there are fourteen.) For three years, I gave myself weekly injections of the \$24,000 per year Avonex. After all that time and needle-pricked thighs, my doctor and I discerned no easing of symptoms. We can only guess at what the drug might have prevented.

I was getting desperate when I heard about an exciting clinical trial and embarked on one of the most significant ordeals of my life. I was in a group of about twenty-five people accepted in one of the first experimental stem cell transplants for MS in the world. The doctors knew a reversal of neurological deficits already incurred was impossible, but the hope was to stop further disease progression. My physiatrist (a doctor of rehabilitation medicine), Dr. George H. Kraft at the University of Washington, was on the cutting edge of this clinical trial.

On a ten-point disability scale, a patient could not be worse than an eight to be allowed to participate. In the year 2000, when I got to a seven, then to seven and a half, I persuaded Dr. Kraft that I fit the criteria for eligibility. He finally relented. The first step was to get funding for the \$150,000 procedure. “Go Fund Me” was not in

existence then and bake sales would not bring in enough money fast enough. AARP had a self-funded health insurance plan with Cigna, and I had a remarkable Medical Case Manager named Teresa Wachs. She knew the procedure would be denied but said, "I'll help with the appeals process every step of the way." Teresa was good to her word. I wrote an appeal statement, which Teresa expertly edited to persuade the insurance company to bankroll my request. Dr. Richard Nash, with Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center, also contributed his justifications. We were on a conference call with about fifty doctors and nurses in attendance from California on Cigna's Appeals Board. We each had ten minutes to separately make our pitch.

Teresa called me later to tell me they hadn't been able to reach an agreement and were sending it to three outside expert reviewers. A few weeks later, I saw her coming up to my house with helium balloons! Apparently, one reviewer had said "No," another "Yes," and the third, "It shows promise." So, they allowed AARP's executive team to make the final decision that turned out to be in my favor.

My prayer was answered, but the next step was, of course, the most grueling. Since Lee traveled extensively, my daughter, Aimee, postponed a quarter of college to be my chauffeur and support for the many weeks of testing prior to the chemotherapy and total body irradiation to come. It was an autologous transplant (meaning the doctors used stem cells harvested from my blood) to prevent problems that generally come when an outside "host" is used. A Hickman catheter was implanted near the heart for ease of blood work to facilitate the process of spinning out exactly the cells they wanted. Each day several of us were lined up in open cubicles to have our blood drawn and analyzed. It reminded me of cows coming for their daily milking.

After they harvested the right quantity of stem cells, they destroyed my dysfunctional immune system through chemotherapy and total body irradiation. I then spent three weeks in quarantine in a gigantic room on an upper floor of Swedish Hospital. I was in the middle of downtown

Seattle skyscrapers overlooking Elliot Bay, watching all varieties of birds fly by at eye level. In those days before smart phones, computers had been donated in the room of each transplant patient.

The chemo caused nausea and painful mouth sores, but the radiation was more tolerable to me. One morning however, I woke up after radiation with brittle hair all over my pillow and an itchy scalp. Aimee took an amazed look, calmly walked to my bedside, and pulled out a huge handful of hair. Another daughter, Shannon, teared up, but Lee, Aimee, and I burst into laughter as we all grabbed and yanked. A nurse stood by with an electric shaver to remove the rest. It felt wonderful to get all the dead hair off.

On May 8, 2000, a man in a business suit came striding into my room with a suitcase containing a vial of my new baby stem cells ready for infusion. He and the nurses called it my “New Birthday,” and wrote May 8 prominently on a dry-erase board. After my release from the hospital and experimenting with head coverings, I started the slow process of regaining strength and growing new hair. In spite of it all, there was decline. Dr. Kraft was disappointed. On one visit, he put his arm around me and said, “I’m sorry it wasn’t as successful for you as it has been for my younger participants. I’m not accepting anyone over fifty anymore.” I said, “But I’m only forty-eight,” to which he retorted, “You’re almost fifty.”

Lee and I are not so sure that the transplant hasn’t been successful, and time has confirmed our conclusion. My MRIs have shown no active brain lesions since the transplant. I have not had any major MS exacerbations, even though I have experienced grief from the many losses, indignities, and pain associated with permanently landing in a motorized wheelchair in April 2002. My eleven grandchildren (ages seventeen and under) know me as “Grandma Wheels.” I get great joy putting them to sleep as infants while riding them on my lap—or giving them raucous wheelchair rides at five mph when they get older. The disease has taken its toll on me and done permanent brain damage that

no therapeutic regimen can fix. I believe all symptoms and problems I have experienced since the transplant can be attributed to damage done by the MS prior to the procedure.

For instance, in June of 2004 I spent two weeks at the University of Washington Medical Center Rehabilitation Department. Function in my left hand had diminished, and I was trained to use voice-activated software. My years of secretarial typing jobs and piano playing came to an end. I was also preparing to see if I could tolerate the liquid Baclofen that would be injected directly into the spinal column through the implantation into my abdomen of a Medtronic drug pump. Baclofen is a powerful drug that relaxes my skeletal muscles so I can bend my knees. Doctors have now allowed morphine and bupivacane (the numbing drug used for epidural blocks in childbirth) to be added. So I have a cocktail of drugs in the little one-pound metal canister that makes my pain and stiffness much more bearable.

Also making life easier for me (and especially Lee or paid caregivers who *always* needed to be available to transfer me on and off the toilet) was the operation to install a suprapubic catheter. I now have a large urine drainage bag, or a small one hooked up and hidden under my swimsuit for those almost-daily swims. Looking back, I should have had this procedure done years earlier to save many caregivers thousands of transfers.

Something this major is not without its mishaps, however. After some initial glitches in the November 2007 installation, I did have a major scare in April 2013. After my third bladder Botox injection (usually done every six months to calm my spastic bladder), I had a major bladder hemorrhage. It's never good when you see your blood dripping down your wheelchair in the hospital waiting room, pooling on the exam room floor, and hear the ER nurse shout "Stay with me, Marilyn!" before being rushed to an operating room. It was later determined that my regular doctor probably should have used latex

rather than the stiffer silicone tubing when putting in the Botox the day before. The next day she apologized.

Life in a wheelchair made me sedentary and therefore more susceptible to blood clots. Mine came in February of 2009. I happened to be at my pain doctor. When I showed him my severely swollen leg, he said it had nothing to do with my drug pump. He immediately sent me to a clinic for a CAT scan. I started to feel faint as I sat in the waiting room until Lee arrived. I fearfully said a prayer in my mind, but a calm feeling washed over me. I had a sense that at least I wouldn't be dying on *that* particular day. However, it triggered a two-night stay in the hospital after the clot traveled to the lung causing a pulmonary embolism. I now require blood-thinning medication with clinical checks that range from every few days up to every month.

When devastating illness or accidents come along, caregivers are the unsung heroes. Lee is the embodiment of a perfect caregiver. He was able to take an early retirement to help with the household demands and be a very engaged grandpa. He does all the cooking. His patience, compassion, and humor make my situation tolerable. He allowed me to feel part of the wider community when I expressed interest in serving on my city's Library Advisory Board. For four years, he was my ride to and from the library for the quarterly evening meetings. Many paid caregivers through the years have also eased my way. They perform all sorts of ADLs (Activities of Daily Living) and chauffeur me to the swimming pool four days a week. Lee takes the fifth day.

Lee was recently diagnosed with a rare neurological condition called orthostatic tremors, which limits his ability to stand still without shaking. He can instantly diffuse it by moving or leaning against something stable. He waited five years before telling anyone in the family about his symptoms or seeing a neurologist.

It makes us take stock once again of the vicissitudes of life. He said he feels the Lord has given him extra strength to still be able to help with my transfers and anything else I need. But if you think of your life as



a three-act play, at ages sixty-five and sixty-seven, we are both in ACT III—facing all the realities of aging. While Lee spent his career working in the field of aging, we often feel as though we are approaching our later years ill-equipped to meet the myriad of surprises we experience. As most of us realize, life has no guarantees.

My earlier article quoted from Gilda Radner's book *It's Always Something* where she wrote about facing cancer and said, "Like my life, this book is about not knowing, having to change, taking the moment and making the best of it, without knowing what's going to happen next. Delicious ambiguity."<sup>4</sup>

I have thought about this profound choice of words many times through the years—as it applies to all of us. We live surrounded by paradoxes. The emotional and financial toll in dealing with MS has been challenging, yet we know others are in worse situations. I am blessed that I have adequate health insurance and retirement income.

I value the community and comfort zone I feel in the LDS Church. The hymns we sing give me great solace and often bring me to tears. I worked for Jack and Linda Newell for over a decade in various capacities. They were *Dialogue's* editors from the last two issues in 1982–1988. The bulk of those years I worked for Linda King Newell as her typist for the book, *Mormon Enigma* (with Valeen Tippetts Avery). It gave me a great opportunity to intensely study Mormon history. Therefore, strains of the fourth verse of "Come, Come Ye Saints" that starts, "And should we die before our journey's through, Happy day! All is well!" have intense meaning for me. I consider myself a basically happy person, but sometimes struggle to find joy. I receive loving service from family and church members. Through the miracles of modern medicine, I am allowed to remain alive and a part of my community. I am delighted that stem cell transplants for MS are more common now because I believe it was pivotal to a more positive future for me.

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4. Gilda Radner, *It's Always Something* (New York: Simon & Shuster, 1989), 268.

We all make sense of the suffering in our life in various ways. Resignation in the face of adversity helps me embrace and cope with the MS that is so much a part of my outward appearance. The inner me intends to thrive instead of just survive. Through God's tender mercies, the grace of Christ, and the loving service of family and friends, I retain a hope of promising days to come and a firm conviction of what a resurrected body means for me.

## Faith

*Natalie Shaw Evjen*

I once thought Faith the expense to secure  
A pass aboard the Boat That Cannot Sink,  
Destined for the Island Of The Sure:  
A place of facts, concordance, sutured chinks.

That ship has sailed, is somewhere lost at sea;  
Mutinied by Logic, Doubt, and Fear,  
So long held captive by feigned piety,  
Scorned, disregarded, labeled insincere.

I struggled, fought, 'til Doubt exposed the truth:  
The Island never was, and ne'er will be,  
Its pledge of certainty—a myth of youth,  
The wavering ocean, my sole destiny.

My heart still languishes to reach dry land,  
To touch, to grasp, to feast on what is true.  
But though the journey's different than I'd planned,  
If not for Faith, I would have missed the view.

Perhaps I misread what the Bible says  
On never knowing what we'll never know:  
For Doubt will torture, haunt, beguile, unless—You be polite and  
sometimes let him row.

## As If Nothing Matters

*Chris A. Peck*

When I looked at the body  
I thought only in clichés,  
those that I had yet to experience  
for thirty years.

But the second part of  
her empty shell did not  
seem to be anywhere.  
I stared at plastic.  
Carbon.  
An absence of blood.

And what I do know  
is that racists believe in God  
and that the homeless bless in God  
and that children pray to God.

But I have prayed only  
in the shower,  
wrestling in my cleanliness.

And what I know  
is that I don't think about sin,  
but I do think about knowledge  
and understanding things.

So, when I think about God  
I dread the day that I must find out  
if my understanding  
or my sins  
mattered.

## Forgotten Birds

Robert A. Rees

*"Sleep is not death  
but forgotten birds."  
—David Hoag*

1

The black-cassocked crow  
broods in the eucalyptus  
where blood-red umbellates  
breathe out the odor of camphor.  
As the graves grow green  
and spring missiles its  
multitudinous wings,  
his shadow falls and  
falls and  
further falls  
over the grasses,  
over the greening,  
beyond the growing.

2

Listening to kites  
I hear all along  
the long string  
the wind vibrating,  
its wild hum, a poly-  
rhythm strummed  
in air. This paper bird  
pasted to a thin wooden  
cross flies in the sky

like a fragile Icarus,  
kept in air only by the thinnest  
skein of desire.

I'd like to get away from earth,  
soar to the sun, hide  
in the spaces between  
stars, but always  
with some thread  
to find my way home  
to the labyrinth.

## 3

The cirrus blooms once,  
one night only its opaline  
fragrance gossamers the saguaro,  
prickly pear, and manzanita, then  
withdraws into a dark tuber to await  
another blossoming in another year.

But every morning, every  
afternoon, dark finger-  
tipped wings circle  
the desert sky, their narrowing gyres  
the vortex of death. In dreams  
I swirl down toward darkness as  
a pearl-like flower rises higher  
and higher above me.

## 4

The day I cut the locusts  
on Huckleberry Island,  
my chain saw spitting

thick sappy sawdust into  
the heavy air, one tree,  
bound and tethered by ivy,  
wouldn't fall.

I guyed it with ropes and  
cut it in sections  
then noticed I had cut  
a bird's nest in half,  
the fledgling jay clinging  
to the severed cup.

That night I dreamed the bird,  
terror of staccato saw and  
our black cat climbing.  
The next morning I ran  
to see the nest.

## 5

I flew to Christ in fits  
and starts, yet he caught,  
held me in the tight  
fist of his grace.  
When I fled from his nails  
he opened his palm  
to let me fly. Kited  
by his fierce love, I soared  
toward the surgical sun  
then swooned into the nest  
of his cupped right hand.  
His crown was beryl and  
bloodstone. His left arm  
was raised to the square.

# Alpha

## *Douglas Summers Stay*

1. An advent: ancient archangels architect abstract astronomy and arid asteroids.
2. All asteroids appeared amorphous and absent; And all asleep across aquatic anarchy. And astral angels advanced across area.
3. And Almighty asked, "Appear." And all appeared, aglow.
4. And Almighty approved. Aura and absence: an antagonistic arithmetic.
5. An afternoon and aurora, an aeon.
6. And atmosphere and all awash absconded.
7. Astral air above; aquatic area abased. All as Almighty asserted.
8. Angel's abode appeared. Another afternoon, another aurora. Another aeon.
9. And Almighty authored aquatic archipelagos. Arable acreage appeared.
10. And Almighty approved.
11. Abundant agricultural affluence: azaleas, anise, amaranth. And apples and apricots, almonds and acacias, an arboreal appearance.
12. As asked, all appeared. And Almighty Aleph assessed, and admired.
13. Another afternoon, another aurora. Another age.



14. And Almighty asked, "Astronomical atmosphere ablaze, aglow, an auroral aubade. Aurora and afternoon apportioned asunder. Add annual analemmas and anniversaries."

15. And all atmosphere appeared aglow.

16. Apollo's aura, alighted; Artemis's after, alighted. All astral achieved actuality.

17. And Almighty affixed astronomy and alighted all.

18. And all aglow administered allotted ages and anniversaries. And Almighty approved.

19. An afternoon and an aurora, again an age.

20. And Almighty added, "Abyss, abundantly advance all animals: albacore and alligators, anemones and anchovies, angelfish and anglers; and avians, assemble above air: all albatrosses and auks."

21. And Almighty assembled awesome abyssal animals; all alive, ascending and abasing, abyss advanced abundantly. And air afforded all avian.

22. And Almighty anointed all, and announced, "Amplify and accumulate, abyss and air, abounding."

23. An afternoon and an aurora, another age.

24. And across all areas, animals assemble. Asses, aardvarks and antelopes appeared. "Aphids, an ant army, arachnids, all ambling animals: Appear!"

25. Arthropods and amblers arose: and Almighty approved.

26. And Almighty advocated assembling anthropic anatomy, after Almighty ancestor's appearance, allowing administration and ascendancy above all animals.

27. Almighty animated Adam, affixing Almighty's aspect and appearance. Adam and Ava awakened, and achieved awareness.

28. Anointing Adam and Ava, Almighty admonished, "Abound; ascend above all, and administrate, as appointed, above all abyssal, aerial, and ambulatory animals.

29. "Attend: all agricultural, and arboreal apples, apricots, almonds appease appetite, and all abyssal, aerial, and ambling animals are accommodated aliment."

30. And Almighty apprehended all, and approved all as acceptable. And another afternoon and aurora approached another age.

## COME TO ZION

Annette Haws

Six months after she'd divorced her most recent husband, Sue kicked back the silk sheets one chilly morning and decided to take back her maiden name. She packed her bags, grabbed a cab to Charles de Gaulle, and flew endless hours to Hawaii to attend a Dream Walker Ascension Association Seminar on the Big Island. She had discovered faithless Milton *in flagrante delicto* with a charming French girl—long legged and twenty-something—whom Sue had been foolish enough to hire for some light cleaning and miscellaneous duties. She'd ignored that pinch in the center of her psyche that had warned her, but she didn't blame herself, she blamed Milton, that worthless ex-pat from Cincinnati. The desperation in his face when she told him his plastic was cancelled didn't move her, not one bit. The man had obviously forgotten the infidelity clause in the pre-nup.

In her past life, a plethora of new lovers had materialized to replace discarded husbands, but now none arrived, and Sue wasn't pleased with this change in the rules; in fact, she was angry. Life had betrayed her—more than once—but nothing had prepared her to face this endgame of biology. Growing old was proving to be a formidable calamity.

One afternoon not long after faithless Milton's unwilling departure, Sue had been waiting in the Salon La Sultane for Christine Marie to pamper her. Bored with her glossy magazine, she glanced down and noticed on the coffee table a simple brochure, embossed on thick linen paper, inviting souls in need—it didn't specify any particular need—to join the Crimson Circle. *Crimson* caught her eye. Her first husband had

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This short story is a chapter in the forthcoming novel *Maggie's Place*, set for publication by Covenant Communications in 2019.

been a running back for the Crimson Tide. A southern boy with a drawl, so thick and caramel, that he'd just melted her heart. She sighed. A pretty memory, but that's all he was. A memory and a yearly Christmas card from Mobile, Alabama.

Crimson Circle. Kona Coast. Dream Walkers? Sue read on. *Working in a safe and sacred place though conscious choice, clients experience a beautiful process of clearing and balancing, becoming more present, and in some cases, experiencing physical healing. Ascension is the answer to the simple but spiritually profound question, Who Am I?*

Who indeed? She had enough last names to fill a phone book. Her lifelong practicality and good humor had not sustained her. Her excellent skin and aristocratic profile were starting to slide, droop in unfortunate folds around her jaw, gather in pronounced wrinkles in the vicinity of her eyes, and line up across her forehead when those moments of anxiety visited with disturbing frequency. Did she really want to experience another *beautiful process*? Using her finger and her thumb, she stretched the skin to open her left eye more broadly as though the Lasik surgery hadn't adequately corrected her vision. *A sacred and safe place* under an active volcano might be just the solace she required. If the *clearing and balancing* didn't give her the answers she needed, she could just hire a helicopter tour, and at the precise moment, become a not so virginal offering to appease Pele, the goddess of fire. A quick exit. A puff of smoke given for the greater good.



In her fourth session in a semi-private lanai on the beach, she was naked under a soft white sheet. Waves crashing against the cascade of black volcanic rock were the only sounds she could hear, and a collection of crystals hovered inches above her skin in the hands of a spiritual adoula. "Energy surrounds us," the woman's warm voice whispered. "It is not negative. It is not positive. We infuse energy with our own emotional

yearnings.” Tears ran down the woman’s smooth cheeks. Sue resisted the urge to clutch the sheet to her impressive chest and comfort the woman, but she was more than a little curious about what this adoula had discovered running those crystals over Sue’s very own spine, as though the woman had been palm reading on a larger surface and each mole and age spot had a story to tell or a prediction to make.

The adoula, a native woman, probably a mixture of Chinese, Japanese, Hawaiian and Portuguese, mopped her own tears with a hand towel ready on a low teakwood bench. “So much hurt. Deep within you.” She kneaded her strong hands inches away from Sue’s face as though she were wringing water out of a sponge. “You must release it all.” Her hands moved in larger and larger circles pulling years of disappointment out of Sue’s muscles and lungs. “Lift your hands above your head.”

Not an easy thing to do. Sue caught the edge of the sheet between her beautifully capped teeth and raised her hands in an awkward motion.

“Let go.” The woman urged her. “Feel the sun kiss your skin. Let it warm your spirit.”

The sheet puddled around Sue’s abdomen as she stretched her hands above her head. She didn’t feel particularly cleansed or balanced or healed, but she certainly was in the moment and glanced over her shoulder to see if anyone was enjoying the spectacle of a seventy-one-year-old woman naked from the hips up.

“Relax.”

That she could do, and pulled the sheet up around her neck.

“Accept yourself. Choose freedom.”

The suggestion made her smile. Freedom was something she’d always chosen, large quantities of unrestricted freedom, much to the consternation of her parents and other extraneous relations.

The adoula continued, “Don’t be held hostage by your past. Release your past. Set it free on the waves. Fill your canoe with those bitter memories. Set them adrift on the water.”

Sue lugged the football star from Alabama off the back shelf of her mind and gave him a front seat in the canoe. A French diplomat with an elegant silk scarf knotted around his neck followed close behind. She wedged the beefy rugby player between the pub owner from Notting Hill and the airline pilot from Albany. She tossed Milton in last, then she blew them all a kiss before she gave the boatload a figurative shove with her left foot. “Bon Voyage,” she called, the white sheet clutched in one hand.

She did feel free, but somehow cast adrift herself. No room for her in the imaginary outrigger canoe, she floated along side in an inflatable kayak with a single oar, vulnerable to anything sharp, a knife or a shark’s tooth or a jagged bit of coral. An empty little canoe bobbed up and down in the waves filled with the adorable children she’d never had time to produce. Her heart ached for the little granddaughter she’d never cozy next to on the couch.

“Breathe. Listen to the sound of air filling your lungs.”

Right. But if anything poked a quick hole in this kayak she was paddling, her entire psyche could go down with the ship, or—she envisioned herself circling in a miniature sudsy hurricane—down the drain.

She gave her head a quick shake and reached for the terry cloth robe on the end of the massage table. She unclasped the headband holding her hair off her face. “Thank you so much.” She extended her hand. “You’ve been wonderful. I’ve learned so much, but I think it’s time for me to go home.”

Home? The word caught in her throat like a piece of steak or a shred of fresh kale she couldn’t swallow. Where on earth was that? Which of her half dozen domiciles did she consider *home*? Then a line of poetry pushed its way past the clutter into her consciousness: *Home is the place where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in.* Robert Frost. A hired hand, too old to work, almost too old to live, had come back to the people who wouldn’t turn him away. Where was that for her?

Her life was a cautionary tale to dozens of well-behaved nieces and nephews, and her family name, Carlyle, was on the side of modern

glass and concrete buildings in the heart of Salt Lake City. The Carlyle Group funded the Carlyle Center for the Performing Arts, the Carlyle Library at the University of Utah, the Carlyle Cancer Research Center, and a Shakespearean festival in Southern Utah's Red Rock Country. The Carlyles supported the symphony, the ballet, and the new Real Salt Lake. It was a name with considerable weight.

She gave the square knot securing her robe a firm tug. The return of a prodigal Carlyle would probably go unnoticed. No doubt, she'd receive a few invitations to weddings, funerals, and gallery openings, but the cloying attention of young relatives was not what she needed. She needed familiarity, the mountains, dry air, and a salty lake in the distance. She'd go home, not to the Georgian mansion in Federal Heights inhabited now by a thirty-something entrepreneur who'd invented high tech ski goggles, but to Salt Lake City. She'd find something small, an apartment with a view, a view of the city and its spectacular red and pink sunsets, a view of the giant slabs of granite shoved up from the valley floor. Home. She could do this. Her sandals slapping against the tiles, she pulled her iPhone out of her pocket and called the concierge. "I need a plane reservation. Salt Lake City. Tomorrow. A nonstop would be lovely."



Three weeks later, Allied Van Lines arrived in front of the Eagle Gate Apartments with a single load of Sue's chattels. She stood in the center of the freshly painted living room of a penthouse apartment, retied the scarf around her hair, and inhaled. *This will do nicely*, she told herself. 8-B. Another beginning. But she was feeling an odd sense of dislocation when someone knocked on her door.

The dwarfs had arrived, because the woman standing on the threshold wouldn't measure sixty inches if she stood on her toes.

"Sue Carlyle?" The munchkin must have read Sue's name on her mailbox. "I'm your neighbor. Rose Kimball. 8-D. Around the corner."

Rose's hands were empty. No cookies on a seasonally appropriate paper plate? No clever bouquet? No fruit in a basket? Perhaps times had changed.

"I'm in something of a mess," Sue apologized. "The moving crew unloaded the boxes and placed the furniture, but that was it. I was hoping for a gentle soul who wasn't wearing a sweaty tee shirt. Someone I could bribe to hang pictures."

Without speaking, Rose gave her a long studied once over. Sue felt like she was being measured for a pine box or a navy pin-striped suit. Then the diminutive blonde surveyed the apartment and stacks of boxes. "I have a level and a stepping stool."

*I'm sure you do. You'd need it to reach the sink,* Sue thought. "I don't want to impose. I'm sure I can manage." Sue was starting to wish she'd stayed longer in Hawaii—in the Crimson Circle or just in a cabana on the beach.

"I'll be right back." And the woman returned in less than ten minutes with a hammer, a sinker—something Sue didn't know existed—nails, screws, wires, and the stepping stool. A welcome wagon hostess with a bent for carpentry. What next?

Rose hauled the stepping stool over to the wall and held up a picture while Sue made a dot on the fresh paint with a Sharpie. After painting number five was hung with a good deal of discussion and laughter, Sue felt comfortable enough to say, "You're married?"

"For fifty-three years," Rose sighed, "to a Kimball. Mormon Royalty. Heber, Franklin, LeGrande. And Carl. Such a sweet man, but when he turned seventy and hadn't progressed past stake president, something in him just died. Three years later the rest of him followed."

"Noblesse Oblige?" Sue didn't know it was fatal.

"He was the only one in his family who wasn't called as a mission president. He was crushed."

Sue hoped it wasn't literal, the crushed part. It seemed like a grim way to go—compressed under something heavy and large. She hoped chagrined was what Rose meant, the terrible weight of unmet expecta-



tions. In her years away, she'd forgotten the upward ecclesiastical climb: bishop, stake president, mission president, regional rep, and then those glorious maroon upholstered chairs.

"He was a man of right angles and straight lines, but a wonderful man, no doubt about that." The matter-of-fact tone in the woman's voice suggested a life on permanent probation, but the story on her face spoke of love.

Sue tapped her right temple as though retrieving a repressed memory. "You sat on the second row center seats?"

"Every Sunday. Right under the pulpit." Rose looked up at her, which was her only choice, but nevertheless, her expression softened. "You understand."

Of course Sue understood. Life under a masculine thumb, it made her squirm even now twenty years later. "I was married to the diplomatic corps in one of my past lives. One cocktail. No cleavage. Chit-chat about children. No politics. A smile but never a grin. Believe me. I understand."

"You're a widow too?"

"I certainly could be." Sue had received a black-edged note card a year or two ago written in French that she hadn't bother to translate, and the pilot from Albany had drowned in a tragic sailing incident off Cape Cod. The body was never recovered, but by then it wasn't her husband's body, so she'd pressed one hand against her chest in a gesture of mourning before lunching with friends at Le Tastevin on the Ile St. Louis.

A flicker of sadness crossed Rose's face, and Sue had the distinct impression, correct or not, that Rose blamed herself, was in fact the missing rung in the ladder her husband desperately needed to climb. Perhaps this diminutive woman couldn't bring herself to perform the the cheery compliments, the differential kowtowing, the lowered eyelids and reticent smiles in the rarified presence of high status males. Oh dear. Sue understood too well. She glanced out the window at all those cars at the intersection of State Street and South Temple waiting for the light to change. And good luck to them.

Rose raised one lightly penciled eyebrow and gave Sue a nod. "We play scrabble on Tuesday afternoons. Ruby Everton, Maggie Sullivan, and me. We've been looking for a fourth."

She and Rose had been chatting for less than an hour, but unbeknownst to her, Sue had been auditioning for a position as confidante and friend.

"It would be fun to have you join us," Rose said, but Sue wasn't sure Rose's idea of fun coincided with her own. She studied the plump woman standing with a hammer in her hand. Her white hair was a little wild, finally out of control after a life of being sprayed into tight obedience, but this woman was a mensch, no question, a guide to the innards and inhabitants of the Eagle Gate.

"Scrabble?" Sue asked. She had a vague memory of wooden tiles and a checkered board that rewarded difficult consonants.

Rose nodded.

"I'll be there."

"At one," Rose said. "And church."

"Ah yes," Sue smiled. Her recollections of Scrabble might be a bit vague, but memories of wooden benches and metal folding chairs were as vivid as her memory of being denied a turn on the swings by a fourth grade clique at Ensign Elementary. "I'm looking forward to church." She raised one eyebrow and resisted giving Rose a wink.

"Ten o'clock," Rose said. "The chapel's on Third Ave and D Street. It's uphill but if the weather's fine, some of us walk."

Delighted with the sound of *some of us*, Sue smiled, because the phrase obviously included her. Home. She'd arrived. She hummed the first few measures of *Come to Zion, Come to Zion*, and Rose laughed. Well, Sue was within her freshly painted walls and sincerely hoped that some unexpected rejoicing might be in order and perhaps a few triple word scores.

# THE SHYSTER

Levi S. Peterson

Arne met Leanne Holburn at church during his final year in an MBA program at the University of Washington. He found her very attractive. Of medium height, she had sculpted cheeks, an aquiline nose, and bright, intelligent eyes. Arne was tall and had a thatch of sandy hair and placid blue eyes, and by moments he supposed they might make a pair. He altered that supposition abruptly one evening when they were assigned cleanup duty following a Sunday School party. During the conversation that accompanied their work, Leanne let him know that she intended to go by her maiden name after marriage. "It's a lot of work to change your name on all the public records," she said. "Even worse, it's demeaning to take on a man's surname. It messes with a woman's identity. It demotes her. It makes her a junior partner."

She paused to place a serving tray into a cupboard. "If I am asked to pray in public," she went on, "I address my prayer to Heavenly Father. But I don't understand why I have to. I think it's wrong to leave Heavenly Mother out of our prayers. I address my private prayers to her, and if I ever have any daughters, I will to teach them to do the same."

She was a feminist and proud of it. He might have guessed that from the fact that she was in her final year in law school. He respected feminists at a distance, but their battle wasn't his, and he certainly couldn't see marrying one. Having been raised in a proper Latter-day Saint home and having served a mission, he had firmly in mind a wife like his mother, maybe more culturally aware and more attuned to urban life than his mother but, like her, fully in accord with the authorities of ward, stake, and church.

A couple of weeks later, Arne saw Leanne at a study table in the main university library. Impulsively, he took a seat beside her. She looked up and broke into a broad smile, and they exchanged a few words. Law students typically studied in the law library. Maybe she had switched to the main library on the chance of running into him. The thought pleased him—but seconds later, as he left the library, he became worried. He recognized that his attraction to her was stronger than he had believed. It required conscious restraint on his part—deliberate choices aimed at avoiding her at church and on campus.

This proved hard to do. Following sacrament meeting the next Sunday afternoon, Arne saw Leanne as he prepared to leave the church parking lot. She gave him a cheerful wave and he rolled down a window and offered her a ride. It seemed barbaric not to. As she got out of the car at her apartment building, she said, “Do you want to do pizza and a cheap movie Saturday night? Dutch, of course.” What could he say but yes? He couldn’t fault her for asking. Being forthright, taking the lead, went with feminism. But he assured himself this Saturday night date would be absolutely the first and the last. If he had to, he’d stop attending church for a while.

Things didn’t turn out as planned. After the movie he parked the car in front of her apartment building and they walked to the entrance to the building, where he figured on saying goodnight. However, she invited him in for cookies and milk. It would have been rude to refuse. The cookies tasted good. She said her roommate had baked them. Being a law student, Leanne didn’t cook much. After they had finished the snack, he said he guessed he’d better get going. She followed him out of the apartment to the front door of the building. As he turned to say goodbye, she stepped close and kissed him. The unexpected kiss anchored to something inside him.

At the car, he looked back. She was still in the doorway. “It was nice,” she called. She was thanking him although it was he who should be thanking her. It was she who had suggested the Dutch evening out

and who had just provided the nightcap of cookies and milk. She radiated signs that she liked being with him. With that thought, his reserves crumbled and he accepted that he was in love with her. What did being in love consist of? It consisted of being addicted to the presence of the loved one. Arne wanted to live with Leanne. He wanted to kiss her goodbye in the morning and come home to her at night. He wanted this despite her fixed views on going by her maiden name and addressing her prayers to Mother in Heaven. He could regard those as foibles, and love demanded tolerance for one another's foibles.

From then on, they dated steadily, usually taking in an inexpensive event on the university campus on Saturday night and, like a married couple, always sitting together in sacrament meeting and gospel doctrine class on Sunday. A couple of months before their graduation, Arne asked her to marry him and she accepted with a simple yes, not requiring, as Arne noted, express confirmation that he accepted her prerequisites. That went without saying.

After Arne got to his apartment on the evening he proposed to Leanne, he steeled himself and phoned his parents back home on a wheat farm in eastern Washington. His mother murmured a sad disapproval when he told them Leanne intended to go by her maiden name. His father said, "Well, it's easy to see who'll have the upper hand in your house." It hadn't occurred to Arne that he needed to worry about having the upper hand. Leanne didn't strike him as wanting to boss anybody. She just didn't want to be bossed.

"I'm going to remind you of something, Arne," his father went on. "You hold the priesthood. A priesthood holder is supposed to be in charge in his household. There isn't any ands, ifs, and buts about it. It's the way the Lord set things up."

Arne proceeded then to let them know she intended to be a lawyer. After a long silence, his father said, "Are you sure you want to marry this woman?"

"Yes sir, I am." He hoped he sounded confident.

"You know what I think about lawyers."

"Yes sir, I do."

"I don't say all lawyers are shysters, but most of them are. They're deceitful and on the take."

"She won't be that kind," Arne said. Nonetheless, for a moment he regretted having become engaged.

Arne graduated from the MBA program and Leanne from law school at the June commencement. A week later they were married in the Seattle temple, located in the nearby suburb of Bellevue. With them were both sets of parents, one of Leanne's sisters, who served as her bridesmaid, and a friend of Arne's from their Seattle ward, who served as his best man. Following the ceremony, there was a photo shoot in front of the temple. They were standing in the flower garden in front of the imposing white structure, whose single steeple featured a golden Moroni blowing his trumpet toward the late afternoon sun. While the photographer was taking a picture of Leanne and her bridesmaid sister, Arne felt a touch on his elbow and, turning, saw his mother-in-law.

"I hope she's given up on that notion of going by her maiden name," she said with a nod toward Leanne.

"No ma'am, she hasn't."

His mother-in-law shook her head dismally. "I don't know where it came from. It struck her about the time she started attending Mutual. I want you to know she didn't get it from me."

"It's okay," Arne said. "It's just the way she is."

"I'm just grateful a good, upright Mormon man would have her," she finished, giving his elbow a squeeze as she turned away.

Arne was left with the enigma. How could Leanne have derived from a mother like that? Her feminism defied her genetic line, it defied the culture she was born into.

As the wedding group melted toward the parking lot after the photo session, Arne found himself walking beside his father. Arne's father was

a short, solid man with sun-tanned cheeks and a pale upper forehead where his hat shaded him from the Palouse sun.

“Well, you’ve tied the knot,” he said to Arne. “I hope you make each other happy.”

Arne knew his father meant to be kind to Leanne, and he was grateful for it. Nonetheless, he knew his father hadn’t changed his view on who ought to have the upper hand in their household. Ironically, he and Leanne had to deal with the issue of someone having the upper hand within several hours of the foregoing conversation. As they sat on the edge of their nuptial bed, still dressed in the clothes they had worn to the wedding supper, Leanne mentioned some wording in the temple ceremony that instructed a wife to obey her husband’s counsel as he obeyed the counsel of the Lord.

“I guess that means you are in charge,” she said. There was an edge in her voice.

“I don’t know what it means,” he said, “but I’m not in charge.”

Neither of them said more about it, but Arne couldn’t stop worrying. A married woman had to approach the Lord through her husband—is that what came of a woman being married in the temple? That didn’t seem just. But undoubtedly it was acceptable to Leanne’s mother and his mother too—to say nothing of their fathers. One thing was for sure: it wasn’t going to work in his marriage.

Arne and Leanne went on a three-day honeymoon in Victoria, Canada. Predictably, the aforementioned issue festered in Arne’s mind, and by the time they returned to take up residence in a small apartment in the Fremont district of Seattle, he had devised a helpful procedure. As they sat to their first meal in the apartment, Arne laid a quarter on the table. “You flip and if it’s heads, I say the blessing. If it’s tails, you say it. And after that we take turns.”

Leanne said, “Okay,” and when it came up tails, she said the blessing.

Before their evening meal that evening, Arne proposed they determine who would offer family prayer by again flipping a coin. “Don’t bother,” Leanne said. “You do it tonight. I’ll do it tomorrow.”

Arne was relieved and a little proud of himself for so deftly disproving his father’s predictions of discord—though of course Arne had to accept his wife’s addressing her blessings and prayers to Heavenly Mother. Given that he did accept it, they settled down to a busy but happy first summer as a married couple, Arne taking a bus downtown to work at an exporting firm and Leanne catching another bus to the university to cram for the Washington state bar exam.

As things turned out, Arne did a lot of the cooking and cleaning though Leanne pitched in and helped on weekends. When it came to making decisions, either of them was as likely as the other to take the initiative. Arne could see that they were operating their marriage like a New England town meeting without a mayor to convene it and establish its agenda. One of them would say, “What do you think? Should we do such and so?” or “Hadn’t we better do this or that?” making it easy for the other one either to agree or else to object in a polite way. Leanne behaved in this way without apparent forethought. Arne, for his part, granted it was a happy, stress-free way to live, yet from time to time he wondered whether his father was right in believing the truly righteous Mormon household had to operate like a subsidiary of the Church, with a priesthood holder distinctly in charge.



Leanne passed the bar exam in late July but had no luck in finding a position in Seattle. There was an opening for a researcher in a large legal firm, but she wanted a position that would give her trial experience. When a position for public defender in Hampton, a town down in Pierce County, came open in mid-September, Leanne asked Arne how he would feel if she applied for it. He said he was okay with the idea. Having two



salaries, they could buy another car and she could drive back to Seattle on one weekend and he could drive down to Hampton on the next.

On the day of Leanne's interview with the mayor and town council, Arne wrangled a day off from work and drove her to Hampton. Although he didn't say so, Arne had growing doubts about a commuter marriage. They would be apart five days out of seven. Maybe being physically apart would foster being emotionally apart. Given his reservations about Leanne's maverick ways, maybe he'd succumb to getting along without her.

While Leanne was in her interview, Arne went into a convenience store at a truck stop to pay for gasoline and saw a sign that said a general manager was wanted for the truck stop. It was a big place—separate stations for gasoline and diesel fuel, ample parking for semis, a truck repair shop, and a large convenience store with an attached restaurant. Arne saw its implication instantly and applied for the job. It didn't pay much, and neither did Leanne's, for that matter. Together they wouldn't be making much more than he had been bringing home in Seattle. But at least they could live together year-around. Also, an old van went with the truck-stop job, which meant they wouldn't have to buy a second car.

Both of them being successful in their applications, they rented a small house in Hampton and, after they had finished the moving process, settled into a routine close to the one they had followed in Seattle. They got up at five and went for a jog, had breakfast, and went to work by seven. Leanne thrived on her heavy load of cases. Arne found managing the truck stop challenging, though in a different way from his former job. He especially got a kick out of relating to the personnel of the truck stop. He learned a lot from the mechanics in the repair shop and early on found the guts to fire one of them, who had been missing a lot of work on account of a drug problem. In the evening, Arne usually got home first and prepared dinner. After their meal, they worked together in the kitchen, Leanne reviewing legal documents at the cleared table while Arne washed the day's accumulation of dishes. He didn't mind

cleaning up and he liked to listen to her elaborate on the documents she was perusing.

On Sunday, of course, they went to church. The Hampton ward was large, and Leanne and Arne had their membership records transferred there immediately after their move. The members of the ward gave them a warm welcome but, unlike the members of their more liberal Seattle ward, they were obviously troubled that they couldn't say the customary, "Good morning, Brother and Sister Jarvis." Since it didn't seem natural to say, "Good morning, Brother Jarvis and Sister Holburn," they mumbled something like, "Good to see you," or "Hope you're doing well." Arne envied Leanne's indifference to their discomfort. As for himself, he felt to some degree like an oddity in the ward.



A couple of months after they had moved to Hampton, Arne became aware that a house just across the road from the truck stop was more than the massage parlor it claimed to be. According to his head cashier in the convenience store, all its employees were young women, and it drew an all-male clientele from nearby cities like Tacoma, Auburn, and Puyallup. The place was inordinately busy around noon on weekdays. A quick massage at lunchtime, it seemed, was just the thing to soothe the nerves of a harried businessman.

Once Arne became aware of this interesting situation, he began to keep a tally of condom sales in the convenience store, which proved more than a person might expect in an ordinary convenience store. Having become sensitized to this fact, Arne began to feel uneasy about selling condoms. There was something unsavory about the promotion of prostitution, which his retail trade in condoms facilitated. It made him an accomplice, as it were, in an evil held by Mormon doctrine to be second only to murder.

He talked this over with Leanne, who failed to take his view of it. She could understand his scruples, but she didn't think he ought to quit selling condoms. That wouldn't stop illicit sex. It would just make more people take a chance on having it without the protection of a condom. If out-of-town businessmen fueled the local economy by buying their condoms in his convenience store, that was all to the better. This struck Arne as a little callous on Leanne's part. However, one evening, a day or two after they had talked the matter over, she admitted that the proximity of a brothel made her uneasy.

She said, "Does it ever cross your mind to have sex with somebody other than me?"

"No," he said. Then he said, "Well, it crosses my mind, but that doesn't mean I'm going to do it."

He was placing dishes in the dishwasher while this conversation went on. She was at the table studying court documents.

"When you need sex," she said to Arne, "please get it from me."

It was true her job as public defender had taken its toll on their sex life. They had developed a routine of making love only on Saturday and sometimes on Sunday. He hadn't complained about it. He figured sooner or later her work would become less strenuous and things would go back to the way they had been in Seattle. He was therefore unprepared to hear her say, a little later that night, after they had got into bed and turned out the light, "If you want to tonight, it's okay."

From then on, thanks to the presence of the massage parlor, Arne's side of their sex life improved considerably. Once in a while mid-week, Leanne would be in the mood for being emotionally engaged, but usually it was otherwise, in which case Arne got the business over with in a hurry. No drawn-out foreplay, no romantic utterances, just plain, quick sex so she could relax and go to sleep.



After dinner one rainy Friday evening, Arne drove back over to the truck stop to tidy up a quarterly business income tax report. On his way home—it was around ten-thirty—he saw police cars parked with flashing red and blue lights in front of the massage parlor.

“I guess there’s been a bust over at the massage parlor,” he told Leanne when he got home.

The bust was mentioned in priesthood meeting on the following Sunday. The president of the elders’ quorum, Jerome Milson, was a member of the Hampton police force. He had been in on the bust and was eager to talk about it. People called him Spud. Arne wasn’t sure why. Arne could tell the bust had been a lark for him. He was chewing gum rapidly, and his eyes sparkled with pleasure. There were seven prostitutes, plus the madam—a big haul. “Been working on it for months,” Spud said. “A real sting. Better than the ones you see in the TV shows. Worked like a charm.”

The next day, the documents that had come in by fax to Leanne’s office over the weekend included, as usual, the docket for the present day’s court sessions. The docket listed two cases carried over from trials begun during the prior week. It listed a transient charged with both public drunkenness and public lewdness because the arresting officer had seen him pee on a sidewalk. A man from a trailer court was charged with assaulting his wife. As for the ladies from the massage parlor, the madam who ran it had hired a lawyer and posted bail on the night of her arrest. The seven young women who worked for her were still jailed and awaiting arraignment, indicating that they lacked the means to hire a defense attorney. That meant Leanne was obliged to take on their defense.

Arne found out all this at mid-morning when Leanne phoned him at his office at the convenience store and asked him to lend her a hand. Leaving his head cashier in charge, Arne drove to the town hall. When he arrived, Leanne handed him a clipboard and asked him to take notes while she talked to the seven prostitutes, who by now were sitting in a

row just outside the courtroom. Guarded by a single policeman, they wore orange jail coveralls but weren't handcuffed or chained.

They were an odd assortment. With the exception of a tall, willowy, somewhat older blond named Elsa Holst, they were short and young—girls rather than women. Two of them, Le Hahn and Nguyen Cam, were from Vietnam and spoke broken English. The willowy Elsa appeared to have taken them under her wing. According to her, their given names were Hahn and Cam, it being Vietnamese custom for the family name to come first. Elsa wanted it known their given names had meanings. Hahn meant “good conduct” and Cam meant “orange blossom.” Elsa also wanted it known that Hahn and Cam had green cards, the permits that allow aliens to reside and work in the United States.

Another of the girls, Adell Miller, was African-American. There were two Latinas, Flora Gonzales and Luz Trujillo, who spoke fluent but accented English. The seventh, an Anglo girl named Vivian Parker, was obviously embarrassed by her upper incisors, which had grown in crooked, with the result that her lips became wet from saliva when she spoke.

Leanne spoke briefly with each of the prostitutes, glancing at the police report on each as she spoke and relying on Elsa to help her understand Hahn's and Cam's fractured English. Then, addressing them as a group, she said that, although they might already be familiar with the process of arraignment, she was going to go over it with them. She intended to take them before the judge one at a time, and she wanted them to plead not guilty so that she could have some time to study the charges and see if there were mitigating circumstances. She hoped each of them could muster \$90 for bail, that being the sum the local bail bonding company was likely to require by way of a fee. In conclusion, she said it was possible she would turn some of them over to other lawyers. “Trying to represent all of you might pose a conflict of interest for a single attorney,” she said.

Mid-afternoon, after each had been before the judge and bail had been arranged, Leanne warned them to show up promptly at the pre-trial hearing, set for the following Friday, being sure to dress in sober, modest attire such as they might wear to church. Finally, she told them she hadn't had time to decide whether she would represent all of them. She would be letting them know about that on Friday.

Elsa responded to this statement by shaking her head. "We don't want any other lawyers," she said. "We all like you." The others murmured their agreement.

Later Arne asked Leanne how she felt about their faith in her abilities. It was after dinner and they sat on opposite sides of the dining table, she working on a thick sheaf of documents, he tabulating receipts from sales at the truck stop.

"Their confidence in me won't last," she replied. "They were caught red-handed in a misdemeanor. The penalties for a misdemeanor are ninety days in the county jail or a one-thousand dollar fine or both. The best any lawyer can do for them will be a plea bargain of some sort."

With that, they settled down to a period of silent work, broken a quarter-hour later when she snorted and said, "I can't believe this!" She pulled her cell phone from her briefcase and made a call.

"Is this Spud?" she said into the receiver. Then: "I'm reading the police reports on those women from the massage parlor and I'd like you to verify something. In two of the rooms you found men in bed with the ladies, but you didn't arrest the men. You let them go. You just arrested the women!"

There was a pause and then Arne could hear Spud's deep voice resonating from the receiver. Spud went on and on, obviously trying to head Leanne off at the pass somehow. Eventually, she turned off her phone and replaced it in the briefcase.

"I'm plenty steamed," she said to Arne. "They staked that place out for six weeks and saw nobody but men going in and coming out and when they did their bust, in a couple of rooms they found a man in bed

with the girl and they told the man to get dressed and clear out so they could arrest the girl. That does steam me!”

Leanne came to bed that night somewhere in the wee hours, around three o’clock, Arne figured. She tugged at his shoulder till he woke up, then said, “You can’t guess what I’ve discovered. I’m going to get them off, all seven of them.” He was too groggy to ask for details, but later he could recall her repeating, “Who would have thought it?” three or four times before he went back to sleep.

When Arne got up, she was already at the table with her laptop, typing furiously. When he took a shower, he saw no sign she had had one. Moreover, when he came out, she didn’t offer to help make breakfast, being still busy at her laptop. A little later she paid no attention to the eggs, toast, and milk he set beside her computer before placing his own on the opposite side of the table. “Come take a look at this,” she said. “Come and sit by me so you can see this screen.”

When he had positioned himself beside her, she read from the screen. “A person is guilty of prostitution if such person engages or agrees or offers to engage in sexual conduct with another person in return for a fee.”

“That’s the way the state law reads,” she said. “But a municipality has the right to pass its own law prohibiting prostitution, which supersedes the state law.”

She scrolled down a notch on the screen. “This is how Hampton’s law reads. ‘A person is guilty of prostitution if such person engages in or agrees to engage in sexual conduct with another person in return for a fee.’ Can you see what’s missing?”

“Just a couple of words, *or offers*.”

“What that means is it’s not against the law to offer to engage in sexual conduct for a fee in Hampton. But that’s what the police have charged them with. It’s *all* they have charged them with! The town doesn’t have a case. The judge will have to dismiss the charges.”

Arne was doing some soul searching, and his face showed it. It was wrong, just plain wrong, for her clients to get off with no penalty whatsoever.

He could feel Leanne bristle. “The thing is,” she said in a tone of exaggerated patience, “the police have staked them out for six weeks and watched all kinds of men walk in and out of the place, and even caught two of them in bed with girls on the night of the bust, and they let them go scot-free. As far as I’m concerned, if the men go scot-free, the ladies go scot-free too. Fair’s fair, I say.”

Arne knew it was time for him to demonstrate family solidarity if he had an interest in preserving his domestic tranquility. “I can see your point,” he said. “What’s sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander.”

Legally, she was in the right. Due process—the strict adherence to the protocol established by law—was one of the most sacrosanct principles of American jurisprudence. As Leanne herself had passionately declared to Arne while she prepared for the bar exam, it was better that a few guilty persons go unpunished than that the public at large be susceptible to false accusations and coerced confessions. But at best, as Arne could now see, due process dealt in approximate justice, justice for the largest number of persons in a world where, realistically speaking, absolute justice was an impossibility. That didn’t keep a person from regretting that impossibility. Leanne seemed all too pleased, all too vindictive, about discovering the gap in Hampton’s law forbidding prostitution. Arne knew he still had things to learn about his wife. He hoped they would be good things.



On the day of the pre-trial hearing, Leanne again asked Arne to help her by supervising the girls in the hall while she took them one by one before the judge to confirm their acceptance of her procedure. When Arne arrived, the girls were seated in the hall, dressed in blouses of



subdued colors and in skirts with hems below the knee. Leanne was explaining that she had gone over the police reports carefully and found no conflict of interest in representing all of them. Going on, she outlined her procedure.

She had decided to expedite matters by filing for a single group trial of all seven of the girls. Also, even though she could present her case for dismissal of the charges at the pre-trial, she would instead ask that the case go forward for trial and enter a plea for judgment with prejudice—"judgment with prejudice" being a legal term indicating that if the charges were dismissed, amended charges could not be re-filed, as they might be if she were to request dismissal at the pre-trial hearing. Finally, she would ask for a bench trial, that is, a trial by a judge without the involvement of a jury, because a zealous prosecutor could play upon the prejudices of the members of a jury, whereas a judge in a bench trial would be likely to stick to the facts of the case. Although the girls were bewildered by the details, they obviously trusted Leanne.

Near the end of her explanation, a couple arrived. "That's her," Leanne said to Arne. "Havana Thomas, proprietor of the massage parlor. I don't think that's her real name. That lawyer with her is Douglas Reid from Seattle. He isn't cheap." The woman paused a moment as she came abreast of the girls. The girls shifted uneasily under her gaze. It was as if she held them accountable for the bust. The lawyer touched her elbow and they moved on.

While Leanne accompanied each girl into the courtroom, Arne had time for more soul searching. He wasn't sure what the girls thought of him. He wore a sports shirt and a billed cap featuring the logo of the truck stop. Assuming he and Leanne shared the same surname, they called him Mr. Holburn. He saw no advantage in correcting them.

He glanced down the hall toward Havana Thomas from time to time. He wondered how much of the girls' nightly take she had allowed them to keep. He could see no hint of generosity in her frowning face. He wondered whether the girls found any enticement in their work beyond

the money they were paid. He found it hard to believe their *métier* satisfied their own sensuous needs. They certainly didn't exude the saucy impudence of prostitutes in certain famous movies. With the exception perhaps of Elsa, they struck him as depressed. He wondered whether they found a vicarious gratification in their clients' gratification—a matter of giving good measure for value tendered. Likely not, he decided.

He felt a twinge of guilt for pondering such a topic. However, he returned to it shortly. He wondered how the girls had got into the profession in the first place. Were they shanghaied, like sailors in the era of sailing vessels? Why did they stick with it? Was it because they assumed their moral taint was visible to the naked eye and no decent employer would hire them? Or was it simply a matter of getting a job in an economy that offered few opportunities to young, uneducated women? In any event, Arne found himself feeling sorry for them—a sentiment that, upon reflection, disturbed him a little.

At the end of the day, Leanne reminded the girls to show up promptly and again to be respectably dressed for their trial on the following Friday. She also inquired where they had been staying. She was particularly interested in whether they had nearby relatives. As it turned out, none did. Having decided to stick together, they had rented two rooms in a motel in Enumclaw, about seven miles up the road from Hampton. Their rooms had no kitchen facilities, and they were buying prepared foods in a supermarket and eating in their rooms.

Leanne asked about their finances.

"It's all okay," Elsa said. "Our finances are fine."

Adell shifted uneasily. Vivian frowned. Hahn and Cam looked distressed.

"It looks like your finances aren't okay," Leanne said.

Cam broke into tears, and Vivian's frown turned into a scowl. "Hahn and Cam are free-loading," she said. "They're living off the rest of us."

"It's all okay," Elsa insisted. "We don't mind."

"Is there a reason why they're broke?" Leanne said.

Their distress mounting, the seven fell into a tight-lipped silence.

“Okay, don’t tell me,” Leanne said. “Have you got any other problems that need to be dealt with?”

“The library won’t give us a card,” Elsa said. “They won’t let us check out books and magazines to take to the motel. They won’t let us use the computers.”

“Did you try talking to the director?”

“He’s the one who said we couldn’t have a card. He doesn’t like us. His desk is close to the entrance. He frowns when we come in.”

Leanne called Arne aside. “Would you take them back to Enumclaw in your van?” she asked. “And maybe go into the library and lean on that director to treat them like human beings.”

Arne hesitated. Squirring these young women about struck him as an impropriety. He was, in fact, surprised that Leanne would ask him to.

“Please,” she said.

He said nothing and she laid a hand on his arm. “Pretty please,” she said.

He couldn’t resist that. He would just have to depend on his propriety outweighing their impropriety in the judgment of anyone they might encounter.

“Thank you,” Leanne said.

She left her hand on his arm, restraining him while they watched the girls file toward the entrance. After a moment, she murmured, “I do love you. You may not think so when I’m all strung up, but I do.” It was an odd place to be told that his wife loved him, but he was grateful for it.

Releasing him, Leanne closed her briefcase. “It occurs to me,” she said, “that Hahn and Cam haven’t any money on hand because Havana Thomas has been keeping their entire take to pay off somebody for smuggling them into the country. If that’s the case, I don’t want to know about it.”

Arne pondered this statement as he drove the girls toward Enumclaw. Was Leanne acting the part of a shyster? He felt guilty for entertaining the

thought. As he understood the law, defense attorneys had an obligation to report evidence of hitherto unrevealed felonies on the part of their clients—murders, assaults, or other serious threats to persons or property. But a forged green card likely wasn't an offense of that sort. Maybe it was just a matter of Leanne not wanting unnecessary complications.

The girls were pleased with the ride. They had obviously got around to feeling comfortable with Arne. They seemed to regard him as a father figure, a role which upon reflection he decided had both its pros and its cons. As requested, he stopped at the library before he took the girls to their motel. He asked them to wait in the van while he went in.

The director was sitting at his desk. He was a small, balding man who parted his thin hair precisely in the middle. He began to shake his head before Arne had completed his request. "I know who those creatures are," he said. "I know what they do for a living. We don't tolerate that kind of thing in Enumclaw."

"Justly so," Arne agreed. "But they aren't pursuing that line of work anymore. They've been busted. My wife is the public defender in Hampton municipal court. These young women are her clients. She wants to help them reform. She wants to help them figure out a better way to make a living."

The director pursed his lips tightly. The scornful disbelief in his eyes angered Arne. Arne was standing immediately before the desk. Gripping the edges of the desk, he leaned forward and thrust his face close to that of the director. Alarmed, the director rolled his chair back.

Speaking slowly and distinctly, Arne said, "My wife has asked me to drive the girls from the court back to their rooms here in Enumclaw. I'm a businessman—a respectable businessman. I operate the truck stop in Hampton. I regard it as my duty to help these young women straighten up, and I regard it as your duty too. I want you to extend full library privileges to these young women, all seven of them, and I'm not going to leave until you say you'll do it."

The two men stared into each other's eyes for a long minute. The director flinched first. "All right," he said, "tell them to come in. I'll give them cards."

Returning to the van, Arne was astonished by his tough talk—also disturbed that he really was behaving like a father to the errant girls. There was no guarantee that, with the case dismissed, they wouldn't go right back to prostitution. His suspicion was reinforced when, on the drive between the library and the motel, he discovered that a scheme was afoot. Elsa was proposing that, following their dismissal at the trial, the seven of them start a massage parlor in Prosser, a town in southern Washington where Elsa had a friend who would rent them a small house at a reasonable price. Forming a co-op, they would slip out from under Havana Thomas's net and keep their proceeds entirely for themselves. She didn't say whether she meant for them to stick strictly to massaging. Prosser was a town of maybe five thousand people. It was on an Interstate, about fifty miles southeast of Yakima and thirty-five miles west of the Tri-Cities. Obviously, travelers on the Interstate wouldn't be stopping for massages. What frequent travelers like truck drivers might stop for, as word of mouth made its availability known, was the service extraneous to massaging for which the girls currently stood indicted.

Only Luz appeared to favor Elsa's proposal. The other Latina, Flora, said she wanted to go home to the barrio in Pasco and get married. Adell wanted to go back to Seattle because there would be more customers there. Apparently, she had the massage business in mind. Vivian made no comment on Elsa's proposal other than to doubt Havana would let Hahn and Cam go. "They haven't worked off half what they owe her," she said. With that, someone in the back emitted a slight hiss and a sudden silence fell on the others, as if Vivian had inadvertently mentioned the unmentionable in Arne's hearing.

Arne began to whistle "Rock of Ages," hoping to appear totally blanked out on the conversation he had just overheard. He knew Leanne would want to know about Elsa's proposal for establishing a co-op mas-

sage parlor in Prosser. As for Vivian's confirmation of Hahn's and Cam's illegal status, Leanne had already said she didn't want to know about that.

That evening, Arne was surprised when Leanne shrugged her shoulders over the possibility of the girls returning to their illicit trade. "I hope they don't," she said. "But I can't stop them."

Later, after they had gone to bed and Leanne had gone to sleep, Arne found himself troubled by the degree to which his wife was forced into ethical neutrality by her role as a defense attorney. With a rising distress, he realized that he himself was being forced to set aside his scruples. He liked to think of himself as a representative citizen, the sort of ordinary, everyday, run-of-the-mill person who makes a democracy function. But now he had Hahn and Cam on his hands, and he had strong reason to believe they were illegal immigrants and had forged green cards. If acquitted, they would likely go back to prostitution, and even if they chose to pursue the respectable occupation of masseuse, they would compete directly with poor citizens or the bearers of authentic green cards. Obviously, the easiest way to forestall either of those eventualities—also, the *just* way—would be to inform the US Immigration Services of the girls' illegal status. But after threshing restlessly about for a while, Arne realized he wasn't the person to rat out Hahn and Cam. It was the father-figure thing. The girls looked for assistance and protection from him as well as from Leanne. So he'd just have to put up with feeling guilty about aiding and abetting a couple of illegal aliens. Having decided that, he went to sleep.



Trial lawyers have a protocol called *discovery*. Discovery means that by a given deadline—a certain number of days before a trial is scheduled—the prosecution and the defense have the obligation to furnish each other with the complete details of their argument at the trial. In the case of the seven prostitutes, with the trial set for the following

Friday, discovery was required by Wednesday. Having worked on her brief over the weekend, Leanne filed her discovery on Tuesday, a day early. That evening, Spud Milson rang the doorbell and asked Arne to step out for a private conversation. Spud was in uniform, complete with badge, pistol, and handcuffs.

"I took a look at that brief on those whores your wife is defending," he said. "She is fixing to turn them loose. Did you know that?"

"Well, yeah, I know she has it in mind."

"And you are okay with that?" he said belligerently. "She's a shyster, that's what she is."

Arne winced at the word *shyster*. "She's just doing what all defense attorneys do," he said lamely. "They are supposed to do the best they can for their clients."

"We charged them with solicitation," Spud went on in an agitated voice. "We went into the place one at a time in plain clothes and asked for a massage. We went to a lot of trouble to look different from each other. I looked like a Fed Ex driver. As soon as the so-called masseuse asked the one who had gone in if he wanted the premium service for fifty bucks more, he arrested her and then just stayed in the room with her while another one of us came into the place and went into a room with another girl. By the time the fourth one of us had done that, the madam was getting edgy so this fourth guy radioed our uniformed guys to come in and bust the rest of them. Like I say, we charged them with solicitation. Now your wife says Hampton's law doesn't say anything about soliciting sex for a fee, and she means to let all seven of them go. That just won't do, Arne. We caught two of them in bed with clients. We caught them red-handed. And she's going to let them all go. And you tell me you're okay with that!"

Arne sighed and rubbed an eye with the palm of his hand. "I didn't say I was okay with that. I just said defense attorneys are supposed to do the best they can for their clients. That's what they are trained to do."

"If you're not okay with it, then I'll tell you what I think you ought to do. You ought to lean on your wife and tell her to back off."

Arne swung his head back and forth. He was between a rock and a hard place.

"You know the reputation of the Church is at stake, don't you?" Spud said loudly. "People in this town know Leanne is a Mormon. They know I'm a Mormon. Come on, Arne. Man up!"

"It wouldn't work," Arne said. "I don't have that kind of influence over Leanne. I'd just mess up my marriage if I tried. She'd accuse me of trying to exercise unrighteous dominion."

"Unrighteous dominion! Boy, has she got you brainwashed."

Arne's stomach was in a roil when he went back into the house. He went to the sink and went on rinsing dishes and placing them in the dishwasher. Leanne was at the table working on the case of the fellow from the trailer court who had given his wife a black eye. The wife had decided not to press charges, which didn't please Leanne. She figured he needed a penalty that would make him hesitate to hit her again.

Arne could feel her eyes on his back. He knew she wanted to know what Spud was after. He couldn't think of a way to let her know that wouldn't make her angry.

"So does he want you to do something in the elders' quorum?" she said.

"He's peeved," Arne said at last. "He went over to the prosecutor's office and took a look at your brief for the massage parlor bunch."

"Peeved?"

Arne rummaged in the dishwasher, repositioning a couple of plates so that he could crowd a third one in.

"Why didn't he come inside and talk to me?" Leanne said in an insistent voice.

"I guess he's afraid of you," Arne said. That idea had just now occurred to him. There *was* something about Leanne that challenged the average male's instinctive sense of superiority.



“What does he expect you to do for him?”

“He thinks it’s wrong to turn the girls loose without any punishment.”

“But what does he expect you to do about it?”

Arne said, “Well, I told him I couldn’t.” With that, Leanne dropped the matter, much to his relief.

When Leanne got home the next evening, she heaved her briefcase onto a chair and disappeared into the bathroom. When she came out, she said, “I’m wondering now just exactly what you told Spud last night,” she said. Her voice didn’t sound angry, just curious.

Flustered, Arne didn’t respond immediately. He had brought lentil soup from a deli. He was presently chopping a salad. When they sat down to eat, he spoke. “Spud said the whole town knows he’s a Mormon and you’re a Mormon. He said you getting the girls off without any penalty will do the Church damage. He said I should lean on you to change your mind, and I said it wouldn’t work, it would just mess up my marriage. I said you’d accuse me of trying to exercise unrighteous dominion.”

She eyed him askance. “That’s exactly what I’d do. Damn old Spud! He knows very well I can’t change the brief. The judge wouldn’t allow it at this point. Spud is just trying to punish me for ruining their bust.”

For a while she concentrated on her soup. Eventually she said, “Chantal came to see me today.”

Arne could smell trouble, Chantal being Spud’s wife.

“She also wanted me to change my brief,” Leanne said. “I explained why I couldn’t. I told her it’s out of my hands. Then she said I dishonor womankind. I said I didn’t agree. I said the men who pay money for those girls’ services are the ones who dishonor womankind. She left in a huff, but just before she did, she said, ‘I pity your husband.’”

Leanne ladled more soup into her bowl. “Am I hard to live with?” she asked.

He was flustered again.

“You don’t have to answer that question.”

He rallied and said, "I knew how living with you would be. I'm okay with it."

She reached across the table and squeezed his hand. "I'm grateful," she said.

As Leanne prepared to leave the house on Friday, the day of the trial, she told Arne that from things she had heard on the previous day, she expected the entire police force would be present at the trial and maybe some townspeople, too, by way of putting pressure on the judge—and on her too, of course. Arne asked her if she wanted him to come to the trial, which was scheduled for 1 p.m. He said he'd dress up in a suit and tie. She thought a moment and said, yes, she'd appreciate the moral support. Accordingly, he showed up in front of the town hall about a quarter to one. A uniformed woman stood at the courtroom door. Several people sat on the nearby bench. "She won't let you in," one of these said, nodding toward the guard. "The place is packed."

Arne returned to his van and phoned Leanne on her cell phone. "Looks like I can't get in," he said.

"Yeah," she said. "It's a can of sardines in here. Most of the front row is occupied by cops in uniform. A couple of deputy sheriffs are with them. The bailiff let them in, guns and all. The back row is packed with townspeople, also the standing space behind the back row. Somebody has gone all out to let the judge know he might not get re-elected if he doesn't support the police in this matter. I'll let you know how it goes tonight. But I'm not worried. Also, for your information, this morning Havana Thomas was acquitted of all charges except keeping the back door locked during business hours—which isn't going to lighten up the mood of the cops any."

Arne went back to the van and put the key into the ignition, thinking he'd go back to the truck stop. He sat a while without turning the key. It was cloudy and raindrops spattered the windshield. He was depressed and wishing Leanne was a nurse or a school teacher or, since she was

ambitious, a university professor—anything but a lawyer. In any event, he was glad he wasn't inside watching the drama unfold.

That made him even more depressed. He owed Leanne his support. She was his wife, he was her husband.

Glancing at the litter of discarded mail in the footwell of his van, he saw an opened manila clasp envelope from the manufacturer of a line of diesel additives. This sort of envelope, he abruptly realized, might be passed off as containing documents relevant to the current trial. Carrying it, he could likely get inside, where he might be able to worm his way into the standing space behind the rear spectator benches. He wished he hadn't thought of that. Nonetheless, flourishing the large envelope, he returned along the hallway. When he came to the uniformed woman at the courtroom door, he said, "For Ms. Holburn," and the woman opened the door and he went in.

He found himself standing beside an armed policeman. As Leanne had said, the place was packed. He'd have to stand right where he was, alongside the guard.

A railing separated a spectator section from the court proper. The spectator section contained two rows of benches divided by an aisle. Uniformed officers and several respectably dressed citizens occupied the front row. Other respectably dressed citizens occupied the second row. A similar number stood in the space between the benches and the wall. It was clear how the citizenry of Hampton felt about letting the prostitutes go unpunished.

Although no one appeared to be looking at him, Arne felt conspicuous and was within a few seconds of retreat. Then Leanne saw him. She was standing at her desk with a sheaf of papers in her hand. Immediately behind her were the seven defendants, seated in chairs placed along the railing. Leanne pushed through the gate and approached Arne. "Is that for me?" she said, nodding toward the envelope.

He stepped close to her and said in scarcely more than a whisper, "It's a fake—just something to get me past the bailiff. I shouldn't have done it."

"That's okay," she said, taking the envelope.

"I'll clear out of here," he said. "There's absolutely no space anywhere."

"Oh, don't go. Just stay right where you are. It's good to know somebody's got my back." She returned to her desk and, after seating herself, completed Arne's charade by pulling a couple of sheets from the envelope and laying them among her other papers. In the meantime, heads turned among the spectators to regard Arne. Among those spectators was Spud, who, having caught Arne's eye, gave a frowning shake of his head.

Shortly, the judge entered, and the clerk called for all to rise. There was a scraping of chairs and a shuffling of feet, then sudden silence. The judge, duly robed in black, had pouches beneath his eyes and a downward dip at the corner of his lips. He struck Arne as a man who found his present duty to be particularly distasteful.

Having allowed those in attendance to sit, the judge shuffled a few papers and announced that at the request of the defense attorney and her clients, this was to be a bench trial. He paused, then, directing his words to the spectators, said the accused had the right to a bench trial, and as they had requested it, he had no alternative but to grant it. Arne took it that there had been requests from persons among the spectators for a jury trial.

The judge shuffled a few more papers, then looked at the prosecutor and said, "Please proceed, Mr. Hill."

"Thank you, Your Honor," the prosecutor said. Holding a clipboard in his hand, he stepped from behind his table and stood before the judge. A handsome, well-dressed man, he was an associate in an Auburn law firm, contracted to serve as Hampton's municipal attorney and prosecutor.

The prosecutor began, stating that by a clerical error or some other oversight, the recorded ordinance forbidding prostitution within

Hampton town limits failed to specify that solicitation was unlawful. Accordingly, the defense would insist that the charge against the accused be dismissed. However, any person of an untrammelled and objective mind could only consider this an egregious miscarriage of justice

Arne was impressed. This Hill fellow was articulate, and he had a baritone voice somehow suggestive of wisdom and insight.

Sweeping a hand from front to rear of the courtroom, the prosecutor went on to declare that at the court today was the complete embodiment of the rule of law in Hampton. Present were members of the town council, law officers, court officials, and a large delegation of prominent citizens representing a cross section of professions, churches, and service clubs. Other citizens awaited in the entrance hall for the outcome of this trial. The presence of all these officials and citizens constituted a silent plea for justice. Their collective sense of morality held that prostitution was an evil, and their collective sense of equity demanded that this evil be punished. It was their earnest desire that the magistrate of this court make amends for the oversight of the municipal ordinance and find the accused guilty as charged. With a final burst of eloquence, the prosecutor urged the judge to be daring and to break with the expected and find not according to the timorous stance of due process but according to the grand principle of justice.

With the flourish of a hand, the prosecutor sat down, as if exhausted by his short but emotional appeal. As far as Arne was concerned, the prosecutor had hit the nail squarely on the head. It simply wasn't right for the accused—young, unwitting creatures though they might be—to go without some sort of punishment.

The judge sighed and shuffled through several documents absent-mindedly. Rousing himself, he said, "Have you anything to add, counsel?"

"No, Your Honor," Mr. Hill said.

Turning his regard toward Leanne, the judge said, "Ms. Holburn, your presentation, please."

Leanne rose and stepped in front of her desk. Though she often wore a dress to court, today she wore a black pantsuit with a white blouse. Arne judged a pantsuit to be more active, more assertive of strength, than a dress.

After consulting a clipboard in her hand, she began, “My clients are Nguyen Cam, Flora Gonzales, Le Hahn, Elsa Holst, Adell Miller, Vivian Parker, and Luz Trujillo. They have been charged with solicitation, that is, with offering to engage in sexual conduct for a fee. However, at present it is not a misdemeanor to offer to engage in sexual conduct for a fee in the town of Hampton. The town council, which created the existing law forbidding prostitution, had the option of relying on the law as written by the state of Washington. The law as written by the state of Washington reads: ‘A person is guilty of prostitution if such person engages or agrees or offers to engage in sexual conduct with another person in return for a fee.’ However, as it had the right to do, the town council chose to create its own law prohibiting prostitution, which supersedes the state law. The law approved by the town council reads: ‘A person is guilty of prostitution if such person engages or agrees to engage in sexual conduct with another person in return for a fee.’ Notably absent from the law as written by the town council is the word ‘offers.’ I therefore request that Your Honor dismiss this charge and to do so with prejudice so that an amended charge cannot be filed.”

She turned, stepped back to her desk, and exchanged the clipboard for a yellow pad. “The prosecutor,” she went on, “has just urged Your Honor to ignore the actual wording of the municipal ordinance against prostitution and interpret it as if it explicitly forbids solicitation. He has just urged Your Honor to violate due process on the presumption of a collective sense of justice that supersedes written law. I am wondering what difference there might be between such a presumption and vigilante law. I can see none. Hasn’t due process come into being precisely because of the cruel inequities of vigilante law?”

Leanne paused to glance at her pad. "I find the prosecutor's plea an affront to Your Honor," she said and promptly sat down.

The judge buried his face in his hands for a moment. When he looked up, Arne saw Leanne had won her case. A man who looked as doleful, as anguished, as downright haunted, as this judge wasn't about to render a judgment favorable to the prosecutor.

"I am cognizant of the many persons who have shown special interest in the present case," the judge said. "Their presence testifies as to the high level of morality in our community. I am cognizant of the integrity and zeal of our municipal police force. I am cognizant of Mr. Hill's stellar service as municipal attorney and prosecutor. All the more reason, then, that I regret to say that Ms. Holburn is correct. According to the law of the town of Hampton, solicitation is not an infraction, and solicitation is what the defendants have been charged with. I have no alternative but to dismiss this case with prejudice. If I failed to do so, my verdict to the contrary would be overturned in the appellate court and I would be sanctioned for rendering a frivolous verdict. Moreover, the defendants' court costs would be charged against the town of Hampton."

The judge directed his gaze toward the defendants. "Young ladies, you are free to go. I recommend that you take advantage of this opportunity to amend your ways."

He redirected his gaze toward the spectator section. "I advise the town council to call an emergency meeting and remedy this faulty law at once."

With that he pounded his gavel, gathered his papers, and left. A buzz of angry conversation now filled the room. Arne glanced at Spud. Grimacing, Spud shook his head—a gesture Arne took to be an accusation of rank betrayal. Spud mouthed, "Damned shyster," silent but unmistakable. Startled, Arne realized Spud was including him in that pejorative term. And with that, he also realized he had made a serious tactical error by attending the trial. As if fleeing, he stepped forward,

pushed through the gate, and joined the girls, who stood in a smiling knot around Leanne.

"Wait till the courtroom clears," Leanne said to the girls, "and Arne will drive you back to your rooms."

Eventually, the spectator section cleared of all persons except, as Arne now recognized, Douglas Reid, Havana Thomas's high-power Seattle lawyer. He waited as the seven girls filed through the gate. As Leanne came through, he said, "Well done, counsel."

"Thank you," she said.

"Our firm is looking for an associate," he said. "Consider applying."

"I will," she said and walked on.

Before she allowed the girls to enter the van, Leanne asked about their plans for the future. Five of them hoped to find work as masseuses, Elsa and Luz in Prosser, Flora in Pasco, and Adell and Vivian in Seattle. Hahn and Cam stood apart, on the verge of tears.

"Dig out your green cards," Leanne said to the Vietnamese girls, "and maybe Arne will hire you at the truck stop till you can find something better." Leaving Arne speechless, she hugged each of the girls and headed off across the street to her office.



Arne ended the afternoon at the truck stop. Arriving home around six, he went on a short jog, hoping it would calm him. It didn't. It seemed, in fact, to merely stir agitating thoughts. Spud said Leanne was a shyster. He said Arne was a shyster too. Arne had to agree. Being a shyster was built into Leanne's job. She had to adhere to due process. It was her duty to get the girls off. But she seemed to have no regret whatsoever for securing the dismissal of their case. She seemed to sympathize with them as if they were total victims of a sexual crime rather than co-perpetrators of it. Arne admitted that it was wrong for the men who visited the girls to go without punishment, but that didn't justify the exoneration of the



girls, nor did it justify Leanne's taking a vindictive pleasure in taunting the police for their botched arrest. The police, after all, had been merely carrying out their sworn duty in making the arrest. Moreover, the respectable citizens of Hampton were in the right to protest their exculpation. As for Arne, he was a shyster by complicity, first for continuing to shelter Hahn and Cam, and second for simply having been at the trial. Everyone took his presence at the trial as an open declaration of support for his wife. Nobody knew about his reservations, not even Leanne.

After the jog, Arne prepared a supper of lasagna and salad. Lasagna wasn't the easiest dish in the world to prepare, and he ordinarily took some pride in the seasonings he had learned to add. But on this occasion it merely added to his agitation. Generally he liked to cook, and he didn't mind doing other kitchen work in the evening when Leanne was present to discuss her current cases. However, there was a dubious word for a fellow like Arne—househusband. It was obviously a take-off on housewife, and it likely hadn't been coined to carry a pejorative connotation—which brought Arne back around to Spud. There was no question Spud scorned Arne. His contempt—and undoubtedly Chantal's contempt as well—would double if they knew the extent to which Arne played the role of househusband so his wife could practice law. Spud was a man's man. Arne wasn't—that's all there was to it. Arne's father was a man's man, too. His contempt would equal that of Spud and Chantal if he knew the extent to which Arne's domestic life failed to fit the model of a proper priesthood-led household.

By the time Leanne came home, the supper was ready. As soon as she had freshened up a bit, they sat down.

"Whose turn is it to say the blessing?" she asked.

"Gosh, I've forgotten," Arne replied. "It's been a while."

"Shall I do it?"

"Yes, please," he said.

As usual, she addressed her request for a blessing on their food to Heavenly Mother. She ate the lasagna with relish. “Nobody makes it like you do,” she said warmly. “Not even my mother.”

After they had finished the meal, she helped Arne clear the table and wash the dishes. She reviewed the trial with obvious satisfaction. She announced that she planned on attending the city council meeting at which the faulty law against prostitution would be amended. “I am going to gloat in their presence—pure and simple, just gloat!” she said.

She also mentioned Douglas Reid, the high-power lawyer from Seattle, who had invited her to apply for a position in his firm. “What do you think?” she said. “Should I do it? Or should we just stay here and I could go off the pill and we could start a family?”

Arne was speechless. He couldn’t respond to eventualities of such moment without time to ponder.

At bedtime she was in the mood for languorous, romantic love making, during which Arne set aside his perturbations. Afterward, she fell asleep quickly. Arne, however, lay wide awake, his perturbations very much revived. Her talk of starting a family—wasn’t that the straw that broke the camel’s back? Arne had all along assumed he and Leanne would have children. But only now did it bear in upon him that they would be inevitably conditioned to a heretical manner of worship. Sons and daughters alike—all of them would grow up believing it acceptable to address prayers to Heavenly Mother. Maybe they’d grow up believing it was not just acceptable but preferable to worship Heavenly Mother. And with that, a bolt of shock went through him and an eventuality he had been evading all evening broke to the surface. Didn’t all this perturbation add up to divorce?

At three-thirty, he could no longer tolerate lying abed with an adrenalin-fed anxiety pumping through him. He got up and went to the truck stop, where he tried to distract himself by ordering parts for refurbishing a hydraulic lift in the repair shop. He quickly realized that he was grieving, as if he took separation from Leanne as inevitable. For

all his disapproval of her practice of the law and her manner of prayer, there was no doubt whatsoever that he was still in love with her. Divorce would amount to a death, a burial.

As the first hint of dawn began to show at his office windows, he realized images from his wedding day had been recurring to him during the last hour or two. He had paid them no heed, as if they were simply a part of the random mixture of memories his distraught mind was churning up. But now he wondered whether they had a premonitory significance. The temple wedding ceremony had ordained that a wife should approach Deity through her husband. As they prepared to enter their nuptial bed, Leanne had protested and Arne had concurred. It was wrong, just plain wrong, to consider a priesthood holder as superior to his wife in any respect. Wasn't it also possible, Arne suddenly allowed himself to think, that it was similarly wrong to restrict worship only to Heavenly Father? And with that thought, he saw the way to erase the abrasions of living with Leanne. It was to convert, to go over completely, to her way of viewing matters.

A little after dawn, he went into the restaurant and ordered breakfast. After eating, he sat a while, working out the articles of his new faith. He wanted them broad and inclusive. He could stop thinking of Leanne (and himself by association) as a shyster. Accepting her stance on due process, he could admit that the deliberateness of established law should calm the anarchic outrage of a morally offended community. Moreover, he could acknowledge that the premises of Leanne's feminism were sound. She was right to be angry. Women *were* suppressed and there was no civilized justification for it. Hampton's policemen *had* committed a serious injustice when they arrested only the girls and let two men go uncharged. Going further, Arne could stop feeling ashamed of not being a man's man like Spud. He could accept himself as a househusband who also held down the job of a man's man by managing a large truck stop. Going further yet, he could adopt the worship of both Heavenly Parents. For him as well as for Leanne, prayers addressed to Heavenly Father or to Heavenly Mother or to both at the same time would be equally acceptable. Granted

it would be a private mode of worship, done in the confines of their own household. It would be for now and in the future when they might have children, whom they'd help master the nuances of worshiping only the divine male parent at church and both divine parents at home.



Arne got home around ten-thirty. Leanne was up, reading the newspaper while she finished her breakfast. It was the latest she had slept in on a Saturday morning for months. Having taken note of the clear, sunny sky, she proposed an outing. "Let's drive up to the Paradise visitor center on Mount Rainier and see how deep the snow is, and on the way home have dinner somewhere."

An hour later, they left in their aging compact sedan with Arne at the wheel. It was the car Leanne ordinarily drove but when they went somewhere together, Arne took the wheel. It was an arrangement that had persisted from before their marriage, the auto being the one Arne had courted her in.

While they drove, Leanne hummed snatches of songs and repeated, "What a day!" over and over. The sun was bright, and puffy white clouds floated in the azure sky. For a while their road went through farmland and pastures spotted by grazing cattle and horses. The snow pack circling Mount Rainier glistened in the noonday sun. Eventually, the highway entered a towering fir forest, offering only momentary glimpses of the mammoth peak. At the Longmire entrance to the national park, wild flowers lined the highway, but soon the ascending road became banked with snow. At the Paradise parking lot, snowplows had heaped a high bank of snow around its perimeter.

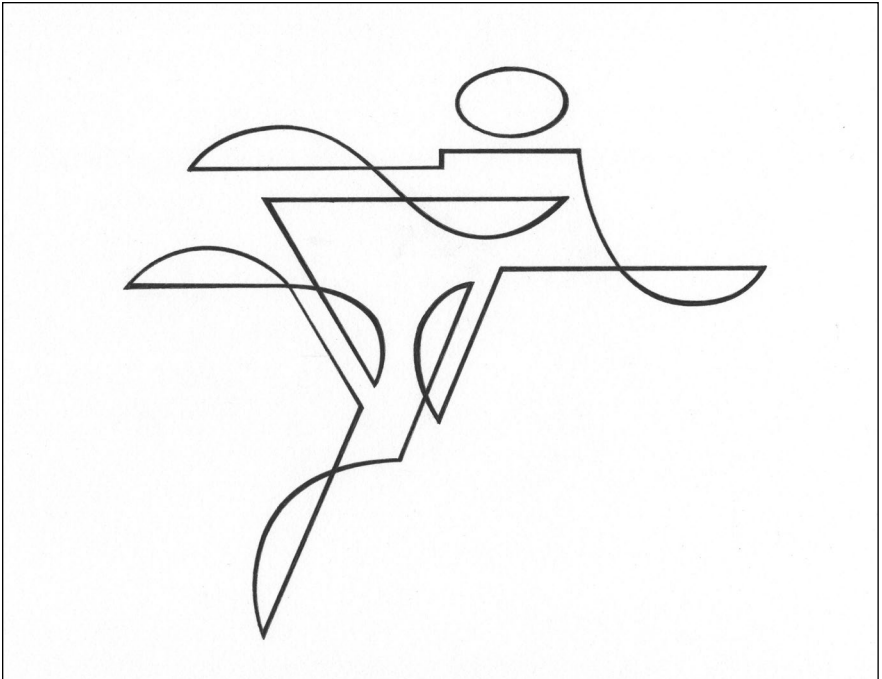
Accoutered with jackets and sun glasses, Arne and Leanne trekked up an icy trail to the snowfield where heavily burdened climbers were departing for Camp Muir, from which, after a few restless hours in their sleeping bags, the climbers would launch their bid for a pre-dawn summit on the towering peak.

On their return, Arne and Leanne had dinner in a rustic café just outside the park boundary. Dusk was falling outside and electric lanterns cast an intimate light upon the log walls and plank floor. Soft, melodic music hummed from a speaker above them. Arne glanced at a menu and made a quick decision. He watched Leanne study the card. She was relaxed, at ease, happy. He perceived anew how tense, how on guard, she generally was during the workweek. By all appearances, she thrived on adrenalin. But the tension had been gone all day—since the night before, actually. She was on furlough just now.

She looked up suddenly and, seeing his eyes upon her, smiled and again reached for his hand and gave it a squeeze. The lantern light shadowed her sculpted cheeks and aquiline nose. The day had been a furlough for Arne too. It had confirmed the decision he had reached early that morning at the truck stop. Harmony would reign in the household of Leanne Holburn and Arne Jarvis, not only now but later when it might be filled with children.

A few days later, Hahn and Cam showed up at the truck stop with their green cards and Arne hired them as clean-up girls in the restaurant and convenience store. He found them a small studio apartment over a garage and paid their rent as a part of their pay package. With Leanne's help, he got them enrolled in an English-as-a-Second-Language course that met two evenings a week at the community college in Enumclaw. Arne calculated that he suffered a considerable net loss of income by doing all this for them but, following a suggestion from Leanne, he made up for the loss by shifting funds from their tithing account. At their next tithing settlement, they told the bishop they'd have to pass on getting a temple recommend for the coming year.

As for Spud and Chantal, they never again spoke a word to either Arne or Leanne. However, Spud wrinkled his brow in a dark, dour way when he met them at church, which told them what he thought of them. That was just fine with Arne. He didn't suppose Leanne was losing any sleep over it, either.



Daniel Hall Bartholomew  
Dancer  
ink on paper, 11 in. x 14 in.

## Our Artistic Potential

The Mormon Arts Center. *The Kimball Challenge at Fifty: Mormon Arts Center Essays*. New York: The Mormon Arts Center, 2017. 156 pp. Paper: \$16.95. ISBN: 978-1977709714.

*Reviewed by Jacob Bender*

The occasion for this slim new volume of essays is the fiftieth anniversary of Spencer W. Kimball's "Education for Eternity" talk, delivered to Brigham Young University faculty at the commencement of fall semester 1967. Although the majority of the talk centered on bringing "the Spirit of the Master" into the classroom, it was Kimball's concluding remarks—which, according to Richard Bushman, were spoken almost as an afterthought—that proved to have the most influential afterlife: "Could there be among us embryo poets and novelists like Goethe?" Kimball asked. "Can there never be another Michelangelo?" He went on to ask if we could produce Wagners, Bachs, and Shakespeares of our own, or an oratorio even better than Handel's *Messiah*. Kimball's questions were interpreted by many as a sort of artistic call to arms for Zion to rise up and not only match but exceed the world in the realms of aesthetic achievement.

It was not the first time a General Authority had waxed rhapsodic on our artistic potential. We had been hearing since the nineteenth century that, with our greater light and knowledge, "We will yet have Miltons and Shakespeares of our own"—though we always felt a slight twinge of disappointment whenever we learned that this prophecy hadn't been uttered by Brigham Young or John Taylor, but Orson F. Whitney, one of the lesser-known apostles; there was always this quiet, nagging fear that the prophecy was false and our faith was vain. But lo, Kimball *did* become a full-fledged prophet, seer, and revelator, and so his words

carried all the more heft and authority. Hence, when this portion of the talk was later reprinted in a 1977 *Ensign* article (the afterthought was now the centerpiece), Kimball's challenge became imbued with the power of a prophetic pronouncement. The Church's artists felt not only challenged, not only encouraged, but *called* to their work.

Fifty years later seems to be as good a time as any to take stock of how well that challenge is going. The essays contained in this collection were all initially delivered as presentations at the inaugural Mormon Arts Center Festival, held in New York City June 29–July 1, 2017. It features a murderer's row of presenters, a sort of who's who of contemporary LDS arts and letters. It opens with a brief introduction by Richard Bushman and a keynote delivered by Terryl Givens, and then barrels forward from there. If this collection accomplishes nothing else, it corrals together a stunningly diverse array of fascinating voices into one convenient volume.

There is no single idea or through-thread that unites all these talks besides their general responses to Kimball's 1967 address. Givens, for example, is less interested in the fallout or ramifications of the talk than in discussing how Mormon religious art can forge its own identity, distinct from that of the Catholic and Protestant traditions. In his own inimitable style, Givens argues that Mormon art focuses upon the holiness of the specific and the quotidian, as opposed to the abstract. That thread is also taken up by Jared Hickman, who examines an anecdote from the life of Joseph Smith, wherein he declared that a jovial dinner party he attended was "after the Order of the Son of God." Brother Joseph, too, found the divine in the quotidian, Hickman argues.

Many of these essayists likewise use Kimball's talk less as a focus than as a point of departure: Paul L. Anderson provides a fascinating historical sketch of temple architecture throughout the late-twentieth century; Adam S. Miller engages in a spirited defense of fiction; Steven L. Peck plugs his upcoming novel *Gilda Trillim*; Kent S. Larsen traces how the Book of Mormon's Corianton story has been adapted for print, Broadway, and Hollywood.



But others do, in fact, respond to Kimball's challenge directly. Campbell Gray, for example, somberly declares that, "Generally speaking, [Kimball's challenge] has not been achieved by Mormon visual artists," though he optimistically contends that it is still possible for Mormon artists to do so—and that without having to make any special concessions to "Western social conditions [that] currently exist . . . other than applying deep thought, analysis and creativity in constructing intelligent visual theses." Meanwhile, Kristine Haglund explores bureaucratic reasons for why our artists have perhaps fallen short of Kimball's vision: she discusses Handbook 2's emphasis on keeping sacrament meeting music "appropriate," which typically only means "non-distracting" or "inoffensive," and hence mediocre. But rather than merely attack the term "appropriate" itself, she instead seeks to expand it: "At its root," she argues, "the word is from 'propriare,'—to make one's own. It is about belonging. 'Appropriate' art for Mormon worship, then, is art that reminds us of the deep covenants which bind us to each other, and to God in a network of transcendent belonging." Similarly, John Durham Peters argues that our LDS predilection toward inoffensiveness is a stumbling block in our quest toward artistic excellence: "Perhaps Mormons fill the ranks of accountants, agronomists, and dentists," he muses, "precisely because these fields seem safe from soul-wrenching questions." He argues that instead of avoiding the proverbial abyss, Mormon artists should gaze into it, engage with it, even seek to redeem it. Likewise, Michael Hicks disputes Kimball's imputation that, say, "a temple-worthy Wagner would have written better music," claiming that "a transgressive personality goes hand in glove with exploration, which we instinctively attach to the idea of art." The problem is not our worthiness, but our daring.

Hicks is one of several essayists who openly critiques Kimball's challenge; he takes direct issue, for example, with the flagrant Eurocentrism of Kimball's list of great artists. Hicks calls for an LDS aesthetic that looks beyond Utah, beyond the Western tradition, to encompass the whole world and see the "Mormonism" in everything. The gospel, he argues,

is not geographically bound, and neither should our art be (Hicks's and Givens's essays are the two that feel the most like sermons). Jana Riess for her part not only criticizes Kimball's Eurocentrism, but also contends that his list focuses too much on the "lone genius archetype," a paradigm with which Mormons have had little success. "We're valuing and honoring the wrong things, the things that Mormons don't do well," she argues. Rather, we tend to excel at communal artistic efforts, e.g., the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, ballroom dancing, and genre fiction. Eric Samuelsen, in turn, finds Kimball's very categories hopelessly outdated, far too beholden to "hierarchal" attitudes toward artistic achievement. Nowadays scholars tend to judge artworks as cultural artifacts, he argues, not against some arbitrary definition of artistic "greatness." "Our contemporary post-modern approach to literature . . . is altogether good and right and worthy and virtuous," he provocatively argues, and he consequently dismisses Kimball's challenge as a mere cultural artifact as well.

Still others contend that many LDS artists have *already* fulfilled Kimball's vision, and it is to our own condemnation that we have failed to recognize them. Glen Nelson argues as much for the Great Depression paintings of Joseph Paul Vorst, while Nathan Thatcher claims the same for Spanish composer Francisco Estévez. The implication of both essays is that we as a Church do not know what to do with the artistic geniuses we already have, and we will not be able to cultivate more until we do. Hopefully the sheer existence of these essays will be a first step toward better recognizing these neglected figures in our midst; in fact, one of the chief values of this collection may simply be that it provides an excellent series of rabbit holes to explore, as each essay introduces the reader to a wealth of new artists. Even if you've already heard of many of these folks, odds are you haven't heard of them all.

Each essay has something to offer, though of course not every essay will hold the same interest for the same readers. It is also not a flawless volume: a few stray printing errors crop up here and there, and many

of the images discussed therein are represented only by long URL links that were clearly copy and pasted from someone's web browser. But then again, the entire production has a sort of informal, conversational air about it—much like the conference proceedings themselves were, I imagine. This collection is not intended to provide the final word on anything, but rather to stimulate the conversation, to keep it going, as we continue to wrestle with what it means to be a Mormon, to be an artist, and to be both and neither at once.



## As the Savor: The Poetry of R. A. Christmas

R. A. Christmas. *Saviors on Mt. Disneyland: New and Collected Poems*. Self-published, Lulu, 2017. 180 pp. Paper: \$20.00. ISBN: 9781365463686.

*Reviewed by Dennis Clark*

If you have never read a poem by Bob Christmas, this book is your chance to catch up. Take it.

If you have read poems by Bob Christmas, this book is your chance to enjoy yourself all over again. Plunge in.

If you have no interest in reading poems by Bob Christmas, it's only because you haven't yet read any. This review is your introduction.

I like reading poems by Bob Christmas. This is not because they are pretty, fluffy, light-filled evocations of young love, true faith, or the beauty of nature. You do not inhale fresh mountain air through these poems. Reading a Christmas poem is more akin to changing a flat tire on your Ford Fairlane in the grit of the shoulder of I-15 as eighteen-wheelers and

giant RVs whizz by just past your butt, and you have to breathe their exhaust. But the experience is exhilarating, and you are glad to escape alive with your aesthetic sensibilities intact. And when you continue down the road, it's with a greater appreciation of the journey.

These are confessional poems by a convert to Mormonism who struggled, and still struggles, with the strictures of his faith. He says what people hesitate to say in testimony meeting, and he says it fast and formally. But not in traditional verse forms. A running theme in this collection is poetics, ten poems Christmas calls "Bunk-House Poetics" deployed throughout the collection, in which he explores various statements on poetry he's encountered in earning a PhD in English via Stanford, Berkeley, and USC, and then applying what he learned from his study and teaching, both in the classroom and at his desk.

These bunk-house poems are of interest in helping the reader understand what seems at first a very flat aesthetic behind the poems, with a lack of formal structure. This is an example of the whole shebang:

Saviors on Mt. Disneyland

His second wife constantly called for  
cigarette money. Two of their grand-kids  
lived with his first wife. He and his third  
were living with a daughter divorcing  
her husband and sending their boy  
on a mission at the same time.

His gay actor brother played Grandpa to  
his gay oldest son's three. His first  
was "Grandma" to the grand-kids by  
his second (the bummer of smokes);  
and he was Bob, "Dad," or "Grandpa"  
(depending) to the tribe of his third.

In hopes for all he partook  
of broken bread and a sip of  
water each week in remembrance  
of the One who descended below

and rose above in order to  
redeem him and these people.

He'd heard a tall tale about a place  
so cold words froze—in mid-air.  
Folks couldn't hear, but kept shouting.  
In Spring all those icy words broke  
loose at once—it took a while  
before things got cleared up.

Maybe their lives would thaw out.  
Maybe Jesus was about.

Not all of the poems are this serious. He includes humorous poems like “Do You Have a Sister Named Mary?” and “Playing Softball Against the Polygamists.” These are not stand-up routines, they are not “light” verse. But Christmas never loses sight of the ironic nature of much of his life, as lived, and some of the matter of his poems is funny.

But in addition to humor and irony, you will find, as noted above, some general guidelines about verse, and especially about his practices, in “Bunk-House Poetics”—which may be of more interest to someone like me. For example, in “Bunk-House Poetics 1” he asks:

Why not get some emotional distance by  
writing in the third-person? Why don't we  
tell our stories, or make statements about  
interesting subjects, without constantly  
repeating “I,” “I,” as we go along?

Since these are clearly poems about poetics, he addresses his audience as writers of verse. But if you love to read poetry without having ever tried to write it, it will help you appreciate these poems if you understand his use of this strategy.

Christmas reveals a second strategy he embraces in “Bunk-House Poetics 4”—the use of free verse. He says of it:

Free-verse, so to speak, has now been written  
for so long—and so well—that there's no  
turning back. . . .

But he goes on to emphasize:

The bottom line is—always has been—  
beauty and meaningfulness.

This is bad news for readers who prefer traditional forms, rhymed verse, a fairly regular meter, and a sense of being part, as a reader, of the “great tradition” of English poetry. I resist that preference, for reasons explained in a blog I write for the Association for Mormon Letters, under the title “in verse.” I’m working on the eighty-seventh post now, and I began with Anglo-Saxon alliterative verse in the first post, so I was gratified to read this in “Bunk-House Poetics 6:”

The closest thing to a natural metrical norm  
in English would seem to be a Germanic  
line of four accents (with the accents falling  
on either side of a caesura) held together  
by alliteration, consonance, and assonance.

This is a more accurate description of verse in English, and Old English, than the “iambic” verse introduced into English from French, using a bastardized concept of classical Greek verse. Chaucer was the first great poet to employ that meter, and for a hundred years or so it wrestled with alliterative verse before emerging triumphant, essentially with the English adoption of the Italian sonnet by poets like Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey and Sir Thomas Wyatt.

Given that burst of poetics, here is another of Christmas’s poems in which you should be able to discern all these elements at work:

At Point of the Mountain, Utah

To the east, the freedom  
of hang-gliders; to the west

the State prison. This isn’t  
the place; this is only

a place between two valleys,  
where the wind blows

harder, the snow flies faster—  
where even in summer you feel

lucky to have gotten through  
without crashing, or getting  
pulled over, or breaking  
down—where just as you  
come around, going either  
way, you feel a kind of  
relief, a blessing—like maybe  
the pioneers felt, sort of.

To dissect only the first stanza, I hear the stresses (indicated by italics) as “*To the east, the free-dom* [2 stresses] / *of hang-gliders* [2 stresses]; *to the west.*” The prepositions have a lesser stress than the nouns but are not unstressed—they take the stress a tour guide might give them. And indeed, Christmas is acting as a tour guide in this poem. In addition, the rhyme of “east” and “free” and the consonance of “east” and “west” tie the stanza together. The stresses and ornaments are what make this poem a pleasant reading experience—but the “beauty and meaningfulness” of the poem are what make it linger in the memory.

To those of you who enjoy Christmas’s poems, this review may seem like overkill. I am not writing for you, although I appreciate your reading this far. I am writing to encourage those of you who skip over the poems in *Dialogue* to slow down, train your ears by reading poems aloud, and revel in the subversion poetry makes of this instrument of communication we call language. Art is not always pretty. Like life, it happens at inconvenient times and with a coldly-calculated indifference to your readiness to indulge. So I urge you to learn to approach poems not as an incidental distraction from the serious scholastic fare of this journal, but as the savor that makes the rest of the contents endurable, if not interesting.

That’s the review. I have but one remaining duty here: you have to buy *Saviors on Mt. Disneyland* online, but it’s not offered through, say, Amazon. You have to buy it here: [www.lulu.com/spotlight/rachristmas](http://www.lulu.com/spotlight/rachristmas). It is self-published. And it is a shame that a poet as fine as Christmas has to publish his work himself. Give him some encouragement and order a copy of this book today. Now. Before you finish reading this review.

## Opening Invisible Doors: Considering Heavenly Mother

Rachel Hunt Steenblik. *Mother's Milk: Poems in Search of Heavenly Mother*. Illustrated by Ashley Mae Hoiland. Salt Lake City: By Common Consent Press, 2017. Paper: \$9.95. ISBN: 978-0-9986052-2-7.

*Reviewed by Kristen Eliason*

*Mother's Milk: Poems in Search of Heavenly Mother* is a collection of poems written by Rachel Hunt Steenblik and illustrated by Ashley Mae Hoiland. Divided into four sections and armed with nearly thirty pages of notes, the work of this book appears to be two-fold: first, to enter into a discoveratory conversation about the nature of Heavenly Mother, and second, an outcropping of the research Steenblik conducted for the scholarly article “‘A Mother There’: A Survey of Historical Teachings about Mother in Heaven.”<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the epigraph from Kierkegaard sets the stage for what the reader expects to be a deep poetic dive into the nature of a Heavenly Mother and the relationship between the deity and the writer. However, the following 200+ short poems (often three to a page) accomplish little more than cursory observations of a feminine divine. The poem, “Sometimes” muses:

Sometimes  
I just  
need my  
Mama.

(Sometimes  
it is hard for Her

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1. David L. Paulsen and Martin Pulido, “‘A Mother There’: A Survey of Historical Teachings about Mother in Heaven,” *BYU Studies* 50, no. 1 (2011): 70–97. Steenblik is credited as a research assistant for Dr. Paulsen.



to be so  
needed.) (18)

The two short stanzas host a representative sample of the consistent capitalization of the feminine throughout the book. The primary thrust of the book is to highlight the feminine, and the capitalization seems logically necessary; however, the thorough underscoring of the importance of the deity's gender and role through Capital Letters comes across as somewhat self-aware and overwrought in poems already so spare.

The structure of the stanzas and line breaks attempts thoughtful symmetry—unfolding Sometimes/Sometimes and Mama/needed as matching bookends to the dual statements. But the careful scaffolding of the structure fails to elevate the poem beyond its existence as two statements. The observation, “Sometimes I just need my Mama,” lacks the precision, concrete imagery, metaphor and, ultimately, epiphany required for the poem to land with the force that I suspect was intended. The poem appears to rely too heavily on the reader to supply what it looks like to need a mother-God-figure in the transcendent space between the lines.

Steenblik goes to great lengths to establish herself as not only the writer but a highly knowledgeable speaker of the poems. References to her children throughout the book effectively blur the line between speaker and writer. With this foundation, she then strives to establish herself as a very well-read researcher of Heavenly Mother. Titles such as “What Søren Aabye Taught Me,” “What Chieko Taught Me,” and “What Jeffrey Taught Me,” suggest that Steenblik wants the reader to know she's done her homework. But the poems themselves rest too heavily on the accomplishments of the titular philosophers, prophets, and poets invoked. “What Chieko Taught Me” reads again as two linked statements:

The Mother's face  
is hidden from us,  
because Her arms  
are around us.  
(Our heads rest gently  
on Her shoulder.) (62)

The sentiment here is really nice—a loving Mother in Heaven who holds us, her children, with our sleepy heads resting where we cannot see her face. The approach however, calls to mind the well-known “Footprints in the Sand.” “Footprints”’s (limited) success rests entirely on the surprise/perspective shift—the realization that Christ was there all along. Similarly, Steenblik’s poem relies on a shift in perspective of Mother in Heaven and requests that the reader take this perspective seriously not through the wrought language but by telling you that a well-known LDS leader also holds this perspective.

There are overtures to a more profound look at Heavenly Mother in poems such as “Marco Polo II” and “Motherless Milk,” which offers a somewhat more developed metaphor with the lines:

I searched for my mother, the way a baby roots  
for her Mother’s breast, head nuzzling from side to side,  
mouth open, ready to suckle. But still I was thirsty.

This section reflects the metaphor I expected from the outset of the book—the speaker/writer searching as a child does for her mother. I appreciated the positioning of the blind searching of the babe that cannot see her mother’s face but knows intuitively that a breast is near. The poem, which I count as the most successful of the book, continues with the lines:

Then my belly grew, and my breasts grew, and  
a ravenous little thing came out. I offer her my milk  
without money and without price. My husband  
offered it to her once, while I sat beside them on a train.  
She pursed her lips against the false nipple,  
and stared at me with sad eyes. I wondered then,  
if Heavenly Mother walked into another room  
so we would take the bottle. I wondered then,  
if we are weaned. (8)

There are a few brilliant pieces of language here—the ravenous thing, the false nipple, and the sad eyes carrying an emotional impact that belies the somewhat prosaic tone of each line.

Steenblik's conversational style is consistent throughout the book, with most of the stanzas holding one or two fairly innocuous observations, statements, or feminized versions of scriptures; however there are a couple of poems that gave me serious pause. The juxtaposition of two specific poems was particularly troubling: The first "Maybe" posits that perhaps one must "[be] a mother / to know the Mother." This exclusionary and somewhat elitist idea is immediately tempered by the final line that suggests one could be the mother of "a child, a poem, an idea," and thereby qualify to know the Mother. My initial reaction, as a new mother myself, was to feel generally alienated by the sentiment, but I didn't want to get too bent out of shape over a poem that was clearly backpedaling out of the unfriendly territory it had unintentionally wandered into.

Maybe

Maybe it takes being a mother  
to know the Mother,  
to carry something inside  
for months, before birthing  
it into the world—  
a child, a poem, an idea

I decided to give the poem's potential blunder a pass until I read the poem immediately following it.

The Mother Understands

The divine  
Mother  
of us all,  
understands  
not every  
woman  
is a mother. (87–88)

At first blush, this poem seems to be trying to be more inclusive—not every woman has given birth to a physical child, and the "divine / Mother / of us all / understands." But the cumulative effect of these two poems

is to be told first that only a mother can know the Mother, then that you can be a mother even if you haven't born children, and then that not everyone is a mother. If it is true that not every woman is a mother, and if it is also true that it takes being a mother to know the Mother, then only some women are entitled (via their ability to reproduce) to a relationship with deity. The thought is grating. I feel certain that the intent here was to somehow say that it's okay to not be a mother by way of giving birth, but if so, these two poems shouldn't be read in succession. The positioning of these poems is disappointing, if not offensive.

Poetry aside for a moment, the book is sustained throughout by Hoiland's warm and inviting illustrations. The thoughtful artwork celebrates women and children by recognizing quotidian moments and allowing us to see them as art. Line drawings of a woman's pregnant belly, or a mother holding a child, recognize and honor the feminine experience and elevate the work as a whole. The facelessness of the people depicted allows the reader to insert herself into the art and to resonate with it in a meaningful way.

Where this book ultimately succeeds is in provoking more profound thought on the nature of Heavenly Mother and starting conversations about this relatively undiscussed deity. The form of the poems asks the reader to get very comfortable with the feminine pronoun, and with Heavenly Mother as an active participant in the situations described. The work insists on her presence and posits interesting questions about the characteristics of a relationship with her. Lines like, "She knows our / need by kissing" and "The Mother still remembers to sing" are thought-provoking and stand alone in a quiet field where not many other texts have been crafted. I am left, perhaps like the speaker of these poems, wanting to know more about why the Mother remembers to sing, what it is that she sings, where she sings from, and what she sounds like. If this were a draft manuscript, I would earnestly want to read second, third, and fourth revisions to see how these ideas develop, and how greater precision could make them sing. That said, the existence of this book does open previously invisible doors to new thought, and that is an accomplishment that should not be overlooked. While it's not a great

book of poetry, this book is benchmarking new territory, and that is worth a great deal of consideration.



## Resisting Interpretation

Lisa Bickmore. *Ephemerist*. Sante Fe, N.Mex: Red Mountain Press, 2017. 74 pp. Paper: \$18.95. ISBN: 978-0997310269.

*Reviewed by Bert Fuller*

Ephemerist, n.: (1) after the Greek word for day, a journal keeper; (2) a collector of ephemera (see *archivist*); (3) an inventor of ephemera (see *capitalist*); (4) a devotee of ephemera (see *nudist*); (5) one who privileges ephemera (see *nepotist*); (6) a scientist whose subject is ephemera (see *mycologist*).

What follows is a lecture on three samples from a known ephemerist.

### "Let's Get Lost"

Bickmore resists interpretation. She draws you in, leaves you tingling or still, and sets your mind wandering. No conclusions, no closures to the verse, except her Emersonian epigraph that "Dream delivers us to dream, and there is no end to illusion."

"Let's Get Lost" opens with the crack of billiards on a November night in rural Vermont. Bickmore is by herself, "so I could have the loneliness I craved." Late in the poem she reveals that she had been there twenty years before with her children and "the man who was my husband." Presumably the husband is no more, yet the spot remains where they had shared dinner over a fire. "*I am lost*," she writes, "at the mouth of the canyon / closed with a gate." The closed gate says: "*Enough* . . . with emphasis."

The poem centers on the fact (call it “fiction” if you like) that for Bickmore to “get lost” means going to a place you’ve already been, not somewhere entirely strange. This space between familiar and unknown is where losing oneself is possible, and, if I may make a suggestion without elaborating at length, it is the space that the whole of literature traverses. It is the twilight of consciousness between waking and sleep, and in pieces like “Let’s Get Lost” Bickmore excels at its articulation.

### “Heavy Metal”

This double-scene interweaves Catholic mass and a car crash, indenting stanzas to indicate narrative shifts. At church there are three characters—the narrator, the priest, and a boy with headphones a few pews back blaring thrash metal. Present at the crash is the narrator again, plus the truck she hit and some bystanders. The simultaneous chaos and calm with which these events are conveyed demonstrate Bickmore’s high capacity for taking in, then ironing out catastrophe. She is able with her inner ear to pick up on some elusive wavelengths, including stillness amidst pandemonium and “a quiet scream” in the deep of silent oppression. She rides the lightning between dissonance and counterpoint almost to perfection, managing to salvage import from scrap metal—audio ephemera awaiting temporal redemption.

### “Eidolon”

For a book whose title signals the fading away of day after day, Bickmore could not have selected a more appropriate sticking place than the eidolon as her finale. An eidolon is either an *ideal* of enduring substance or an *idol* of fading shadow.<sup>1</sup> “Eidolon” floats gingerly about this tension, never landing on firm ground. What is real versus illusory, what is passing versus permanent? Those are questions for the philosopher, less for the poet, and even less for the critic. I won’t attempt them because (a) I am

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1. “Ever the permanent life of life” (Whitman) v. “the smoking souvenir” (Hart Crane).

not trained to do so and (b) what matters more are the lines, the fiction, the images, and so forth. “Eidolon” is a poem after all, not a treatise.

The first line extinguishes perceptions of stability readers might have brought along with them: “The pop of the disconnect I feel as a point in space.” *Pop, disconnect, point, space*. Then the occasion generative of speech comes into view. Bickmore’s son is dead—or gone, rather. Absent, distant, away on a mission in Asia. Not dead, really, but disembodied. A voice from beyond the veil that prods, *Are you willing?* “I could not bring myself to answer,” comes the confession, but later: “*Willing for what?* I should have asked.” These probations draw forth Jonathan Edwards, like leviathan on a hook, who observes with elegance that will is the faculty that makes choice possible but is not itself susceptible to wishes, wants, or whims. Edwards dispatches the image of a bird, which Bickmore toys with through a macaronic pun on flight (*volare*) and volition (*volere*), and to which she adds the indelible movement of swallows tracing “glyphs over the glyphs of midge-flight.” There is more to be said about Bickmore sporting with Edwards of all people—because I sense Calvinist stocks rising slightly but steadily among Mormon intellectuals (n.b.: the late fawning over Marilynne Robinson)—but I will hold off until conditions become clearer as to whether the market is a bull or a bear.

If my remarks seem scattered, it’s because they are. The poem refuses to stand still and subject itself to brisk anatomization. Perhaps it requires the scrutiny of a more skillful critic, though I would like to offer one final point before closing out this review. If we suspend disbelief, exercising what Coleridge calls poetic faith, and grant for a moment that the image of a thing is more real than the thing itself—a notion Bickmore entertains—then this poem, or some future transmutation of it, has the potential to become a profound expression of Mormon sensibility. The commonly held sensibility is this: gods are human, humans are gods, humans and gods are conspecific. A potentially controversial next step is this: humans are made in the image of gods, gods are made up of these images, the image is what lasts, the stuff that endures among the gods are the human bits. A possible conclusion: the gods fade, but people don’t. This concept is

potent yet morally neutral, capable of justifying blasphemous tyranny or radical charity—*idolatry* or *idyllatry*. If pushed, it could lead to another phase in the unfolding, collective revelation called Mormonism.

To be ugly, but honest, I didn't like most of the poems in *Ephemerist* at first. It took some time sitting with the book's sashay-and-sway before I could internalize the rhythm at a level that felt natural. Thankfully, what I like and what I don't like is rather irrelevant. Instead, what matters is engagement of a fair and balanced sort. I still prefer Bickmore's last book over this one, but I consider both it and *Ephemerist* important enough to justify buying and reading everything she writes. I look forward to decades more of being haunted by her amiable ghost.



## Gender Structures within *Seasons of Change: Stories of Transition*

Sandra Clark Jergensen and Shelah Mastny Miner, eds.  
*Seasons of Change: Stories of Transition*. El Cerrito, Calif.:  
Peculiar Press, 2017. 264 pp. Paper: \$19.99. ISBN: 978-  
0991189281.

*Reviewed by Mei Li Inouye*

Aptly titled, *Seasons of Change: Stories of Transition* is a well-curated collection of prose and poetry featuring a specific demographic of Mormon women who read and contribute to the literary journal and blog *Segullah*. Eleven thoughtfully arranged categories containing fifty-eight voices capture a diversity of experiences that occasionally touch on issues of class,



sexual orientation, ability, race, and ethnicity,<sup>1</sup> but primarily plumb the life and death observations and gendered experiences of a middle-class swath of well-educated, able-bodied, heteronormative, married women from different age groups and North American geographies (their rare references to race or ethnicity also suggest racial homogeneity among them). A unique ethnographic case study for analyzing the boundaries, values, and negotiations of this specific demographic of Mormon women, this collection makes a valuable contribution in its exploration of what it means to be such a Mormon woman and how such women negotiate the gendered structures and roles containing them.

Three gendered structures that frame the social practice and performance of gender (see R.W. Connell and Judith Butler) give context to the threads of grief, joy, and realization woven throughout the collection. In the first structure (division of labor), reproduction, child-rearing, and domestic responsibilities that trump personal ambitions seem to be the primary labor of these women. Secondly, the structure of power—or the ability to define gender roles and the terms of existence—falls within the domain of patriarchal bodies external to women’s personal determinations. The third gendered structure or structure of “cathexis,” (emotionally charged social relations) is largely reflected in cis-gendered, heteronormative, sexually-driven, monogamous emotional attachments that reproduce the above two structures. More explicitly, in terms of labor, Lisa Rumsey Harris packs her prose into an Eliot-inspired epiphany that there will be time enough and more to learn, travel, write, and teach, but given the limitations of the moment, her most important labor is to usher a child into mortality (19). The imperative to be fruitful, to

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1. See Jennifer Quist’s “Ice Cream with Superman and Kafka,” Tresa Brown Edmunds’s “How to Kill a Cocktail Party,” and Kylie Nielson Turley’s “Ears to Hear” on ability; Kel Purcill’s “Blue Polish” and Sherilyn Olsen’s “Because of Bob” on sexual orientation; Terresa Wellborn’s “Yá’át’ééh” and Elizabeth Cranford Garcia’s “To My Children, Who Will Be Asked What They Are” for race and ethnicity.

multiply and replenish the earth derives from an outside source and power and sets the terms of existence for these women. Julie Nelson's evocative poem aligns with this outside imperative by defining women in terms of reproduction, marriage, and sexuality (in that order), in the "ripening" and "budding" of "hips and lips / and damp seeds clustered to burst by moonlight" (21). Dependence on God, Heavenly Father, the Lord, and the Spirit to set the terms of existence for Mormon women appears in many narratives that rely on outside impressions and comfort to lead them through grief, divorce, miscarriage, and midlife crises. As for emotionally charged social relations (cathexis), the most prominent are those between marriage partners. Shelah Mastny Miner's tightly crafted narrative about the centrality of sex and privacy in her marriage provides such a narrative. Taken together, these three gender structures of division of labor, power, and cathexis support and reinforce what it means to be a Mormon woman and define the parameters in which these women exercise their agency.

These structural frameworks leave room for narratives to expose gaps and allow for the exercise of agency. Cozied between duvet covers and decorative pillows, pregnancies, and toddler's clapping hands, some narratives trouble the fulfillment and joy that reproduction, marriage, and domesticity assumedly bring; the site of self-definition and strength as coming from an external source; and the importance of sex within heterosexual marriages in establishing and maintaining relationships. Without challenging the structural framework of family, Sandra Clark Jergensen's trembling narrative captures the torment of waiting to have a child and of the equally tortuous gestational process of stretching skin and nausea, postpartum depression, and the obligation to have more children. Angela Hallstrom, a woman who runs away from home, children, and husband for a day and a night, highlights the frustration of giving oneself to the labor of childrearing and domestic housekeeping while wanting another form of fulfillment. Michelle Lehnardt interrogates the domestic duty and narrative of

“no one loves you like your mother” based on her own pain of feeling unloved by her mother (94–95). Emily Bishop Milner despairs at the entropic process of housekeeping and its corresponding value of domestic tranquility in her contemplation of suicide and clinical diagnosis of depression. While Lehnardt’s narrative turns to God and others for kinder voices and validation, Milner’s main comfort in this period derives from her deceased grandmother.

This turn to a female (though still external) source of power for peace and direction contrasts with reliance on male figures that dictate the terms of existence for women. Doubting “the ability of the LDS church to be an integral part of [her] relationship with God,” Emily Clyde Curtis challenges the authority of Church-led directives in her own life. Despite maintaining the importance of trust in the Lord—a source of power outside herself—through personal revelation, there are moments when she struggles to hear the voice of the Lord. In those moments, she turns to her own impressions and instincts to combat the perceived injustices she sees within Church organization. Likewise, the heartache of Kylie Nielson Turley after being diagnosed with cerebral palsy leads to angrily and loudly crying to God, “I don’t want Thy way.” After losing her voice and learning to scream again, she peers inward with the realization that when she is deaf she will “hear the truths [she has not wanted to hear before]”—truths that only surface while she is “slowly being undone” by memories, walls, helplessness, silence, and humiliations (132). This focus on personal autonomy and self-realization can be summed up in Claire Åkebrand’s well-rendered poem that presents the agency of Eve in the shadowy blues of darkness and falling, outside of her emotionally-charged relationship to Adam.

Åkebrand’s Eve, who makes decisions based on her own impressions and separate from a marital relationship, challenges the emotionally-charged social relationship of marriage that has traditionally defined a woman’s labor, feelings of self-worth, and ability to make her own decisions. Other narratives within the collection also challenge the

dominance of marriage as the main type of emotionally-charged social relation used to define women. Jes S. Curtis uses the parable of Ruth to explore what it means to be a divorcee and to lose the comfort and safety of the institutional norm of family. Jessie Christensen, in gracefully outlining the transition from a seemingly “normative” Mormon marriage to becoming a single mother with a gay ex-husband, discovers that the love she needs to sustain herself need not come from a partner but can extend from herself to others. Other examples of emotionally-charged social relations used to define Mormon women include stories of mothers, fathers, and daughters, siblings, cousins, and strangers. Though the majority of these relations fall within the institutional framework of a cis-gendered, heteronormative, monogamous family—an institutional structure that is difficult to separate from reproductive labor and male patriarchy—they offer up strains of struggle, clarity, grief, and wonder that culminate in a beauty and creativity made possible only by these very structures.

In conclusion, *Seasons of Change* both outlines and makes porous the institutional gender structures containing this demographic of Mormon women. It highlights the agency and creativity of these women in negotiating their own personal needs and desires, even when their desires are written in the language of their institution. However, to read this collection solely through the analytical framework of gender structures and agency neglects the multiplicity of ways one can read these narratives as well as their narrative absences. Organized in categories such as acceptance, hunger, grafting, and entropy, this collection is emotionally and intellectually compelling. Its individual narratives, often short but well-written, raise valuable questions for humans, Mormon and non-Mormon alike.

## A Philosophical Portrait in Pieces

Steven L. Peck. *Gilda Trillim: Shepherdess of Rats*. Winchester, UK: Roundfire Books, 2017. 272 pp. Paper: \$21.95. ISBN: 978-1-78279-864-4.

*Reviewed by Rachel Kirkwood*

It has now been months since I first made the acquaintance of Gilda Trillim, but even now I must admit that I do not completely understand her.

However, I do not view this as a failure of the novel that bears her name, nor of my comprehension of it. For Steven L. Peck's *Gilda Trillim: Shepherdess of Rats*—a generic chimera that is part character study, part academic satire, and part philosophical treatise—is not your average book club fare. In it we are presented not with a storyline or even literary characters in their conventional form, but with an “Academic Work Disguised as a Novel Disguised as an Academic Work”—an amateur source biography on Trillim compiled by fictional graduate student Kattrim Mender. As we sift through the letters, journal entries, gossip columns, magazine articles, novel excerpts, and interviews collected here, a rough image of Trillim emerges but never solidifies. Each vignette reveals a different side of this enigmatic figure: one moment she is a Western girl from a potato farm in Idaho, the next she is an avant-garde poet, the next a professional badminton player, the next a supplicant studying at a Soviet monastery, and still later a POW in Vietnam. Just when you think you may have finally pinned down her character, she takes an unexpected turn. Her life is less easily described than listed, a constellation of competing experiences and character traits that inhere within one body-shaped ecosystem.

While at times frustrating, such elusiveness seems fitting in a book so concerned with modes of knowledge and understanding. Peck's novel itself takes the form of an academic quest to understand a subject, and

that very subject—Gilda Trillim—has a quest of her own. She is insatiably drawn to pursuing questions of being and the reach of radical empathy: Where do we come from? What is the place of human life in the cosmos? How does it feel to be another person? A rat? The items of a junk drawer?

In many ways, the story of Trillim's life and career is the story of the conceptual development of her answers to these questions, and of the various means she employs to reach satisfying answers. Trillim does not shy away from traditional sources of knowledge, such as academic study and organized religion, but she does not view them as sufficient. Instead she supplements them by looking for answers to life's questions in less obvious places. Some of these are relatively well-accepted by society's norms (art, literature, travel), while others veer into the fringe or extreme (monastic meditation, psychedelic drugs, visionary meetings with the divine, and physical communion with other creatures).

It is through Trillim's exploration of these less traditional practices that her quixotic relationship to Mormonism is made clear. Trillim identifies herself as a Mormon, and the text itself takes a knowledge of Mormonism for granted; indeed, Peck quite unabashedly incorporates phrases and concepts from the Mormon idiolect and LDS Church history into the text without explanation. "Sacrament meeting" (48), "the priesthood" (145), "the Nephites" (12), "the Mexican territories" (13), and "sacred garments" (29), for example, are sprinkled throughout the text without much elaboration of cultural context. Such a familiarity with Mormonism, however, does not make Gilda's a familiar Mormon story, for as Katt states, Trillim's "take on Mormonism was unorthodox to say the least" (9). The most obvious signs of Trillim's sideways relationship to the LDS faith are her inconsistent record of church attendance over the years and participation in practices that are not sanctioned by the Church as presently constituted (blessings of female healing, for example) or are actively condemned by it (her use of ayahuasca in her vision quest, and for that matter of marijuana in her youth [166]).

But these outward signs are but indications of a more basic difference in theological approach that sets her apart from the Mormon masses. Trillim is many things—an athlete, an explorer, a writer, a thinker. But she is also, unquestionably, a mystic—in the mold of Hildegard of Bingen or Margery Kempe. Her connection with the divine is intense, individual, and punctuated by unique visions that in their specificity and strangeness are discordant with most accounts of Mormon revelatory manifestations. In one she meets a giant dragonfly, for example, who leads her through the cosmos and the beginning of time (78), and in another she chats with a Heavenly Mother that appears not wearing the Mormon angel's uniform of generic white robes, but a “red sequin cloche hat” and “gorgeous blue heels” (148). While not actively contradicting Mormon doctrine, these visions are outside the standardized norms of discussions of the creation, Heavenly Mother, etc. within the Church, and as such these moments gave me as an LDS reader moments of pause, despite myself. Conditioned as I am to the standard stories and doctrines I have been taught since I was a child, I fought against the knee-jerk reaction to reject the unfamiliar and pondered why I had experienced such discomfort in the first place. I found myself thinking, “Putting aside the fact that Trillim is a fictional character and that therefore these visions are in fact also fictional, the accounts in this book are only descriptions of personal experience, not statements of absolute doctrine or dogma. So why did they make me raise my eyebrows? Do I not believe in personal revelation, at least to this extent?”

My experience grappling with Trillim's iteration of my religion highlighted for me how much Mormonism and mysticism are uncomfortable bedfellows. In some ways the LDS Church is one of the most personal and mystical Christian sects of the modern era. After all, the Church was born out of the visionary revelations of a prophet and teaches of a God who knows each of us by name and to whom we can turn for individual guidance and revelation. As Trillim herself states, “Indeed, all of Mormon faith is about seeking an encounter with the

divine” (219). But it is also a church of order and authority—there are protocols regarding stewardship over revelation: every member may receive answers from God, but not every member is a prophet who we can trust to receive *the* correct answer, particularly to questions of great doctrinal significance. Combine this with a belief in the existence of ultimate truth, and thus of right or wrong answers, and one is left with a church that believes in individual revelation—and indeed visions—in theory but is wary of them in practice.

When regarded cynically, these seeming safeguards to revelation may be viewed as a way to discredit dissidents and to control the Church through denying some versions of personal theological exploration. But is it not also true that not every “vision” comes from God, and that there is the chance for a madman to appear among the mystics? If so, where does Trillim fall on the spectrum? How are we meant to view her? As a misguided outsider at odds with her culture? As a mystic who pushes the boundaries of Mormon culture to uncover deeper truths? As a woman struggling with mental illness and delusions of grandeur? As a prophetess, or even a savior? Neither Kattrim nor Peck solves the mystery; through the fragments collected we read many different interpretations of Trillim’s life—from scholars, Trillim’s friend (perhaps lover) Babs, and Katt himself—and none entirely agree. Indeed, although the reader is made to feel predisposed to believe and sympathize with Trillim throughout the text, in the final scenes her fervid religiosity reaches such a peak that she offers her body as a salvific sacrament to the rats of Thailand. It is difficult to rationalize that action, and indeed it is the turning point for Babs in her interpretation of her dear friend, prompting her to concede that perhaps a madness lurked in Trillim that she had not previously seen.

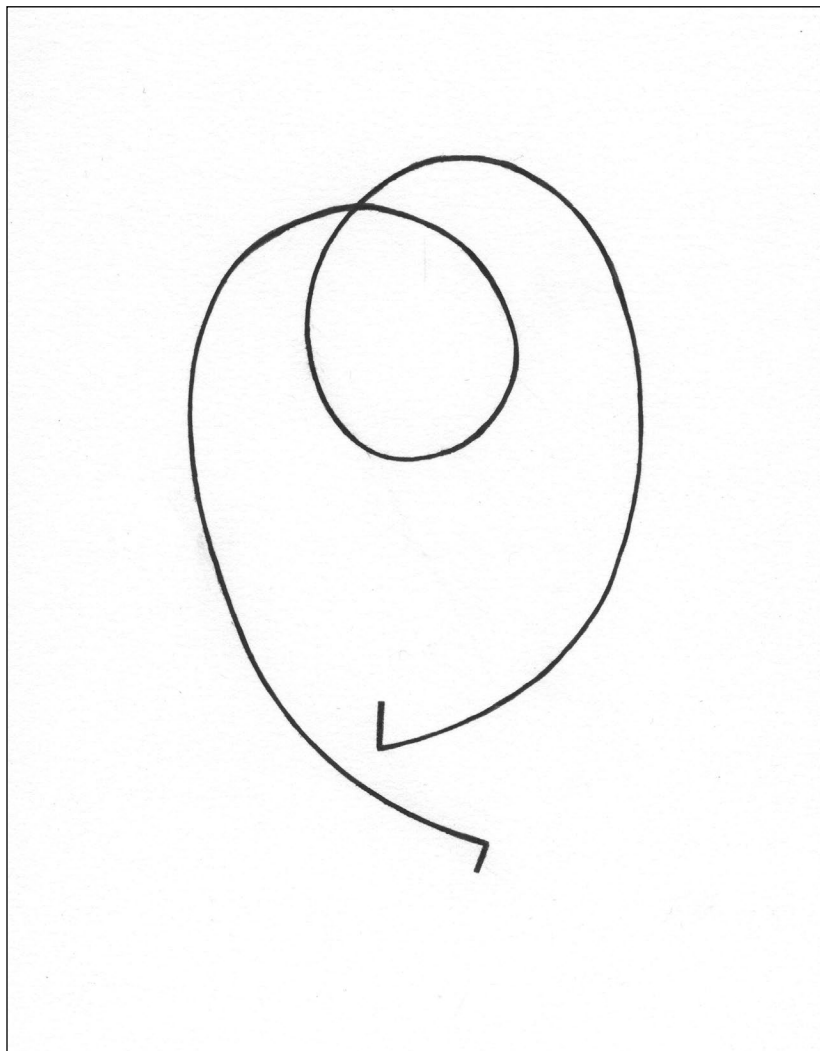
This open-ended conclusion is all to the book’s good, for it underscores the questions at the book’s heart that were so important to Trillim and that insistently demanded my attention as I puzzled over her: Where do I find sources of information and insight and why do I trust them?



What place does the mystical have in my religious practice? What is my limit case for revelation? Just how far can empathy reach? And how does anyone come to understand the being of *any* other creature, be it an eccentric poet, a rat, or an apple seed?

Just as Trillim fails to completely understand the essence of the seed she studies for so long, my studies of Trillim feel unfinished. I've looked at her from numerous angles, attempted to sketch her qualities, stretched the limits of my empathy, but each vignette is an insufficient portrait of the whole. I am not entirely convinced that each part in this literary ecosystem—in particular the frame narrative—provide the characterization and depth for which the book seems to reach. But the insufficiency of the fragments has its own charm, letting the questions in this novel of ideas hang, not masking them with niceties and pleasant endings.

So, do I completely understand Trillim? No. Was it a fascinating, baffling, and rewarding experience to try? Absolutely.



Daniel Hall Bartholomew  
I Bow My Head  
ink on paper, 8 in. x 10 in.

## NORMA

an excerpt from *The Encore*

Charity Tillemann-Dick

The mid-November darkness settles early in the afternoon. As my window dims, a tall man with a chocolate complexion peeks through the door. “Charity,” his rich baritone voice fills my small room, “I’m one of the chaplains here. I’ve heard you’ve been having a hard time. Would you mind if I sang a song for you?”

I smile and nod my head. I’m just getting over a fentanyl headache and I haven’t heard anyone really sing in months. I close my eyes and feel the air in the small room move as he inhales deeply. Swells of sound pulse over me as the chaplain belts the chorus of “Amazing Grace” with a rich, mature tone. His melody is a salve for my aching body. But its lyrics sting. Listening to them, I can’t help but dwell on the grace I’ve received this year: from my donor, Mom, doctors, family and friends, God. But no matter how hard I work, I come up short. I know grace has already saved my life; that grace will get me out of this hospital and, ultimately, lead me home. But all of this grace is frustrating.

I’m a glutton for miracles. But while other people get miracles like dream jobs, babies, debuts and houses, my miracle is not being dead. Don’t get me wrong: Not dying has significant benefits. But before I got sick my talent, artistry and hard work was what people recognized and appreciated, not some visible or invisible hand of benevolence. Personally, I’ve always appreciated the human and heavenly hands at work in my life—trying to show my appreciation in the way I live and work and strive for worthy goals. And then I got sick.

Now, it’s like that one Christmas when Santa obviously didn’t get my letter. I have to be grateful for gifts I never asked for in the first

place. Someone else has to lift my bags and hail my cabs. I need special food and perpetual hand sanitizer. I'm in a place of unending gratitude, and it can get exhausting. Some days, I'm *not* grateful that my sister carries in the groceries; I'm not grateful that my siblings are alone in Denver while Mom sleeps in my hospital room. I'm not grateful for the tubes coming out of my neck, my arms and my chest—even though they're saving my life. I wish I had my own lungs. I wish I was back in Europe singing. I wish Mom was home in Denver sleeping in her own bed. I wish I caused less hardship and sorrow. I wish that, instead of giving me so many little miracles, God would have just given me the one miracle I most wanted. Wouldn't it have been simpler to just cure my PH? Or not give it to me in the first place! Don't get me wrong. I love miracles. And I love Jesus. I need grace every day. But in my life, the things other people get to claim as their own achievements turn into my miracles. It's like everything I do is accompanied by heavenly jazz hands.

As the chaplain sings the last verse, the messages swirl through me in a vortex of frustrated, confused, resentful gratitude—

*When we've been there ten thousand years  
Bright shining as the sun  
There's no less days to sing God's praise  
Than when we've first begun.*

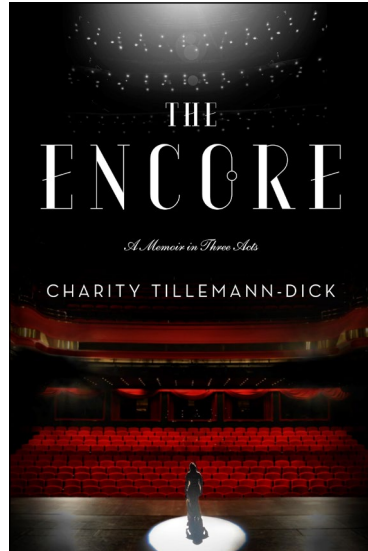
I stifle my tears long enough to thank him before he leaves. Then I let loose. Does God not love me enough, or does he love me too much? Whatever it is, all of this grace is confusing, exhausting and it feels increasingly physically dangerous.



Charity Sunshine Tillemann-Dick is a soprano, composer, and best-selling Billboard classical artist. Her book, *The Encore*, was published with Atria Books and Simon & Schuster last fall. To listen to

Ms. Tillemann-Dick's art, please follow the link below to a performance given at the Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts in Kansas City, Missouri:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PG9OpWd6w3M>



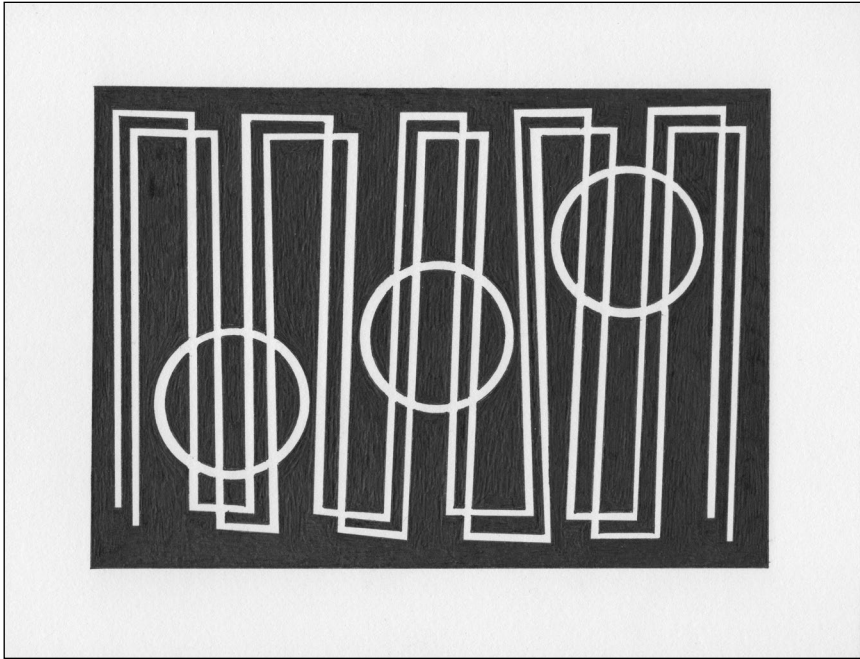
## AN INTUITIVE APPROACH TO ART

Daniel Hall Bartholomew

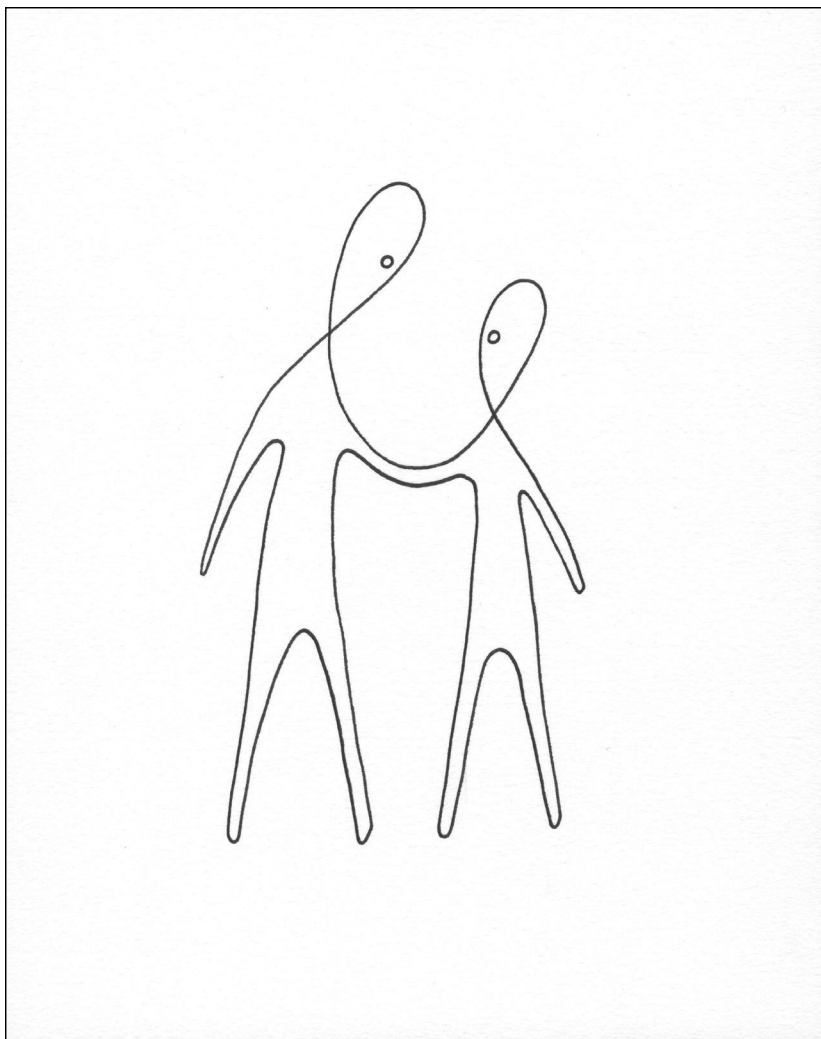
Throughout his life, Daniel has continually experimented with line, form, and color to create abstract artworks. He chiefly works with ink on paper, sometimes employing collage to bring more dimensionality and complexity to his endeavors. While living in New York City, the

Casa Frela Gallery displayed two of his artworks during the 2013 Harlem Art Walk Tour (HAWT). A number of his artworks have since been displayed in Utah museums. *Seventy Times Seven* received an award of merit in the 10th International Art Competition at the LDS Church History Museum. The same artwork is on display until the end of March 2018 at the BYU Museum of Art as part of the The Interpretation Thereof: Contemporary LDS Art and Scripture exhibit. *By Small and Simple Things* was included in the 93rd Annual Spring Salon at the Springville Museum of Art and *Jubal Jubilee* was displayed at the 32nd Annual Spiritual & Religious Art of Utah exhibit at the same institution. In March of 2017, New Vision Art sponsored a solo show of his work in Orem, Utah. In October of 2017, Summit Sotheby's International Realty featured a solo show of his work in Salt Lake City. His next upcoming solo art show is scheduled to be held on Friday evening, September 7, 2018 at New Vision Art.

Daniel takes an intuitive approach to his work. He begins with a single line or an irregular shape and then adds and alters successive forms, elements, and colors until a cumulative level of interaction exists to communicate a cohesive feeling and a complete idea. Many of his designs are unrestrained in their use of color and complexity while others are minimalistic black-and-white compositions. Often in the process of creating arrays of lines and forms, he relies upon pareidolia as a means to identify and build upon recognizable elements. At times he integrates words into his artworks. The artist routinely creates smaller artworks that he refers to as "abstractoons."



Daniel Hall Bartholomew  
Trilogy / Culmination  
ink on paper, 7 in. x 9 in.



Daniel Hall Bartholomew  
Mentor  
ink on paper, 8 in. x 10 in.



## I'M TRYING TO GET TO KNOW JESUS

Kate Harline

For a good portion of my life, I didn't understand how Jesus fit into the equation. I prayed to Heavenly Father and so I felt like I had some sort of connection to him because I talked to him. And I had often felt the presence of the Holy Ghost so there were some tangible experiences with that member of the Godhead. But I never talked to Jesus and I never felt him in my bosom, so I felt a little confused about how to connect with this brother of mine for whom I quite instinctively have always felt a deep love, even without—it seemed—much contact.

When I was eighteen, I left Orem, Utah, where I had grown up to attend an evangelical Christian university in Seattle. There, I encountered a whole culture (and myriad subcultures) of what we might call “born-again” Christianity and suddenly Jesus was everywhere. I loved how my new friends and peers could talk about him so easily. I loved how he was the obvious center of their devotion, worship, and lives, and how they were even on a first name basis with him—actually calling him Jesus! I almost immediately started participating in worship nights, attending different churches with friends (in addition to attending my YSA ward), and overall immersing myself in this Jesus-loving culture. It was so nourishing to my Jesus-longing soul and I felt like I was beginning to better understand how Jesus can be an evident part of a person's life. Sure, while growing up I heard talk of Christ in church, and from my family and friends, and in seminary, but the religiosity I encountered at my university in Seattle was just so explicitly Jesus-centric. I often felt “holy envy” toward my friends when they would pray directly to “Jesus” or “Lord Jesus”—and then during the prayer would refer to him as You

instead of Thee—it all seemed so intimate. I longed for more of that personal connection to Jesus in my own spirituality.

I have thought a lot about why for so long I felt so distant from Jesus in my Mormon experience—and why I sometimes still do. Surely there is residue of past rhetoric that Jesus is not a being with whom we *should* create a personal connection (thank you, Brother McConkie), and there are probably many other factors. But whatever the reasons, I find that common ways of talking about and thinking about Christ and “The Atonement” in Mormon communities have had the unfortunate effect in my personal spiritual strivings of either diminishing Jesus to no more than a footnote, or whitewashing him into an almost unrecognizable figure. With a little boost from my interactions with Christians of other denominations, and through my experiences in years since, I’ve tried to find ways to connect more meaningfully to Jesus within the context of Mormonism. I share a few of my ideas in the hopes that some of this may be helpful to others as well.

First, I have come to realize that no matter how good or not-bad I may be, I am still a sinner in need of Jesus. It has been important for me to recognize that sin is more than committing sin—sin is also a state. Individual sins (like, thoughts or acts that are wrong and contrary to eternal truth) are not the deepest layer of sinfulness. Sins are the surface-level symptoms of a deeper sickness, the state in which we find ourselves by virtue of being mortal, “fallen” humans and being separated from God in this, our current “probationary state” (Alma 12:24). We *all* “come short of the glory of God” as Paul said in Romans (3:23), or as King Benjamin taught, we are *all* beggars (Mosiah 4:19).

There is a story in the New Testament in which Jesus is confronted because he ate with people who were considered obvious sinners. Jesus’ response is “They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick” (Matthew 9:12). For so long, when I heard this story I *wished* that I were one of the “sick”—one of the obviously sinful and derelict, so that I could be one of the ones who Jesus hung out with! It wasn’t that

I fancied myself perfect, it's that I fancied myself a "good girl" who, because she never had and never foresaw herself doing something *really* horrible, figured she would never *really* "need" to "use" the Atonement, besides for some minor offenses.

But what I had so totally wrong was that I am one of those sinners, no matter how much I keep the commandments or don't do "bad stuff." I need Jesus, and I belong at that sick table every day, whether I commit some blatant act considered sinful or not. As the Mormon writer and philosopher Adam Miller puts it: "Being a good person doesn't mean you're not a sinner. Sin goes deeper. Being good will save you a lot of trouble, but it won't solve the problem of sin. Only God can do this. Fill your basket with good apples rather than bad ones, but, in the end, sin has as much to do with the basket as with the apples."<sup>1</sup>

It seems that the difference between "they that be whole" and "they that are sick" is simply a question of awareness. "They that be whole" are actually also sick but they live under the illusion that they are righteous of their own accord and thus think they are whole and thus do not seek out the Physician. But Jesus is not a backup plan to perfect obedience or a referral on a list of resources for when times get really tough and we need some extra "enabling power."

I believe we are healed through a constant relationship with Jesus, not through his occasional dropping into our lives when we think we need him most. I am a clinical social worker and I practice as a psychotherapist. Compelling research and evidence suggests that the *most* important factor in determining a positive therapeutic outcome is a trusting therapeutic relationship—that is, more than the method or approach used in therapy, or even the skill of the therapist at employing that method, the relationship and trust built between the therapist and client is the most telling predictor of a positive outcome. In a similar vein, I feel that comfort and change through Christ is less like a prescription

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1. Adam S. Miller, *Letters to a Young Mormon* (Provo: Neal A. Maxwell Institute, 2013), 17.

that might read something like “Access Atonement. Apply twice daily until symptoms decrease” and more like creating and maintaining a long-term, trusting relationship with the Great Healer himself.

A few years ago, I worked as a social worker at a domestic violence shelter. One of my clients, who I will call April, had been abusing heavy drugs for the better part of twenty years. Her life had been shaped not only by her drug abuse but by an abusive childhood. She had narrowly escaped with her life from an extremely violent partner and all her children had been raised in foster care. April had been a regular visitor to the cesspools of darkness, despair, and desperation and at some point when she hit rock bottom she had sought out Jesus. I was saddened to find out last November that April had died of an overdose. I attended her funeral services with dozens of other people who had been touched by April in some way. Her obituary read, “She found her clear path and truth as a Christian and was baptized a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when she began a new life. The Serenity Prayer gave her comfort and peace.”

Someone like April is who we generally think of when we think of “they that are sick.” But if someone like me, who has never been “tormented with the pains of hell” (Alma 36:13) so explicitly as April has, strips myself of the illusions of my own righteousness and of the false security afforded me by thoughts of being one of “they that be whole,” I come to discover that I, too, am sick and in great need of “the merits, and mercy, and grace of the Holy Messiah” (2 Nephi 2:8).

Secondly, I have found that even though I may never fully “understand” the Atonement, it is helpful to try to gain insight into it. I have sometimes thought about how incomprehensible it is that Jesus could suffer for everybody. At times, it has seemed so inconceivable that I have figuratively thrown up my hands and said, “I will never understand the Atonement!” I have heard similar sentiments expressed many times at church, in general conference, and elsewhere. But this attitude keeps us from searching for deeper insight, which in turn distances us from Christ.

I recently learned that astrophysicists have determined that before the universe began about 13.7 billion years ago, “all the space . . . matter and . . . energy of the known universe was contained in a volume less than one trillionth the size of the point of a pin.”<sup>2</sup> If all the energy of the universe could somehow be contained in an area one trillionth the size of a pinpoint, then perhaps the relatively “small” moment of time of Christ’s life and suffering can in some mysterious but real way contain *all* suffering. Perhaps it’s that through his life and atonement (a relatively small “pinpoint” in comparison to the expanse of the history of the earth and eternity), his vision and understanding were expanded (like the matter and energy of the universe was) to comprehend all the suffering that ever was or would be.

Because he allowed himself to be engulfed by sorrow, suffering, and pain, he has the capacity to imagine exactly how it feels to be you or me or April or anybody. Sometimes I think of the Atonement as the way in which Christ gained the Ultimate Imagination. Often we call this imagination, empathy. Alma described it like this, “And he shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind; and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people. And he will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people; and he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities” (Alma 7:11–12).

It seems that we humans also have quite a bit of capacity for empathetic imagination. Every time we suffer because someone else is suffering, every time we “mourn with those who mourn,” every time we extend mercy and forgiveness, or every time (to quote Joseph Smith) “we look with compassion on perishing souls . . . [and] feel that we want to take them upon our shoulders, and cast their sins behind our backs,” we are

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2. “A Brief History of Everything, feat. Neil deGrasse Tyson,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7KYTJ8tBoZ8&feature=youtu.be>.

employing our empathetic imagination, and thereby emulating Jesus. In this way, I believe our everyday experience can help us to understand the Atonement.

I currently work as a therapist at an agency where all my clients are people of refugee and immigrant background who have survived torture, war trauma, and other severe human rights abuses. Working in this setting, I have become acquainted with a phenomenon familiar to many who work directly with those who have been severely traumatized called “vicarious traumatization.” Basically, in being a witness to and interacting so closely with the stories and lives of people who have experienced such horrific trauma, a therapist can begin to experience symptoms that are normally associated with post-traumatic stress disorder *even though the trauma did not happen directly to them*. It is as though what happened to the client had happened to the therapist. This is an extreme and unhealthy example of empathetic imagination, but it illustrates to what extent we humans are able to vicariously suffer—like Jesus did and does.

Third, I try to focus on Jesus, the Person behind the Atonement, to avoid thinking of the Atonement as an abstract entity. I minored in English in college and actually find grammar somewhat exciting. A pronoun is a word (such as he, she, they, and it) that replaces a noun, and an antecedent is the noun that has been replaced by the pronoun. I have frequently observed language used about the Atonement sounding something like this: “The Atonement can heal us. It can pull us out of sin. It can cleanse us.” In this example, “the Atonement” is the antecedent and the pronoun that replaces it is “it.” “It” is a pronoun that denotes a thing, so, whether we mean to or not, when we say something like this, we are referring to the Atonement as a *thing*. The Atonement also sounds like a thing when used in common phrases like “apply the Atonement” and “access the Atonement” because “apply” and “access” are verbs we usually use in reference to things, not people. It is spiritually beneficial to me to focus on the Person behind the Atonement and avoid referring

to it as an entity of itself. So, in an effort to focus more on Christ the Person, if I heard someone say “The Atonement can heal us. It can pull us out of sin. It can cleanse us,” I might rephrase it to myself as, “Jesus can heal us. He can pull us out of sin. He can cleanse us.”

You can imagine I was pleased to hear Russell M. Nelson speak about this very thing in a recent Conference talk. He said,

It is doctrinally incomplete to speak of the Lord’s atoning sacrifice by shortcut phrases, such as “the Atonement” or “the enabling power of the Atonement” or “applying the Atonement” or “being strengthened by the Atonement.” These expressions present a real risk of misdirecting faith by treating the *event* as if *it* had living existence and capabilities independent of our Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ.

There is no amorphous entity called “the Atonement” upon which we may call for succor, healing, forgiveness, or power. Jesus Christ is the source. . . . The Savior’s atoning sacrifice—the central act of all human history—is best understood and appreciated when we expressly and clearly connect it to Him.<sup>3</sup>

To continue with my grammar spiel, I also like to think of *atonement* as a verb and not just a noun. As a verb, it is something that is constantly happening—Jesus is perpetually atoning for me because he is always providing grace that allows me to “live and move and have [my] being” (Acts 17:28). This puts Christ’s role in my life in the here-and-now, and not just the past, like in the present forms of the verbs in these lines from the hymn “Reverently and Meekly Now”: “At the throne I intercede; for thee ever do I plead” (*Hymns*, no. 185).

Fourth, I focus less on the Atonement as blood payment for sin and more as “at-one-ment.” The *Oxford English Dictionary* explains that the original meaning of the word “atonement” refers to unity or uniting. The word “atone” is derived from a combination of the two words

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3. Russell M. Nelson, “Drawing the Power of Jesus Christ into Our Lives,” April 2017, <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/2017/04/drawing-the-power-of-jesus-christ-into-our-lives?lang=eng>.

“at” and “one” and means “the condition of being at one with others.” Although we don’t pronounce this word “at-one-ment” anymore, this understanding of the term helps to emphasize the purpose of Christ’s at-one-ment as bringing us into one-ness with God and with others.

Jesus seems to care a lot about this. Some of my favorite passages of scripture are Jesus’ prayers in 3 Nephi 19 and in John 17, and in both, Jesus prays for one-ness. “And now Father, I pray unto thee for them . . . that they may believe in me, that I may be in them as thou, Father, art in me, that we may be one” (3 Nephi 19:23). And in John, in what we now call the Intercessory Prayer (John 17:21–23), Jesus prays: “That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us. . . . And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one. . . .”

It sounds to me that Jesus desires unity, one-ness, harmony, between himself and the Father, between him and us, and between us and others. He is the Way by which we become at-one with God and at-one with our fellow children of God. This, I believe, is the essence of his purpose and being, and is the force that we must use limited words to describe as “the Atonement.” I love him for this and I also pray for this same unity.

I say these things in Jesus’ holy name, Amen.



## CONTRIBUTORS

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