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a journal of mormon thought

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DIALOGUE

a journal of mormon thought

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JOSEPH SMITH AND SIDNEY RIGDON: CO-FOUNDERS OF A MOVEMENT

Steven L. Shields

With the recent push by President Russell M. Nelson to refer to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints by its proper name and stop using the term “Mormon,” perhaps the time has come to advocate for a more objective term for the academic study of the larger movement than “Mormon Studies,” which has tended to focus solely on the Utah-based branch. Students and scholars need a more objective name for the movement, one that is based in the history of its foundations. The studies they do must be done with a broader rubric of interpretation—not one that is focused on telling one side of the story.¹ For historical and theological purposes, then, I argue that the academic community should adopt the term “Smith-Rigdon Movement” in their studies and publications.

To call the movement “Mormonism” is confusing, even though “Mormon” and “Mormonite” are among the earliest nicknames to appear in history. A French scholar proposed referring to the movement as “Mormonisms.” His argument is that because Mormonism is widely understood,

The author presented on this topic at the thirty-ninth annual meeting of the John Whitmer Historical Association in Nauvoo, Illinois, Sept. 23, 2011. This is an updated and expanded version.

1. For a catalog of almost five hundred expressions of the movement, see the author’s *Divergent Paths of the Restoration*, 5th edition, Greg Kofford Books, forthcoming.

making the word plural signals there is more than one brand.² However, many denominations within the movement do not identify with the term.³

Furthermore, the term “Latter Day Saint movement” is anachronistic, regardless of whether the beginning of the movement is counted from 1820, 1829, or 1830.⁴ The phrase was not introduced to the movement until 1833.⁵ The name was formalized in 1834.⁶ But, as with “Mormonism,” many of the denominations in the movement do not identify with the phrase.⁷

2. Chrystal Vanel, interview with author, May 9, 2011.

3. Eber D. Howe, in early 1831, popularized the terms. “Mormonism,” *Painesville Telegraph*, Jan. 18, 1831, 3.

4. Joseph Smith reported a powerful conversion experience as having occurred in 1820. Baptisms were taking place in 1829, following a reported visit from John the Baptist. Smith legally organized a “church” in 1830.

5. Mark Lyman Staker, *Hearken, O Ye People: The Historical Setting of Joseph Smith’s Ohio Revelations* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2009), 74.

6. Richard S. Van Wagoner, *Sidney Rigdon: A Portrait of Religious Excess* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1994), 149. See also Mark A. Scherer, “Called by a New Name: Mission, Identity and the Reorganized Church,” *Journal of Mormon History* 27, no. 2 (Fall 2001): 40–63. The minutes of a May 3, 1834 “conference of the elders of the church” were published in *The Evening and the Morning Star*. The conference met to consider “names and appellations.” Joseph Smith Jr. was chosen as moderator. Sidney Rigdon made a motion, seconded by Newell K. Whitney, that the church be called “The Church of the Latter Day Saints.” The motion passed unanimously (*The Evening and the Morning Star* 2, no. 20, May 1834, 160).

7. There are also the two spelling conventions, British and American. When the British is chosen, the name favors the LDS Church in Utah with “Latter-day Saint.” If the American convention, Latter Day Saint, though used by some others in the movement, confuses the issue. For a brief summary of the hyphenation conventions, see Wikipedia, s.v. “American and British English spelling differences; Compounds and hyphens,” last modified Sept. 18, 2019, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_and_British_English_spelling_differences#Compounds_and_hyphens.

The label “restoration movement” is a retrospective gloss that introduces confusion as well. Anachronistic application of later or contemporary understanding to historical circumstances leads to fundamental misunderstanding. Joseph Smith commonly called the Church “a great and marvelous work,” but rarely used the term “restoration” in his earliest writings.⁸ Many followers often talked about the “new revelation” when speaking of the Book of Mormon. In the rare times that we find *restoration* in Smith’s revelations, the Book of Mormon, or other writings, the term speaks of other ideas. Smith uses the word to talk about future events, about the Jewish people, or in general terms. In no case did he use the term to suggest that he understood himself to be “restoring” either the gospel or an organization.⁹

The use and meanings of *restore* and *restoration*, as has become commonplace in the Smith-Rigdon Movement, was borrowed from Reform Baptist (the Stone-Campbell movement) language in use from the early 1820s. Sidney Rigdon and those leaders who came with him when they merged with Smith introduced the language.¹⁰ Joseph Smith’s appellation “the restorer,” the term “restored gospel” as applied to Smith’s message, and the unique definition of *restoration* all postdate Smith’s founding experiences. Interestingly, the earliest Ohio members of the new movement continued to call themselves “disciples” at least until the church name was formally changed in 1834.

8. For instance, see D&C 6. See also *Evening and the Morning Star* 1, no. 1, June 1832, 6.

9. For example, see D&C 84, 85; SLC 77, 86, 88 (SLC 77 does not appear in Community of Christ editions of the book). Doctrine and Covenants section and paragraph numbers in this article refer to editions published by Community of Christ. SLC denotes editions published by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. A thorough study of the use of the terms *restore* and *restoration* in the early years of the movement is needed.

10. Staker, 19ff. Staker has an excellent outline and background history of the Stone-Campbell movement’s earliest years. Alexander Campbell introduced the language “restoration of the ancient order of things” in the 1820s.

The Churches of Christ, and independent Christian Churches and Churches of Christ use the phrase “restoration movement” when writing and talking about themselves, but the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) long ago stopped using such language.¹¹ Academics in that tradition have long used “Stone-Campbell movement” to discuss their broader history because styles and definitions of *restoration* are varied.¹²

For example, Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon each sought restorations that were charismatic and experiential, revelational restorationism. Alexander Campbell was noted for rational restorationism.¹³ This idea is based on the belief that the Bible contains concrete facts, rather than abstract truths, and Campbell advocated a scientific method to understanding the teachings of the book. Campbell felt that by relying only on the facts contained in the Bible, Christians could come to a unity of agreement.¹⁴ Further, the restoration vision was widely known as it had already emerged with great strength in the sixteenth century and was foundational for much of the Reformation throughout Europe.¹⁵

Sidney Rigdon’s importance to the movement cannot be overemphasized. When Smith and Rigdon met late in 1830, they formed a partnership, resulting in a merger of two independent movements. This had been several months in the making, from the time some of Rigdon’s

11. Ralph G. Wilburn, “A Critique of the Restoration Principle,” in *The Renewal of Church: The Panel of Scholars Reports*, vol. 1 (St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1963).

12. Douglas A. Foster, “Community of Christ and Churches of Christ: Extraordinary Distinctions, Extraordinary Parallels,” *Restoration Studies XIV* (2013): 2.

13. John L. Morrison, “A Rational Voice Crying in an Emotional Wilderness,” in *The Stone-Campbell Movement: An International Religious Tradition*, edited by Michael W. Casey and Douglas A. Foster (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2002), 163–76.

14. C. Leonard Allen and Richard T. Hughes, *Discovering Our Roots: The Ancestry of Churches of Christ* (Abilene, Tex.: ACU Press, 1988), 84.

15. Richard T. Hughes, “Historical Models of Restoration,” in *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement* edited by Douglas A. Foster, et al. (Grand Rapids, Mich., and Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 635.

followers began to believe in the new revelation represented by the Book of Mormon. Smith's was a loosely organized collection of fewer than three hundred people scattered around the border area of upstate New York and Pennsylvania;¹⁶ Rigdon's was a network of several congregations and hundreds of members.¹⁷

The Doctrine and Covenants and other sources clearly demonstrate that Sidney Rigdon was not second to Joseph Smith, but an equal partner. The problem from our modern perspective is that by the time Joseph Smith was killed, he had become disenchanted with Rigdon. Likewise, Rigdon had become disenchanted with Smith, due largely to the cancellation of the common stock association, the Kirtland Bank debacle, and the repeated failures to establish Zion. Nevertheless, prior to this, Rigdon had remained loyal and largely hid his discouragement and frustration. His belief in Smith's revelations and the testimony of the Book of Mormon remained strong until Rigdon's death.¹⁸

Not long after Joseph Smith's death, Sidney Rigdon was written out of the Church's history by Brigham Young and others who disagreed with Rigdon's position. Ever after, those writing the history of the movement

16. Wikipedia, s.v. "The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints membership history: LDS Church membership numbers," last modified Sept. 27, 2019, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Church_of_Jesus_Christ_of_Latter-day_Saints_membership_history#LDS_Church_membership_numbers.

17. Richard S. Van Wagoner, *Sidney Rigdon: A Portrait of Religious Excess* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1994), 49–67, details the extent of Rigdon's influence in the "Western Reserve."

18. Lloyd Knowles, "Sidney Rigdon: A Frustrated Restorationist in Pursuit of 'The True Church,'" manuscript, dated June 29, 2012, in author's possession, 16–17.

have ignored Rigdon's significant contributions that shaped the identity and message of the movement.^{19, 20}

James J. Strang and those who formed Community of Christ had little or no knowledge of Sidney Rigdon's true role in forming the movement. Many of them were latecomers and not located at the center. The same is true for Granville Hedrick. Rigdon's legacy lived on, but only in part, through William Bickerton's Church of Jesus Christ.²¹

Joseph Smith's religious work began taking shape by May of 1829 in New York and Pennsylvania with the first baptisms, although the foundations were several years in the making. The founding event was the Book of Mormon. Reliance on the First Vision as founding event did not happen until decades after Smith's death.²²

19. Rigdon was also written out of the Stone-Campbell Movement history in earlier years, but recently his contributions have been more widely acknowledged. See Staker, 24, n. 3.

20. Van Wagoner, 165–66. The beginning of the end of the Smith-Rigdon partnership was the disruption over the Kirtland Bank. A caustic meeting held in the temple at Kirtland in December 1837 tried to deal with the serious leadership crisis that had developed.

21. W. H. Cadman, *A History of the Church of Jesus Christ* (Monongahela, Pa.: The Church of Jesus Christ, 1945), 4–9. Robert A. Watson, et al, *A History of the Church of Jesus Christ, Volume 2* (Monongahela, Pa.: The Church of Jesus Christ, 2002), 28–34. William Bickerton was unique among the many leaders during the Fragmentation Era. He had not belonged to the original church, nor had he met Joseph Smith Jr. or other leaders. He came into contact with Sidney Rigdon's Church of Christ in the Pittsburgh area, was baptized, ordained, and became a member of Rigdon's "Grand Council" (similar to Council of Fifty). When Rigdon's lack of administrative skill failed the church, Bickerton and a few elders continued in their local branches until the late 1850s when they reorganized the first presidency and other leadership councils. See Daniel P. Stone, *William Bickerton: Forgotten Latter Day Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2018).

22. Richard P. Howard, *The Church Through the Years, Volume 1* (Independence, Mo.: Herald Publishing House, 1992) 111–12.

What Smith and his followers did on April 6, 1830, was organize a religious association to be legally recognized to perform marriages. They were not incorporating, nor were they forming a denomination in the modern understanding. Such an idea was counter to the ideas of Smith, Rigdon, and many others.²³ They were organizing a church in the local sense.²⁴ I think that is why the word “branch” emerged to refer to the scattered congregations.

Meanwhile, Adamson Bentley, Sidney Rigdon’s brother-in-law, introduced Rigdon to Alexander Campbell in 1821. Historians consider that meeting to be the beginning of the movement. Rigdon and Campbell quickly became close associates. Rigdon was known as one of the most successful and eloquent leaders in Campbell’s movement.²⁵

Some scholars consider Sidney Rigdon, Walter Scott, Adamson Bentley, and Alexander Campbell as co-founders of the movement that gave birth to what is now known as the Stone-Campbell Movement.²⁶ The Mahoning Baptist Association, which they formed in 1820, was an alliance of like-minded ministers and congregations that were the nucleus for the later development of the Disciples movement with Campbell.²⁷ In the earliest years, they were called Reformed Baptists. The Mahoning Association functioned in some ways as a micro-denomination. It was geographically localized over a relatively small area. There were dozens of such associations in the United States at the time. They held annual

23. Douglas A. Foster, “Denominationalism,” in *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, edited by Douglas A. Foster, et al. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2004), 267–69.

24. David Keith Stott, “Legal Insights into the Organization of the Church in 1830,” *BYU Studies* 49, no. 2 (2010): 121–48.

25. Staker, 19–26, 31, 34, 38, 40, 47, 279, 320–21, 405.

26. Staker, 24, n. 3.

27. Lloyd Alan Knowles, *In Pursuit of the True Church: The Attraction of Restorationism on the Nineteenth Century American Frontier: Sidney Rigdon, the Disciples of Christ, and the Mormons* (Deer Park, N.Y.: Linus, 2007), 78–86.

conferences, appointed ministers to certain tasks, and declared common doctrinal statements. Sidney Rigdon was one of the bishops, supervising several congregations northwest of Warren, Ohio.²⁸

By 1828, Bentley was the leader supervising several congregations near Warren, Ohio, Scott was in charge southwest of Warren, Rigdon was the leader northwest of Warren, and Campbell was the scholar and writer.²⁹ Walter Scott claimed to have restored the “ancient gospel,” but Campbell rejected that claim.³⁰

Rigdon and Campbell parted company in the summer of 1830 over issues dealing with the role of charismata and setting up communitarian societies.³¹ Eventually, Rigdon found the prophetic impulse to be powerful in his life of faith. As one scholar declared, “few sources could be more authoritative than direct revelation from God.”³²

Historian F. Mark McKiernan explained:

Rigdon disagreed with Campbell over whether the so-called “manifestations of Spiritual Gifts” and miracles had a place in the restoration. The gifts of the spirit were the speaking and interpretation of foreign tongues, prophecy, visions, spiritual dreams, and the discernment of evil spirits. Campbell declared that the miraculous work of the Holy Ghost

28. Phil McIntosh, “Mahoning Baptist Association,” in Douglas A. Foster, et al., eds. *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2004), 501–02. Also, Richard McLellan, “Sidney Rigdon’s 1820 Ministry: Preparing the Way for Mormonism in Ohio,” *Dialogue* 36, no. 4 (Winter 2003): 155.

29. Richard McClellan, “Sidney Rigdon’s 1820 Ministry: Preparing the Way for Mormonism in Ohio,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 36, no. 4 (Winter 2003): 151–59.

30. Staker, 321. Interview with Douglas A. Foster, Stone-Campbell movement scholar, Nov. 11, 2015.

31. Thomas W. Grafton, *Alexander Campbell* (St. Louis, Mo.: Christian Publishing Company, 1897), 127.

32. Grant Underwood, *The Millenarian World of Early Mormonism* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 20.

was “confined to the apostolic age, and to only a portion of the saints who lived in that age.” Rigdon, however, sought “to convince influential persons that, along with the primitive gospel, supernatural gifts and miracles ought to be restored.”³³

Sidney Rigdon has been identified by some historians as one of the “Three Witnesses to the Restoration of the Ancient Order of Things.” The primary holders of the title are Alexander Campbell and Walter Scott.³⁴ When Rigdon met Joseph Smith Jr., Smith declared that Rigdon was like John the Baptist and appointed him as a spokesperson. Interestingly, the same language was already being used to describe Barton Stone.³⁵ Sidney Rigdon is mentioned by name in dozens of sections of the Doctrine and Covenants; many sections were jointly received by Smith and Rigdon.

Some of the earliest believers in the Book of Mormon message had been Disciples trained by Sidney Rigdon as ministers and church leaders. They introduced their beloved leader and teacher Rigdon to the message, who finally accepted rebaptism late in 1830. By December, Rigdon traveled to New York to meet Joseph Smith Jr. and stayed for several weeks through the winter.³⁶

33. F. Mark McKiernan, *The Voice of One Crying in the Wilderness: Sidney Rigdon, Religious Reformer, 1793–1876* (Independence, Mo.: Herald House, 1971 [1990]), 27. An explanation of how this idea played out in the experiential primitivism, as shaped by nineteenth-century American romanticism, espoused by Joseph Smith and the early years of his church is found in Foster, et al., 637. See also Richard T. Hughes, “Two Restoration Traditions: Mormons and Churches of Christ in the Nineteenth Century,” in Casey and Foster, 356; and Gregory A. Prince, *Power from on High: The Development of Mormon Priesthood* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1995), 63–64.

34. Staker, 24, n. 3.

35. Quoted in Staker, 19ff.

36. Lloyd Knowles, “Sidney Rigdon: A Frustrated Restorationist in Pursuit of ‘The True Church,’” manuscript dated June 20, 2019, in author’s possession, 13–14.

Even though Smith and his missionaries rebaptized Rigdon and his followers, this does not suggest that Rigdon and his followers felt they were in submission to Smith or did not have authority to baptize previously. Rather it was that Smith claimed to be able to give the gift of the Holy Spirit. That was important to Rigdon and his followers. Rigdon disagreed with Alexander Campbell on this issue, which was one reason leading to their separation.³⁷

The Smith-Rigdon partnership merged two distinct religious bodies and created a new one that contained features of both. They built on those foundations. Neither leader gave up cherished basic principles. Rigdon brought communalism and a fervent belief in gifts of the Spirit. Smith had the “new revelation” and oracles from God. Rigdon also brought a refined understanding of the Bible and theology. Each leader contributed to the newly shaped church body ideas and skills the other lacked.

Sidney Rigdon was well-spoken, educated, and experienced as a church leader. He was appointed to be Smith’s principal adviser and spokesperson by revelation.³⁸ He brought hundreds of his followers into the movement, including Orson Pratt, recognized as the first systematic theologian of the movement.³⁹ I believe that without Rigdon’s contributions, Joseph Smith’s church would likely not have developed its several distinct teachings and practices. Indeed, much of the theology was founded on Disciples doctrine, which Rigdon and his followers brought with them.

When Sidney Rigdon merged his faith community with that of Joseph Smith, the demographics of the movement shifted dramatically. Rigdon’s followers who were attracted to Smith’s message were at least double the New York and Pennsylvania membership to begin with, but within a few months, the newly merged church’s population in Ohio reached upwards

37. Staker, 23.

38. Doctrine and Covenants 34; 35 SLC; 97; 100 SLC.

39. Breck England, *The Life and Thought of Orson Pratt* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1985). See also Leonard J. Arrington, “The Intellectual Tradition of the Latter-day Saints,” *Dialogue* 4, no. 1 (Spring 1969): 17.

of one thousand members.⁴⁰ These *new* members were not new. Most of them had been members of the various congregations of Disciples under Rigdon's bishopric in the Kirtland area and had followed him out of Campbell's movement.⁴¹ Historian Mark Staker noted that former Disciples were the majority, had been taught by Sidney Rigdon, and that Smith built on that foundation.⁴²

One scholar suggested that Rigdon's influence and importance in the merger with Joseph Smith included five key points:

First, Sidney was one of the most influential figures in northern Ohio. His reputation, visibility, and prestige created instant credibility for the fledgling [Church of Christ]. Second, Sidney's skill and fame as a religious orator provided ready audiences throughout northern Ohio. Third, Sidney brought with him a vast network of acquaintances—former Baptist and Disciple converts . . . Fourth, Sidney's experience as a religious organizer, trainer, minister, missionary, biblical scholar, and scribe far exceeded that of any other early convert. Fifth, Sidney had spent years grooming a number of individuals for the ministry: . . . Edward Partridge, Newell K. Whitney, Isaac Morley, Frederick G. Williams . . . Parley P. Pratt, John Murdock . . . Orson Hyde . . . Eliza R. Snow . . . Orson Pratt.⁴³

Other former Disciples included John Corril, William E. McLellan, John F. Boynton, Lyman Wight, Levi W. Hancock, Zebedee Coltrin,

40. Lee Copeland, "Speaking in Tongues in the Restoration Churches," *Dialogue* 24, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 17. Richard S. Van Wagoner, "Mormon Polyandry in Nauvoo," *Dialogue* 18, no. 3 (Fall 1985): 67–83. McKiernan, 36. Van Wagoner, 87.

41. Richard McLellan, "Sidney Rigdon's 1820 Ministry: Preparing the Way for Mormonism in Ohio," *Dialogue* 36, no. 4 (Winter 2003): 157–59. See also Staker, 61–62.

42. Staker, 335.

43. Richard McClellan, "Sidney Rigdon's 1820 Ministry: Preparing the Way for Mormonism in Ohio," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 36, no. 4 (Winter 2003): 159. See also Scott Kenney, "Sidney Rigdon: The Baptist Years (1817–1830)," unpublished paper (copy on file) presented to Sunstone Symposium, Aug. 14, 2009, for a list of prominent Church leaders who had been Sidney Rigdon's followers.

Luke S. and Lyman E. Johnson, John Johnson, and Sylvester Smith. One-half of the original twelve apostles were Rigdon's people. In fact, many of them, including Orson Hyde and the Pratt brothers, had been Campbellite preachers.⁴⁴ Indeed, of the four people who were crucial in introducing new ideas and policies, and who helped articulate the theology of the fledgling church in the early years of the movement, three were Disciples, or Campbellites—Sidney Rigdon, Parley P. Pratt, and Orson Pratt. Moreover, Rigdon had trained both Pratts as ministers. The fourth was Joseph Smith Jr.⁴⁵

Objective studies of the movement need to understand Sidney Rigdon's and others' contributions to the movement as it developed, rather than judging those contributions through retrospective gloss, discounting valid and important contributions based merely on later events. Sidney Rigdon's contributions to the original church⁴⁶ and the overall movement need to be written back into the history of the movement, regardless of what happened to his relationship with Smith in succeeding years.

Rigdon delivered every major speech and sermon in the first decade of the church's history, dealing with faith, repentance, baptism, spiritual gifts, the Millennium, and communitarianism. The early church's periodicals are replete with notes, prayers, texts, and comments by Rigdon. He outlined the basic theology of the movement in his *Lectures of Faith*⁴⁷ that were used for missionary training and canonized as equal to the revelations in the first edition of the *Doctrine and Covenants* in 1835.⁴⁸ He laid the foundations for what has become, for some denominations in the movement, essential temple ritual. To

44. Staker, 34, 61, 320.

45. Arrington, 16.

46. "Original Church" refers to the organization up to Joseph Smith, Junior's death in 1844.

47. These are also referred to as the "Lectures on Faith."

48. Van Wagoner, 162. See also Arrington, 17.

discount or deny Rigdon's contributions because of his later, rockier relationship with Smith and his refusal to agree with Brigham Young and the Quorum of the Twelve would require a reinterpretation of the entire canon of scripture of the movement.⁴⁹

Smith and Rigdon's first joint project was revising the Bible; although Smith had begun this a few months earlier, it had languished, but now consumed much of the attention of the partners. Not long after Smith and the New York/Pennsylvania group relocated to Kirtland, the Book of Abraham project began and continued concurrently with the Bible revision.

The idea of problems with the text of the King James Version of the Bible was commonplace. There is little question that Rigdon was well informed and likely made use of Alexander Campbell's 1826 revision of the New Testament. Scholars grounded in first-century Greek commonly agreed the King James Version was not inviolable. Between the late 1770s and the early 1830s, some five hundred different editions of the Bible or New Testament had been published in the United States.⁵⁰

Richard S. Van Wagoner noted that Rigdon was "often called a 'walking Bible' by his peers in the Reformed Baptist Movement." "That Rigdon could have been merely Sidney the Scribe, a penman whose sole function was to take down dictation, is implausible. A biblical scholar with a reputation for erudition, he was more learned, better read, and more steeped in biblical interpretation than any other early Mormon, despite his common school education. Any number of Smith's followers could have served as clerk, but only Rigdon could have functioned as a scribe in the historical Jewish sense of the word: "a man of learning; one who read and explained the law to the people."⁵¹ Before Rigdon's involvement

49. This includes Doctrine and Covenants 34, 37, 40, 44, 71, 73, 76, 97; SLC 35, 37, 40, 44, 71, 73, 76, and 100; the Inspired Version of the Bible, revisions to the Book of Mormon text, and the Book of Abraham.

50. Van Wagoner, 72.

51. Ibid.

in the Bible revision project, only about seven chapters of Genesis had been written. Manuscripts were in the handwriting of Oliver Cowdery and John Whitmer. However, even those early manuscripts were revised and rewritten by Rigdon.⁵²

During work on the Bible revision, while Rigdon was in New York with Smith, the idea of moving the entire church to Ohio came up. Joseph Smith's elaboration on the Prophecy of Enoch (Inspired Version of the Bible Genesis 7; Pearl of Great Price Moses 7) spoke directly to Rigdon's yearnings for what he believed to be a restoration of New Testament communitarianism. Rigdon's experience with communitarianism surely influenced Smith's revision of the idea. The communal ideas expressed in the Book of Mormon were different from Rigdon's and different from what developed after Smith and Rigdon merged their two movements.⁵³

The church was struggling in New York but booming in Ohio. Many of the early church members in New York were prosperous landowners and farmers and were not keen on being uprooted. Persuasively, Smith pronounced a revelation in December 1830, directing church members to assemble in Ohio (D&C 37). Smith declared, "God is about to destroy this generation, and Christ will descend from Heaven in power and great glory."⁵⁴ F. Mark McKiernan noted, "Kirtland was Rigdon's city, and while the church's headquarters remained there the basic structure of the Mormon Church was developed."⁵⁵

52. Ibid., 73.

53. Thomas F. O'Dea, *The Mormons* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 37. Van Wagoner notes, "The prophet's syncretic ability to blend others' ideas with his own intuition was a conspicuous feature of his career. It was not surprising that Joseph Smith's communal vision began evolving within days of meeting Rigdon" (79). See also Van Wagoner, 74 and 85.

54. McKiernan, 45. The section number is the same in both Independence and Salt Lake City editions.

55. McKiernan, 66; Van Wagoner 82.

Richard S. Van Wagoner has described Smith and Rigdon as equals. He noted that Smith “used the term ‘having a revelation’ when referring to the statements he issued in response to specific questions or crises. Rigdon was privy to the same epiphanies, and several early revelations were given to both men simultaneously.”⁵⁶ These include Doctrine and Covenants 34, 37, 40, 44, 71, 73, 76, 97/SLC 35, 37, 40, 44, 71, 73, 76, and 100.

Doctrine and Covenants 76 (both editions), dated February 16, 1832, is important evidence of Rigdon’s equal status with Joseph Smith. Rigdon was the only other person besides Smith, who claimed to have conversed with Christ, and he and Smith were together at the time.⁵⁷ The vision contains teachings about the hereafter that were often a matter of debate. Those members who had not come out of the Disciples movement were the ones who questioned the vision’s teachings. However, the former Disciples understood the vision through the lens of their rational restorationism, as taught to them by Sidney Rigdon. They were the ones who explained the teachings of the vision to others.⁵⁸

Further confirmation of Rigdon’s equal status is found in Doctrine and Covenants 87/SLC 90, dated March 8, 1833. The text declares that both Sidney Rigdon and Frederick G. Williams “are accounted as equal with [Joseph Smith] in holding the keys of this last kingdom.” Williams, as noted earlier, was also a former Disciple.

As Zion’s Camp was assembling at Kirtland in the spring of 1834, Rigdon preached a sermon to the recruits on May 3. Rigdon announced, “that the prophet and the high council had agreed to his suggestion to change the name of the church from ‘The Church of Christ’ to ‘The Church of the Latter Day Saints,’ emphasizing the proximity of the Millennium.”⁵⁹ It was by this name the church published the first edition of the Doctrine

56. Van Wagoner, 74.

57. D&C 76. See McKiernan, 69. D&C IND 76:3a, 3b; SLC 76:11–14.

58. Staker, 331–33.

59. Van Wagoner, 149.

and Covenants in 1835. The name was inscribed on the entablature of the Kirtland Temple.⁶⁰

Sidney Rigdon ordained Joseph Smith to the office of president of the high priesthood when the high priesthood was introduced into the church. The suggestion came from Sidney. His influence over the identity, mission, message, beliefs, and organizational structure of the church was disconcerting to those from Joseph's original group. David Whitmer complained, "Rigdon finally persuaded Brother Joseph to believe that the high priests who had such great power in ancient times, should be in the Church of Christ today. He had Brother Joseph inquire of the Lord about it, and they received an answer according to their erring desires."⁶¹ Rigdon also ordained, or set apart, the members of the first high council at Kirtland, and was that body's presiding officer.⁶²

Sidney Rigdon was one of the best-educated members of the church. Late in 1832, instruction was given to set up a school to teach the priesthood. Various called the School of the Elders or the School of the Prophets, Rigdon was the chief instructor. The curriculum included religious topics, but also grammar, reading, writing, history, geography, and foreign languages. None of this was new to Rigdon. He was an experienced teacher and trainer of ministers.

One of the most important contributions to the identity, mission, message, and beliefs of the young church "was Rigdon's preparation and delivery of a seven-part series of theological lectures to a group of prospective missionaries . . . during the 1834–35 winter term."⁶³ Rigdon's lectures were canonized in the 1835 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants and designated by the First Presidency as the "doctrine of the church." The

60. Scherer, 42.

61. Quoted in David John Buerger, "'The Fulness of the Priesthood': The Second Anointing in Latter-day Saint Theology and Practice," *Dialogue* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1983): 10–46.

62. Kenney, "Sidney Rigdon: The Baptist Years." See also Van Wagoner, 163.

63. Van Wagoner, 161.

lectures had equal scriptural status with the revelations in part two of the book until 1897 in Community of Christ, and 1921 in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.⁶⁴ Not only had Rigdon solidly laid the foundation for the importance of education in the movement, but he also produced the first written theology.

The Kirtland Temple was, perhaps, Sidney Rigdon's longest-lasting visible project. When the building was dedicated, Rigdon co-presided with Joseph Smith, gave a lengthy dedicatory address, and conducted the proceedings overall. The ordinance of washing of feet, first performed in the Kirtland Temple, was "a remnant of Sandemanian theology from Rigdon's late 1820s ministry with Walter Scott in Pittsburgh" and "Two days after the dedication [of Kirtland Temple], the foot washing ceremony, the only ordinance performed in the solemn assembly after the dedication of the temple, was performed." Rigdon "first washed the prophet's feet. Smith then reciprocated after with the ordinance was performed for the rest of the group by Smith and Rigdon."⁶⁵

Richard S. Van Wagoner noted, "Mormonism in its purest distillation is the fused product of Joseph Smith's and Sidney Rigdon's revolutionary thinking condensed into the prophet's revelations."⁶⁶ To discount human-divine interaction in revelation or to see Joseph as merely a scribe for dictated communication from God simply does not fit with Smith's description and experience of revelation and prophecy.⁶⁷ Smith, with Rigdon, felt complete freedom to revise the texts of the Bible, the Book of Mormon, and the contents of the Doctrine and Covenants.

64. Ibid., 162. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, sometimes called the LDS Church, prefers "the" to be capitalized.

65. Van Wagoner, 169–73.

66. Van Wagoner, 142.

67. See Geoffrey F. Spencer, "A Reinterpretation of Inspiration, Revelation, and Scripture," in *The Word of God: Essays on Mormon Scripture*, edited by Dan Vogel (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1990), 19–27.

In summary, by the end of 1830, Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon effected a merger. Joseph brought only a handful of members to the merged organization but brought “the gifts of the Holy Spirit,” especially prophecy and revelation. Further, those in New York and Pennsylvania were scattered and endured persecution. Rigdon, better educated and better spoken, brought his experience as a spiritual leader and his biblical scholarship. Rigdon also brought a huge network of members who were located in settled communities that were free from persecution. Smith and Rigdon clearly brought to the merger what each other needed.

Rigdon laid the foundation for educational pursuits that became a hallmark of the original church and for many of its successor denominations. Smith and Rigdon blended their views of communitarianism. Rigdon proposed ideas, and Smith confirmed them by revelation. Sidney Rigdon was responsible for the basic articulation of the church’s identity, mission, message, and beliefs, with his *Lectures of Faith* having equal canonical standing with Smith’s revelations. His influence was far-reaching and gave shape and longevity to what otherwise may have been a short-lived religious experiment in upstate New York. Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon both had pivotal roles in shaping the movement that emerged from their partnership.

An academic name for the movement, then, should recognize their equal contributions. And the name of the study of this religious movement should recognize its roots and development and reads its history frontward rather than backward and avoid retrospective interpretive gloss.

I propose, then, that for historical and theological purposes, those in the academic community use “Smith-Rigdon Movement” in their studies and publications about the movement. Such a move will help bring objectivity to the study of the movement and broaden the lens through which the movement’s historical and theological development can be viewed and interpreted.

THE MORMON CHURCH AND THE LANGUAGE OF MY FAITH

Michael Austin

It is no easy thing to command a language to change. Language just sort of happens, and those who make the rules eventually have to get on board or become irrelevant. Only pedants and fools think that they can stand in the path of linguistic evolution and order language itself to stop doing what it wants to do.

Well, pedants, fools, and the *Académie française*—one of the world's oldest and most prestigious institutes for the regulation of a language. The forty members of the *Académie*, known fondly as *les Immortels*, choose their own replacements, govern their own affairs, and answer to nobody's will but their own. Since the days of Cardinal Richelieu, who established it 1634 the *Académie française* has been responsible for preserving the integrity of the French language.

In recent years, the *Académie* has lead the charge against English loan words like *le weekend* and *le best of*—words that have, in their view, polluted the French language. In their official dictionaries and style sheets, they recommend alternatives for new English words that appear to be gaining currency. Don't say *networking*, they insist. Say *travail en réseau*—it is more French.

Does it work? Sometimes it does, sometimes it doesn't. French editors generally accept the recommendations of the *Académie*, and French Universities teach their standards. But French is a global language with 440 million speakers, only about 15% of whom live in France. Official as the *Académie française* may be in the country where the French language emerged, most of the people in the

world who speak French as a first language have probably never heard of it. And, as it commands neither an army nor a police force, its regulations bind only those who agree to be bound.

English does not have an official academy—the British were more concerned about acquiring the world’s wealth than with taming its wild tongues. But we do have the *Chicago Manual of Style*, which works in somewhat the same way. Some people declare rules, some people follow them, some teachers teach them, most editors enforce them, and just about everybody else talks however they want. It has been going on for a long, long time.

But even when backed by the authority of the French Crown or the University of Chicago, only certain kinds of rules can be declared, followed, and ignored like this. We can call these “regulative rules” because they regulate the way that language is used in official and semi-official venues. A good English example of a regulative rule is “use *fewer* with things that can be counted (count nouns) and *less* with things that can only be measured (mass nouns).” I know this rule well, and I observe it meticulously in my own writing. I have probably marked wrong a thousand times on student papers. But when I see a sign in a store that says *TEN ITEMS OR LESS*, I still know what it means. I may clutch my metaphorical pearls and feel superior for a few minutes, but I don’t scratch my head in confusion. The sign, I know, is still in English. But if I saw a sign that said *LESS TEN OR ITEMS*, I would have no idea how to interpret it. Such a sign would violate another kind of rule—a “constitutive rule,” or a rule that constitutes part of the definition of the thing itself. Word order can vary in English, but it cannot vary indefinitely without ceasing to be English. *LESS TEN OR ITEMS* is not an incorrect sentence, but neither is it an English sentence, as it does not fulfil the semantic requirements that constitute what English means. This is how constitutive rules work.

I am spending so much time on language here because I believe that religion, at its best, is a type of language. It provides a vocabulary

and a grammar and a set of symbols that a group of people can use as the basis for shared spiritual conversations and experiences. Whether we acquire it as a child or learn it as an adult, a religion gives us the conceptual tools that we need to think and talk about spiritual things. The variety of religions and denominations in the world are the different languages of faith.

Mormonism is the language of my faith. I have spoken fluent Mormon for nearly all of my life, and I have grown comfortable with the cadences of Mormon speech, the nuances of Mormon thought, and the peculiar ways that Mormon understands things like God (Father and Mother), agency, the afterlife, atonement, and revelation. I can get by in other spiritual languages too. Because of my life's experience, I am reasonably fluent in both Catholic and Methodist, and I have recently acquired at least a solid reading level of Muslim. I love and respect these spiritual traditions deeply, but they are not my language. When I speak them with other people, I have to translate them in my head back into Mormon.

I am, and will always be, a proud and enthusiastic participant in the Mormon Church. As it happens, I am also a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which is not the same thing at all. That Church's recent emphasis on its correct name has been a welcome development in my spiritual life, as it frees up the name "Mormon Church" to use to describe something else—something much less predictable and controllable than the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has ever been, but something nonetheless vital and important to my spiritual identity.

The two churches that I refer to—the Mormon and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—are churches in different senses of the word. The former is a regulative organization with duly appointed leaders, loyal followers, buildings, codes of conduct, members, non-members, and a process for kicking people out. It has an address, an

official web page, a newsroom, and a tax status, and it can be sued and held liable for damages. It is, in every material sense, a thing.

The Mormon Church, on the other hand, is not a thing. Or, more accurately, it is many things. The Mormon Church is a church in a much older sense of the word: a constitutive body of people who use a common religious vocabulary and who share part of their spiritual journeys with each other. It includes everybody for whom “Mormon” is the correct noun. The adjective can vary: liberal-, orthodox-, fundamentalist-, practicing-, non-practicing-, disaffected-, excommunicated-, ex-, dry-, and post-. There is tremendous variety among, and within, these different kinds of Mormons, but we all share a culture, a history, a grammar, and a set of beliefs that we either accept or do not accept—but that partially define us whether or not we accept them.

Much like the *Académie française*, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints can issue proclamations binding those who agree to be bound. It has a perfect right to decide what it wants to be called and to insist, however politely, that it be called by its proper name. It can also determine who qualifies to be a member. It can let people in and kick people out. It can decide whose children can be baptized and whose children can’t. And it can set rules for various levels of participation within its organization, including taking the sacrament, holding the priesthood, and attending the Temple.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints can control almost every aspect of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. But it has no control at all over the Mormon Church. The only requirement to be part of the Mormon Church is the desire to be part of the Mormon Church. You can’t get kicked out of it, any more than you can get kicked out of “French.” Affiliation is purely a matter of choosing to use the language. Some Mormons are agnostics who need to use their spiritual language to talk about what they do, and do not believe. Some Mormons are atheists who don’t believe in any god, but who adopt a spiritual language to talk about how best to behave in this life. And

some Mormons are completely comfortable declaring that the Church is true and that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God. All are part of the Mormon Church. We may not agree with each other, but we can talk to each other about where we disagree.

And we can even work together to build the Kingdom. We don't need anybody's permission to love each other or to struggle with each other towards an understanding of the divine. We can, with no organizational authority whatsoever, mourn with each other, comfort each other, bake the occasional casserole for each other, and load up each other's moving vans—even when the van is moving somebody we love away from the formal institution that some of us belong to. One's status in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints does not determine one's place in the Mormon Church, nor do the rules of the regulative organization constrain our responsibility to the constitutive body of the Saints.

The Mormon people have not been called to go to Zion; we have been called to build Zion wherever we are—and this is true spiritually as well as geographically. Like all large communities, Mormonism has a center and a periphery. Once upon a time, these were geographical markers. The center was in the Utah urban corridor, and the periphery extended to the deserts of Nevada and California and the inhospitable borderlands between Southern Arizona and Northern Mexico. Today, the markers of the community are cultural and spiritual rather than geographical. Mormons exist all along different spectrums of activity, belief, and behavior.

Many of us find ourselves, at least some of the time, in the inhospitable borderlands of our religion and our culture—between activity and inactivity, belief and doubt, orthodoxy and dissent and all manner of social and spiritual wilderness. But that's OK because there are a lot of us wandering around looking for a place to start blossoming. As a people, we have always been able to build thriving communities in the spaces that nobody else wants to inhabit. Making deserts blossom is kind of our thing. We are Mormons; it's what we do.

In closing, I would like to bear my testimony of the Mormon Church. I don't know that the Church is true, nor do I have any idea what it would mean for something like the Mormon Church to be "true." I cannot even say that I know that the Mormon Church is good, though I know that it can be when the Mormon people use their spiritual vocabulary to think and do good things. I cannot say with authority that anybody else should be part of the Mormon Church, but I know that it is right for me.

I know that the Mormon Church is mine. It provides the vocabulary that I need to frame my deepest questions, and it gives me the metaphors that I need to make infinite and ineffable things hold still long enough for me to examine. I do not claim that the language of my faith is the best language in the world, or that it provides a perfect translation of God's mind and intentions. I only claim that it is my language—the one that I acquired in my childhood and have used ever since to make my way through the world.

This does not mean that my spiritual journey is over. It just means that my spiritual journey is Mormon. When I doubt that God exists, it is the Mormon God about whose existence I am unsure. When I feel God's love in my life, it is the Mormon Holy Ghost who is speaking comforting my soul. And when I feel compelled to work towards the Kingdom of God on Earth, it is the Mormon Zion that I feel called to bring about. We expect too much of a religion, I think, when we look to it for answers. Finding answers is what we seem to be on earth to do. The purpose of religion is to give us the vocabulary we need to frame the questions. And, as for me and my house, we will ask them through the spiritual grammar of the Mormon Church.

WHY I'M SO BAD AT NOT USING "MORMON"

Rebbie Brassfield

It's been almost six months since we were asked to ditch the term "Mormon." I've been reflecting on it lately, I think because I'm anticipating some sort of follow-up at General Conference and I am keenly aware of how badly I've done at it.

With each reminder that "Mormon" is out, I've felt what I can only describe as a sense of mourning. It's a strange reaction, given that I am fully on board with efforts to represent ours as a global, Christ-centered church.

But as I've gone about trying to scrub the word "Mormon" from my vocabulary, I've realized how deeply it is intertwined with my identity as a Latter-day Saint. I've attempted to simply swap out the old lingo for the new, but the correct name of the church is not a synonym for all that "Mormon" means.

It's led me to wonder whether we are being asked to give up not just the word Mormon, but the cultural identity it represents. I find myself simultaneously ecstatic and sorrowful at this prospect. I am flummoxed, and here's why—

Weirdly, a couple months before the "Mormon" ban, I launched a project with a friend on Instagram called @MormonsInMedia. Our goal was just as the name suggests: find every mention of Mormons, or Mormonism, in mainstream media, and see what it could tell us about how we're represented.

What it's told us so far is that we show up everywhere, characterized by our cultural peculiarities.

In *Friends*, a pregnant Rachel makes a joke about pretending she's Mormon as an excuse for why she can't drink on a date. In *That '70s Show*, Red complains about a group of kids following him around, saying he feels like a Mormon. By far the most frequent jokes have to do with polygamy, which we've seen so far in *New Girl*, *Two Weeks Notice*, *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*, and the Broadway musical *Chicago*, to name just a few.

It's been fascinating to explore the ways Mormons are depicted in mainstream media. But after President Nelson's announcement, we experienced an awkward moment of, do we rebrand this thing? If we keep the name (and the catchy alliteration) are we disobeying the Prophet?

We decided to stick with it, if for no other reason than that @MembersOfTheChurchOfJesusChristOfLatterDaySaintsInMedia was too long for a handle. A couple more months into the project, though, we've realized that name would not even be accurate, because these references are not depicting followers of Christ. They're depicting Mormons.

They are depicting the identity we embraced and promoted for so long, the identity I think we are now being asked to disappear?

It's the Jello stuff, you know? The stuff that is not Jesus but so Mormon. The stuff that stems from doctrine but is far enough in practice to obscure it almost completely.

On one hand, these examples have made clear to me why moving away from the term might be important—because it's made it too easy for us to be defined by cultural oddities rather than religious belief.

On the other, it's shown me that those representing us in books or on the big screen are not interested in accuracy or nuanced depiction, even now. I am highly skeptical that any Hollywood writer will come around to this name change, when they don't seem to be capable of Googling whether polygamy still exists in our church. (Here it feels necessary to mention that almost the only instance we've seen where someone uses the correct name is Eminem, in two different songs from 2017 and 2001. Thank you, Marshall!)

Now, do I think President Nelson cares much how we are represented in Hollywood? Probably not. But as a writer in the era of ‘representation matters,’ I care deeply about it. I want us represented, and I want us represented accurately, or at least by our Own Voices.

The question then becomes, is it possible? And if the likelihood of real, nuanced Latter-day Saint characters showing up in mainstream media is low, is it better to eradicate “Mormon” and the caricatures it tends to produce altogether?

Another facet of *Mormons In Media* has been highlighting noteworthy Mormons. Take, for example, Bryce Harper’s recent record-breaking contract with the Phillies, or Ryan Gosling’s classic performance at the Mormon talent show.

I feel perfectly fine claiming these famous strangers as Mormons. But I feel like a presumptuous jerk calling them Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I simply have no idea what their current relationship to Christ looks like, and who am I to out them for a religion they may or may not believe in?

I’ve heard people say Mormon is the new Jewish, in the sense that it’s possible to claim it as a cultural identity while not practicing its religion. I suspect some part of this name not-change is in effort to slow a trend toward cultural Mormonism. Half of me feels thrilled and relieved at this, given there are enough damaging or simply extraneous parts of Mormon culture that get in the way of true religion. The other half of me feels my Mormon heritage so deeply I wonder, is it even possible to do away with?

Because a Mormon identity is not one you can simply shrug off. It’s not a culture many of us choose—we’re born into it, surrounded by it; a disproportionate number of us are blood descendants of its founding fathers (I told you it always comes back to polygamy).

Mormon culture is so strong, it will define you whether you believe in its God or not. Can we do away with it by taking away its name? Do we need to in order to be ‘one in Christ?’

I am flummoxed at how to implement this change because it feels like a game of chicken and egg: we have to stop talking about the culture so the culture can go away. But the culture is so behemoth and has been wholly formative of my (and I suspect others') lives, how can we not talk about it?

I'm aware that I am likely being a giant baby and maybe even ethnocentric for mourning the loss of my specific Mormon culture. I sincerely don't want to promote the tendency to view Mormonism through a strictly American lens. But the lines seem to blur between Mormon heritage, Mormon culture, and Latter-day Saint belief. It's splitting hairs, but feels necessary given I am a writer interested in exploring these identities.

When I use the word "Mormon," I am talking about a sober, smiling, industrious people who build strong communities, export missionaries, and drive minivans. I am talking about Funeral Potatoes and Pinewood Derbies—warm fuzzy not-Jesus things that shape a Mormon identity.

When I use the word "Mormon," I am also talking about an absurd dating culture, narrow gender roles, and sometimes hurtful treatment of those who don't fit the mold. I am talking about insular communities, homogeneity, and a perplexing tendency toward MLMs.

Is this a culture worth defending? I'm not sure. But it is a culture worth exploring, and without being able to use the word "Mormon," I don't know how.

ON “MORMON” IN MORMON STUDIES PUBLISHING

Loyd Isao Ericson

After arriving home during a long rainy drive from St. George on Conference Sunday last October, a headline from the *Salt Lake Tribune* on my social media feed immediately became a source of anxiety. Topping Peggy Fletcher Stack and her colleagues’ article were the words: “Members ‘offend’ Jesus and please the devil when they use the term ‘Mormon,’ President Nelson says.”¹ As a managing editor of a press focused on Mormon Studies books, the easily recognized name “Mormon” has been essential in promoting and marketing what we publish for multiple reasons, including: (1) search engine optimization for general internet searches, such as on Google, as well as book searches on Amazon and other online retailers; (2) until very recently Mormons loved to see “Mormon” in public—especially in a noncritical way—both as a recognition of their own identity and a validation of their relevance in the world; and (3) for brevity—with a single word, “Mormon” or “Mormonism” get to the point and make clear what is being referenced—there simply isn’t any other word that encapsulates the broader Mormon tradition and culture. All of these are crucial when trying to stay afloat in a publishing industry that is struggling as a whole, and in particular in the niche of Mormon Studies publishing that is seeing its once reliable customer base shrinking.

1. Peggy Fletcher Stack, Scott D. Pierce, and David Noyce, “Members ‘offend’ Jesus and please the devil when they use the term ‘Mormon,’ President Nelson says,” *The Salt Lake Tribune*, October 7, 2018, <https://www.sltrib.com/religion/2018/10/07/members-offend-jesus/>.

Away from the business side of publishing, the scholarly field of Mormon Studies—of which we not only publish but of which I have also been deeply involved with as a student at Utah Valley University and Claremont Graduate University as they were launching their respective programs—covers much more than the Salt Lake City–based institutional Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

In his eulogy describing the martyrdom of the prophet Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum Smith, Apostle (and later President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints) John Taylor ended by declaring “their innocent blood on the floor of Carthage jail is a broad seal affixed to ‘Mormonism’ that cannot be rejected by any court on earth.” These words would eventually be canonized as binding scripture for Latter-day Saints in Doctrine and Covenants 135. Taylor’s use of “Mormonism” here is important because (1) it seems to be used to highlight how Joseph Smith’s legacy is much bigger than the institutional Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and (2) this is the word that Smith himself used to describe the movement that he had begun:

The inquiry is frequently made of me, “Wherein do you differ from others in your religious views?” In reality and essence we do not differ so far in our religious views, but that we could all drink into one principle of love. *One of the grand fundamental principles of Mormonism is to receive truth, let it come from whence it may.*²

I don’t care what a man’s character is, if he’s my friend, a true friend, I will be a friend to him and preach the Gospel of salvation to him, and give him good counsel, helping him out of his difficulties. *Friendship is one of the grand fundamental principles of Mormonism to revolutionize and civilize the world, and cause wars and contentions to cease, and men to become friends and brothers.*³

2. Joseph Smith, quoted in *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1949), 5:499.

3. Joseph Smith, quoted in *History of the Church*, 5:517.

Hell may pour forth its rage like the burning lava of mount Vesuvius, or of Etna, or of the most terrible of the burning mountains; and *yet shall Mormonism stand*. Water, fire, truth and God are all realities. *Truth is Mormonism*.⁴

That Taylor understood Joseph Smith's legacy, "Mormonism," to be much more than the institutional Church is clear from the absence of the Church in Taylor's list of the Prophet's accomplishments:

In the short space of twenty years, he has brought forth the Book of Mormon, which he translated by the gift and power of God, and has been the means of publishing it on two continents; has sent the fulness of the everlasting gospel, which it contained, to the four quarters of the earth; has brought forth the revelations and commandments which compose this book of Doctrine and Covenants, and many other wise documents and instructions for the benefit of the children of men; gathered many thousands of the Latter-day Saints, founded a great city, and left a fame and name that cannot be slain. (v. 3)

For Taylor, Mormonism began not with the restoration of what was first called the Church of Christ but with the bringing forth of the Book of Mormon. More than an institution, Mormonism was the beliefs, practices, revelations, life, and even a city that ultimately began with that book of scripture. And while Taylor most certainly did not view other churches that came out of this Mormon movement as legitimate, his yearning throughout his life for many of these other Mormon denominations to unify with the Salt Lake City-based Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints points to his recognition that they also were a part of Joseph Smith's Mormon legacy.

It is with John Taylor's expansive understanding of Mormonism that I propose a way for academics and other scholars to discuss both the institutional Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and its members and the broader Mormon movement in a way that respects the wishes of President Russell M. Nelson's recent request that "Mormon,"

4. Joseph Smith, quoted in *History of the Church*, 3:297.

“Mormonism,” and “LDS” not be used to reference the Church or its members.

The distinction is rather simple (but with a few caveats*):

- When referencing the broader religious culture that began with the Book of Mormon—particularly aspects of it surrounding the Salt Lake City-based LDS Church—it *is important to use language that does not imply official sanction, support, ownership, or recognition*. In these cases it is may be more appropriate to use “Mormon” or “Mormonism” and inappropriate to use the name of the Church or “Latter-day Saint.”
- For most scholarly works, authors should not use “restored Church of Jesus Christ,” as doing so affirms a theological claim and is not an official name of the LDS Church. Authors should also refrain from using “Church of Jesus Christ” to avoid confusion with the many denominations that officially use that name.
- If immediate recognition, brevity, or literary devices (such as alliteration) are essential, “Mormon” may be appropriately used in titles to reference persons as members of the LDS Church, and Mormonism may be appropriately used to reference the broader Mormon tradition, which may or may not include the institutional LDS Church. However, if possible, the text should note the request by the LDS Church’s naming preference and follow that in the text.

Some examples of appropriate and inappropriate references:

Latter-day Saint scripture / ~~Mormon scripture~~ (the LDS Standard Works)

Mormon scripture / ~~Latter-day Saint scripture~~ (the various religious texts of Mormonism in the context of Mormon culture)

Latter-day Saint doctrine / ~~Mormon doctrine~~ (official LDS teachings)

Mormon theology / ~~Latter-day Saint theology~~ (speculative beliefs based on Mormon Scripture, tradition, and LDS doctrine)—for example the work done by those involved with the Society for Mormon Philosophy and Theology or the Mormon Transhumanist Association would be doing Mormon theology not espousing LDS doctrine.

Latter-day Saint / ~~Mormon~~ (persons as members of the LDS Church)

Mormon / ~~Latter-day Saint~~ (persons as they identify with being part of Mormon culture or heritage)

Latter-day Saint history / ~~Mormon history~~ (official history of the LDS Church)

Mormon history / ~~Latter-day Saint history~~ (unofficial history of the LDS Church and the broader movement beginning with or leading up to the Book of Mormon)—much of the work done by those involved with the Mormon History Association or the Mormon Women’s History Initiative

Latter-day Saint culture / ~~Mormon culture~~ (aspects officially sanctioned or implicitly promoted by official policy and instruction in relation to institutional matters, organizations, and events—such as appropriate attire in LDS church meetings or the requirement to have a temple recommend for LDS Church employment)

Mormon culture / ~~Latter-day Saint culture~~ (aspects common to broader Mormon culture but without official support—such as Jell-O salads, conservative/Republican ideology, and pretty much anything and everything associated with Utah County)

Mormon Studies / ~~Latter-day Saint Studies~~ (the study of Mormonism).⁵

To end, perhaps, on a more personal note. As someone who still identifies as a Mormon but is unsure about his Latter-day Saint identity, the anathematizing (as Elder Jeffrey R. Holland put it⁶) of “Mormon” and

5. I understand that the University of Utah recently rebranded their Mormon Studies program and chair to Latter-day Saint Studies—a political decision I believe to be ill-conceived and either implicitly affirming the Salt Lake City-based Church as the legitimate expression of Mormonism or limiting the scope of its research to the branch of Mormonism led by Brigham Young and corporately continued by Russell M. Nelson.

6. “So, dear friends, when coming from our own tongues the use of ‘Mormonism’ is anathema and so is ‘Mormon’ as it pertains to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints per se.” Jeffrey R. Holland, “The Maxwell Legacy in

“Mormonism” points to something more than just a name correction or rebranding effort. Along with the dissolution of pageants, reduction of Sunday worship meetings, elimination of many extra-curricular events (such as roadshows), separation from Scouting, and more, the cursing of “Mormon” feels symptomatic of a larger and radical revisioning or reunderstanding of the Church away from its being a means of community-building and toward simply being a means of delivering ordinances. These things, more than the Word of Wisdom or temple worship, were the defining Mormon experiences of my youth. They were what made me Mormon, and my hope is that through Mormon publishing and Mormon Studies I can find a way to remain Mormon.

the 21st Century,” in BYU Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, *2018 Annual Report*, 14.

“MORMON”: A JOURNALIST’S DILEMMA

Peggy Fletcher Stack

I have worked at *The Salt Lake Tribune* for nearly twenty-eight years, after being hired November 4, 1991 as a full-time religion writer. So my only beat for twenty-seven years has been religion, and, as you might guess, it’s because it’s been a tricky beat: I love it, it’s fabulous, it’s the most interesting beat you could ever want, but it’s also fraught with danger, and no one at the paper gets more hate mail than I do. As a journalist covering religion, I have worked towards three particular values: one, respect for all faiths; two, taking no sides in truth claims; and three, clarity. I may have my own religious bias—of course I do—but I’m expected to keep those at bay as best as I can. Of course, the biggest faith I do cover is The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints whose headquarters is in Salt Lake City, not very far from my office, but whose reach is global. I don’t only write about Church members and trends in the state of Utah, but really the world is my beat.

I have now written more than 5000 articles for *The Salt Lake Tribune* and of those maybe 3500 were about the Utah-based Church. So, you might suppose that when President Russell M. Nelson requested that all media use the full name of the Church on first reference, and “the restored Church of Jesus Christ” or just “the Church of Jesus Christ” on the second reference, and lose Mormon and LDS, it had an immediate impact on my work. The second reference request, though, challenges all three of my values—starting with respect. In his original statement—and also in his General Conference address—President Nelson insisted any media that truly respected the Church would make this change. As a journalist, it is my goal to respect faith and to respect what people want to be called, what organizations want to be called, and how individuals self-identify.

We're always going back and forth about African-American versus black, what do people want to be called? There's lots of talk about the pronouns having to do with transgender individuals, and we try our best to be sensitive and aware, but we have to be careful if it causes confusion among our readers. When it comes to faith, we do not write only for members of the LDS Church, we write for everyone. We have to be clear about what group we're discussing. What Church of Jesus Christ are we talking about? If President Donald Trump wanted us to call him "His Holiness" on the second reference, we wouldn't do it, given that is the term Tibetans apply to the Dalai Lama. Not that there would be big confusion between President Trump and the Dalai Lama, but it just wouldn't be appropriate. Even if he asked us to, we wouldn't do that. I guess I bristled a little bit at the suggestion that it is somehow lack of respect if we don't go with the second preferences that were proposed in the Church's style guide.

The second point I made about our journalistic values is about not taking sides in terms of truth claims. To call the Utah-based faith the "restored gospel of Jesus Christ" or "the restored Church of Jesus Christ," would be confusing. You have to understand that there are several other restoration faiths that claim to be the restored Church of Jesus Christ, and, also, of course, there are many other Christian churches that claim to be the Church of Jesus Christ. We could use the Church of Jesus Christ, but we would have to follow that with parentheses clarifying that it is the Mormons or the Latter-day Saints or some other way to identify which Church of Jesus Christ we're talking about. We use parentheses with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and with the Churches of God in Christ (Pentecostal churches). The Community of Christ, you may know, was once known as the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. And even though it changed its name in the 90s, we still have to use parentheses to explain to people who the Community of Christ is if we're writing story about it. Aside from the confusion it would create to use the terms, "the restored church of Jesus Christ" or "the church of Jesus Christ," it also ends up being a truth claim, and we can't side with anyone on a truth claim. We have to be neutral about truth claims. That leads me to the third concern: clarity. There are just

too many churches of Christ so we can't side with anyone and we have to be clear on who it is we're talking about. To us it doesn't suggest any lack of respect if we continue to use Mormon as a descriptor.

That leads me to my next point—there is no word to replace Mormonism. There's just no other “ism” word; you can't say Latter-day Saint-ism, really. That just doesn't work for most people and Mormonism is a bigger word than members of the main body of Latter-day Saints. It's a bigger concept, it's a bigger movement, and it includes lots of people, people in the Church, not in the Church, once in the Church, somehow connected to the Church, anybody who believes the faith's text, the Book of Mormon. If that book is something that they also ascribe to, then they fall under the category Mormonism. There just simply isn't another term. We're waiting. If the Church comes up with another term that is widely recognizable, it's clear, and it's inclusive, we'll be happy to use that term. But for now, Mormonism is it. Also in the style guide it said, “when describing the combination of doctrine culture and lifestyle unique to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the term the Restored Gospel of Jesus Christ is accurate and preferred.” I've had lots of emails from believing Latter-day Saints who told me, especially black Mormons, that they took issue with the idea that the culture and lifestyle could be listed under “the restored gospel.” These readers told me “doctrine can go under the category of restored gospel, but culture and tradition, I reject as being part of the gospel,” and they want no part of that.

Adjectives are a problem for journalists too. When you're describing a blogger, a scholar, something like that, we can use Latter-day Saint, but it just isn't quite the same as Mormon. Also, President Nelson suggested that one of the reasons why he wants this to happen is because the full name of the Church includes Jesus Christ, and lots of folks—outsiders—seem not to know that Mormons worship Jesus Christ, so he wants to connect those more closely, but does “Latter-day Saint” do that? Lots of members I've talked to feel really uncomfortable calling themselves Latter-day Saints. Saints are associated more frequently with Catholicism, and a special category of Catholicism. So that makes some members just really wince at the notion of being called saints or even Latter-day Saints.

Where does that leave *The Salt Lake Tribune*? You may know we have a podcast called Mormon Land, and no, we're not changing it. We're open in the future to changing it if ultimately the word Mormon becomes so extinct that no one uses it. We can revisit that, but to us Mormon Land falls in the category of Mormonism, which, as I said, is a bigger concept than the Church or Church members. We've adapted somewhat. If you're a careful reader of my work, which I doubt many of you are, you will see many more uses of the term Latter-day Saint and fewer uses of the word Mormon. We've really tried to do that more. We have almost entirely expunged "LDS Church," which is what President Nelson asked for, and we had long ago stopped, as much as possible, saying Mormon Church, because we know that that's not the name of the Church. Headlines remain a big problem. I don't write headlines and I am really appreciative of those who do. They have wit and their skill goes well beyond mine, but I doubt you will see the full name of the church in a headline anytime soon. It just doesn't fit. It's nine words long, and it's cumbersome. I'm sympathetic to President Nelson's request, but I also know as a journalist how hard it is to maintain those three values of respect, neutrality, and clarity.

As an example of the clarity issue, my actual first name is "Margaret," but I've never used the name Margaret in my life. Even my wedding invitation used "Peggy" because I worried that people wouldn't know who was getting married. So I understand all President Nelson's concerns, but I do think it's going to be very, very difficult going forward to get rid of the term Mormon. I also have received emails and correspondence from people who don't want to lose the connection with the faith's sacred scripture, which is the Book of Mormon, and they don't necessarily see it as pejorative. Many members of the Church themselves have felt really comfortable with that term, and they don't want to see it go away. That's the other thing that I write about, members and how they identify themselves. As long as members continue to see themselves as Mormon and see it is a way to be distinctive from other Christian faiths, I think you'll see that term continue. Language changes and journalism changes, though, and I'm not going to tie my hands totally in the future. I am taking a wait-and-see attitude.

WHAT'S A MORMON EXPERT TO DO?

Mette Ivie Harrison

When I sold *The Bishop's Wife*, a contemporary murder mystery set in Utah, to a national press in 2012, I spent a lot of time trying to figure out what my “bio” would be. I had little say over how the book would be marketed, because that was largely decided by publishing professionals who would consult with me so as not to offend me, but little more than that. I didn't have approval over the cover of the book (which was a Mormon temple, though not the iconic Salt Lake City one), and even the title was something I waffled over because it (still) confuses people who are looking for the movie with Cary Grant. Did I want to be referred to as a “member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints,” a “Mormon,” an “active member,” or a “practicing Mormon” or did I want to come up with some variation of my own?

At the time, I'd just come out of a five-year atheist phase, in which I reluctantly served in a Primary Presidency and then declined callings for my own sanity, following the devastating and faith-destroying death of my infant daughter in 2005. I was trying to come back to belief in God, though I wasn't sure what shape that belief would take, if I would in fact ever believe in anything again, or if it was even possible to go back to a more orthodox belief once one left. (I had multiple internet friends who assured it wasn't, even as family members were desperate to tell me that it was—as long as I was “humble” enough.) I originally sold the book as “M.I. Harrison” and not as “Mette Ivie Harrison” because I was concerned readers who had discovered my name through my young adult novels (very clean read romance/fantasy

books) would be disturbed by the more adult content (though they're still pretty clean). But Soho wanted my full name because they didn't want it to look like I was standing behind a pseudonym. And indeed, in every public event they asked me to speak at, I was very honest about where I was now, who I'd been in the past, and what I felt about just about any topic regarding The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (How tiresome that whole phrase is, sorry!).

Ultimately, the bio in the back of *The Bishop's Wife* reads simply, "a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints." But on the cover of that book, and all the subsequent books in the series, it proclaims to be "set in Mormon, Utah." As if this is a place, like other books Soho Crime publishes, set in Bangkok, Thailand, or set in Paris, France. In fact, we've kept this bio to the present date, though I am currently on sabbatical from attendance in my local ward and have rejected some of the traditional markers of my membership.

I've been asked since then to help with several books by outsiders about the larger cultural movement of Mormonism including fundamentalism, and books with characters who are members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (phew!). In one situation, I told the author firmly that we Mormons do not refer to each other as "Saints," and assured her (before the new revelation) that we are fine with "Mormon." I thought we'd come back around to the nickname with Gordon B. Hinckley's successful PR campaign to position ourselves as "regular Christians" and not associated in any way with polygamy—or with having horns, and even no longer believing in the idea that the most righteous among us strive to become gods ourselves in other universes and in millennia from the current day.

It's a strange position to be in, seen as the expert about Mormonism, as for example when the BBC called me personally to ask my advice about a televised piece they were doing on MLM's in Utah. I spent an hour on the phone with the producer, despite the fact that I've never been part of an MLM myself, have no degree in economics, and am

basically just your average person observing the phenomenon. This was partly because of an essay I wrote for the *Huffington Post*, where, for a short time period between 2015–2017, I contributed regular pieces for them about contemporary Mormon issues. Similarly, an author from Australia who is shortly to publish an academic book on the “Prepping Movement” called me on the phone and then flew out to meet me (and go to a convention in Salt Lake City) to ask me about the Mormon version of this. (As an amusing aside, he asked me if Mormons thought that we’d be saved faster in the rapture if we prepped and I had to explain that we members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints don’t really have a concept of the rapture theologically.) Because I wrote another essay for Huffington about having been a Mormon Prepper who did yearly months of living on food storage but now saw that as harmful and damaging to my children, he thought of me as a “safe” person to talk to, and asked me to connect him to other “safe Mormon preppers,” including a friend who is into gardening, canning, solar panels, and generators, an interesting cross-section of religious belief and environmentalism.

Years into this journey, I’ve found that I believe even more firmly in God than I ever did in the past as a more orthodox Mormon, and that I find this belief more important to my everyday well-being. I used to feel “commanded” to pray regularly, but in a certain, prescribed way. Now I pray eagerly at night, as part of a meditative ritual. My experiences with the divine have been powerfully sweet and deeply meaningful and have sometimes meant me being awakened in the middle of the night with a poem that demands to be written down that I do not feel at all like I wrote, but came to me word by word, dictated from heaven. If that sounds blasphemous or arrogant, it is, in fact, my experience with God now. It is also one of the reasons that I found it more and more difficult to attend my local ward, because I couldn’t share with them the deepest spiritual experiences I had unless I was willing to change my vocabulary drastically and to let them correct me about who and what God was.

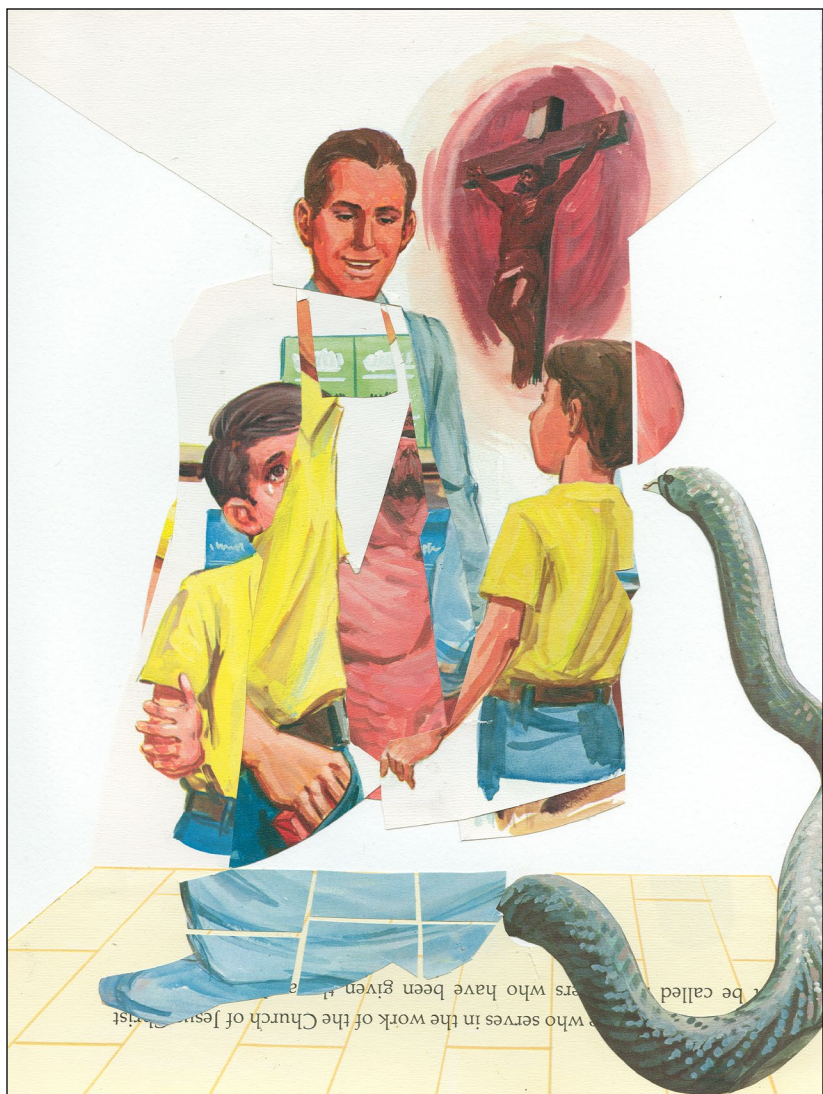
I have to admit that on some level, I think there is a parallel between the difficulty I'm having translating my larger experience of God into the rhetoric of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. I'm not sure what the Church believes in, to be honest. It feels like there is so much of my childhood "Mormonism" that is no longer part of the Church: open talk about polygamy being practiced again in the future when it was legal, near worship of Joseph Smith but a hatred of Emma, talk about the Catholic church being the "whore of the earth," rejection of face cards and all caffeine, plus excessive modesty and saving for an apocalypse that was imminent and that I personally had been "reserved" for as a special spirit in the kingdom of God. What is uniquely Mormon about Mormonism now? The Masonic symbols and handshakes of the temple? The insistence that we are not trinitarian, which keeps us from being accepted fully into the body of Christ by other Christian churches? The belief that our leaders are somehow closer to the revelations of God than any other church's leaders? I really don't know, but it seems interesting to me that we're reading scriptures less and manuals written by nameless committees more.

Here I am in early 2019, looking at the publication of a new Linda Wallheim book in 2019 and in future years, wondering again what my bio should read. For now, I am technically still "a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints." I'm on the records. I spent almost fifty years of my life attending church every week and held a calling until just a few months ago, when I handed in my last version of our ward's history to the stake. I've begun a podcast called *The Mormon Sabbatical* where I talk about my problems with Mormonism and also my new experiences with the divine. But after the year I've given myself, what will I be? If I'm not going back, am I still Mormon? Do I still get to write about Mormonism? Am I going to be an expert on Mormonism because I have a unique forum for explaining Mormonism to non-Mormons who make up the large numbers of my leadership (since Deseret Book refuses to carry my books in Church-owned bookstores)? Does my character Linda have to leave The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day

Saints if that's why I do? Or can she just be "Mormon"? I don't know the answer to any of these things. I've toyed many times with the idea of using the moniker "Mormonish," but it sounds a little twee.

The last year of my attendance at church was one of the hardest, as the new president, Russell M. Nelson declared it revelation from God that the name "Mormon" was no longer to be used. Everyone at Soho and all my readers were careful to ask me if it was all right to use that word casually with me and I always assured them it was. Trust me when I say that everyone else is still going to be using this name for us, no matter how polite some try to be when they talk to our faces or come to official public events. And why shouldn't they? It's awfully hard to use the full name of the Church and the shortened version "The Church of Jesus Christ" is not only a kind of editorial, it's also frankly not very useful in distinguishing us from anyone else. Is that what we want? To give up all the weirdness and wonder that I thought meant being a Mormon entailed when I was eight years old and proud to tell my friends that I'd been baptized?

In the end, I'm glad to see the Church focusing more on Christ. I don't know if it makes me see Russell Nelson as a prophet, though, since he declared the November 2015 policy of exclusion as "revelation" as well, and I have felt a strong spiritual impression to the contrary. I don't know if this new insistence on the full name of the Church will stick or if we'll be back to "Mormon" in ten years with a new prophet. I don't think that this will do anything to make us more palatable to other Christians. But other changes might. Certainly de-emphasizing the doctrine of God as man and man as God will help. So do the temple changes and genuine humanitarian efforts that I applaud the Church for engaging in. For now, I'm content to be a "Mormon," as in a cultural part of a movement that also includes Jello and funeral potatoes are with us, faith-promoting rumors about the Three Nephites and garment fire protection. These are quirky, weird Mormon things, and I guess I am, ultimately, more Mormon than I am "a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints."



Casey Jex Smith
Yellow Boy
collage on paper, 2009
11" x 8.5"

I'M NOT A MORMON, AND NEITHER ARE YOU

Clifton H. Jolley

When I was a child, Grandma Holt would slap my mouth when I called myself a “Mormon.” Her post-pioneer youth in Alpine, Utah, was haunted by stories of what the word meant in the mouths of persecutors of the Church who first called us “Mormonites” and then “Mormons.” She told me I was not “a Mormon but a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,” and I was to tell anyone who said otherwise.

It wasn't long after her instruction that a kid in the fifth grade at Garvanza Elementary School in Highland Park, California, asked, “You're a Mormon, right?” He wasn't being confrontational, just inquisitive. But I defensively replied as instructed, “No! I'm a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints!” To which he asked, “What's the difference?”

I was stumped.

And I would be further confused in 1956 when open-house tours of the Los Angeles Temple ended, the temple was dedicated, and word went around California that if you weren't a Mormon, you wouldn't be allowed into a Mormon Church.

To counter the confusion between temples and chapels, the Church put up billboards around the metroplex advertising, “You're always welcome in a Mormon Church.”

Grandma never got over it.

But over time, the term was gentrified and accepted throughout the Church. In 1945, the year I was born, Elder J. Reuben Clark (then a member of the First Presidency) insisted the US government—which had used the choir for an inspirational war message—identify the Choir as the “Mormon Tabernacle Choir,” a name that stuck for nearly three quarters of a century.

But no more.

Goodbye to the pleasant alliteration of “Mormon Missionaries,” the self-satisfaction of being a “Mormon boy.” While it once seemed a sensible abbreviation of who we know we are—“Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints”—President Nelson has had the equivalency of a revelation instructing us that for the past more than half century the prophets and apostles have permitted us to devalue the importance of Christ by permitting the omission of Christ’s name from the name of Christ’s church. We are not Mormons, this is not the Mormon Church, and the argument that has arisen, President Nelson says, is not about “branding” but obeisance.

Which raises a question perhaps as important as the argument over branding Mormonism is unexpected: Is it possible to follow the prophet while at the same time doubting that he knows much about branding? And to wonder whether this is the best use of that lighted pen with which he jots down the revelations he receives late into the night?

Two influences have governed the popularity of the moniker “Mormon” in the past:

1. Although there was the occasional kerfuffle by descendants of the pioneers (Grandma Holt) who knew the persecution once associated with the word “Mormon,” utility more than history insisted on the persistence of the once objectionable name.
2. A sensible fundamental of branding is that the brand is an agreement between the company (the Mormon Church) and the customer (us, the media, and everybody who has put the word “Mormon” between tongue and teeth). The company may insist all it wants on what it wants, but ultimately and whoever owns the brand, the *branding* does not belong to the company, whether the product be a patent remedy or a religion.

Vaseline was intended by its inventor to be an ingestible elixir long before it settled down to being an ointment (except in India, where it still is used as a bread spread). And although its inventor ingested two tablespoons a day, and although he lived to be more than a hundred, no one who is not a brand fanatic eats any of it today. Similarly, Dr. Pepper was a tonic, only to be trivialized by its customers to a recreational beverage. Stamp their feet and wave their arms though they may, companies are incapable of defeating popular initiatives.

Except for companies run by Prophets. But even with churches, practicality occasionally insists. How effective would California billboards have been had they advertised,

“You’re always welcome
in one of the chapels of
the Church of Jesus Christ
of Latter-day Saints.”

(Imagine the T-shirt.)

Were it not for debate being short-circuited by heavenly mandate, history, and the brand awareness of a living prophet, one may have inquired of prophets Smith or Nelson: “Doesn’t that seem a tad long for the internet?”

We are not what people call us, nor even what we call ourselves. We are what we believe, what we do (often in spite of what we believe), and what Mormons have ever been: our history, our culture, our practice. Our name—whoever’s name is inside it—is more utility than purpose. And, with so many other churches believing they also belong to Jesus Christ, not even unique.

But what about reverence for the God upon whose sacrifice the church is founded? There is an argument to be made that reverence is more evidenced by *not* using the name of deity, as is the case for Orthodox Jews who believe that either to speak the name of God or to make an image of God is a desecration. (Although even Judaism can suffer from brand deafness: As a child, my wife attended the “The Joseph Eisner Camp Institute for Living Judaism,” a name she relishes repeating today with a tone short on reverence.

President Nelson may protest that those of us who protest are not protesting a brand but a revelation . . . which may be . . . *in addition to protesting the rebranding of a brand*. Either it’s branding on which the Prophet is insisting, or it is branding upon which Jesus once insisted. And either way, it takes a lot of thinking to figure out the magic hidden in what appears to be so catastrophic a branding blunder as so long a name, no matter whose name is in it. Especially given the new requirements of the digiverse, which are increasingly more present and insistent than those of God’s universe.

But in spite of this most recent slapping of my mouth for calling myself a Mormon (and this time the slap is by a prophet!) I have a more private and personal concern. I believe myself to be a Mormon. Still. But many in my family would argue I am a “Jack Mormon,” a pejorative originally associated with gentile friends of the Mormons, but the target having migrated to describe those of us who are Mormons of some sort but do not replicate the actions or opinions of the Mormons who call us “Jack.”

I understand that President Nelson has made us no longer Mormons, but what about us Jack Mormons? What am I?

My wife answers, “What you’ve always been: a sinner.”

Precisely. And that, I believe, is the fundamental issue of character and behavior and belief with which not only my wife but my Prophet should be more concerned.

Instead, the Prophet tells us:

My dear brothers and sisters, I promise you that if we will do our best to restore the correct name of the Lord’s Church, He whose Church this is will pour down His power and blessings upon the heads of the Latter-day Saints,¹⁷ the likes of which we have never seen.¹

This abstract promise to *open the windows of heaven* is what got us paying tithing, so it’s no surprise President Nelson should use it to jack up enthusiasm for abandoning the name my grandmother tried until her dying day to get me to abandon.

And there you have it. As little as I liked being a Jack Mormon, and as little as Grandma Holt liked me being a Mormon, they were identities I understood and had made peace with being called.

But now we’re told that *hearing* without protest the name “Mormon”—a name previous prophets robbed of its persecutory power by making it our own—is a betrayal, that every time someone calls us by it is not merely a convenience or an ignorance but an *opportunity for crusade*; a crusade that if we do not make it, we risk having “failed to *defend* the Savior Himself.”

I know that a “false equivalency” is subjectively equated, that recognizing one depends on one’s values as much as one’s education. And

1. Russell M. Nelson, “The Correct Name of the Church,” Oct. 2018, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2018/10/the-correct-name-of-the-church?lang=eng>.

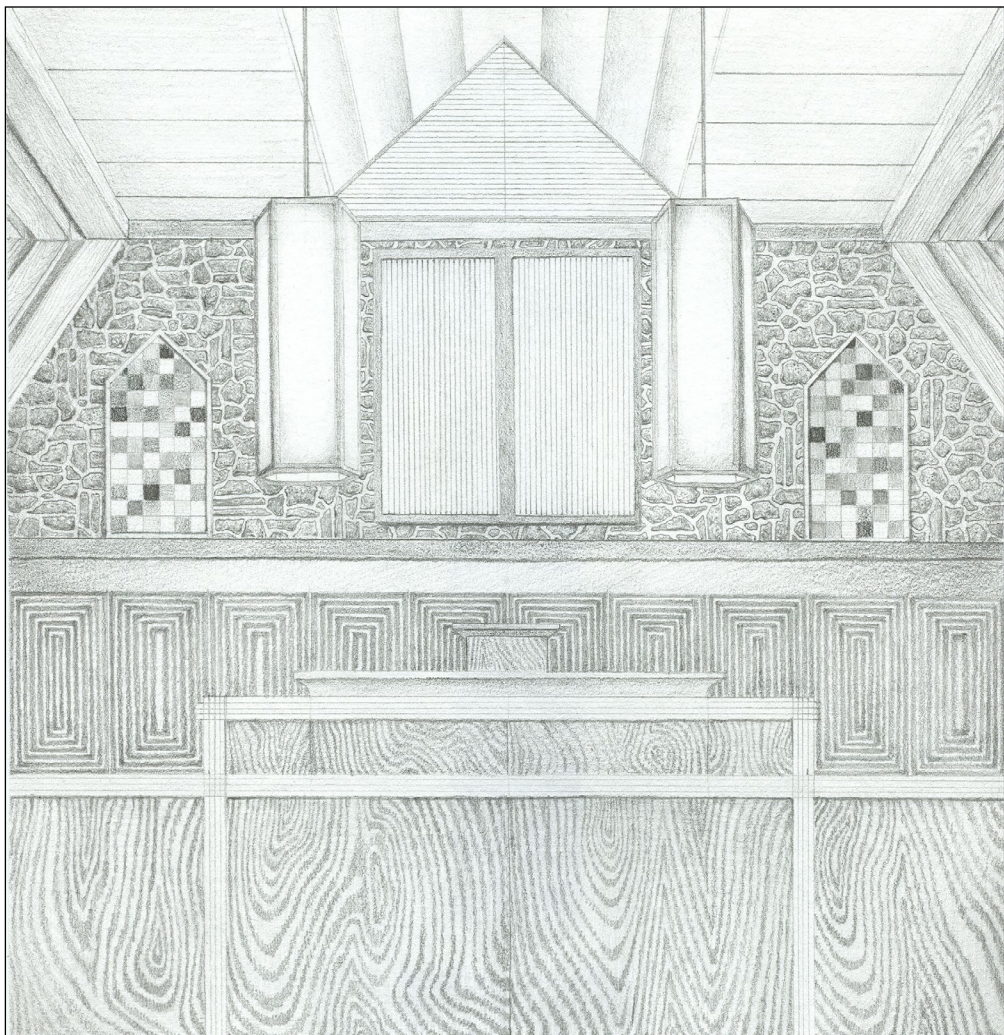
finding an example that is universally received can be challenging. Which is why I recommend the false equivalency provided above. Calling oneself a Mormon may or may not deserve a mouth slap. But it certainly is not equivalent to being a traitor to the cause of Mormonism or to “crucifying anew” our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

So, I’m ready to admit I don’t like any of the new brands so well as I liked the old ones, and I believe the new ones more likely to be a betrayal of our history, our culture, and our once-healthy sense of irony. Nor will promising to bless me more than tithing blesses me get me to pay one decimal point more than I do.

But I have friends more principled than I am who say they simply wish the Prophet would come up with more important revelations than the “Block Plan” and rebranding us from “Mormons” to “Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.” While I have admitted to sharing their agitation, I must also admit to being less agitated today than when President Nelson’s attitude was maturing from his earliest pronouncement that the Lord “impressed upon my mind the importance of the name,” to the dictum that “It is a command of the Lord.”

My more principled friends again express the desire that President Nelson would have revelations affecting *persons* more than *style guides*. (A more specific and generous policy regarding LGBTQX would be a good place to begin, they say. That, and making Trump supporters ineligible to attend the Temple.) But President Nelson insists (by increasingly dramatic rhetoric and accusation) that this present revelation is more important than either names or style guides.

Perhaps. And perhaps it’s because I’m old that my expectations are more easily fulfilled than by being worried more than I already have been by Grandma Holt and President Nelson. All I know is that I recently attended Sacrament Service with my daughter, and that we no sooner had sat and sang and had the sacrament passed than . . . *it was time to go*. I turned to her and whispered, “If for no other reason than shorter Sunday meetings—and by whatever name anyone brands the change—I support President Nelson as our Prophet!”



Casey Jex Smith
Chapel
pencil on paper, 2009
7.5" x 7.5"

STILL YOU

Kalani Tonga

I have a six-year old named Sofia, who, for reasons beyond my comprehension, insisted that we all call her “Cat Poop” for about six months last year. This feels relevant to the conversation at hand.

All my life, I’ve been a Mormon. The name “Mormon” was as much a part of my existence as my own name, and I wore both names with pride. I grew up outside the Jell-O Belt, so being a Mormon meant that I truly had to embrace the idea that we are a “peculiar people,” and, living in the South, I had ample opportunities to defend my “weird Mormon ways” as I spoke to Baptist and Methodist and Catholic friends. I learned the song, “I’m a Mormon” as a very young child, and I remember singing it to myself often. My family history includes polygamists and pioneers on one side, and on the other, my family attended Liahona High School and came to the United States via the Church College in Hawaii (now BYU-Hawaii). The history of Mormonism is in my blood and my bones.

More recently, my Mormonism has evolved to include being on the board of directors for a nonprofit called Feminist Mormon Housewives, whose purpose is to fund scholarships for single Mormon mothers. Many of my communities currently use the word “Mormon” as a more inclusive term for anyone whose beliefs stem from Joseph Smith’s original church, and I fully embrace the idea that there is “more than one way to Mormon.”¹

I heard the big commotion about dropping “Mormon” from the vernacular when referring to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day

1. “More than one way to Mormon” is a phrase made famous by *Sunstone Magazine* when it was used as the theme for their 2018 Summer Conference.

Saints, and, admittedly, I rolled my eyes and filed it away in the Much Ado About Nothing drawer in my brain. It sat there for a while, but pretty soon I pulled it out and inspected it again, and as a *hafekasi*² Tongan woman, I have some thoughts.

Before I begin, let me state for the record that I am speaking only for myself—not for all people of color, not for all women, not for all feminists, and not even for all biracial women of Tongan and Swedish ancestry with five children who currently reside in Utah. I speak for myself alone and from my own experiences, and I do so with the hope that I am elevating the marginalized voices of other people like me, but I speak without the expectation that others will draw the same conclusions from their own experiences just because their lives happen to be similar to mine.

All that said, I believe that this insistence upon calling The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints by its full name is less about the One True Name of The Church and is much more about naming rights.

Did you know that in the Tongan culture, when a baby is born the mother of that child typically has very little say regarding the name of her own baby? Rather, it is the privilege of the child's aunts on their father's side to bestow a name upon their new niece or nephew. When a Tongan woman marries a Tongan man, she does so with the understanding that his sisters will name their future children. Naming rights belong to the paternal aunts.

If you are a *hafekasi* Tongan woman, though, you might have been raised by a non-Tongan momma who didn't necessarily follow or teach traditional Tongan culture. You might have picked out names for your imaginary future children when you were ten or eleven years old, and imagined calling said children by those names for years and years before you ever married into a very traditional Tongan family. You might have been very unpleasantly surprised to find your in-laws incredibly

2. *Hafekasi* means "half-caste" in Tongan, and denotes that I am not full Tongan. My dad is from Nakolo, Tonga, and my mom's ancestry is predominately Swedish.

displeased with your inability to just shut up and be the “right” kind of Tongan wife, and you might have spent many sleepless nights agonizing over whether naming your own children was worth the intense marital discord caused by bucking the system. As I’m sure you’ve guessed by now, the “you” in this situation was me.

Ultimately, my husband and I settled on a compromise: I wanted to name my daughter after my sister (Kalea), and his family wanted us to name her after his sister (Elva), so we gave her both names and agreed to call her by her full name. Elva Kalea entered the world unaware of the turmoil we experienced as I struggled to relinquish or share the naming rights of my child. And, unsurprisingly, once she was born, family members on each side dropped the other family’s name when speaking about my daughter, with my husband’s family calling her “Elva,” and my family calling her “Kalea.” She answers to both names now, and I think that if you asked her she’d tell you that she truly has no preference for which name you call her. Both names belong to her, both names fit her, and both names are now a part of her history and identity. However, when it comes to which name is her One True Name, the traditionalists will tell you that because her aunties have naming rights, I, as her mother, am in the wrong and we should call my daughter Elva.

Nevertheless, I will use Kalea.

Kalea is her name, too.

I see The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints embroiled today in a similar battle for naming rights. For years, we’ve used Mormon interchangeably to refer to the Church. We had a Church-sponsored “I’m a Mormon” campaign. There’s a delightfully campy song somewhere called the Mormon Rap. And what about the Mormon Battalion and the Mormon Trail? It seems to me that Mormon is irrevocably intertwined with Joseph Smith’s Church, regardless of whether or not current leadership particularly cares for that name.

However, this leadership group seems determined to remind us all who retains the traditional naming rights. They don’t particularly care

whether or not any other name fits. They don't care about the history or identity associated with our collective Mormon-ness. Instead, they remind us from the pulpit that they hold the power and they are the Name Keepers. They are the givers of the One True Name, and we are wrong to expect any compromise just because of silly sentiment.

As someone who has felt keenly and intimately the sting of cherishing the "wrong" name, and as one who continues to use that wrong name despite intense criticisms, I feel drawn to protect the Mormon-ness of the church. The stubborn *hafekasi* in me wants to shout that I didn't agree to this change, didn't ask for it, and don't want it. I want to rend my clothes and lament the unfairness of being expected to give up a name that means something to me just because someone else claims authoritative naming rights. Leaders tell me I am in the wrong and we should use The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Nevertheless, I will use Mormon.

I've been Mormon all my life, and that name still feels true to my identity.

Honestly, if we look at the history, these name fetishes seem to come and go, depending on the preference of those in positions of leadership. So, while part of me bristles at the thought of this leadership group randomly taking something so precious from me, I'm also a little inclined to take this whole rebranding business about as seriously as I did when my daughter Sofia adamantly insisted that we call her Cat Poop. In that moment, I thought to myself, "This, too, shall pass. And, in the meantime, I guess we can call you Cat Poop and know that you're really still Sofia Sue."

Therefore, when I hear leaders insist, "Don't call me Mormon anymore. My name is The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints." I hear them. But, I also think to myself, "Ok, Cat Poop, we can call you whatever you want. But, at the end of the day, I know who you really are, and you're still you."

POST MORMON PAST

Ronald Wilcox

{1}

APOLOGIA

I suppose I should have foreshadowed my own shadow. I should have seen what I did not want to see. That said, I must say, I see what I see for fear my shadow over-take me, for fear I become mere shadow of my former Mormon self. Formerly and formally, I tell it like it is, that is to say, “it” being what I see I say, what I say I mean, what I mean to say, I *think* is really me. I like to think I think so, so I say what I think.

Were I to devise destruction to myself as a man the *first* thing I would do is destroy my name, if not destroy, at least change it, make it—*meaningfully demeaning*. Suddenly I’m not a Mormon. What? Am I also suddenly not Ron? Am I to play with letters, digits, symbols, syllables, vowels, tricky consonants, as if they were really more me than I who am, who is, who, hopefully, one day will be? Why?

At whose instigation am I no longer a Mormon? Is a Catholic less a Catholic because the word implies a phrase of recognition, a “universal” church? Is a Mormon merely a lowly nick-name, discarded at leisure, because the full name any Mormon will tell you is: *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints*.

What slinky madness sneaked in when the central pole I lean upon is yanked away from me? Do you expect me to fall? Satan, maybe, might expect me to. Not my Heavenly Father, who knows me more than I do myself. *I am a Mormon*.

How would I, were I *Lucifer*, strike at the heart of my faith. Why I would yank away the clumsy pole I lean on as I look high above me toward the sun. He would hope, I assume, I would sink into the dark shadow the bright sun casts behind me, like a tar pit of disbelief. He would play with my name and say Ron, why not juggle a few syllables, become *More Ron*, or *Moron Ron*, or, better still, *Post Mormon Ron*.

Yes. Yank away that rough “post” I lean upon, *Mormon*, a long-ago nick-name first devised in obloquy by enemies of The Church (my new name?) but risen to admiration through the years, as in Mormon Tabernacle Choir, known, beloved, admired world-wide. How easy it was. All that went before was an “error,” a stupid mistake, a maudlin jibe, one used by all my forebears proudly: *Mormon*.

Me, I’m too brave, too smart, to occupy the air with less than *the church of jesus christ of latter-day saints—lower case in case my “pride” should show*. Who thinks this way? Who but a died in the wool bureaucrat, one who assumes a pet peeve (we’re more than “Mormons”) proves his intuition to be a revelation, that we are to shed the designation like an old coat, cast it aside, claim we never were what we said we were, for we are now . . . now . . . not “Mormons.”

No, we are . . . what *are* we? Well, we’ll define that another time in the manner of the bureaucrat employing pure bureaucratize to a new problem he just invented. And why is this so important, Moron Ron, or whatever your name is? Why bother to get your garments in a tussle, your shorts in a twist, or whatever it is you wear these days of your elderly majority, you old coot? I’ll tell you why.

I am a Mormon.

So, the question again, how would I (Lucifer) strike at the very heart of a soul? The pole, the wretched, splintery, battered, pole the fool leans upon. *Identity*. Yank it away. Let the fool lean on something *else*, if lean he must. Just don’t use the word *MORMON*. After all, *heh, heh*, minus an “m” we have a, *hee, hee*, MORON. That’ll show him who’s *boss*, whose boss has a *boss*, and, by God, that’s *me*, Lucifer, Too damned clever for you by increments far past the human mind.

{2}

DIALOGIC¹

~~dialogue with myself~~

B-b-but, it's just a name.

A rose by any other name would smell as sweet.

Okay.

Present your sweetheart with a bouquet of
say, *stinkweeds*. They smell as sweet.

They're *roses*.

Mormons are still Mormons when they say
they aren't Mormons.

Exactly. Now you're catching on . . . even
though you *are* a moron . . . I mean, Mormon.

Don't call me a Mormon. I'm not a Mormon.

I'm a member of . . . *the church of jesus christ
of latter-day saints*. God told me personally
that Jesus would be insulted if you called him
anything but Jesus Christ.

So don't call you Mormon.

Exactly. We call Jesus Jesus.

Savior. Lord. Master. Logos (the Word).

Son of God. Son of Man. Son of David.

Lamb of God. Light of the World.

King of the Jews. Friend of Man.

You just made my point. Mormons
don't have to be called Mormons.

What should we call them?

Well . . . you got me there.

A *revelation* will tell us what to call us.

I hope to become a member of

1. T. S. Eliot: "dialogic" is consonant with Eliot's ideas in "Tradition and the Individual Talent," where Eliot holds that "the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past."~~Post Mormon Past.

The church of Jesus Christ of Latter

-Day Saints Tabernacle Choir.

That's kind of clumsy.

Why not just "Tabernacle Choir."

You mean like the really neat one
like what belonged to Sister Aimee
Semple McPherson?

No, I mean

Temple Square Tabernacle Choir."

But your temple ain't square. It's sort of
"ratcheted" into segments.

Stop complaining. It's a revelation.

It sort of snuck into the mind of the prophet.

"The Lord has impressed upon my mind the
importance of the name He has revealed for
His Church, even The Church of Jesus Christ
of Latter-day Saints."

That's what Russell M. Nelson, the church's
present president, said in a statement recently.
I'm impressed.

You better be. Otherwise, you're out.

Caput. De-churched. Excommunicated.

I won't say another word about it.

Honest?

Honest.

Only a fool would.

It goes straight to the heart of the church member,
whose member (the heart) was mistakenly pierced
by a nick-name way back when. So get used to it.
Shape up or ship out.

I promise to shape up. Soon as you tell me
which shape to shape up to I'll shape up.

Just don't call me or you a Mormon.

I won't. That's a promise.

Amen.

“THERE IS NO EQUALITY”:
WILLIAM E. BERRETT, BYU, AND
HEALING THE WOUNDS OF RACISM
IN THE LATTER-DAY SAINT
PAST AND PRESENT

Rebecca de Schweinitz

Shortly before The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints’s 2018 “Be One” event, celebrating forty years since the LDS Church removed racial restrictions on temple and priesthood participation, Black Latter-day Saint podcaster and author Zandra Vranes asked white members to consider “what you or your Mormon ancestors were doing between 1852 and June 7, 1978.”¹ It’s an important question that forces us to, in Eugene England’s words, “face our unbearable Mormon loss of innocence.”² It forces us to deeply consider, and to apply to Mormonism, the late Reverend James Cone’s observation that “*the white church* is not God’s redemptive agent but, rather, an agent of the old society. . . . [I]t maliciously contributed to the doctrine of white supremacy. . . . Racism has been a part of the life of the Church so long that it is

1. Zandra Vranes, Facebook, May 21, 2018.

2. Eugene England, “Playing in the Dark: Mormons Writing about Blacks and Blackness,” in *Colloquium Essays in Literature and Belief*, edited by Richard H. Cracroft, Jane D. Brady, and Linda Hunter Adams (Provo: Center for the Study of Christian Values in Literature, Brigham Young University, 2001), 434, 444.

virtually impossible for even ‘good’ members to recognize the bigotry perpetuated by the Church.”³

In his essay that appeared on the Church’s blog, “Healing the Wounds of Racism,” Darius Gray offers valuable instructions for coming to terms with and overcoming the racism that has been and still is a part of the LDS Church.⁴ They include: acknowledging racism, recognizing it in ourselves, learning a new approach to addressing racism, and listening to those who are and have been most affected by the racial bigotry within and perpetuated by the Church.

Black members and scholars of Mormonism have done a lot, especially in the last decade, to acknowledge and to help us recognize racism in ourselves—as individuals and as an institution—but there is more to be done.⁵ Because of my position as a professor of history at Brigham Young University, the Church’s flagship educational institution, I’ve been especially interested in understanding BYU’s role as an “agent of the old society,” and how and why it is that for the last thirteen years that I’ve been teaching there—including now, more than forty years after Official Declaration 2—BYU students are still encountering racist justifications for the priesthood/temple restrictions in their religion classes, on their

3. James H. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (New York: Seabury Press, 1969), 71.

4. This essay first appeared on the Church’s blog as Darius Gray, “Healing the Wounds of Racism,” Apr. 5, 2018, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/blog/healing-the-wounds-of-racism>. A shortened version was subsequently published in the June 2018 *Ensign* with the title “Moving Forward Together,” available at <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2018/06/commemorating-the-1978-revelation/moving-forward-together?lang=eng>.

5. The articles and essays in the fall 2018 issue of *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* provide a good example of recent academic work along these lines. Paul Reeve’s *Religion of a Different Color: Race and the Mormon Struggle for Whiteness* (New York: Oxford, 2015) represented an important scholarly milestone on this topic as well.

missions, in Gospel Doctrine classes, from peers, in sacrament meeting talks, and in Church books.

William E. Berrett, most famous among scholars of race in the history of the LDS Church for his contribution to John Stewart's 1960 *Mormonism and the Negro*, joined the religion faculty at BYU in 1948 as its first "expert" on LDS Church history after a brief stint as an Assistant United States Attorney in my hometown of Fairbanks, Alaska. Berrett was not new to Church education: he had started the LDS seminary in Roosevelt, Utah; taught seminary in Blackfoot, Idaho; and wrote numerous textbooks and other core curriculum for the Church Educational System (CES) and various Church auxiliaries beginning in 1932. The Church published his most popular book, *The Restored Church*, in multiple languages. It went through more than a dozen editions between 1936 and its most recent reprinting in 2017. Berrett's work has been used throughout the CES, including at Church universities, seminaries, and institutes, in Sunday School classes, and in other auxiliary organizations. As a "scholar" of Church history and doctrine (he received graduate training in law, not religious history or theology), what he said mattered. This likely gave *Mormonism and the Negro* more standing and traction than it otherwise might have enjoyed and legitimized everything else Berrett said about race. In 1954, Ernest L. Wilkinson appointed Berrett vice president of BYU during a period in which the university oversaw the Unified Church School System. Berrett served in a dual capacity, teaching and heading religious education at BYU and serving as vice administrator (i.e., director) of the Unified Church School System, which meant he headed all LDS seminaries and institutes. He also recruited and approved BYU faculty hires and, not insignificantly, brought Boyd K. Packer (later a member of the Quorum of the Twelve) and A. Theodore Tuttle (who would become a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy and serve in its presidency) into CES leadership and the orbit of the Church hierarchy. When BYU no longer oversaw all Church education beginning in 1964, Berrett continued as

Commissioner of Church Education until Neal A. Maxwell assumed that position in 1970, after which he remained on the teaching faculty at BYU for a few additional years. Berrett was celebrated for his work expanding Church religious education across the nation and the globe. And in 1986, *Dialogue* reviewed one of his books, noting that he had influenced “thousands of seminary and institute teachers . . . encouraging kindness, moderation, and faith.”⁶ He also used that influence, however, to validate and spread a racialized Mormon theology that reflected, embraced, normalized, and sanctified white supremacy.⁷

Berrett’s published work, his curricular materials, memos, letters, teaching notes, and BYU devotionals reveal that his views about race in general, and the priesthood/temple ban in particular, echoed the ideas of white Southerners who protested integration, along with the “powerfully influential . . . racialized theology” of Joseph Fielding Smith, Mark E. Petersen, and other Church officials.⁸

For Berrett, like for many other Church leaders, “the seeming discrimination by the Church toward the Negro” did not originate with man but went “back to the beginning with God.” He supported the belief that, acting under divine mandate, Joseph Smith initiated the

6. Kenneth W. Godfrey, “Balance and Faith,” review of *The Latter-day Saints: A Contemporary History of the Church of Jesus Christ*, by William E. Berrett, *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 20, no. 4 (Winter 1987): 192.

7. William E. Berrett Papers, 20th Century Western and Mormon Manuscripts, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah (hereafter cited as Berrett Papers); William E. Berrett oral history interview, Jan. 27, 1982, Manuscripts Collection, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah. On *Mormonism and the Negro*, see Russell Stevenson, *For the Cause of Righteousness: A Global History of Blacks and Mormonism, 1830–2013* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2015): 313–36.

8. England, “Playing in the Dark,” 434. Berrett’s beliefs and teachings as described throughout the article were culled from various documents in boxes 2, 3, 4, 5, 10, 11, and 12 of the Berrett Papers.

priesthood/temple ban. Especially since they had been reaffirmed by modern prophets, he argued that the race-based restrictions should not be questioned by man. To do so meant questioning the trustworthiness of multiple Church presidents. Even to suggest that the ban was a matter of policy and not revelation signified an act of supreme disloyalty to the Church and its leaders. Aware of early Black Latter-day Saint Elijah Abel's priesthood ordination and Church service, Berrett emphasized Abel's mixed-race status, labeling his ordination a reasonable mistake that had been rightly corrected by later Church authorities. He explained Abel's subsequent missionary work as understandable since women could also serve missions without the priesthood. (He did not note that sisters were not called to serve proselytizing missions until more than a decade after Abel's death.⁹)

At the same time he rejected the idea of the ban as evidence of discrimination and asserted its heavenly and deep historical origins, Berrett also argued against the whole notion of human equality. He defended the Church's racial restrictions, insisting: "There is no equality." "Men are not equal when entering this life. . . . We were not equal in the pre-earth life," and will not be equal in the eternities. "A Negro child," he declared, may be "born into the world innocent . . . [but] this does not mean that he had achieved the same status or progress in the eyes of the Lord prior to coming into the earth that some others may have achieved." In *Teachings of the Doctrine and Covenants*, Berrett even offered corrections to some of Joseph Smith's writings to buttress his point—suggesting that Smith meant to describe spirits as "co-eternal" rather than co-equal with our Father in Heaven."¹⁰

9. See William E. Berrett, "Church History and Philosophy 245 Advanced Theology Address," July 10, 1956, box 3, folder 4, Berrett Papers.

10. Ibid.; Berrett's handwritten notes in box 3, folder 3, Berrett Papers; William E. Berrett, *Teachings of the Doctrine and Covenants* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1961): 243.

Berrett further insisted that the Church's racial restrictions were evidence of God's respect for human agency and compassion for all mankind. Berrett taught: "The Lord is withholding the priesthood from the Negro because of his love for them, so that they won't be under condemnation." Poor pre-earth choices and behavior meant that some souls were less virtuous than others as they entered mortality. Restricting priesthood/temple access kept otherwise unprepared people from entering into covenants they would fail to uphold. Careful to square the restrictions with Mormonism's second article of faith, which precludes the possibility of penalizing individuals for other's transgressions, he claimed: "We do not believe that the Negro is punished or cursed because of the act of Cain, but that Cain was cursed by having a certain group of pre-earth spirits come to earth through his lineage who, because of their own lack of preparation, may not yet have been ready to serve in the Priesthood." For Berrett, differences in race, wealth, and national origin could be explained by, and were all determined by, pre-earth behavior. The most righteous of God's children entered the world in white bodies, in Christian nations, and with greater economic resources. Drawing on his own experience living in "the polar north" with "dark-skinned" "Eskimos" as evidence, Berrett dismissed scientific explanations for differences in skin pigmentation.¹¹ He also pointed out that God had historically limited priesthood ordination, so the current racial restrictions were in keeping with ancient patterns. He further suggested that contemporary Mormons were unusual in the purity of their bloodline, which accounted "for the freedom [outside of the race restrictions] which the Lord has allowed our prophet in this day to call people to the Priesthood."¹²

11. In addition to everything else wrong with Berrett's statements, the Fairbanks, Alaska region is home to Athabascan, not, traditionally, Eskimo peoples.

12. Berrett, "Church History and Philosophy"; William E. Berrett to Allan Taggart, Apr. 24, 1967, box 4, folder 1, Berrett Papers.

Berrett called on scripture, history, unique LDS theologies, and what he labeled “practical good sense” to support the Church’s racial restrictions and taboos against interracial marriage.¹³ His justifications and ideas about race were hardly unique in Latter-day Saint thought. Other, even more prominent, LDS Church leaders believed and promulgated the same ideas. Yet, there has been little direct engagement with these ideas or acknowledgment that they represent an especially insidious and influential expression of white supremacy in modern Latter-day Saint and American history.¹⁴ As Cone says, “there has been no sharp confrontation of the gospel with white racism.”¹⁵ Moreover, it matters that at a time of heightened activism by civil rights organizations and African Americans across the South and the nation, and at a time of notable changes to the legal structure and moral framework of white supremacy in the United States, Berrett was heralded as an expert on Church history and doctrine and was the man in charge of Church religious education. Scholars have noted the central role that religion and religious groups played in challenging segregation and the unequal status of Black Americans. Civil rights organizers, and many religious denominations, called on constitutional principles as well as on religious beliefs—their understandings of God, Jesus Christ, humankind, and the gospel—to contest the racial status quo. Scholars have also shown that religious beliefs undergirded segregationist defenses. As Jane Dailey argues, religion “played a central role in articulating not only the challenge that

13. Berrett, “Church History and Philosophy.”

14. Again, the articles and essays in the fall 2018 volume of *Dialogue* stand out for their direct engagement with this history and what it means. Joanna Brooks’s “The Possessive Investment in Rightness: White Supremacy and the Mormon Movement,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 51, no. 3 (Fall 2018): 45–82, in particular, uses terms like “white supremacy” to describe Mormon beliefs and structures, and shows how white supremacy was an integral part of Mormon theology and institution and community building.

15. Cone, *Black Theology*, 31.

the civil rights movement offered Jim Crow but the *resistance* to that challenge.”¹⁶ Ultimately, Martin Luther King Jr. and others in the civil rights movement won “the titanic struggle waged by participants on both sides of the conflict to harness the immense power of the divine to their cause.”¹⁷ The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints supported the theology of segregation and racial inequality in that struggle. Berrett’s ideas and teachings were not only like those of other Latter-day Saint Church leaders, they were also like those of white Southerners who staged a massive resistance to the Black freedom movement.

William E. Berrett, as BYU’s vice president and head of Church education, played a key role in affirming, institutionalizing, and repackaging previously expressed and officially sanctioned white supremacist ideas for continued and broad dissemination among Latter-day Saints in the second half of the twentieth century and beyond. He used his positions at BYU and in Church leadership to support and normalize racist ideas that were quickly losing legitimacy across America and the world.

Indeed, it is indicative of Berrett’s conscious opposition to the growing consensus about racial equality and of his role in facilitating the spread of an increasingly (on both the national and international scenes) contested white supremacist interpretation of racial difference that shortly after the 1954 Supreme Court ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education*, he invited apostle Mark E. Petersen to address religion faculty and CES employees at BYU. (Berrett had recently reintroduced the practice of having General Authorities speak at training sessions of religious education personnel at the university.) Petersen’s now notorious talk at that event repeated a number of racist theological ideas, including some unique to the faith; warned LDS religious educators against “the philosophies of men” being peddled by civil rights advocates; and otherwise

16. Jane Dailey, “Sex, Segregation, and the Sacred after *Brown*,” *Journal of American History* 91, no. 1 (June 2004): 22.

17. *Ibid.*

defended the Church's racial restrictions. It seems unlikely that Berrett would have been unaware of Petersen's intended topic or his views on that topic. Moreover, Berrett conducted a discussion among Church authorities and religious educators following the address. During that meeting, he, along with President Wilkinson, apostle Joseph Fielding Smith, and BYU religion faculty members Sidney B. Sperry and Archibald Bennett, was among those in attendance who voiced dismay at the outcome of the *Brown* ruling, articulated theological ideas grounded in white supremacy, and worried about how to teach the rising generation of LDS youth to respect their racial heritage and the Church's position on racial exclusion given the new law of the land and the overall more racially-inclusive direction of the country. That so many in attendance, and in positions of authority within the Church and its education system, unambiguously supported Petersen's remarks suggests the salience of segregationist thought in mid-century Mormonism.¹⁸

Berrett was also largely responsible for BYU's disingenuous approach to Black student admissions in the 1960s. Indeed, he seems to have played a key advisory role for President Wilkinson on this issue (and everything having to do with race), warning Wilkinson that there would "always be some problem with Negroes on our campus" but arguing that barring Black applicants "would be far more detrimental to us and the Church than the danger of a chance intermarriage which now exists." Instead of outright exclusion, he recommended a number of steps that BYU and other Church schools could take to effectively limit Black attendance and save "our fine white girls." Those steps included:

Do no proselytizing of Negro athletes.

Discourage undue publicity of the Negro who is on campus.

18. Mark E. Petersen, "Race Problems As They Affect the Church" (address given at the Convention of Teachers of Religion on the College Level, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, Aug. 27, 1954, available at <https://archive.org/details/RaceProblemsAsTheyAffectTheChurchMarkEPetersen/page/n1>). A transcript of the Oct. 7, 1954 discussion can be found in box 4, folder 7, Berrett Papers.

Watch moral standards carefully.

Quietly counsel students against dating a known Negro. (Call in any boy or girl seen with a Negro.)

Send a prepared letter in answer to inquiries of Negroes regarding admittance to BYU to other church schools.¹⁹

Berrett's sample letter for Black students interested in attending BYU, which the university appears to have adopted, stressed that BYU "is open to all who meet our academic and moral standards" but, "in fairness," also warned of the "social difficulties and disappointments [Blacks] might encounter on entering an institution where all of the students are of the white race, save a mere dozen or so. . . . They are treated courteously and as equals in the classroom—but invariably are lost socially. . . . This situation, right or wrong as it may be considered in your thinking or mine, does exist, and could be a constant source of irritation and hurt." The letter also explained that "the community in which our University is located contains no families of your race," and that "despite our best efforts . . . students of your race . . . rarely return to us after one year."²⁰

Here Berrett, like many other white segregationists of his generation, cast racism as an interpersonal problem—a problem with and between individuals, about hearts and minds, that laws or university policies or Church practices could not change—rather than as a structural, institutional problem, for which the university (and its sponsor) was directly responsible and could alleviate through a different set of teachings, policies, and practices. Scholars like Charles Payne have called for attention to the "mystification" of the nature of racial oppression. By

19. See, "How Can the Door of the University Be Left Open and Still Attract Few Negroes?," box 3, folder 2, Berrett Papers; "Church Schools and Students of Color" (1961); and "Memo, RE: The Negro Problem," Dec. 8, 1960, box 3, folder 3, Berrett Papers.

20. Ibid.

making the racial situation at BYU about “how white and Black people feel about each other,” and about the sensitivity of Black students, rather than connecting it to a theology and set of practices that systematically privileged whites, Berrett was adopting a distinctly Southern paradigm for thinking about race. It was a paradigm rooted in racism that tried to hide its racism even as it aimed to perpetuate structures of inequality.²¹

This is a little of what BYU and one of its chief administrators were doing between the time the school’s namesake, Brigham Young, instituted the ban and June 7, 1978. Moreover, although Berrett retired in the early 1970s, he continued to speak to CES groups and to write Church-published and distributed titles that spread his white supremacist interpretations of the restrictions long after 1978. At a 1980 devotional at the University of Utah’s LDS Institute of Religion, for instance, Berrett expressed his “shock when in June 1977 [*sic*] the announcement came that every worthy male member of the Church could hold the Priesthood of God.” His description suggests he found the inclusion of Black members into full fellowship more difficult than he had found their marginalization. It is significant that he never used any positive modifiers to talk about the 1978 revelation, that he reaffirmed that the racial ban originated with Joseph Smith, and that he used it as an example of how “that which is wrong at one time, under one set of circumstances, may in another set of circumstances be right.” Official Declaration 2 did not alter Berrett’s belief in the infallibility of Church leaders or the supremacy of the white race. In his view, the 1978 revelation left ample space for racist beliefs about pre-earthly grades of righteousness, priority races and nations, and divinely sanctioned race-based inequalities.²²

21. See Charles M. Payne, “‘The Whole United States Is Southern!’: *Brown v. Board* and the Mystification of Race,” *Journal of American History* 91, no. 1 (June 2004): 83–91.

22. See William E. Berrett, “Change,” devotional address given at University of Utah Institute, Salt Lake City, Utah, 1980, typescript in Berrett Papers. Bruce R. McConkie’s oft-quoted 1978 “All Are Alike unto God” speech likewise leaves

Indeed, in his 421-page *The Latter-day Saints: A Contemporary History of the Church of Jesus Christ* published in 1985, Berrett spends only two pages on the 1978 revelation, most of that explaining how a loving and just God has, at times, withheld power and light from men in order to save them from condemnation, and in another section likewise maintains that “out of love for his children” God has sometimes withheld his power (i.e., priesthood) “because they were not prepared to receive it.”²³ The latest edition of Berrett’s *The Restored Church*, published in 2017, includes similar ideas. In it he posits that “pre-earth man” exercises “his own will or free agency” and is therefore “subject to laws of progression” and can only advance “in varying degrees of capacity and intelligence.” All of these entries are thinly veiled code for racist concepts about lineage, pre-earth valiance, and the supposedly God-sanctioned inequality of humankind and past racist LDS practices. In addition, the 2017 edition of Berrett’s book (Berrett himself died in 1993) still refers readers who want to know more about the topic of race and the priesthood to sections about the “curse of Cain” and other blatantly white supremacist teachings in Joseph Fielding Smith’s *The Way to Perfection*, which the Church-owned publisher Deseret Book distributed until May 2018, when an independent scholar successfully lobbied for its removal.²⁴

ample room for theological beliefs grounded in white supremacy, including the Church’s unique teachings about racial difference. See Bruce R. McConkie, “All Are Alike unto God,” devotional address given at Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, Aug. 18, 1978, <https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/bruce-r-mcconkie/alike-unto-god/>.

23. William E. Berrett, *The Latter-day Saints: A Contemporary History of the Church of Jesus Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1986), 351–53, 382–85.

24. See William E. Berrett, *The Restored Church* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2017), chap. 44, section 144 and the “Supplementary Readings” for chap. 45 (e-book edition). Joseph Fielding Smith’s *The Way to Perfection* is referenced in nine different chapters of *The Restored Church* and in its bibliography. Stirling Adams correspondence with Deseret Book, May 2018, shared with the author.

Perhaps just as significantly, and in the absence of any specific repudiations from Church headquarters, the generations of religious educators and students Berrett trained, and the religious education department he played a key role in developing, continued to pass along the racist teachings he helped to legitimize. One former Black student recently explained: “I don’t remember exactly when and how I first heard about the ban but I assumed it was in the Church’s past and it was over with, so I didn’t think much of it. Attending a Church school and being in Utah changed that. I realized its effects still lingered in its organization, books, materials, and members.”²⁵ Many other students, Black and white, have shared similar sentiments with me and other BYU faculty.

As Matthew Harris has argued, despite Jeffrey R. Holland’s and others’ fairly recent dismissal of these ideas as mere “folklore,” the racist theories that BYU religion professor Randy Bott reported in 2012 to the *Washington Post*, the ones that Berrett believed, validated, and promulgated, and that my students have been asking me about over the last thirteen years, came—and still come—from authoritative, official sources. They come from Church leaders and Church publications, and from the Church Educational System.²⁶ That “people who espouse white supremacy feel comfortable sitting in LDS pews on Sundays and using [LDS] scriptures to support racism” can be directly attributed to the ways that the institutional Church has supported and, even in the twenty-first century, continues to give space to white supremacist ideas.²⁷

25. Daylin Farias, email correspondence with author, May 21, 2018.

26. See Matthew L. Harris, “Mormonism’s Problematic Racial Past and the Evolution of the Divine-Curse Doctrine,” *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 33, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2013): 90–114; Jason Horowitz, “The Genesis of a Church’s Stand on Race,” *Washington Post*, Feb. 28, 2012, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/the-genesis-of-a-churchs-stand-on-race/2012/02/22/gIQAQZXyFR_story.html.

27. “Commentary: Putting Our Shoulders to the Wheel to End Racism and White Supremacy in Mormonism,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, Aug. 17, 2017, <https://www.sltrib.com/opinion/commentary/2017/08/17/commentary-putting-our-shoulders->

In his Church blog post and *Ensign* essay, Darius Gray not only talks about the importance of acknowledging racism and recognizing it in ourselves, he also advises that we “take a new approach” to the topic. As a historian, I can identify old approaches, patterns the Church and its leaders and members have generally followed as they address issues of race. Pointing out such patterns can help the Church stop acting as “an agent of the old society.” It can help point the way to something new that can move the Latter-day Saint community toward the type of healing that Gray imagines, and for which many of my students yearn.²⁸

On this, Berrett again is a useful example. He, like many others in Church leadership throughout the twentieth century, tended to historicize the issue of race, distancing the contemporary Church from any direct engagement with it and effectively placing the racial restrictions beyond current leaders’ control. Berrett did this by insisting that the Church’s temple/priesthood policy originated with God and Mormonism’s founding prophet and by locating the reasons for it as far back as possible in LDS theology, that is, in pre-earth life—a time for which there is little (or no) record, and certainly no memory. Attributing the race restrictions to Black people’s own actions, completely outside the realm of earthly existence, was one way the LDS Church further “mystified” the nature of race and racial oppression.

More recently, the Church’s official “Race and the Priesthood” essay claims, in the present tense, that “in theology and practice” the Church “embraces the universal human family,” that its “structure and organization” and lay ministry “encourage racial integration.” The document puts racists ideas and practices associated with the faith squarely in the

to-the-wheel-to-end-racism-and-white-supremacy-in-mormonismbr/, last updated Aug. 28, 2017. See also Zandra Vranes, “Op-ed: Speaking to the Pain of a Black Mormon Woman,” *Deseret News*, Aug. 17, 2017, <https://www.deseretnews.com/article/865686989/Op-ed-Speaking-to-the-pain-of-a-black-Mormon-woman.html>.

28. Gray, “Healing the Wounds of Racism”; Cone, *Black Theology*, 71.

past, dismissing them as irrelevant to the modern Church. Moreover, it admits Brigham Young's role in creating past racial restrictions, and that these were clearly inspired by human prejudice, but effectively skips over nearly a century of official racist theology and practice, framing the mid-twentieth century in particular as chiefly a period of softening racial lines that steadily led to the 1978 revelation rather than as a period in which many Church leaders and educators, very much like white Southern politicians of the era, drew a line in the sand and staged a massive resistance in defense of strict racial boundaries. The Church's progressive narrative contradicts the theologizing and actions of LDS leaders like Berrett. That the 1950s and 1960s saw the escalation and normalizing of white supremacist defenses of its restrictions coming from the center of the Church Educational System surely played no small role in keeping those restrictions in place for more than two decades after the *Brown* ruling and more than a decade after the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Voting Rights Act of 1965. The work of Berrett and other Church leaders in reinforcing racist beliefs (along with the notion of prophetic infallibility) at mid-century and beyond also helps explain the persistence, into the present, of white supremacist explanations for the temple/priesthood ban.²⁹

In his much-heralded 2006 general conference talk, President Gordon B. Hinckley insisted that "we all rejoiced in the 1978 revelation." "Racial strife," in his estimation, was supposed to be a relic of the past, its continued presence worthy of condemnation but not of substantial, sustained institutional attention. In that same year apostle Jeffrey R. Holland talked to the media about the Church's "racial folklore," relegating those teachings to the margins of the Latter-day Saint past and discounting their actual and unremitting status in LDS thought. The Church's 2012 responses to BYU religion professor Randy Bott's *Washington Post*

29. "Race and the Priesthood," *Gospel Topics Essays*, available at <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics-essays/race-and-the-priesthood?lang=eng>.

comments likewise emphasized a sharp divide between historical teachings and practices and the modern-day Church that was in some ways more theoretical—more aspirational—than real, and which certainly belied the continued prominence of Mormonism’s racial mythology.³⁰

Another old approach has been to deny any direct relationship between LDS teachings and practice and racism. Berrett, like other Church officials during his lifetime, repeatedly argued that, “Our treatment of the Negro has been the best of any segment of the American people,” highlighting Joseph Smith’s pre-Civil War statements against slavery, Black people’s unhampered access to the franchise in Utah, the absence of officially segregated LDS congregations, and the history of integration in Utah public schools (including BYU’s overtly inclusive admission policy) as evidence of Latter-day Saint racial liberalism. He attributed the practice of missionaries “not going deliberately among the Negro” to practical considerations born of local conditions rather than “prejudice on the part of Church leaders.” The low number of Black students at BYU was not the result of institutional racism, including backhanded deterrents, but a matter of the personal preference of individuals. Sounding like so many other white supremacists of his generation, Berrett personally maintained that “I always had close friendships with Negro families, and my parents went to school with Negro children.” He defended the institutional Church he represented in similar terms. “We accept [the Negro] as a brother, perhaps as no other people in the world accept him,” he insisted. “There is no people more anxious that the Negro shall have their full civil rights.” Mormons could not be blamed; after all, “the prejudice didn’t start with us. White people

30. Gordon B. Hinckley, “The Need for Greater Kindness,” Apr. 2006, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2006/04/the-need-for-greater-kindness?lang=eng>; Holland interview transcribed at “Interview: Jeffrey R. Holland,” *The Mormons*, PBS, <https://www.pbs.org/mormons/interviews/holland.html>; “Church Statement Regarding *Washington Post* Article on Race and the Church,” *Newsroom*, Feb. 29, 2012, available at <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/racial-remarks-in-washington-post-article>.

everywhere are prejudiced. . . . [T]his is an international prejudice. . . . All races are prejudiced against the Negro.” “Integration hasn’t been effective,” he further argued. “But it isn’t the fault of the Mormons. It is not peculiar to us, and we are not as bad as most.” Averring a strict distinction between civil rights and religious practice, he, like many other Church officials, also vociferously asserted: “Mormons defend civil rights” and “there is no evidence that the priesthood doctrine interferes with the civil rights of any person.”³¹

More recent Church statements and resources follow similar patterns. They emphasize Joseph Smith’s abolitionist stance; the fundamental LDS doctrine that “all are alike unto God” (even if LDS practices might not have always matched that principle); that past Church leaders’ prejudices reflected the racism of the period in which they lived; that the LDS Church does not have, and has never officially countenanced, race-segregated congregations; and that people of color sometimes serve as leaders over white members. Official Church sources and leaders disconnect the teachings of the past from present theological beliefs. They also stress both historical and contemporary distinctions between the Church’s support for civil rights and its insistence on religious freedom, as well as between doctrines identified in LDS scripture and policies practiced, for a time, by the Church. Resource materials linked on the “Race and Priesthood” topic page of the Church’s website include talks that do not address race directly but instead reference more general ideas about “inclusion” and “the global Church.”³²

A third old approach has been to insist that Black people in the Church are content with the status quo. Berrett, for example, liked to quote Abner Howey, “a prominent Negro leader who says the Negro is not ready for the priesthood.” He also kept copies of, and sometimes

31. William E. Berrett, “The Negro Situation,” address given at Coordinators Convention, Mar. 6, 1969, BYU, Provo, typescript in box 3, folder 4, Berrett Papers.

32. “Race and the Priesthood.”

referenced, Corey C. Bowles's autobiographical booklet *Experiences of a Negro Convert*. This publication contrasted Bowles's supposed expectations that upon joining a church with race-based priesthood restrictions he could "relax" (his "slaving days were over") with the multiple ways he was called on to serve in the Church after baptism. In addition to minimizing the impact of the restrictions, Berrett repeatedly insisted that "the Negro convert to the Church has no difficulty in separating the will of God from the prejudices of men. . . . [They] have been happy in their faith." "Black members of the Church do not object [to the priesthood ban]. The objection is raised by Blacks who are not members of the Church," who do not even know what priesthood is.³³

The same pattern has dominated official post-1978 discussions of the topic. For the thirtieth anniversary of Official Declaration 2 in 2008, for instance, the Church solicited and shared comments that affirmed the institution's innocence on racial matters from select Black men who had advanced to significant leadership positions.³⁴ Church sources quoted Ahmad Corbitt (then a stake president in New Jersey), who maintained: "Anyone who says the Church is racist isn't speaking from experience and has no idea of the racial harmony we enjoy as a Church family." They also quoted Tony Parker (who served as the first Black stake president in Atlanta) saying: "Anyone who thinks the Church is racist just needs to come and see. They can sit in our church on the sidelines and watch, or talk to members." Without denying the validity of these men's individual experiences or the sincerity of their views, the Church's focus on these kinds of Black member narratives has worked to discount others and to draw attention away from the still overwhelming whiteness of Church leadership. Parker's description of

33. Berrett, "The Negro Situation"; Letter from William E. Berrett to George Allan Taggart, Apr. 24, 1967, Box 4 Folder 1; Corey C. Bowles, *Experiences of a Negro Convert* (Newark, N.J.: April 1970), in box 3, folder 2, Berrett Papers.

34. "Race Relations," *Newsroom*, available at <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/topic/race-relations>.

himself as “a better person now than I was back then [before becoming a member]” and his years of Church membership as “years of personal growth and enrichment” have, like Bowles’s and Howey’s stories, been used as a way to silence critics and other voices, including other Saints of color with different experiences and perspectives, and to excuse the Church from more thoroughly and systematically attending to past and present racism. One former BYU student explains: “Black members are not a monolith. Some need an ‘apology,’ some don’t. . . . The Church needs to actually listen to the concerns of its Black members.” She also worries that her daughter’s sense of self is being harmed by all the white faces she sees in Church materials.³⁵

When addressing the history of its racial restrictions, another traditional approach employed by the Church and its leaders has been to talk about it in terms of the functioning and expansion of the bureaucratic institution rather than in terms of the people targeted and most affected by the restrictions and the 1978 repeal.³⁶ For Berrett, the Church’s “race problem” was about how to protect and advance the Church, including how to shield its overwhelmingly white membership from racial stain and discomfort and how to promote their spiritual progress and redemption. In an Advanced Theology class address, for instance, Berrett cautioned against getting “carried away by some of the enthusiasm of some sociologists of our time” and pushing to take the gospel to all peoples. We “have to be practical,” he explained. “When missionaries go to the Southern states they find tremendous prejudice

35. Tony Parker and Ahmad Corbitt, quoted in “Race Relations”; Daylin Farias, email correspondence with author, May 21, 2018. See also Darron T. Smith’s important analysis of Black member identity and internalized oppression in “Negotiating Black Self-Hate Within the LDS Church,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 51, no. 3 (Fall 2018): 29–44.

36. Gina Colvin, ed., with Elise Boxer, Laurie Maffly-Kipp, Melissa Inouye, and Janan Graham-Russell, “Roundtable Discussion: Challenging Mormon Race Scholarship,” *Journal of Mormon History* 41, no. 3 (July 2015): 277–78.

against the Negroes, and it becomes pretty much the choice of whether to spend the time with the Negroes or with the whites.”³⁷ Memos and other documents repeatedly show that Berrett’s concerns centered on “the adverse publicity” that racial issues brought the Church rather than on the exclusion of Blacks from Church proselytizing efforts, from BYU, or from the priesthood.³⁸ Moreover, after June 1978, he repeatedly framed the lifting of restrictions in terms of its relationship to the global expansion of Mormonism. Rescinding the ban mattered not because it opened opportunities for salvation to Black people or corrected a grave injustice, but because it facilitated Church growth around the world.³⁹

Modern leaders have likewise overwhelmingly centered their narratives of the 1978 revelation, the history leading up to it, and its aftermath on the expansion of the institutional Church, especially in Brazil, the Caribbean, and African nations. The 1978 declaration allowed the Church to expand its membership, to “accomplish the commission to teach all nations,” and erased bureaucratic impediments and headaches.⁴⁰ Church narratives that celebrate the 1978 revelation have also fixated on the emotional and spiritual relief it brought the white LDS Church hierarchy. For instance, Elder Dallin H. Oaks, in a 2007 account currently highlighted on the Church website, shared that his heart “ached *for my church*,” and that “nobody was more relieved or more pleased

37. Berrett, “Church History and Philosophy.”

38. Berrett, “Memo, RE: The Negro Problem.”

39. Berrett, *The Latter-day Saints*.

40. See, for instance, Howard W. Hunter, “All Are Alike unto God,” address delivered at a fourteen-stake fireside, Marriott Center, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, Feb. 4, 1979, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1979/06/all-are-alike-unto-god?lang=eng>; Gordon B. Hinckley, “Priesthood Restoration,” *Ensign*, Oct. 1988, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1988/10/priesthood-restoration?lang=eng>. Note: The website currently refers to this as “an edited version of a talk given 15 May 1988 at the Churchwide fireside commemorating the 159th anniversary of the restoration of the priesthood.”

when the word came.”⁴¹ The emphasis was on Oaks’s feelings and on the predicament of the institutional church. His comments at the June 2018 “Be One” event included a similar story about his personal struggle with the restrictions and the strain they created for the Church in the larger society. While one can appreciate the deeply-felt sentiments Oaks expresses in the video and allow that acknowledgements of shared distress can help in healing processes, such accounts still signify a tendency to focus on the perspectives of the Church as an organization and its white male leaders. They do not convey a willingness to fully grapple with the pain and suffering of those directly hurt by past policies and their legacies. Moreover, while other elements of the “Be One” event, and the inclusion of a greater variety of Black voices in the planning and media coverage of Official Declaration 2’s fortieth anniversary, marked an important step forward in decentering Church narratives about race and history, Oaks’s assertion that “institutionally the Church reacted swiftly to the revelation” even if “the hearts and practices of individual members did not come suddenly and universally” and his plea for Church members to look forward as a unified body suggest an enduring narrow, institutionally oriented frame of reference. Again, while one can agree that the 1978 revelation brought with it significant changes, alongside the leaders’ hopes for a unified, inclusive Church organization, such comments denote a lack of understanding of (or willingness to be accountable for) the Church’s role in the reluctance of some of its members to fully abandon “attitudes and practices of prejudice.” The statements of contemporary Church leaders continue to “mystify” the problem of race—making it solely about how individuals think and feel outside of their religious background rather than directly

41. “Elder Dallin H. Oaks’ Reaction to Priesthood Revelation,” *Newsroom*, July 20, 2007, available at <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/additional-resource/elder-dallin-h-oaks-reaction-to-priesthood-revelation>, emphasis mine.

related to more than a century of “systemic racial domination” within the LDS Church.⁴²

Another example along this same theme, and one that suggests BYU Religious Education continues to hold some responsibility for the obstinacy of racist justifications for the temple/priesthood ban, as well as the need for the university and the Church to deliberately take action to fully “emancipate the gospel from ‘whiteness,’” is that during winter semester 2018 a professor asked at least one section of Foundations of the Restoration (a required religion class) to defend Brigham Young’s 1852 decision to establish the restrictions. His study guide invited students to: “Explain why you think the Prophet felt this was a necessary course of action during this time period.” At least one student was subsequently marked down for attributing the restrictions to racism and told by the class teaching assistant to make allowances for Brigham Young because he had to make choices for the good of the Church during a time of persecution for the Saints. “Life in nineteenth-century America demanded institutional racism and the Church needed to be in the government’s good graces,” the TA wrote. A question on the final exam later asked: “What was the primary motivating factor behind the priesthood ban?” The correct answer? “Utah statehood.”⁴³

Another “old approach” has been to insist that members ignore or not draw attention to racial issues in the Church and its history. In the 1960s, Berrett cautioned seminary and institute teachers: “You have difficult problems in this area, but I think sometimes you make them greater than they are.” He counseled, “Let’s not raise this problem unnecessarily,” and summarily dismissed suggestions to create lesson

42. “President Oaks Remarks at Worldwide Priesthood Celebration,” *Newsroom*, June 1, 2018, <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/president-oaks-remarks-worldwide-priesthood-celebration>; Payne, “*Brown v. Board* and the Mystification of Race,” 85.

43. Cone, *Black Theology*, 32; Twitter correspondence (Apr. 16, 2018) documenting this incident in possession of the author.

plans “on the Negro question” for seminary and institute teachers in the late 1960s because to do so—to talk about the issue—might cause more harm than good.⁴⁴

Oaks’s directives at the “Be One” event to concentrate “on the opportunities of the future rather than the disappointments of the past” and to not “concern ourselves . . . with past explanations by those who were operating with limited understanding” are perhaps the best recent example of this approach. Church curriculum materials of the recent past have also encouraged members to brush off the topic. The *Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball* manual, for instance, includes a chapter on the doctrinal principle of revelation that highlights the 1978 announcement as the “most well-known of all” of President Kimball’s revelations. The lesson, however, does not address the actual content of that revelation and instead focuses on questions such as: “what aspects of [Kimball’s] experience are common to all our efforts to receive revelation?”⁴⁵

A number of students, white and Black, presently report that many of their BYU religion professors do not talk about race or the history of race in the Church even when the subject is clearly relevant to the course, or they talk about it only superficially. These students relate some change over the span of the last few years, but not as much as they had expected to see. Students tell me that they are often both surprised and disappointed by the unwillingness of some religious education faculty to engage in serious discussions about race and the Church’s racial history. One former Black student recently related: “In religion classes at BYU the topic [is] briefly explored, usually without substance or acknowledgement of the

44. See Berrett, “Church History and Philosophy,” and letters between William E. Berrett and Henry Draper (1963) in box 12, folder 12, Berrett Papers.

45. “Revelation: ‘A Continuous Melody and a Thunderous Appeal,’” chap. 22 in *Teachings of the Presidents of the Church: Spencer W. Kimball* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2006), available at <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/teachings-spencer-w-kimball/chapter-22?lang=eng>.

harm it has caused black people.”⁴⁶ Another reported that they still hear things like: “Let’s not pretend that God hasn’t made racial restrictions for the priesthood and gospel before. He didn’t want the gospel being taught to the Gentiles at one point. I don’t know why God makes these restrictions, but he let both go on for a long time.”⁴⁷ One spoke directly about Church leaders’ responsibility, saying, “I just want them to own the history and make sure everyone is aware the best they can in order to dispel the inaccuracies, racism, and myths of the past.”⁴⁸ And another recounted: “I learned about the racial restrictions the Church made over a stretch of time because no one would give me a straight answer until college. . . . People would just say that we don’t know why it happened but it did and things are better now. That was obviously unsatisfactory.”⁴⁹ One of these former students explained the current problem saying:

I wish there were more talks against racism in Church lesson manuals [and] devotionals (both BYU and Church-wide) and that these topics were addressed in greater length and depth than the few sentences they are given now. Conversing about an issue normalizes it as an issue, and not just something related to someone’s personal opinions. The statement issued after the Charlottesville protest is a clear example that the Church has not made it clear enough in the past that it doesn’t support white supremacist ideals or racism. Why should that have to be clarified by the Church?! Because the leadership never addresses it!⁵⁰

These Black Church members, whose sentiments have been repeated by many others I’ve encountered at BYU, suggest that resisting or limiting opportunities for conversations about the topic of race in Church

46. Julian Harper, “Racism at BYU,” May 14, 2018, typescript in possession of the author.

47. Kirstie Stanger Weyland, “Racism at BYU,” April 2018, typescript in possession of the author.

48. Justin Tyree, email correspondence with author, May 15, 2018.

49. Harper, “Racism at BYU.”

50. Stanger Weyland, “Racism at BYU.”

history has resulted in its further mystification. Moreover, when placed beyond the pale of human explication, Church members, teachers, and leaders continue to ascribe the origins of the priesthood/temple ban to God and to believe the racist ideas that undergirded the ban.

Even as these old approaches—and old, white supremacist ideas—have persisted, Black Latter-day Saints have increasingly encouraged (to channel Ta-Nehisi Coates) the creation of a “new story, a new history told through the lens of [Black Mormon] struggle.”⁵¹ And indeed, the last point of Gray’s essay on healing the wounds of racism in the Church is to listen. While I have studied race in American history for more than two decades, and dedicated some of that time to exploring the topic in my own faith tradition, listening to Black students at BYU has fundamentally changed the way I think about race and the history and legacies of America’s and the Church’s racial past. It has also strengthened my resolve to support them as they create a “new story,” told through the lens of their struggles, their hope, and their faith. I am privileged to have included as part of this essay a small sampling of comments from several current and recently graduated Black BYU students and invite you to hear more of what they have to say at the *Dialogue* website. Their voices suggest, among other things, the importance of continued, direct engagement with this history and of listening to those most affected by it and most in need of a new story. For, as one student relates, “Mormon myths are still prevalent, making it difficult for black members of the Church to form positive self-fact for themselves in the gospel context.”⁵²

51. Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me* (New York: Random House, 2015), 44.

52. Melodie Jackson, “African American History Since Emancipation” final exam, Apr. 2019, typescript in possession of the author. Used with permission.



Casey Jex Smith
Nauvoo
colored pencil, acrylic, and collage on paper, 2006
11" x 8.5"

LISTENING FOR A CHANGE

Déborah Aléxis

“Rèv mwen pou demen”

Douvanjou n se rèv demen
ki dwe plòtonnen nan konbit tèt ansanm
Mizè ayè n va sèvi fèy papyè listwa
pou korije devwa demen
Nawè n va sèvi plim ak lank
pou kouche sou papyè
zègrè n nan manje ayè
pou jenerasyon k tou piti
ak sa k gen pou wè premye solèy lavi
apre bonnèt ventyèm syèk chavire
N a kontinye met angrè ak fimye
nan pepinyè Ginen yo
pou kontinye bay bon rekòt
N a sekle raje zigzani, lògèy ak egoyis
nan jaden nou
pou n simen plan lanmou
dekwa pou rebwaze lakay ak bèl flè peyi.

This week, my introduction to Africana studies class explored what it means to speak, and we concluded that to speak is to be understood. When I opened with this poem in Haitian Creole, I am sure many of you wondered, “What’s going on?” I’m sure that some of you leaned in, squinted, strained your neck hoping to catch the words falling from my lips. Try as you might, if you don’t speak Haitian Creole, you didn’t understand me. So, did I really speak if you did not understand me? Or, as it happens frequently in this distracted world, did I really speak if you didn’t listen to me? At this conference, commemorating forty years

since the release of Official Declaration 2, you have listened to many presentations and many stories. As we near the end of this conference, I ask: did you lean in, squint, strain your neck in hopes of catching the words that fell from our lips? We used a common language to share research, experiences, and deeply held thoughts about the Church's racial restrictions, their meanings and legacies. I ask: did you listen? Did you understand? And if not, did we really speak?

The dialectical process necessary in speaking, understanding, and healing was apparent when the nation confronted Colin Kaepernick's choice to sit during the national anthem as a protest against police brutality. When US Army veteran Nate Boyer saw Kaepernick's actions, he initially responded with anger. Upon further reflection, however, and as Boyer began to acknowledge their very different lived experiences, he chose to lean in, to strain his neck, to listen—to try to understand what Kaepernick wanted and needed to say through his actions. Boyer wrote a letter—he spoke—to Kaepernick and Kaepernick also listened; he reached back. It was this Army veteran who suggested that Kaepernick take a knee rather than sit, as a sign of respect. Although our current political climate has encouraged us to draw deeper into our camps and engage in trench warfare, I know we can do better. Like Boyer and Kaepernick, we ought to hear with the intent to listen. I love the words of a dear and brilliant friend of mine who said, "One of the most important words in English and in scripture is 'Remember.' I imagine that the world is chaotic and wicked because we forget too soon. We forget patience. We forget love. We forget compassion. We forget that no man is an island—that we are all connected through life." We were never meant to do this alone. That is why we come down to families, why we seek community.

How will you change after today? Will you remember? Will you forget? I ask this because it's disheartening to attend events like this, rife with hope for a better future, only to be thrown back into an ignorant and unchanging environment. Will you correct false justifications for the

priesthood ban in the classroom? In conversations with your friends? At the dinner table with family members, long after this conference ends? I know some of you may be thinking, “Do I really need to correct Aunt Gertrude?” And the answer is a resounding yes! Because if you don’t, when I’m at the temple, Aunt Gertrude will lean over and tell me, “Just think! When you get to heaven, you’ll be white just like me!”

Passive approaches will not dismantle the lingering problems of racism in the Church either. One of the most common passive approaches I see members espouse is the idea of “colorblindness.” (Of course, somehow people seem to forget that they are colorblind when discussing my admission to BYU, but that conversation is for another day.) An American political sociologist, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, explains that “colorblindness” is often used to dismiss the plight of people of color. High-sounding ideals get used to erase real issues. And when you don’t have the words to communicate problems, or they get replaced with abstract values, they go unresolved. In sociology courses, we learn that race is a social construct, developed to justify the abhorrent subordination of groups of people. Yet if men define a situation as real, if society creates and codifies and institutionalizes particular understandings of skin color and blood lineage, there are real consequences. H. Richard Milner, director of the Center for Urban Education at the University of Pittsburgh, said it best: “I’m someone’s father. I’m someone’s husband. I’m someone’s friend. I’m someone’s son, but I’m also a black man. And my being black shapes my experiences, and so if you are not attuned to the part of my being that is race, then it’s very difficult for you to understand and respond to my humanity.” People who attempt to absolve themselves from the very real problems created by our all-too-real constructions of race are complicit with the structures of racism of our past that continue to shape our present. To those who say, “I don’t see color,” I counter: “How can you embrace someone fully if you disregard an integral part of their identity and lived experience, like their skin color?” Latter-day Saint doctrine teaches us that we are spiritual beings.

But we very much dwell in the physical space of our physical bodies and this temporal world. We cannot simply disregard skin color; it affects how we interact with the world and how the world interacts with us. My dear friend said: "I believe that Christ tells us to remember quite often in the scriptures because in that remembrance we push ourselves beyond this fallen world and into a life once lived with God and deity, where we [knew] each other's worth and divinity." Our task is to push ourselves to remember our shared worth and divinity without denying the ways this fallen world shapes our individual earthly journeys.

I am not a follower of Christ first, or black first, or woman first; these are all things that I am simultaneously. I cannot be in alliance with people who do not acknowledge all of me. My multiple identities are constantly informing each other. BYU is not yet my dream school, but I would like it to be. There are some promising changes, including some attempts to increase the admissions of students of color. Yet retention of students of color is just as vital. And I would say that the same goes for the larger Church. I want people of color who attend this school, and who join the Church, to feel empowered, valued, and supported. I do not want people of color to have to carry this load alone. It's disappointing to watch people lose interest or roll their eyes when I mention these issues in class and during Church discussions. It starkly reminds me that I am alone when it comes to this. I am expected to ally myself with BYU and the Church, to demonstrate my unfailing commitment to them while there are few who believe they have any responsibility to mourn with me, to take on the burden of societal and religious racism I disproportionately carry as a woman of color.

I can see the tides changing slowly but surely. We are having forums about race on campus, important discussions in courses, department- and student-group-sponsored panels and talks that address racial issues, and cultural celebrations that highlight the perspectives and experiences of students of color. And I know there is more in the works. It gives me hope that when we graduate, we will leave BYU as better friends, spouses,

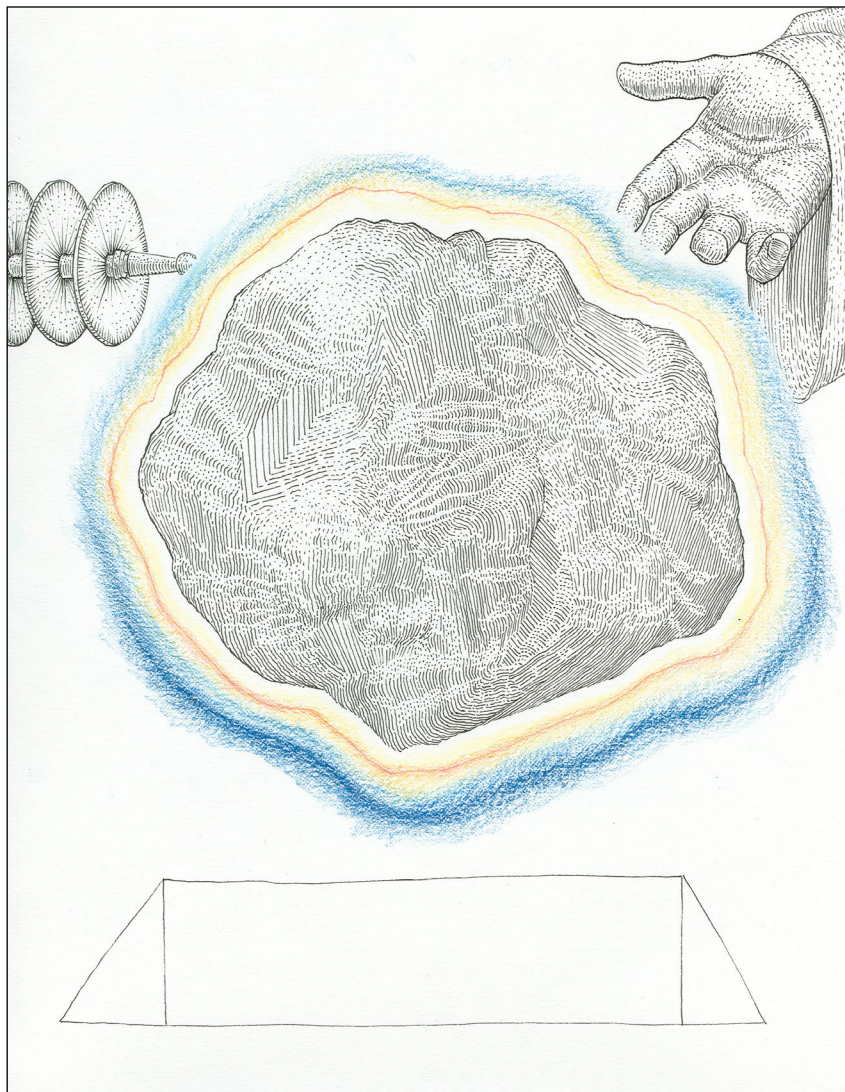
employers and employees, leaders, and disciples of Christ because we took the time to be uncomfortable, to learn, to grow—to speak, to listen. Maybe one day BYU will be my dream school.

I hope you leaned in today, I hope that you gave us the chance to speak, by listening.

In closing, I invite you to hear the English translation of the Haitian Creole poem I read at the beginning.

“Dream for Tomorrow”

Dawn is tomorrow’s dream
imagined in togetherness.
Pages of history will bear yesterday’s misery,
correcting tomorrow’s path.
Ink will like heavy on paper
for the growing generation
for the ones seeking first light.
With the turn of the century,
we continue to nourish the nursery
we continue to yield good crop.
Let us uproot the weeds of pride
and of selfishness from our garden,
so that we may sow love
so that the flowers of this land
make this house a home.



Casey Jex Smith
Levitation
pen and colored pencil on paper, 2009
11" x 8.5"

IMAGERY AND IDENTITY

Daylin Amesimeku

“Mami, you’re light brown. I’m dark brown. And Dada is dark brown,” my two-year-old daughter blurted out unexpectedly one night before her bedtime. “Yes mama, you’re right,” I responded as my mind raced. I could not believe that my toddler could already distinguish between skin colors. Where did she learn this? Did someone tell her this at her day care?

I understood that it was likely she was just associating colors she learned in school and at home with the different skin colors of her classmates. Yet it was alarming that I hadn’t had the opportunity to introduce it to her myself. I had always imagined a grand conversation where I appropriately introduced my daughter to race, explained to her how important it was, and how she could protect her integrity and self-esteem, yet here we were. My daughter could see different skin colors, and I was the worried parent feeling completely unprepared. I started to wonder about the other connections she had made in terms of skin color. Obviously, she knew Mami was light brown, Dada was dark brown, and in a moment of humor within an otherwise serious affair, Grandma was dark-dark brown. When we watched TV, did she make any connections with the colors she saw? How about at restaurants, school, doctor visits, and more importantly to me now, church?

How could I create the appropriate framework for my daughter to see race?

I’m an immigrant. My family moved to the United States when I was very young and moved here for the same reasons many immigrants do: the chance at a better life. I am perpetually grateful for the sacrifices they made. They had to leave friends and familiar comforts to create a

new path in a sometimes-hostile environment. Yet they persevered, and as a result, my life has been forever changed for the better.

I started to understand race when I got older. Although this country afforded us a better life, it also introduced us to the disease of racism, and the United States' long tortuous history with it. I daresay this nation's legacy of race is the most important narrative in this country. Unfortunately, religious institutions including the LDS church were not exempt from this influence. And in my opinion the white supremacist view of race has unfortunately been present in the Church, even down to the imagery used. I had already made my peace with this, but now found myself thrown into turmoil on the realization that at such a tender age my daughter was differentiating between skin colors and internalizing it all.

A fundamental belief we members of the church share is that of deity as our father. I think as children we look for bonds and security from our parents and gain love for ourselves through those connections. If my belief is that I am a child of deity, then my connection to deity will be tied to love for myself. This realization gave me some consternation because the current image of deity was a foreigner to my little girl. And as a result, she could see herself being foreign to deity as well. If she knew she was brown, then she could obviously tell Jesus and Heavenly Father were not. And more importantly, that Jesus and Heavenly Father belong to the family of the classmates in her nursery class and not her own.

This point became even more poignant I when bought my daughter a puzzle that had a "nonconventional" Jesus—he was as dark-skinned as my husband. I gave it to her and said, "Here's Jesus with children." Her response was, "That's not Jesus, that's Dada." It took a minute to suppress our shock, but then we explained to her that it truly was Jesus. It is important to note that we do not have any images of a "conventional" Jesus in our home. Her imagery of Jesus came strictly from her nursery class at church and visits to Grandma's home. We also noticed how important it is to introduce alternate images to what she sees. We

thought the absence of imagery would help her create her own; we now realized that we had to provide alternative imagery to what she was seeing so she could at least question it. Additionally, her calling the dark-skinned Jesus “Dada” made me realize what a filial relationship with Heavenly Father could feel like. If she could truly see Heavenly Father as her father, then should could see deity in herself, see herself and her family among the concourses of angels, and see a heaven that was made for her and those like her. As a woman and a mother, there is nothing I desire more for my daughter.

I have a testimony of the gospel of Jesus Christ, but I’m also honest enough with myself to reject specific cultural and human aspects of the Church that I do not believe are divine. White supremacy in religions, specifically in Christianity, is not unique to the LDS church. However, I do think the LDS church stands in a unique position to be everything it purports itself to be.

As I focus on what I can change, I am grateful for the small blessing of a child that has been able to communicate clearly at such a young age and taught me at my more mature age how important imagery is, and my responsibilities to her as a parent.



Casey Jex Smith
Treasure Stick
pen, colored pencil, and gouache on paper, 2013
10" x 8"

ROOM FOR ME

A. J. Bouilly

I remember the very first time I saw a painting of a black person in a Latter-day Saint building. It was the painting titled “And Thou Didst Hear Me” by Elspeth Young, located in the Payson Utah temple. The piece features a beautiful woman of color kneeling with her head bowed, deep in prayer. One arm rests atop another, as her hands are folded, but clasp the ends of a white shawl that wraps around her shoulders into her lap, almost lost in the folds of a white dress that gently gathers on the floor. Perhaps the greatest thing about the piece is how Elspeth perfectly evokes the emotion and reverence of genuine invocation. Whenever I see that painting I can’t but help feel the Spirit. I feel frozen in the moment when you’ve borne it all to God and having nothing left to give. My heart beats with memories of the pull before the crescendo in the hymn of my supplication, where desperation for intercession borders on adjuration. It’s peaceful, it’s powerful, and she is me! Well, sort of. I am not a woman, but I still felt like this painting was there for me—“for the culture,” as one might say.

I remember the first time I heard a hymn that moved me. It was a chorus-only rendition of “How Great Is Our God” by an unnamed gospel choir. The spirit I felt in that chapel that day was simple, but strong. A group of earnest worshipers offering testimony through praise as their hearts bore witness to a truth that they knew cemented into my mind the validity of the words “the song of the righteous is a prayer unto me.”

As a lifelong member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, I was taught that building a testimony and coming closer to God is a lifelong process, and that I should seek to follow the example set by Jesus Christ. With his help, we can overcome obstacles and endure trials

to achieve our potential. Why is it, then, that the trials and difficulties that I face seem to come from the very institution that I belong to? Some people's experiences in church can be soured by a particular person or leader. But as a person of color who has lived most of my life between the borders of Utah and Idaho, the obstacles placed in front of me have been rooted more in the systemic and problematic aspects of Mormon culture and Church history than individual disagreements or differences.

For example, my parents divorced sometime after my eighth birthday. I grew up living primarily with my mother and two younger sisters (my grandmother joined us sometime close to my freshman year of high school), and our family was about as stereotypically black as it could be in that regard. My mother held down multiple jobs to make ends meet while Grandma would keep the peace at home. Family outings would consist of going window-shopping to pass the time while orders to the bishops' storehouse were filled. Sometimes, if we were lucky, we'd come home with a new pair of pants or clothes for school from a thrift store nearby. In spite of our meager prospects, I never felt like I went without. In fact, having so little makes you aware of just how much you have.

My father (the white side of the family) was the first to get remarried. We (my sisters and I) started to bounce back and forth between our mother's during the week and our father's on the weekend. It was during these trips to visit my stepmother's family where I was first introduced to a "typical" Mormon household. The chatter of step-aunts, sisters, and grandmothers would float over the soundtrack to *Wicked* that played from the kitchen stereo where they cooked, cleaned, and packed leftovers for the week ahead. Step-uncles, brothers, and grandfathers would debate politics, sports, and religion from their reclining armchairs and couches whose springs had long since sprung. I would listen as the men recalled tales of bravery and fortitude from their pioneer ancestors. How, if the world could only just emulate them, we wouldn't have so many families in lines to pick up welfare checks! I would listen as the women talked about

their children. They would counsel among themselves how best to separate them from the evils of the world, from the things that were different.

As I continued in my Church education through Seminary and Sunday School, I listened and learned of the early (white) Saints who would thrive time and time again in the most hostile of environments purely through hard work and prayer. I memorized Joseph Smith's depiction of his first vision wherein we read of two personages whose brightness and glory defy all description, though I understood that they were white. I read the stories of the Nephites who were gifted a land of promise while their brethren were cursed with marks of blackness. I studied missionary materials showing white young men in black suits as they read the Book of Mormon to ethnic families in dilapidated homes. White young women were the examples of the virtues of modesty, chastity, and innocence in every lesson on the dangers of *steady dating*. I observed and felt the disapproving gaze of many a Church member as I passed and blessed the sacrament in a white shirt and long plaited hair. Friday afternoons were sometimes spent with close friends enjoying the activities of a canceled date. Those moments were bright lights in what would have otherwise been a dark night after hearing, once again, the phrase: "You're a great guy, but my parents . . ."

I continued my church attendance in college where I had the opportunity to stay in the same singles ward for my first two years. The bishop opened our first sacrament meeting of my second year with the amazing news that of the seventy-four young men in our ward last year, seventy-three of them had gone on missions! The bishop went on to close his opening remarks by announcing that the concluding speaker would be me, a veteran of the ward. Of course he failed to mention was that I was a bit too young to serve the year prior, as I was only just turning nineteen. When I cut my hair for the first time in years, a counselor from the bishopric came to me and pointed out how sharp I looked, commenting that he would be happy to help me finish cleaning up and

preparing to serve a mission, when in reality I couldn't afford to pay someone to braid my hair any longer.

Reflecting on these experiences, I find that these formative points of my spiritual relationship with the institution were met with casual racism in some form or fashion. And yet, I cannot say that my life was filled with bigots, racists, or individuals seeking to put me down. My life has been improved and greatly blessed by my membership in the Church and by the individuals therein. The aforementioned experiences were instigated by and involved good, kind people from families who willingly served those in need without question. The study materials distributed by our seminary were not done so as an intended slight, but to help uplift and edify. The scriptures that I read are the word of God, and it was only when interpreted by the cultural views of other (white) individuals that those same words were twisted into justifications for racial prejudice. I have no doubt in my mind that the leaders of our wards and stakes are led by the Spirit in their decisions when they qualify for its companionship, as this is the same promise that is extended to every child of God on the earth. But how many of their actions are informed by their own biases and cultural backgrounds and the quotes they heard from Church leaders decades earlier? Does a stake president look at a young woman from a typical Mormon home and advise her against a mission because he feels it would suit her better to get married? Do accusations of sexual misconduct get brushed aside because the man is an upstanding member of the priesthood? How many families of color are looked poorly upon because they're waiting outside the bishop's office long after church has ended, never given a chance to explain, "I'm renewing my temple recommend"?

Fortunately, on the surface things are improving. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is a living church, and great strides have been made in the name of diversity and inclusion for its members all over the world. I am grateful for the progress that has been made, and I look forward to the day when the memories I hold are whispers of

the past. However, today is not that day. The closer one examines the relationship between the gospel of Jesus Christ as taught by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the Mormon culture that has spawned from it, the more it becomes apparent that my culture and identity as a black man simply do not belong.

There is no room in *Come, Follow Me* for the true stories of faith and courage of the black Saints found throughout the history of the church. To tell their story is to recall the lives of great men and women bound by the chains of policy and racist ideologies held tight by the prophet Brigham Young and his successors. There is no room in *Preach My Gospel* to explain why it took 126 years for true men of God to end church-sanctioned racism. Any justification for this discrimination must address and acknowledge the self-proclaimed racial superiority owned by those who didn't "sit on the fence." But those conversations still haven't happened. There is no room in *Hymns* for black spirituals, nor is there room, apparently, for more than five or six people of color in the Tabernacle Choir at a time. I fully submit that I know very little about the admittance and tenure of a Tabernacle singer, but as amazing as they are, how is it that a genre of music classically known for performances by people of color has so little diversity?

I am not the first to ask these questions or raise these concerns—far from it. But until the Church separates the teachings of the gospel from the culture that permeates its western American front, I fear that multicultural appeasement will continue to result in minimal diversity and that the privilege of white members will still be protected. Because as of right now in congregations in southern states, black boys will still see the posters of white young men suiting up in the armor of God while the gaze of the Savior watches over them in the reflection of a mirror. Little black girls will fill out the pages of their Personal Progress as they compare themselves to the young woman with fair skin dressed in white, climbing the steps of the Salt Lake temple. Biracial children will continue to lack a foundation for their identity: too racially black

to enjoy white privilege, but too culturally “white” to easily connect to their black heritage. “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other” (Matthew 6:24).

This same cultural dissonance felt by biracial children is felt on a spiritual level by Saints of color who struggle to fit their cultural identity into the prescribed outline suggested by the materials distributed through the Church. This divide can tear at an individual. When white is both symbolically and realistically our metaphor for good, the words left unspoken are loud for those who have ears to hear.

In spite of the trials and obstacles I have faced in my life, and continue to face this day, I can still say that I am a member of the restored Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I have a testimony of its truthfulness, and will stand by that testimony forever. My experiences are my own, and I am fortunate to have not endured the trials many other Saints of color have borne. I haven’t been disowned by my family, nor have I been outright persecuted for my race. With that preface, I say that things will change. It may take time, but are we not a patient people? It may be difficult, but hasn’t our strength been tested beyond a doubt? There may not be room in *Come, Follow Me* or *Preach My Gospel*, but I can tell you there is room for a painting; a painting of a woman located just after the entrance to the waiting room inside the Payson Utah temple. To me, she kneels as a reminder that no matter how little room there is for you, our Father in Heaven has room for us. As she prays, I feel the prayers of the Saints who were refused the blessings of the priesthood but persevered. Her head is bowed with the same knowledge that was given to Jane Manning James: the blessings of the gospel are not owned by white men but are given by God, and for me, for now, that is enough to carry on.

TRUE JOY CANNOT BE FOUND IN THE GARDEN

Jenna Rakuita

When Eve partook of the fruit, she envisioned a different kind of world than she knew in Eden—a world where she could learn, progress, and create. Unlike most Christians, Latter-day Saints believe that Eve knew precisely what she was doing. She knew that true joy could not be found in the comfort of the garden, because she could not remain in ignorance and also progress toward godhood. So Eve, with humanity resting in her belly, partook of the fruit and entered into mortality (2 Nephi 2:22–25).

Like Eve, we can only progress and gain knowledge by asking difficult questions and wrestling with decisions. Eve taught humanity a valuable lesson when she saw past her mortal limits and anticipated something greater than what the present had to offer, and took the steps necessary to bring the world she imagined into existence—even though such a decision meant sacrificing the life she knew in the Garden of Eden.

My community involvement is also rooted in my vision of a different kind of world—one that goes beyond our current institutions and our contemporary society. And, similar to Eve, I work to bridge the gap between the realities of human existence and the possibilities of what it can become. In Proverbs 29:18 it states, “Where there is no vision, the people perish” This is the lesson we learned from our first mother, Eve (Genesis 3:20): human beings were not meant to rest in comfortable stagnation. We were designed to continue learning and progressing toward godhood.

Studying sociology gave me the opportunity to expand and stretch toward greater understanding regarding the world around me. I learned

about the racial history of the United States, and I was given language to inform my experiences as a woman of color as I gained knowledge about systems of hierarchies present in my country. During this time, I learned to bask in discomfort and I experienced hope for a better society—and for institutional changes at BYU itself that would offer greater belonging to students of color.

Like other minority groups on campus, allowing myself to hope for structural changes at BYU often felt futile because the small, incremental changes were often interspersed with setbacks, such as microaggressions and hate-filled comments. These setbacks included students repeating racial slurs in the classroom and professors calling on individuals from marginalized groups to speak on behalf of their entire communities. It was only after I knew the weariness associated with being part of a historically disadvantaged group on campus that I began to hope for spaces that would replenish my efforts.

In order to assist in the formation of such spaces, I had to exercise hope; such hope, I learned, must be proceeded by knowledge. That is, the only way to conceptualize the need for a future that is *more* just, we must first understand the unequal distribution of justice that affects us presently. As I leaned into these emotions and the complexity of inequality, I began to realize that it takes courage to hope, it takes hope to envision, and it takes vision to create spaces that bind and heal.

Tinesha Zandamela and I had courage when we hoped for an intentional space where women of color at BYU could provide support to each other, we envisioned as we discussed the details for the Women of Color Club, and we created a community that fostered belonging so that others could have the courage to hope, envision, and create as well.

Each Thursday, we would gather in the Wilkinson Student Center. There we exchanged words, offered empathy, and provided healing. During one particular meeting, a fellow student approached me and stated that the space we each occupied in that room each week offered her an opportunity to recharge so that she could better face the stressors specific

to being a woman of color at BYU. She explained the healing nature of gathering and the necessity of community when fatigued by oppression.

As we gathered, we learned to navigate the intersection of race and gender with a variety of other identities. During one particular meeting we discussed the impacts of attending a university that offered a spiritual and secular learning environment. As individuals shared their personal experiences it became apparent that the narratives surrounding race within the Church affected each of us on campus.

For example, when a student comments that a person of color will be made white in the next life, when a professor states that the priesthood ban was a blessing that allowed black people the opportunity to exercise patience, and when classmates discuss how the genocide of Native Americans was the will of God, the isolation that historically marginalized groups experience extends beyond their human state and encompasses their entire soul.

With these unique experiences that students of color face at BYU, it is vital that steps are taken towards greater inclusion. Although there are a number of professors challenging the current processes at BYU and how they interact with individual's marginalized identities, the university is far from the imagined state discussed on a weekly basis at the Women of Color Club. On an administrative level, the university needs to be willing to evaluate their current efforts in regard to creating an environment where students of color feel comfortable.

The evaluation of such efforts would require BYU's administration to listen and learn from students of color. While this could be achieved through a variety of means, one option would be for the university to conduct a sociological study examining the experiences of racial minorities on campus. Ideally, this would lead to practices that would create a greater sense of belonging for students of color.

Such practices could include offering students opportunities to confront their assumptions and gain informed perspectives through courses designed to challenge preconceived notions and stereotypes,

such as a course on sociology of race and ethnicity. The knowledge gained from these courses would produce inclusion and diversity bred from an attempt to increase campus learning, rather than a desire to meet a specific quota.

Just as new practices should be created, current practices should also be reexamined to facilitate greater inclusion. For example, unlike most universities, BYU offers a reduced cost of attendance for Latter-day Saints rather than offering subsidized tuition for students who are residents of Utah. This leaves room for opportunities to expand the university's reach. Increased efforts should be made not only to recruit students of color, but also to foster an environment that students of color feel comfortable enough to attend, learn, and potentially return to teach at.

These changes would demonstrate how small steps lead progressively toward change. Just as knowledge is attained "line upon line, precept upon precept" (2 Nephi 28:30), efforts toward greater inclusion require gradual improvements that build upon one another.

The continuous and progressive nature of change begins with self-reflection. Like Eve, we must partake of the fruit before inviting others to do the same. President Russel M. Nelson said:

it was our glorious Mother Eve—with her far-reaching vision of our Heavenly [Parents'] plan—who initiated what we call "the Fall." Her wise and courageous choice and Adam's supporting decision moved God's plan of happiness forward. They made it possible for each of us to come to earth, receive a body, and prove that we would choose to stand up for Jesus Christ *now*, just as we did premortally.¹

As we follow Eve's example by asking difficult questions, wrestling with decisions, and ultimately leaving what is comfortable, we will be able to envision a different world—one that leads to growth and progression, rather than comfortable stagnation.

1. Russell M. Nelson, "Sisters' Participation in the Gathering of Israel," Oct. 2018, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2018/10/sisters-participation-in-the-gathering-of-israel?lang=eng>.

PIONEER DAY

Tinesha Capri Zandamela

“Tinesha, we found your relative’s headstone,” reads the email subject line. And then, a few days later: “Tinesha, your 4th great-grandmother was born in Finland.” From details of pioneer companies to the stories of my ancestors who were part of the early church, I have no shortage of information about my white pioneer ancestors.

I remember one particular message from FamilySearch that I was excited about. The subject: “Tinesha, discover your name’s meaning and origin.” I clicked eagerly to discover details about my name, including its popularity and its meaning. Unsurprisingly, the system could not find any names that matched mine, except for a few matches for my middle name in the United States.

I had another option to discover something about my name, but I “uncovered” what I already knew: my name is Mozambican. And while there are no emails from FamilySearch about my Mozambican ancestors, I would argue that my dad *did* cross the plains as a pioneer—as the only member of his family to join the Church. The LDS Church Archives report my father as “the first missionary from Swaziland, Paulo Cipriano Zandamela, a Mozambican, [who] served in the Pennsylvania Philadelphia Mission from 1989 to 1991.”¹

Pioneer Day in Utah, the state where I was born and currently reside, is a celebration that commemorates the pioneers who used wagons and handcarts to cross the plains to Utah. Each year, I realize that those events are there to commemorate only one side of my family—the side

1. “Country information: Swaziland,” *Church News*, updated Feb. 1, 2010, <https://www.thechurchnews.com/archive/2010-02-01/country-information-swaziland-34988>

that already has a monopoly on nearly all of the discussions we have in the Church about the pioneers. But the Church is made up of people from many different heritages and backgrounds, and all of them have their pioneers, and all of their stories form a vital part of the Mormon pioneer heritage.



The first time I landed in Mozambique I was twenty-two years old. It felt like a dream. I was overwhelmed by the opportunity to be in a country that I had been deeply connected to throughout my life. When you drive through the streets of Maputo, it's a blur of color.

While I was in Mozambique, I attended the LDS ward one Sunday. On my way to the church building, I heard the sounds of other worshippers at other churches. Some services made such powerful sounds that the car I rode in vibrated when we were stopped next to them.

They say LDS church services are the same everywhere, and I tend to agree. I am a lifelong Latter-day Saint who grew up on the West Coast of the United States, so the silence of that particular ward's sacrament meeting should not have shocked me. I had attended church services in other countries, and it had never been uncomfortable. This time it was. The contrast seemed so stark. A newcomer even asked if this was it—could it be that all we did at our church was sing songs that are played like funeral dirges, then sit and listen to other people speak for three hours?

Yes. This is what I was used to. Silence as a synonym for reverence. But I know that, for many people, dance and song are cultural. The music and the loud church services were important to them. It is how they worshipped. Their reverence did not mean silence. It was then that I wondered to myself if these cultural elements were incompatible with being a member of the Church of Jesus Christ as it exists today.



I learned about Mozambique growing up, of course. I communicated with family members on my dad's side when I was young—usually by letter or landline phone. As technology became easier to use, international messaging applications became the quickest way to reach out, and it helped to have the internet on my phone to overcome language barriers. When I was primary-school age, I learned a traditional Mozambican dance to perform at a talent show, and I wore a capulana, which is a type a sarong worn in Mozambique. Capulanas existed in many shades and colors in my home. I knew the geography and history of the country. I listened to traditional music and was no stranger to soccer, rice, and sweet potatoes. I have always tried to learn and embrace my heritage while also being an active member of the Church.

Of course, culture does not just manifest itself in the physical. While I learned many things growing up from my Mozambican father, I found one particular belief deeply life changing during a difficult time. It was a belief that my dad had learned from his father, that his father had learned from his parents, and so on: The belief that our ancestors are always watching over us, cheering us on when we do the right thing, supporting us, and staying with us as we go through life.

When my brother passed away unexpectedly, he was fifteen. I was twenty-three. It was a shock, and I found myself being consoled frequently by Church members with the promise that I would see my little brother again.

Now, while I believed I would see him again, I also clung to the knowledge that those who die still support us in this life. I do not believe that my ancestors, and those who have passed on before me, are just sitting around waiting for my return. They support me as a *living* being, as long as I try to do the right thing. I do not think my brother is sitting up above me and looking down all the time. I think those who pass on can aid the living if they so choose. They cannot change circumstances

or alter reality, but they can help us find answers. It was this specific and culturally rooted belief that helped bring me much-needed peace alongside the knowledge that I would see my brother again after this life.



The second time I went to Mozambique I was twenty-five. It was a longer trip this time, and I felt more comfortable with what had previously been a complete unknown. This time, I knew the answer to my previous question about whether or not cultural beliefs are incompatible with my faith: no, they are not. They often seem incompatible because leaders who espouse the idea that Western culture is superior have defined other cultural beliefs as less valid. However, the gospel itself is not incompatible with clapping during worship or feeling connected to our ancestors via other ways than just trek and online family history.

Maputo was hot, as usual. The palm trees, the ocean, the coconuts, the history—this country that westerners view as only being poor was so much more than its GDP.

During a drive through the countryside, I found myself full of unexplainable excitement. This was my first experience outside of Maputo and its suburbs. At some point, I drifted off to sleep, and I suddenly awoke when I was informed that we had stopped in Zandamela.

Stepping out of the car felt holy and sacred. Zandamela was not just a town that shares my name. As I got to see the place where my family came from—where *I came from*—I realized this was the completion of something I had been waiting for my whole life—an opportunity to fully meld my pioneer ancestries together. That day in Zandamela was more than a visit or a photo-taking opportunity. It was my first Pioneer Day.

Jesus Christ

Tyler Clark

A star exploded, scattering its life
So earth could gather from the dust and churn
A healthy wheel of seasons. Life will burn
And feed the soil so seeds will germinate.
Beneath the olive trees, the roots that dig,
The stripes of bees that dance on peonies
Who work themselves to death for honey. THIS
Is where I see the face of God. He dies
A sick tomato plant, rebirths himself
A compost mulch a young gardenia needs
To nurture fragile petals sewn in silk.
What's keeping me alive? I murder plants,
Consume the meat from wings of flightless birds.
I eat salvation mouthfuls at a time.
And furthermore, to decompose is life
Eternal. Plant my ashes with a rose
To mourn the loss of time, and nothing more.
Salvation is a tomb within my cells
Where ghosts of people I've survived inscribed
Their stories in my DNA. Their tales
Will reemerge like Jesus Christ in spring
And spread with pollen on a hopeful breeze
While fields of flowers turn with grace to face
A passing star across a dying day.

Bridegroom

Dennis Clark

When Jesus took the church to bed, rocks rent,
earth groaned, sky split, spilt watered wine.
Trees shivered to their hearts to know the carpenter
laid in the bed he'd made, stone of his stone.
Flesh of our flesh wound in the woven flax,
the bloody sheet that no one thought to show.
We'd rather forget the lover our spear had pierced,
the man our nails had pained, his passion passed.
But this love-child hangs around, this albatross,
trying to feed us blood from his wounded breast,
opens his heart to us, while biting his tongue:
the child who raised himself wants to raise us.
We put him back in the manger where we feed,
soothe him and coo; he calls out to our need.

Creek Skating

Anita Tanner

In the pasture behind the barn
where workhorse colts frolic all summer long,
the creek, once the broth of stones, freezes over,
greens and blues of creek bed and cottonwood
muted in meandering.

All rivering stills
for the crisp cut of metal blades
on the ice-path
like fingernails scraping
against frosted farmhouse windows.

Upon a curved tablet of snow and ice
our silver runners scrape and flow
like cursive. They skip
and glide, then claw a halt,
fragments of ice ascending in the cold.

What is it that draws us, our feet
huddled into too-small skates
we want never to outgrow,
wild in our breasts with sub-zero air
that hurts down through our saw-blade toes?

The creek opens a window in our body house
to let birds fly free. We are carving our names
on white stone in arcs, curves, figure eights,
racing against spring, another season of growth
liquefying our souls.

Advent: Moose in Moonlight

Anita Tanner

*... he hath no form nor comeliness;
and when we shall see him
there is no beauty
that we should desire him.*

—Isaiah 53:2

Among the death of foliage
in skeleton trees
he appears, moonlight gracing
his rack—that upturned,

awe-inspiring crown.
Hint of his heavy breath
grizzles the air
beside the ponderous weight.

He comes to the edge, pauses
as witness of winter's extremities,
careful that our eyes meet:
stark litigant.

Flake by flake the dark earth
fills with exquisite whiteness,
depth and abundance amplified
longer than the moon endures.

The Four Stanzas of the Apocalypse

Michael Hicks

The sky has fasted in the desert
forty thousand years.
Now it's caught a glimpse
of barley fields and orange groves:
the table the world sets for winter.

If clouds could study the earth
they'd find not one soul who'd died of joy.
Elephants standing against the wind.
Whales cargoing the sea with history.
The leap of the jaguar in gravity's face.

Men's crimes are tilled into the soil.
God farms with the faithfulness of tides.
Elm trees lift their frail wings
and the world readies itself to ascend.
All things alive are the triumph of good will.

Our ancestors are the cold fronts
of the Arctic. Our children are
the ecstasy of the equator. At any
second, the thrill of sunlight
could overrun all our thoughts.
Our sins are only fences to climb
or kick down. The ghosts
of Adam and Eve wave us to shore.

The Agreement

Michael Hicks

After the staredown, saliva gathering in their mouths,
cotton swelling in his, Daniel invited the lions
out for drinks and a late supper.

But he'd vowed not to drink. And they'd lost their appetite.
So they just talked.

The lions asked him, "How did it feel to be perched
like a bird in our sight?"

"I mounted the air, beyond snatching.
The torches glazed your fur with hope.
The whole den gaped in awe.
Demons sat on their hands."

"We see," said the lions.

Daniel asked, "How did it feel when I hovered
beyond your lips?"

"As if hunger had turned to tar in our chests.
As if longing had gorged us in the flanks.
As if Yahweh had cheated us for a trick."

"I see," said Daniel. And he put their paws,
one by one, in his hands.

True Religion, by James

Michael Hicks

When you're young you think "widow" is a misprint for "window."
Then the tarp of age gets pulled over you and the words drift apart.
There is a cleanness to good marriage that is like the Renaissance.
It is a force of beauty that tramples mere love. When the blood rushes
out of it, life goes generic and foolish. You don't remember its face
exactly anymore. You wake up to elks in the fog, barely visible.
A beating heart turns to crickets. Widowhood is what it begets.
Savonarola destroyed Boccaccio and carnivals and jokes and icons.
That is the scent of widowhood prowling the rooms of the world.
To be a saint is to open the windows on both sides of the house.



Jackie Leishman
Big Yosemite II
printmaking ink, paint, pastel, and collage on linen,
100"x60"

THE SACRIFICE

Steven L. Peck

Mnemosyne

She was still puzzled that the stars were not the same ones she knew. She corrects. That she used to know. Where was Orion, its belt and sword glowing bright with mythic power against the black as it did from the La Sal mountains? Where was Cygnus, the swan? Where was the North Star; the end of the dipper gesturing towards it while circling it round and round through the night? The names for the stars sounded strange on her tongue. Beetlejuice. Rigel. As if the appellations that belonged in the Northern Hemisphere, viewed from some familiar longitude she knew by heart, could not be countenanced in this valley. Wait. Even the words “Northern Hemisphere” and “longitude” seemed foreign and out of place, as if from some other universe or dimension—so other that they had no real truck anymore in her mind, and it took effort to bring them out from dark corners. Maybe “The Dipper” never existed and was from some fantastic tale that in the light of day betokened a fantasy or a fable of some kind, not a reality she could grasp from the village. These old words dredged from possibly imaginary constellations might not have ever existed in any meaningful way. Ghost words. Words from another realm that only haunted this one from an oblique angle, like a shadow skittering away in the corner of your eye on a windy night. Maybe she’d always lived here? No. She couldn’t believe that. It would make it easier to believe in such a wonderland fantasy, but she could not. This had only been her home for a little over a year. She shook off the doubt. *This* was the unreal place. As nearly ordinary as it was, it had to be the dreamscape. A place where myths resided and a person’s only duty seemed to be to lament losses. Maybe she’d

gone mad. That was possible. Or died. In some ways that even made the most sense. Either seemed more likely than the idea that her life before coming here had not been real.

She sighed as the cuckoo clock—what an absurd contrivance for this place to include—began its slow whirl, signaling the little blue and white bird was about to pop from its hiding place and begin to chirp its rhythmic song. Four calls—it was 4 a.m., of what day of the week no one in the village could rightly reckon. Days of the week had been sacrificed upon arrival to this nearly timeless place. She moved to the window and watched the empty cobbled street basking in soft starlight, the windows of the houses on the other side were dark and shuttered. She looked up and down the dark street, but the window was aligned parallel with the road so she could not see far in either direction, even had it had not been dimmed by the night. She listened carefully for the clicking that would announce their passing but heard nothing. Should she open the door and step out onto the porch to glimpse them lurching and floating and heaving down the road? Should she dare their malice and taint? She knew the cost and so with ease resisted any temptation toward such an action.

After staring out the window for a time, she left her small drawing room and returned to her bedroom. She needed at least a few hours of sleep. All was as it should be—her dark oak four-poster bed, stilted to an over-moderate height above the floor so that a small ladder was necessary to mount the bed, the beautiful quilt atop, suggesting an almost stained-glass effect depicting a woman in a flowing gown, rising from a river, with cattle and fish gathered around her—all bespeaking comfort and warmth. At one end of the well-made bed, fine linen sheets slid out from the quilt and folded over its top edge. The head of the bed was graced with a long down pillow. To the side sat her chest of drawers, which held, respectively in each drawer, (top) her white cotton undergarments, (second) her calf-length simple blue tabinet smock dresses, and (third) her stockings and various kerchiefs, and in the last her shawls and thicker socks which served as slippers, along with a few extra pillowcases she kept on hand. At one end of the cozy room was a red brick fireplace with a small, neatly stacked supply of quartered hardwood logs lying on the hearth.

It was currently unlit, but below the fire grate it sported a good supply of ash on the firebox floor. Next to her bed was an end table with a small kerosene lamp and a book from the lending library—Darwin’s *Voyage of the Beagle*. Various candle holders extended from several places along walls, with their candles currently unlit. On the floor was a round, off-white, braided wool rug. Near the bed was a window with soft yellow gingham curtains, pulled back to permit a view. In the daylight, it would reveal a sloping grassy hill that led to a pine forest. She decided not to write in her journal tonight and just took off her dress, dropped it on the floor, crawled into bed, and stared at the carved wooden moldings and beams of her ceiling. Sleep, however, did not come quickly.

This was her one-year anniversary in the village. She went over her arrival again in her mind. Nothing was clear, and she sometimes feared she was creating memories as much as recalling them. She thought she remembered seeing the cluster of houses from above, all in a lovely green valley surround by tall, formidable mountains. The implacable peaks that relentlessly guarded the valley each had a forest marching up its side up to the timberline before yielding to dark grey rock, glacier, and snow. How could she have seen it from above? Had she been in a helicopter? A hang glider? No, there was something dreamlike about it. There was a faint memory of something like crossing a border, and then crossing some ill-defined boundary gliding down, as if the invisible hand of an invisible being were placing her here. Anyway, it was unclear. Too dreamlike to be real. No details of her coming here could be genuinely reconstructed. The memories of the week previous to her arrival, however, were quite clear: she was trekking in the Andes with her fiancé Jorge, a returned missionary and graduate of Duke University in finance, but how had she come here? Why had no one tried to find her? Why no search planes? In fact, over the course of a year she had never even seen a contrail. She knew she was in an isolated place. And most disturbing of all, there seemed to be no way out of the valley.

When she first arrived, people had been so helpful. They welcomed her, helped her get settled with a roommate who spoke her language—a Scottish woman named Meg who had been here five years and whose previous

roommate recently had been “emptied” as they called it. The former roommate now lived in the big house near the edge of town with others in like condition. One year. She had been here a year. The ceiling began to blur as once again her eyes filled with tears and she wept, as she had so many times, that she had lost everything and there seemed no way to ever get it back. And once again, as she had for a year, she drifted off to sleep listening to the night wind discreetly murmuring through the nearby forest and questing through the narrow cobbled streets of her little town.



She slept late. There had been some commotion fairly early, but she refused let herself rise to attend to it, so she turned over and returned to her dreams. She finally arose as the sun had just cleared the mountains and bathed the valley in late morning sunshine. She went to the toilet and wandered into the kitchen, where Meg was seated at the table having a cup of coffee. She saw her eyes, swollen and red, but now dry. She knew what it meant.

“Who?” She said covering her mouth, perhaps to avoid a scream.

“Kartari” Meg said softly, “Poor Kartari.”

“How?”

“She was playing cards at the public house with some of the emptied. She lost track of the time. When she realized how late it was she decided to chance it. It was only a hundred meter dash.” She paused and looked a long time into nothing in particular, then added choking back a sob, “She was unlucky.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes. I saw her walking by on my way to get some bread so stepped out to talk to her. Yes I’m sure. She told me the story herself.”

She looked at Meg and nodded and sagged into her chair. It did not take a long conversation to recognized the emptied.



That afternoon she and her friend Xhi took their small packs loaded with a green-leaf bamboo basket of lamb curry and rice and left the village to continue their search for a way out. They had searched most of the valley already, but they were returning to some sites they had initially rejected but had decided they deserved a closer look. Most of their efforts ended only in discouragement. At the south end of the valley, the wide, pebbly creek running between the mountains descended into a ravine two hundred meters below. The edge of the cliff over which the river plunged was a granite wall as smooth as glass all the way to the canyon floor below this valley. To the east and west, featureless cliffs rose until they met the mountains above. From peaks in the northwest, the small river poured into the valley from a series of violent cascades with seven waterfalls, with twenty- to seven-hundred-meter drops much like she remembered in the Yosemite Valley. So far, they had discovered no hope of escape. Even so, today they were heading to the western wall where a new idea had taken hold of them. It was the shortest vertical cliff in the valley— only about thirty meters to where it looked like there were talus slopes covered with scattered conifer trees to the timberline, followed by a steep, but not unmanageable, climb to the saddle between two goal-posting crags. They had spent a few days last week looking through binoculars, scouting a route to the top, and tracing into their notebook what looked like a pathway to the mountain pass if they could ascend up the initial cliff face. This could be the way out.



On the way up they talked. Or tried to. When they started this project four months ago, Xhi spoke no English and she no Chinese. But over the course of the months they had developed a fairly serviceable communication system that included gestures, words they had shared with each other, pointing, making faces, imitating the sounds of nature, drawing in the dirt or in a notebook, using their fingers and hands to make shapes and mimic the processes they wanted to depict, holding up certain fingers to represent numbers and amounts,

and acting out in pantomime their intentions or the actions of others they wanted to communicate. Their vocabulary was now nearing five-hundred English words (Xhi seemed better at managing her English than she was his Chinese) and perhaps 100 Chinese words and characters. She had learned this: Xhi was a paleontologist. He and his wife met at the university where he taught, and she may have been his student. She may be an artist. They had a grown son named Wu who taught something—Xhi had tried to explain but she didn't understand quite yet—that made his father very proud, and they had all been very happy. He had been digging for bird fossils somewhere in China when he had been brought here. He was fifty-seven years old and loved to sing and garden. He did not believe in God, but now he was not sure because this place did not fit with what he believed. His father either made or sold umbrellas or maybe did something in the rain. His mother had died. He had been here eight years. She thought he understood that she had studied botany in college, was in love with a man from Paraguay, and they had been about to be married when she had arrived here. That she did believe in God, but this place had confused her and did not fit with what she believed either. She was twenty-four. She loved to read and play video games. She had a cat named "Carnage," and she was sure he did not know what the word meant.



When they arrived at the foot of the cliff, she broke several large sticks into short pieces, and pulling out some string from her pocket she began tying the sticks together making a model of some sort of scaffolding that resembled the tower forest rangers used to watch for fires. This she placed against the face of the rock wall. He looked at it and then at the rock wall before him. He picked it up and pointed to some large branches, and after nodding to the little structure, picked it up and pointed to the string tying the little twigs together and shrugged. With what would they tie the logs together? String would not do. In answer, she pulled a strip of bedding she had shredded and then twisted into a kind of rope-looking configuration. He handled it and

gave a series of sharp tugs, and then pursed his lips and nodded with wide eyes. This might work. “I like,” he said. She lowered her head and said, “Xièxiè.”

The truth was they could get bedding any time they wanted. The little mercantile, as Meg had first introduced the place, carried fresh bedding, food from various locals, spices, rice, wheat flour, sugar, the clothing that everyone wore, pans, condiments, gardening tools, scissors, supplies for quilting, needle point, potters wheels and clay and pigments, wood carving tools, an assortment of crafts, paper goods, a fairly impressive selection of musical instruments, writing implements—even typewriters, and lots of things that might come in handy for not being bored like telescopes and such things. Some things were missing: nails, hunting equipment (not that anyone had seen any animals here), medicines (no one in anyone’s memory had ever seen someone sick), weapons, rope, explosives, anything made from fossil fuel like plastics (all implements were made from metal and wood, even the aforementioned type-writer), and detergents (all soiled clothes were placed in a bin in the mercantile), and new ones picked up at will. No money was exchanged. You took what you needed and that was that. Who or what replaced the items carried away was a mystery. No resupplier was ever seen coming or going, yet every morning the bins of dirty clothes were empty, and anything taken was replaced. Some spoke of underground tunnels, others of Star Trek transporter technologies. But it was a fact of life nothing new ever appeared, and nothing in the store became scarce. This is why most believed they were prisoners. Things could get in and out. They could not. The inference: they were being kept.



They spent the rest of the afternoon constructing twig and string prototypes. This could work. This could really work. There was an excitement building between them. They might get out of this place yet. Whatever was keeping them as pets had not secured the cage quite as well as they thought.

Simultaneously they looked up and noticed how far the sun had dipped; it was touching the western mountains. They looked at each other with a panicked expression and stood up and started scampering back to the village, but not before grabbing a few of the prototypes to show the others. By the time they got back to the village, they were out of breath, but smiling broadly as they parted back to their homes. This could work!



The village consisted of slightly more than three-hundred people from all over the world. About a third were from China and another third from India. The rest were a mix of nationalities from all over the world; she was the only American. There were many Muslims, Catholics and other Christians, Buddhists. About sixty were among the emptied. Unexpectedly, there were few conflicts. Both sexes were represented equally, and their ages ranged from about nineteen to ninety-one. Resources were abundant. What would you steal when everyone had the same things you did? Crime was possible, however. Meg had recounted that about five years ago a man from a notoriously patriarchal culture had attacked a woman. However, her screams had brought help in time to stop the assault. Meg said the village had voted to have the man tied up outside during the night. It was a severe punishment, but most agreed that such actions could not be tolerated. To ensure he was emptied, a group of women and some men kept vigil from a window in one of the houses where they could watch. When the night horrors came through the streets, they saw the monsters empty the man. In the morning, the attacker calmly observed the other villagers as they cut him loose. They asked him how he felt and he said he felt healthy and able to do the tasks life required of him. He joined the others who had been emptied in the large house at the end of the street.

For the most part, however, things were calm. Neighbors respected each other's privacy. All in all the society took care of each other as needed, and supported each other's plans and goals. They even rearranged the cricket

and football teams every year, assembled randomly from among those who wanted to play. Usually, enough people signed up for one or the other or even both sports to field five or six teams. And making new teams every year kept villagers from establishing long-term rivalries, so it remained a source of fun and recreation.

She was also grateful there were four Mormons, a disproportionate number given the demographics of Earth, which all four took as a genuine miracle. They would meet once a week on a day they designated the Sabbath and read from a Spanish Book of Mormon that had been found in the library. She had served a Spanish-speaking mission in California, and she would translate into English for two of the others—a Belgian man, who had been a member for his whole life; and a Syrian woman, an English teacher, who had joined in Germany. The last was a woman from Brazil who was learning English but could understand the Spanish well enough not to need the translation. After reading the scriptures, the Belgian (as the only priesthood holder in the village) would bless the sacrament and then pass the bread and water to the others. Then they would bear their testimonies and share a simple meal together. Sometimes her roommate, Meg, would join, as she missed her Anglican church and found fellowship with the little congregation.



She and Xhi made it back to the village well before dark. While the strange fearsome monsters would assail people they found out in the valley as soon as the sun dipped below the horizon, they did not enter the village until the clocks struck ten. First, they would gather on the cricket pitch in the field on the far end of the village—humming and clicking with their inhuman sounds. Once they had amassed there, the folk had about fifteen minutes to get back to their homes from wherever they were gathered—the pub, the baths, the library, the public house, the mercantile, or just visiting friends. When the creatures gathered, someone who had been assigned the rotating duty would clang an old copper kettle loudly, the sound of which could be heard throughout the village, to warn everyone to retire for the night into



Jackie Leishman
Yosemite 29
printmaking ink, paint, and collage on paper
24 x 18 inches

the safety of their homes. There were no locks on the doors, but they were safe. The creatures never entered a structure.

Tonight at the pub a large group had gathered around Xhi as he explained the plan to build a ladder out of the branches of trees and ropes made from linen—a ladder that would reach the top of the lowest cliff surrounding the valley. They would escape. Most of the crowd was Chinese, but there were a number of others listening to translations of Xhi's voice into Hindi, English, Spanish, French, and other common languages. She watched from her cup of chamomile tea. The conversation was animated and lively. She listened to a Han woman named Bao translating into British English for about ten other eavesdroppers who understood the language. Most of the discussion focused on how unsafe it seemed, but a few had concerns of a more metaphysical nature. An older man named Akpofure, from Nigeria, looked upset as Xhi offered the details about the plan; suddenly the African stood up and said, "No, No, No! This will lead to ruin! Don't you see, if you do this they will punish us all? It is the tower of Babel. You know the tower of Babel? Very bad. Why leave this beautiful valley? Are we not given everything we need by God? Give this up. I beg you. Give it up."

At the man's words, she looked up and stood and took his hands and looked into his eyes with that familiarity the villagers shared. "No, we don't have everything we need. I don't have Jorge."

He looked at her and slowly pulled his hands away. He mumbled something in Urhobo, and, although she did not understand it, she could tell she had not convinced him. Tired of the discussion, she was going to do this whether anyone helped her or not. Meg was in the corner playing a dulcimer, so she walked over to listen. She sat there thinking until the copper kettle began to clang in alarm and everyone fled to their homes.



Meg had gone to bed, but she found some soup still warm on the wood stove, so she ladled a bowl and sat down at the maplewood table. As she ate, she

thought about Kartari. Of course she had gotten distracted playing poker with the emptied. They were tireless, excellent players. They gave no tell and could bluff stoically without giving anything away. They took no joy in the game. They were playing because they had been asked to, but what was it about their emptiness that let them play to win? Because it was an expectation? Did they understand that their old selves would not have wanted them to play otherwise, so they enacted that desire? They never played by themselves. She remembered once visiting their big house when she had first arrived. They all were just sitting around, silently looking out into the space before them at nothing in particular. When she walked in, all their eyes turned toward her, and someone asked how they could help. When she said they wanted to see if they had any scraps of cloth because they were going to make a quilt, one man stood and walked into another room; as he did all their eyes returned forward and they just stared unfocused into the space before them. She remembered the horror she felt as she looked at them sitting like that. Without purpose. Now as she thought of Kartari she shuddered again. Kartari was funny. A delight in conversation. She could deliver a good joke like no one in the village. She would never tell another. Not spontaneously anyway. She could be asked to, and she would do so. She would not laugh, and it would be delivered without inflection or cadence. It would just be said. What was the point of this place? She wiped her eyes with the heel of her hand and got up from the table and went to bed. But unlike last night, she fluffed her pillow and sat up in bed and wrote a few lines in her journal,

My Beloved. We lost another today. Kartari. A lovely person in every way. You would have liked her. I will miss her laugh and her optimism. She never doubted we would leave this place. She always spoke of when we got back she would do this, she would be better at that. Now she's a shadow person—

What did you do today? Did you feel me hugging you with my mind? Did you feel my thoughts drifting toward you? Did you just have to shout out loud! 'Someone out there loves me!?!'—

It's been over a year. I've missed you every day since I arrived. Don't give up on me. Please don't give up on me. I'll find you again.

She closed her journal and turned down the lamp. She fell asleep quickly this time.



They were sweating with exertion as they continued to cut the large branches away from the tree they had felled earlier that morning. Having put in some good work, they decided to take a break for lunch. She had taken off her smock to keep cool during their labors. Her underwear was usually modest enough, but her sweat was starting to soak through, making it less so. Still, it would be uncomfortable to do the lumberjacking they were doing in one of the smocks, so Xhi would just have to endure her exposure today. She made a mental note to alter a smock and make a belt to connive a more functional chopping ensemble. They sat on the trunk of a pine that lay sprawled on the carpet of pine needles that went all the way up to the face of the cliff they were going to try to scale. She handed him a tuna sandwich she'd made, and they sat side by side talking about the day's labor and slowly nibbling at their sandwiches. She noticed he was sitting close enough that their thighs were touching, and she could feel the body heat coming from his morning exertions. Normally she would have moved, but she liked that he was there. He felt comfortable. She did not move away. Sex was common in this place, and yet, given the circumstances it rarely produced long-term pair bonds of more than a year. Cultural differences and expectations got in the way, and, given the small number of people in the village, it often made for uncomfortable liaisons.

She was telling him her idea that if they got people from the village together, they might maneuver an entire tree to lean against the cliff wall, giving them an advantage in anchoring their structure. He rested his hand on her thigh as he pointed to another tree with particularly large branches. She knew that, if she wanted to, they could make love right then and there. Even though he often talked of his wife, she knew it had been eight years since he'd last seen her. A long time by anyone's standard. She could feel that his breathing had gotten quicker. She couldn't do it. If this worked she would

see Jorge soon. She had to wait. She picked up his hand and moved it to the fallen log on which they sat. She did so calmly but firmly. He smiled and nodded respecting her choice. "Very sorry." He said. She patted him lightly on the shoulder, "You miss your wife very much."

"Very much. Yes. Long time. Yes. I think she not remember me."

She started to contradict him but said nothing. He was probably right. What had Jorge done? How long did he look for her? Had he given up? She would have been reported as a missing person. He was likely the main suspect. What had they done to him to try to get a confession? Such disappearances turn out often to be the spouse or boyfriend. He was the last person she saw. They had been together hiking when this happened. Did her parents blame him for losing her? Did they think he was capable of murdering her? It seemed hard to imagine. Her parents loved him. Even so, she had vanished a year ago.

They had been silent when she noticed the horrified look on his face staring at her; then she noticed that she was crying. She thought he must think his actions had brought the tears. "I miss my fiancé," she said and then grabbed him around the neck and hugged him. He patted her back and then hugged her tightly back. Finally, she pulled away and noticed he was crying too. "I miss my wife," he said simply. She nodded. She realized she did love Xhi. Not quite that way, yet, but he was a good friend. They spent the afternoon telling stories about their lives, such as they could with their language challenges. Still, working together, trying to build a ladder to those they loved best in the world united them. It was good to have people in her life like Xhi.

On the way home, she thought about how safe she felt here. If Xhi had come onto her back in her previous life it would have made her anxious and afraid. Here, when she had rebuffed Xhi's advances, she knew he would back off. She knew they were still friends. It was not that there was no danger in this place. She thought back to the man who had attacked the woman. Meg had pointed him out one day as he and some of the others like him passed by. He was a lumberjack from Siberia and looked intimidating. But he was empty now. He had no desire of any kind.

There was something about living as a community, likely all bound together for the rest of their lives, that brought a sense of familiar peace and

comfort. You got to know them. You knew they were different and strange to you, just as you were to them, but that meant you tried harder. You were more patient. With strangers you could be rude, you likely wouldn't see them again, but these people you would pass daily and meet again and again. It made for a sense of belonging and safety. She remembered how anxious she was before coming to this valley. There was always something to be afraid of: people, criminals, the "world," running out of money, not finding a job, tensions with neighbors, floods in faraway places, what to do with your life, what to make for dinner, whether she'd made her boss or boyfriend or best friend or siblings angry, wondering if you were paying attention to people you cared about, whether your car had enough gas, wondering if you had locked it, whether you were going to get whatever sickness was going around, who you had offended at church, if your parents were safe, and on and on.

Not here. Here there was one worry, the alien soul-sucking things that haunted the night. But they were manageable. They behaved the same all the time. You knew what they were going to do and where they would be and around what time you could expect them. You could keep yourself safe with a minimum of attention. So the days were simple and slow. The weather ranged only about fifteen degrees; there was no winter or summer—only fall and spring, and when it rained it was rather nice. No one got sick. Why did she want to go back? Why not let love blossom with Xhi for a time? Why not find contentment in the joys this place offered? It seemed so strange that she was driven to find a way out. Why? And strangely, the same thing was true of almost everyone she knew. Not a single person would not trade it all to get back to their life, despite its trouble.

As they got back to the village, a woman everyone called Auntie Loika, a woman from the South Pacific, pointed at them and said, loudly laughing, "What have you two been doing off in the woods all day?"

Xhi laughed and said, "Come with us. You see! I think you like."

The woman laughed and said, "Not with you old man. Maybe with her?"

Xhi's companion laughed, "Anytime, Auntie. I may have some surprises for you!"

They all laughed.

Auntie Loika came up and said, “They say you may have found a way out. Is it true?”

She looked at Xhi before answering and he nodded, so she told the woman, “Maybe. We have an idea. No guarantee of course but maybe.”

“Well you listen to me, you hear? You’ll be going nowhere without Auntie, you understand? No way. I’ve got a place on the first boat out of here. Deal?”

Xhi smiled and said sincerely, “Deal.”



The next day they held a memorial service for Kartari in the public house. Almost the whole village came, including the emptied. Her close friends gave reminiscences about her. Some who knew her well told stories about her previous life they had gathered from her through the years—her family, her son. A group of musicians formed a small ensemble and played some musical numbers they knew she liked. Her best friend stood up and talked about their friendship and how much she would miss her. It was strange, because Kartari was sitting in the back listening. Her face was blank as her best friend in the world remembered their relationship. In the end, many people were sobbing. Including all of the emptied. She whispered to Meg, “Why are they doing that?” Meg whispered back, “Ask one.”

After it was over she approached a hollow woman who had been in the back and bluntly asked, “Why did you cry during the service?”

She said, “It was expected. My ghost would have wanted me to.”

“Your ghost?”

“Yes. If I know my ghost would have done something, I do it. It was what was expected.”

“Did you feel sad?”

“Sad is a feeling. I have none.”

“You cried because . . .”

“Because everyone did, so we did. It was expected.”

“But you felt nothing.”

“No.”

"Do you remember feelings? Remember what it was like?"

"I remember I did feel, but the feeling itself went with my ghost."

"Are you happy?"

" . . . "



That night she could not sleep. She had been unnerved by the weeping emptied ones, but it was more than that; it was a kind of claustrophobia. Like her life had nowhere to go, nothing to reach for. This escape attempt had to be successful. It just had to be. In some ways, she was moving to the same hollowness as the emptied—not through the monsters that haunted the night, but by the slow dripping away of who she was and who she'd become. Her memories were slipping away, and the sense of forgetting was sliding toward the void. She tried to remember Jorge's face, the curve of his strong jaw, the double chin that gave his countenance a Puckish aspect, his brown eyes, his high forehead and premature receding hairline. But while she could catch glimpses of them individually, they would not cohere into a single vision of Jorge. She was losing him. She could not remember his face. Where was it going? How was this possible? As she lay there, she heard the clicking outside her window and got up to watch the soul-stealers pass. She opened the curtains and even opened the window to get a better look.

They came down the street slowly—twelve of them, their soft bulbous heads the size and shape of beachballs glowing of their own accord. They had one great eye, yellow irised, with a black hole in the center that seemed to hold a universe of nothingness in its depths. No eyelid, or hair of any sort, no ears, the papery covering appeared to house a hollow void. Their mouth was a slit that remained always closed. She wondered when it took away the spirits of its victims did it form a sucker shape like a lamprey's mouth? That seemed appropriate, like a science fiction B-movie. But in reality, there was nothing cartoonish about these things. They evoked horror and taint. A presence of utter disgrace, as if one sinned simply by looking at the things. A feeling that one willingly partook of shame and despair just by being in

their presence. As if a thousand unseen maggots were wriggling just on the periphery of your vision, striking naked fear down to the heartwood of your soul. You always know they are there waiting, even during the day, poisoning the edge of your being. But now with them so near, there was a fear that to look at them would somehow let them recognize you, causing them to move toward you and into you and give them possession of your spirit.

Nevertheless, the creatures' great eyes remain fixed ahead as they walked on scores of thin twiggy "legs," although legs does not do justice to the whisking clamor, the clicking and clacking, the creatures make. It was more like a tangle of roots connected by a network of intertwined mycelium. When it moved, these swirling sprigs and shoots conveyed it smoothly forward, as if each root tip were deciding for itself how best to move the swollen pumpkinlike head forward, creating a blur of motion that ended with the floating head moving along incomprehensible vectors, or maybe the legs could be described as a complex machine designed for stirring some evil concoction that required mixing in multiple dimensions. It was while staring at these she would often be wracked by a nameless fear that she had died and had come to a kind of hell. She turned away. She lay back down on her bed and started to cry. She just wanted Jorge. And suddenly he was there, popping into her mind's eye, looking for all the world just as she remembered him. She could see his face! She kept crying as she had earlier, but now her tears were of a different, more pleasant, order. She remembered his face.



Xhi met her at the edge of town on an old wooden bench that faced to the east. A group of people would gather at that end of town just before sunrise and welcome the dawn with tai chi practice. After, Xhi would sit on the bench and meditate until she arrived. She always made a lunch for them and brought full canteens for the day's work, although about noon they would refill them at the stream. It was a pleasant routine, and she liked the regularity and steadiness of it. He had volunteered to take over both duties, but she enjoyed it and insisted she be allowed to continue.

They walked to the base of the cliff in a cheerful mood. Today's goals were simple and straightforward, they had a good supply of linen they would twist into rope. Then they were going to chop down some more trees, section them, and try to frame a ladder of some kind from the poles and branches used for steps. On the way, they practiced Chinese and English by pointing at things, learning the words, and trying to frame them into sentences.

When they arrived, they were surprised to find one of the villagers waiting for them. It was a Ukrainian man named Myroslav. She knew him well because he was a fine storyteller, and she liked to listen to him. He had worked for years as an agricultural engineer in his previous life, but here he liked to fashion little marionettes and organized puppet plays for the village. He stood there with a big drawing notebook in his hands and a pencil kit laying at his feet.

"Hello Myroslav," Xhi said.

"Hello Xhi, your language of the English is more better and better."

Xhi smiled, thanking him with a nod.

She smiled and said hello and after acknowledging it, he answered with a bow.

"I listen to you in pub. I like your idea. I come to help."

"Excellent," she said, "Today we are cutting some more trees down and likely making more rope. We can use the help."

"I see rope?" he asked.

Xhi brought him over a piece about six meters long they had made the previous day and handed it to him. He took two stout staves that he seemed to have brought with him, each about a meter long, looped the rope, and tied the poles together. He placed one rod in the crook of a tree and then twisted the rope with the other. Tighter and tighter he twisted until the linen strips had become a great knot buckling and bunching where the twisting was most intense. He twisted harder and signaled Xhi over to help him twist it even further. Finally, between the two of them, the twisted rope began to fray until suddenly, with a crack, the rope snapped. Myroslav patted Xhi on the back saying, "Yes, Yes, I think this work. Da!" Then he picked up his notebook and sat under a tree and began to sketch something.

She looked at Xhi and shrugged, and they took their hatchets out of their packs and walked toward a tree they had designated yesterday for harvest today. It was a tall brown-barked pine with a trunk about the same diameter as a dinner plate. They took turns chopping, each about three minutes, then the other would take over for the next three. They went back and forth like this for about thirty minutes before they needed to rest. They looked over at Myroslav, sitting under a tree drawing. Apparently, when he said he wanted to help, he did not mean chopping trees down. They had gone through several cycles of work and rest for a couple of hours when finally, after chopping a wedge almost two-thirds of the way through the trunk, they felt the satisfaction of the tree starting to lean toward the wedge they had hacked out. It started creaking and cracking until, with one final loud snap, it broke from its thin mooring and quickly fell in a loud whoosh as it slammed to the ground. They gave a loud, "Harrah!" then shook each other's hands. Myroslav had hardly looked up. They decided to take a break and sat down on the tree they had just felled and ate some apple slices. Just as they finished, Myroslav approached them. He said nothing, but handed them his note pad. On it was a finely detailed sketch of something that looked like a stone-aged siege tower. Strong, frapped tree trunks were shown bound on each of the four corners by multiple ropes, secured to a framework of crisscrossing beams running through the center, where a ladder ran from top to bottom. The number of ropes was listed on the sides with their thickness in millimeters listed near the ropes. Many of the notes were in the Cyrillic alphabet; some were in English.

"You must make tower very sturdy. Bottom must hold many limbs on top. No?"

The other two looked up rather sheepishly, like children on a beach making a sand castle by filling a paper cup with wet sand from the swash just above wave break and then suddenly looking up to see that their neighbor has fashioned a sand dragon breathing fire and being charged by a sand knight on a sand horse. They just kept staring at the drawing of the architectural marvel and then back up to the Ukrainian.

"You see? Da? The rope bind just so much weight; I twist and think good idea of what we need. Maybe I test more. So we must increase strength to

hold? Also, important we use drier wood at top. Much lighter. Very good to scale cliff.”

“I think we need help,” Xhi said.

She nodded, “Lots.”



They got it. A few sections of her journal of the next few days describes it.

Jorge! Ten people showed up this morning. Myroslav showed us what to cut, and by the end of the day we had four huge logs forming the base of the tower (I nicknamed it Babel and it's stuck). The Ukrainian is a perfectionist, and he inspected the ropes we made, the frapping we did to bind the logs into the square base, and every aspect of our tower. But it was so fun. All of us working. Working to get out. Maybe I'll see you in a month or so? I wish you could see me. I'm smiling from ear to ear.

<three days later>

Jorge! There were more than 50 people there today. The word of our task is spreading, and more and more people want to help. I'm so tired. We got up to about a meter and a half today.

< seven days later>

70 people. Some of them tore down an unoccupied house, and we got some serious lumber—good dry wood. Myroslav's done a redesign, so we are building a stairway up the center instead of a ladder. Very fancy! We made it to 5 meters. Xhi and I would have died without Myroslav's design.

<two days>

Myroslav was furious. Tore it down to 3 meters to fix some sloppy rope work.

<three days>

8 meters! I'm exhausted.

<next day>

8 meters still. Myroslav made us spend some time shoring up the sides of the tower with some large trees. We dug trenches and got the tower leaning

tightly against the cliff face for stability. Jorge, can you feel I'll be there soon? Don't give up.

<one week later>

12 meters.

<two days later>

12.5 meters. More excitement more stresses. Fight almost broke out among those twisting rope. Tension's high.

<three days>

17 meters.

<three days later>

22 meters.

<two weeks later>

We are three meters from the top.

<next day>

Thunderstorm. Nice to rest. I thought about you while Meg and I talked about what we are going to do when we get back. She misses her son so much. She's sure her husband will have moved on, but she really just wants to be back in her son's life. He'll be about twelve now. She wonders what he'll be like. I talked about you. How beautiful you were. How kind. How generous. I'm afraid she thinks I'm marrying one of the Saints, ha ha and I guess I am! I love you Jorge. Can you hear me say that? Do you know what you mean to me? It's been over a year. I've missed you every hour of every day. See you soon.

<four days later>

Done. Babel is the most beautiful thing I've ever seen. Everyone is at the pub raising toasts to Myroslav and Xhi. I'm content to spend this time with you. Tomorrow we climb the mountain to the pass. We were going to send a small group up to the saddle, but everyone wants to go. All I know is Xhi and I are going. I don't know where we are, so it might take a few days to hike to civilization. As soon as I find a phone I'll call. I can't sleep or eat. I'm coming home.

<next day>

It rained the day before we were to leave and didn't let up until nearly 6 a.m. However, when the dawn peeked over the surrounding mountains the clouds, though dark, were pulling apart and letting the sun rays through. The world sparkled from the early morning rain and the trees and meadow grass seemed to have been arrayed in their finest dress. The feeling in the air was cool and inviting, rich with pine terpenes and the smell of grass and wildflowers. It seemed as if the valley were trying to coax us into staying. Are you sure you want to leave this beautiful place? It whispered. Haven't I cared for you? Seen to your every whim? Here. Look around. How can you leave this? But we were, and nothing in the world could dissuade us from our journey. Nothing.

Given the logistics, the plan was today forty of us were going to cross over the pass and continue searching for help and rescue from the valley. While we were building the tower, a large group of villagers helped the escape efforts by creating supplies for our journey, sleeping bags from blankets, hardier shoes by modifying our old ones and lining them with cotton and torn up wool blankets and other materials, backpacks to carry enough provisions for a long hike to civilization. They had only enough for the forty going first, but they thought in another two weeks they could outfit a second forty to follow on our heels if we hadn't reported back in that time or sent rescue. But everyone I talked to fully expected helicopters to be arriving an hour after we crossed over the pass. I was more cautious and thought it might be a journey of several weeks. Hard weeks. But it didn't matter. We were going to succeed. We knew it.

It was a merry parade to the tower. The forty going over the top were decked out in their packs and heavy weather gear (why not, we had to get used to carrying it). When we arrived, a few people opened up some jars of juice and poured it on the ground before the tower. A libation to whatever gods might be allies in our effort. A few people offered blessings and prayers; some read poetry. I could not pay attention to any of it though. I just wanted to get started. The night before, the three other members of our little LDS congregation came over to wish me well. Our Belgian Elder gave me a blessing. He promised I would be watched over. He spoke of the Lord being aware of our situation and that things would get better. But as I said, there was a feeling of abandonment that has attended me since I got here. I've never had a sense

that God knew we were here. There was an impenetrable shield that blocked our heavenly parents, or so it seemed from the beginning.

Finally, Xhi, Myroslav, and I were given pride of place to lead up the expedition, and we started up the tower. The forty followed, then about fifty more. They were going to go with us to the saddle and survey the world beyond but would return to the village to report on what they saw. The tower had six “floors,” roughhewn platforms with plank “stairs” between the levels until it opened onto a platform at the top of the cliff with a short ramp connecting the tower to the top. I thought about how much work this had taken to build, and I felt a deep sense of gratitude it had been spawned by my and Xhi’s silly plan to build a big ladder. This was an amazing piece of engineering designed by Myroslav and helped along by people from all over the world working together, bringing their insights and ideas. It was the village that did this. Nothing less. The whole village.

We waited at the top of the cliff for all of the nearly hundred people that were going up to the saddle. We led off in good spirits, but soon the way got rough. We were mostly hiking up a steep forested slope with many fallen trees, scrub, and occasional rock slides that had to be traversed. The group spread out, thinned, and formed into something like a knotted quarter-mile line. I fell in with Meg, who was not going with us past the saddle, but I was grateful for her presence. We talked a while about the first thing we would do after reuniting with our families. Mine was see a movie, something romantic and fun. Meg wanted to go for a long walk along the beach near where she lived with a brand-new Australian shepherd and a bag of peanut butter sandwiches. A group of Indian men who had started a runners’ club took a strong lead. Despite not one of us exercising regularly while here, something about the place had not only ensured we never got sick but allowed us to maintain a high level of fitness. However, the running club was in amazing shape and quickly left us behind.

The way up after the timberline was very steep, with a low heath that did not allow very secure footing. The mountains on either side of us were filled with sheer cliffs, glaciers, and ice walls giving us a sense of how small we were. And so helpless to go in any other direction but the one we were heading. The climbing was not easy because the dirt underfoot yielded too easily, and it seemed like you slipped back two steps for every one forward. Not really of course, but that’s what it seemed like. It reminded me of backpacking in the Rockies with my family when I was little. But I saw no pika, as were so

abundant then. Animals did not live in the valley. I'm not sure why. No fish in the river. No birds ever visited. We grew used to this, but it was not until I noticed the lack of pika that it struck me how very odd this place was. Was the valley so isolated that after the Pleistocene glaciers retreated nothing could find its way here? It gave me a moment of panic that we might have a much longer hike than we were ready for.

Finally, we left all vegetation behind and climbed up a rocky slag, sometimes going on hands and legs. As we approached the saddle, the ground began to level, and we could see the runners, their backs to us, kneeling facing the other side of this range. Our excitement mounted as we anticipated seeing the other side of this land in which we for so long had been held captive.

I have seen anguish a few times in my life, but its exemplar will always be the look of the young Indian man's face when he turned to look at us. Such despair. Sorrow. Pain. His face was stretched in a grimace of agony such as might be depicted in a painting of Dante's Inferno. Tears streamed down his face. He did not try to speak but just stared at us as we closed the distance to the top of the saddle. Then we saw it. A great bowl-shaped cirque cut the saddle in half with both mountains framing the saddle with sheer and foreboding cliffs. We were looking at an 800 meter drop straight down about 10 meters from the saddle's col. It was as if one of the old gods had taken a giant ice cream scoop and gouged a scoop out of both the mountains and the saddle. There was no way out of our valley. I fell on the ground and cried and cried and cried, because, my dear Jorge, I knew then that I would never see you again in this life.



The village went into mourning. Meg locked herself in her room. She could hear her roommate weeping, but there was nothing she could do. Twice more she climbed to the cirque to ensure they had not missed something, that there was not some hidden way down lurking somewhere to the side. There was not. After that, she too gave in to despair and let it take her full. She stopped sleeping, eating, taking care of herself. She just wanted to go away. Or join the emptied. Two villagers did. Two women from China, both part of the forty who were going to try to hike to find help. Three weeks after the fiasco

on the saddle they just walked out at night together and sat on the street until the beasts came and carried away their souls. In the morning they got up and walked to the house at the end of the street and took up their lives with the emptied.

It shook the village that two people had accepted the touch of the monsters. People started talking again about what had happened. People gathered and hugged each other, scolded those who refused to see that nothing had changed and that it was time to move on. "A hope was stolen they never had a right to embrace. It was as it had always been." There was some anger at those who had concocted the whole adventure. In a public meeting, she and Xhi apologized and asked their neighbors' forgiveness. It was granted. In about three months, most had put it behind them. Things in the village took back the shape that had been their way of life for a very long time.



One day after having some porridge with Meg, she decided to hike out to the tower. Those days with Xhi had been magical. The sense of purpose. The joy of laboring in the forest among the trees, flowers, and grasses. She just wanted to think. On the way up she was surprised to find Xhi coming down. They had not spoken since the night they had apologized together to the village. He was glad to see her too. He had gone up to retrieve some tools that he had made to assist the work.

"Those were good days," she said.

"Very good days," he answered. "I miss our many talks and learning English."

She laughed. "Yes. Perhaps we should begin a new project together.

"I like very much. Like me to go with you back up?"

"Not today. I want to think. But maybe in a couple of days."

"A couple of days. Yes very good. We do that. Thank you."

"Thank you, Xhi."

They embraced warmly and went their separate ways.



Jackie Leishman
Yosemite 21
monotype, charcoal, paint, and collage.
42 x 30 inches

There were no clouds in the dome of blue that rose above the mountains, the color shading darker as it rose away from the low morning sun only a little over the tops of mountains. She crossed a small bridge and peered over the edge at the scattered rocks just below the surface of the water. Reeds and willows marked the edge of the stream from where it ran through a meadow to where it disappeared into the pines. She was not thinking. She was listening to her breath as she'd been shown to do in a meditation class taught by a man named Chitranjan. She had been attending only occasionally, but she had not been since the disaster on the saddle. She didn't want to think about anything. Not Jorge. Not the home she would never see again. Not her parents, brothers, and sisters. Not her friends. Not even her Australian Shepherd Molly. She didn't want to think about the food she would miss. The school she would never graduate from. She did not want to think about the books she would never read. The movies she would never see. The music she would never hear. The dances she would never attend. She did not want to think about the trips she would never take to places in the world she would never see.

The tower was still there. It stood a monument to their . . . her folly. Babel. It was well named. It had scrambled her dreams of the future so thoroughly that she did not understand how hope could ever speak to her again. She walked over to the small stream that ran near the site and where she and Xhi had eaten so many lunches together as they discussed a future that would never be realized. She took off her shoes and rested her feet in the cold water. It felt good. She stood up and turned over some of the smooth stones resting on the bottom of the brook. Her father, an avid fly fisherman, had taught her how to look for mayfly, stonefly, and caddisfly larvae. There were none. Just like the pika, there were no animals in this valley. That had seemed accidental once, but now it seemed malicious. It was like living in some kind of aquarium, she realized. Were they being watched? Were some alter-dimensional children tapping on the sky above trying to get her to move?

She climbed up the tower and hiked up to the saddle again, this time not to look down but to look out over the mountains. Did they ever end beyond the horizon? Was it possible they went on forever? She was up to the saddle by noon and took a long drink from one of the abundant canteens people

had left when they returned from their failed expedition. She looked out over the cirque to the mountains. The peaks that stretched into the distance were endless as far as she could see, like a child's drawing of cone mountains shrinking into the distance until they became too small to draw and ended as pointy dots. She looked down; there was a small lake at the bottom of the bowl. She wondered if there were fish in the lake, since it wasn't in their animal-forsaken valley.

It took her only a couple of hours to get back to the tower and climb down to the valley floor. She still had some nuts and dried fruit in her backpack, so she sat with her back against a rock and ate a small meal. She drank from the stream and laid down on the grass and looked up at the sky through a couple of tall trees that stretched high in a circle above her. She wondered again if she were being watched.

When she opened her eyes, she was surprised to see stars. Had she left her curtain open again? Then it hit her—it was night. And she was outside of the village. She sat up and looked around. She did not see the creatures. She turned her attention back to the stars and tried to scry out the time. There was Vishnu's eye near the horizon and the golden arches high near the polar star; it was after midnight, but not as late as 2am. She began to shake. By force of will, she stopped and listened carefully for the sound of the monsters. Nothing. She looked carefully around trying not to make a sound but could not see anything in motion. If she could just lay low until dawn she would be fine. But she had never heard of anyone surviving a night outside. Then it struck her. The tower. Could the beasts climb it? It couldn't get up the stairs, she was sure, their heads would not fit through the opening of each floor where the flight of stairs leading to the next landing ended. Quietly, quietly she crept to the tower. She took off her shoes and began the slow ascent up the tower. She moved very slowly, very quietly, barely breathing. Each hand on the wood of the tower sounded like an explosion to her ears, and she would freeze and listen for the sound of clicking and clacking. Nothing. She climbed carefully up the hill and got behind a tree and sat to wait until the sun rose into the valley. Meg must be terrified she had not come home. She would hope her dear roommate had gone home with some lover, but

she would know in her heart she would not have done that. Meg would be worried sick. She did not even tell her that she was going to the tower. The silence was absolute. There was no wind. No moon. She wanted to look out over the valley and see if she could see the creatures, but she knew anything she did to see them would allow them to see her—and who knew what their capacities for seeing were like. Maybe they were moles, or maybe they were eagles. She would just sit. Wait until light.

She looked up the slope of the mountain adjacent to her. A glacier climbed up its side to where it joined the slope she was sitting on that ran up to the top of the saddle. And there they were. The bulbous headed fiends were clicking and whooshing down the glacier at the speed of a cheetah. It took only seven seconds for them to reach her. Her last thoughts were: (1) would her dog Molley have been able to drive them off? (2) relief that it was over; (3) that she should have let Xhi make love to her; and (4) would being emptied hurt?



Caesura

She could not be spinning. There was no sense of centripetal force. Nor so much as a waft of wind blowing past to suggest she was falling through the air. No feeling of bodily proprioception—were her legs below her? Her arm—where was it? Yet she knew it was there, she could discern it but not feel it. Her body was a growing catalog of contradictions. She was not senseless, she could see colors—in patches, lines, oblongs, blotches, geometric shapes, forms, poofs and splotches, wobbles and splashes, mosaics, smears of lazy flecks of stippling careening namby-pamby over ticklish solids in ways that should have made her dizzy, for all was in motion. Rivers of colors, some on and some off the spectrum reflected in the hues of the rainbow and beyond and swooped back down into the depths of whatever this was.

But then she knew what it was, not through some chain of logic and accumulation of empirical evidence, but as if it had been added to her set

of mental categories—it was the past. All of it. All these things hurricaning around her were the simultaneity of the four dimensions of her existence so far. That roving tangle of green could be her bike, not an object in space, but a bicycle in space and time. She smiled as the thought passed through her mind. Who would have guessed when your life passed right before your eyes you would not have a hint of what you were seeing? Yet because she had no perceptual apparatus to parse it into temporal slices, she could not pull a single event from the background of chaos. To give it meaning, she knew she would need to apprehend it in just three dimensions. If she could just slice it up right, she could grasp the object-laden nature of lesser dimensions in the thickness of this one, and she could find a way out. If she understood how, she could take the multidimensions through which she traveled and condense the well-stirred mess just enough to do a razor-thin Dedekind cut on this reality, then she could recreate the present of her earthly sojourn.

How she knew this she did not understand, but it seemed part and parcel of what she'd been cognitively handed as she twirled in this strange place. She thought how if she had experienced this kind of moving-colors-passage in her life she would be dizzy and seasick, but there was no feeling of motion, only passage and flow. What kind of thing am I? She wondered. A spirit? A soul? An Intelligence? Perhaps a mere notion in the passing dream of a God, as her friend Sonali—who had lived two doors down from Meg's and her place—believed. Meg! Sonali! It was coming back. She had not ceased to exist! That was something; whatever she was, she was alive! The colors began to focus into a cone, the point of which seemed to be gathering together and shrinking the visual field of colors—outside of which was a vast field of grey emptiness now lining the sides of the horizon where the colors melted away and focused her progress toward the sharp point of a cone. Then, as she hit the point at the end of the cone, the void gathered around her; she popped out into what she felt sure was Hell.

She was in a tunnel with smooth blue walls the color of a dark sea, with rounded ceilings and a flat floor—as if a tube had been cut level along the bottom so she could walk. The tunnel was about as wide and high as an aspen. There were people everywhere. She asked someone where she was, but

the other person did not stop—she just looked at her and motioned in the direction everyone seemed to be heading along the broad pathway. She tried to talk to those around her, and while they turned their eyes her direction, they would only turn away and continue their march.

To her surprise, she was not afraid. She was also surprised they were all walking instead of floating, as she supposed spirits would. She noticed that she could feel the passage of air, the ground under her feet, the sounds of the people moving. She touched her face and could feel her skin, the shape of her nose. She ran her finger along her lips and felt the same slight tickle she always felt when she'd done that on Earth. She tried again to talk to a man walking near her, and he glanced at her and gestured forward. The entire congregation was naked, but it seemed natural and unremarkable, as if the old shame and taboos had been lifted out of her. She could see an opening ahead and soon she walked into a vast cavern. It was as massive as a city. Unlike a city, however, there were no structures.

As they entered, the people spread out and began chattering quietly. The man who had walked beside her turned to her and said, "I perceive you are new. We can talk now; in the tunnels we have a tradition to hold our tongues still."

She noticed his voice was not moving with his mouth, like the old Japanese Godzilla movies she watched as a kid. She intuited that he was speaking in a different language, but she was hearing it in English. She nodded and asked, "Where are we?"

He smiled, a very human and reassuring gesture. He said, "It is where we wait."

"The spirit world?" she asked.

"Yes," he said, "Like that. It has many names, but that's not a bad one."

"What are we doing?" she asked. She was calm but confused.

He looked at her and said softly, "We are here for you. And the other arrivals. We are from valleys many and far-flung. We will listen to the voice of The Mendicant Instructor. Then we will separate again into our valleys and return to our section of this place and think about what was said."

"And wait? For what?" she said. "And wait," he answered.

The room was massive, several miles across perhaps, and the floor curved upward as if the bottom of a great bowl so one could see the crowd of spirits gathered on the other side of the concave area. Strange the way that all those gathered here were spirits; it came to her, for there was nothing in their appearance that would have given them away as such. She looked at the multitude of people and for the first time was frightened by the immensity of the crowd. At the center of the bowl she noticed a large platform, like a raised dais several meters high. On it stood an old man. He seemed shabby and out of place. He dressed in rags hanging loosely and unkempt from his shoulders and tied around his waist with a rope. He was not naked like the masses milling in the cavern. He stood and spoke. His voice carried easily over the assembled spirits. A hush fell over the crowd, and she sensed that her growing fear was shared by the others.

“Welcome newcomers. Be afraid, for you will hear terrors. I will tell the story of the death of Zhawa.”

She, following the examples of the others, got on her knees. Every ghost of that multitude started humming and swaying until, from every tongue, from every person came a song. Not the same song. Not the same words nor the same score. From no two spirits did the song that issued forth express exactly the same thing, either in the notes or the lyrics. Each sang different words, to a different strain, yet the chords sprang together, twisting and knotting as one into a single song that bubbled from the throng as if a heavenly choir were singing a single piece. She sang her part. She sang a song she had never heard before, as an individual, to a score that only she was singing. Alone. The words came to her from nowhere and everywhere, and it seemed it was true for each soul of that place. Each voice combined with the others to create a new libretto for a new aria for the assembly as a whole, as if making only a single voice. One song. From millions of different voices.

When it was over the old shabby man stood. “Again. You have sung as one the New Song. The song of Zhawa. And despite your poor performance, nevertheless we honor him.”



Jackie Leishman
Yosemite 32
printmaking ink, paint, pastel, and collage
24 x 18 inches

A great cheer arose. And she with them. She had heard the song. She had learned of the death of Zhawa. The oldest child of the high God and Goddess, Elal and Shkna.

And yet. There was something wrong. The aria had not been finished. She knew this. Yes, the god Zhawa had died. Fully. Not just in body, but in spirit. Yet something seemed incomplete. There were things left hanging. Threads of the refrain unresolved. She wanted to ask, but the man in rags began to speak, and a hush fell again over the crowd.

“Find your valley mates you silly and sad spirits. Return to your small caverns and rejoice until we meet again and sing the new song. Perhaps you will do better next time.” And then he was gone. Just like that. He vanished.

She looked around, everyone was in motion, forming clusters, she felt drawn to one in particular on the other side of the bowl, and as she approached one of the women shouted her name, and as she turned, she returned the shout in delight, “Kartari! Is it you?” They ran together and embraced. It was the biggest surprise of the evening. She could feel Kartari’s arms around her, her breasts pressing against her own, and her spirit body was filled with the warmth of the living.

“I was looking for you!” Kartari said.

She was surprised. “How did you know I’d died?”

“We saw it. Come I’ll show you.”

She followed the group of spirits from her valley down many long twisting corridors through the silent tunnels until they came to a smaller cavern about the size of an airplane hangar back on Earth with hundreds of small tunnels emanating from its hub.

“Kartari, what do we do here? Do we eat or sleep?”

“No,” Kartari said. “We watch and wait. We talk mostly about the past and our lives before coming here, or we try to imagine what life will be like when we leave.”

“It sounds boring,” she said.

“No,” Kartari said, “Without our bodies, that frustration at waiting seems low key. Come let me show you something.” Kartari took her hand and led

her to one of the tunnels that seemed to branch from the main chamber. They walked in a few feet and were met by a shimmering wall of red. Like a sheer curtain that disclosed everything outside when one looked out the window. She was looking into the public house back in the Valley. There were many people she knew well, playing cards or having a cup of tea or just talking.

She turned to Kartari, "What is this place?" Her friend smiled,

"Each of the tunnels that lead from our cavern end in a window to the valley. I watched you and Xhi and the others build the tower to escape." She looked down, "We so wanted you to return to earth. So wanted you to be free. That's how we saw you die. We saw Meg bawling in the pub because you had not come home, so we looked through the windows until we found you asleep under the stars. We knew you would be killed."

They watched for a long time until she took Kartari's hand and pulled her back to the cavern. "Would you mind if I explored others of these windows?"

"Of course not. Please, there is really nothing else to do."



For the next few weeks, she watched her friends. She watched Xhi. He had climbed twice up to the pass that had led them all into such despair, and he sat on the edge staring out over the peaks that slid into the vanishing point of the distant horizon. He cried often. She knew it was because she had been emptied. The rest of the time he wandered the valley.

Meg, too, was inconsolable. She wept on her bed. The loss of hope for an escape, the loss of her roommate and friend, had left her broken. She wanted to reach out to her and comfort her, but she could not. She was far away.

She also found her own physical body. She watched it cooking a breakfast of eggs and bacon. It took the prepared food to the wooden table and ate. It clearly took no enjoyment from the meal. It did not show any signs of pleasure. When the meal was over, it sat down on a stiff wooden chair and focused her roving eye on nothing in particular. Until there was something else that needed to be done to care for the body, or fulfill someone's request

for help, she did not get up. Oh how she longed to be back in there! What a waste of a body. She longed to taste the bacon and eggs, drink a glass of orange juice, taste fresh pineapple. Couldn't she ever again feel her arms and legs moving through the world? She just ached to be brought back into the world. To Earth, or even the Valley. In the plainness of this second place, life had so little to recommend it. Nor did it seem bad, as if her intolerance for boredom had been anesthetized. But nothing changed about wanting her body back. She so much wanted it back.



One day passed much as the last. After what must have been several months, although it was hard to tell, she was sitting at the end of one of the tunnels, as she often did, watching through the red shimmer the people of the village. Right now, Xhi and Meg were recalling some of the times they had shared with her before she had been emptied. It was so touching to see her friends express such intimate things about how much they cared about her and loved her. It was bittersweet, because their conversation helped her realize how much she loved these two old friends. It had been weeks since she had thought about Jorge. But these two? They were constantly on her mind. She wanted to take them into her arms and tell them she loved them.

“You love them?”

She was surprised to see the ragged mendicant sitting on the floor near the screen. She had not seen him since her arrival. She did not hear his approach, maybe because he just appeared—she knew nothing of what could be done or not done here. But there he was, clothed in rags, a nauseous smell coming from this dirty and unwashed body. She wondered if it were the real thing—a genuine physical body like she used to have. “Yes of course. I love them dearly.”

He declared loudly, “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.”

“The Gospel of John, quoting the Savior, I think,” she said.

“Who?”

“Jesus . . . Never mind.”

“Follow me. I want to show you something. You are sort of thick. I’ll show you something useful. Give you a bit of wisdom that you sorely lack.”

They walked out of the tunnel, and then from the main cavern took another. One low to the ground they had to crawl into. She’d been in it before. At the end, the view was from a meadow to a rock wall climbing above the valley. It was not one that many spirits visited, because people from the valley did not come to this area often, and there was really nothing to see. He brought her to the end where, of course, there was a shimmering red window at the end, like all the tunnels here.

They reached the place, and the mendicant said, “Look.”

She did and said, “I see the cliff wall near the waterfall. I know the place.”

“Look closer. What do you see?”

“I see the grass against the cliff. I see a pine nearby, some of its branches trying to find their way around the cliff growing up along its face. I see the shimmer of this mirror lightly reflected against the granite wall . . .”

“Look closely.”

She did. And she realized the faint shimmer was not a reflection. She could see shapes moving within the shimmer.

“That is not a reflection of this window,” she said matter of factually. “What is it?”

Then she saw it. It resolved suddenly with great clarity. Not because of any change in the image itself, but because she focused her eyes differently, and she saw it. It was a city street. A busy city street and people were walking by. New York? Paris? Beijing? She could not tell. But she could tell it was Earth.

“It’s home,” she said in a whisper.

“Yes. Anyone can walk through it.”

“It’s not visible to those in the Valley. I know it. I’ve been to this place. Many times.”

“You never touched the rock?”

“No. Why would I?”

“Yes, why would you. Thus no one ever escapes even though it is easy.”

"This makes a mockery of our lives," she said. "To spring on us that we could have escaped if we just would have touched a certain rock, which we never would have, seems the ultimate cruelty. Did you bring me here to taunt me? To tell me I just had to tap my ruby slippers three times and I could have been whisked home? You are nothing but a monster."

"Perhaps. I suppose someone who has seen it from this place could tell them."

"Is that possible? Tell me. Tell me how? Tell me now!"

"Greater love hath no woman than this, that a woman lay down her life for her friends," he mocked.

She reached out to touch the red screen. She knew what it would feel like. She'd touched hundreds of them. They were warm, glassy, slightly vibrating, and completely impenetrable.

She moved to go through.

"Don't touch it, you dim girl. The field will collapse, and everyone will be free to return to their emptied bodies. But not you. You will evaporate. Your shade will anyway. Don't touch it. Or do, everyone would be happy if you did. You'd be dead though. Gone. Forever. You will go through, but when you try to leave the field you will vanish from existence. Forever. Poof. You will dissolve. Your spirit will be utterly and completely destroyed. Your existence will be over. It is an eternal nonexistence."

She backed away. "I thought you could not die as a spirit?"

He smirked. "Why would you think that?"



Later that week, they were summoned to sing so several newly arrived spirits could sing the strange and lovely New Song. When they got back, she told a few of her company what the mendicant had said. They all knew. They'd all been told by the same person sometime in the past. That is why few went there. All were frightened they might accidentally fall in.

She spent a lot of time there. Watching the people in the fog of the cliff-face scene from some earthly city. The rest of the time she spent watching Meg and Xhi. They had become friends, and after a few more months lovers—apparently drawn together through her death. She was not jealous, not here, but she longed for them and loved them and wished she could see them again and hold their hands and enjoy the pleasures of good conversations and sharing a meal and just being together. Just being together. She loved them. It was that.

One day she found Meg crying. Xhi had his arm around her. His eyes were moist too. Meg was talking about a time she had taken her son to the London Zoo. There was a new exhibit of Koala bears, and her son had been in rapture over the little marsupials. Meg wondered if anyone had taken him to the zoo since. Or if anyone cared about him at all. What was he doing? Was he loved? She was sure her husband would have remarried. Who was the stranger caring for him now? Or did her ex give their son to Meg's own mother to raise? She couldn't bear not knowing anymore. Meg wept. Xhi wept. She wept. Who had done this to them? No God worth worshipping could have done it. Of that she was sure.

The next day as she was sitting before the shimmering door where the scene from earth could be discerned, when the mendicant reappeared. He looked down at her.

"Why do you sit here? You look stupid."

"No reason. I like knowing the place I came from existed."

"The god Zhawa often sat looking at his world too. I thought he looked stupid too. He was the son of god and died to save his universe."

"Like Jesus?"

"You've mentioned him before."

"In my world, he died to save his people too."

"Happens a lot, I'll be bound."

"He was resurrected after three days."

"You mean his spirit was returned to his body after three days? What kind of sacrifice is that? Three days of being dead? That's like saying you are giving up your house for some great cause and then repossessing it after a weekend away."

"It's not like that. He suffered for our sins."

"Ohhh. Suffered for your sins did he?"

"Do not mock it."

"I'm not. I just don't know what that means."

"A lot. It means a lot."

"I'm sure. But Zhawa! Now there was a proper god's son. When he died for us, his spirit was destroyed. Consumed. Forever. His was an eternal sacrifice. Zhawa was emptied permanently. Never to feel a thing ever again. His sacrifice was infinite and eternal. His body became an icon! We pray before it and to it. A living icon. On his left sits the great father, on the right his heavenly mother. They remember him. And what he did. They ask us to remember him. We remember him in word and action. We remember him in ritual meals. He gave up his life for his friends. We call upon our great heavenly parents now in his name, Zhawa! He that will ever be remembered."

She sat silently watching, then turned to the mendicant. "So if I walked through this barrier would drop and everyone could go back to their bodies. Except me."

"Not everyone. Just the people from your valley."

"And would they remember their time here?"

"Of course. Why wouldn't they?"

"I don't know. All the stupid rules seem rather arbitrary to me as it is."

"Don't be blasphemous girl!"

"I'm sorry. But they could tell the others how to get back to our world? To Earth?"

"I'm sure, girl, it would be a stampede to go through the other door to your, what do you call it? Earth."

"So Meg could see her son. And Xhi his wife. Can you tell me if her son will remember him or if Xhi's wife will have waited all these years?"

"I assure you I know nothing of your world. Maybe they did. Maybe they didn't. I can't answer these kinds of questions. I serve Zhawa."

"So, I could do what Zhawa did?"

"Don't be absurd. You really are slow. He saved a universe. Billions of people. You'll be saving a valley? What? Three maybe four hundred? Don't let it go to your head. That is not comparable."

He paused for a time and looked at her eyes as if trying to see something, then said, “Even so, Greater love hath no woman than this: that a woman lay down her life for her friends.”



She watched Xhi and Meg for the next two days. She watched them climb to the saddle again. She watched them swim in a slow part of the river. She watched them weep and hold each other and curse their lot that they would never see their loved ones again. And she wept with them, because she loved them. With all her heart.

She returned to the door that would set them free. All of them. She did not want to give up existence. She wanted to see Jorge again. But she could not live like this. It had to end. But mostly she just wanted Xhi and Meg to have a chance at a happy life—not just living day to day in an endless repeat of a sham existence. She wanted them to have faith and hope in a future. She wanted them to build something that would endure. She wanted them to fulfill dreams. She wept at the injustice of the world that demanded such things. But love. It endured. Even if it meant she would not.



She found Kartari watching a badminton game through one of the other doors that looked over one of the fields in the valley.

“Kartari, come with me a moment, won’t you?”

“Of course.”

She was silent as she led her to the door, “Look, do you see the door on the cliff wall?”

“Yes. The one to Earth?”

“Yes.”

“Will you gather everyone? Tell them this barrier will be down. Tell them to return to their bodies. Tell them to go through the door opposite. Go back to Earth.”

“How? You can’t open it. You’ll die. We all know that. It will be the end!”

“Go! Please hurry. Please just go get them. And Kartari, when you get to the other side, will you do something for me?”

“I’ll do anything.”

“Tell Xhi and Meg how much they meant to me. Tell them I loved them dearly.”

“I will.”

“Go.”

Kartari took off, shouting at the top of her spirit lungs.

The red door was glimmering before her bright with promise, tears ran down her cheeks as she reached out her hand and opened something locked and secured, but vulnerable to certain sacrifices.



Kenoses

The old woman lived in the valley by herself. In the morning she would light a fire in the fireplace of the empty house. Then, after waiting for the proper amount of time to pass, she would walk to the mercantile to get fresh eggs, bread and butter, and some onions. She needed to eat and so would cook a simple meal. Then, to keep her body healthy and strong, she would walk for three hours to the waterfall at the end of the valley and then turn around and walk back to the village. She saw nothing of its beauty. Nor did she long for company. Once every seven days, she would go to the old meeting room and sing a hymn and offer a prayer and then read from the Spanish Book of Mormon, which she kept on top of the piano. There was no one to translate for, but it did not matter because she did not do it to teach or learn, nor to find meaning or gain insight. After, she would offer a closing prayer, walk to the mercantile and pick up an apple pie, a pork chop, a potato, some carrots, and using the butter from breakfast she would fry all but the pie together in the kitchen and eat them. She would then eat the pie. After this, she would sit on the porch and watch the sun set over the mountains. She would sit there until the old clock, which she wound each day, struck 10 p.m. Then she would

ready herself for bed and sleep until the alarm went off at 6 a.m. She would repeat this each day as she had for many years. She did not look for reasons, but if you should ask her, she would say she did these things because that is what bodies do. They need exercise, food, and sleep. And it is what her ghost would want her to do.



One day she met a man standing on the road to the waterfall. He was short. Dark skinned. With brown eyes.

“Hello,” she said.

“Hello,” he answered.

“I am walking to stay in good health,” she said.

He nodded. “I do the will of my parents. And do nothing save they tell me to do it.”

“Are you exercising?”

“I will walk with you as they asked.”

“You are most welcome to join me,” she said.

“My name is Zhawa.”

“It is a pleasure to meet you. I am called Sophia.”

“Sophia. The pleasure is mine.”

In silence they continued down the road. The sun was rising high in the sky bathing the face of the eastern-facing mountains in light, igniting the snow-covered peaks in a pale pink glow. A light wind was playing softly among the pines and the babble of the stream sounded cold and clear through the trees. The rhythm of their footfalls rose from the dirt road and the world was full of green things growing abundantly in brightness and light all round them. When they reached the waterfall, they watched for a time, and perhaps knowing that bodies at times needed to converse, they waited for the other to make a request or issue a command. But neither spoke and so in silence they watched and listened as frigid snowmelt poured over the edge of the world.

A MORMON BOY MEETS A KING

Henry Landon Miles

“Stop gawking at that guy,” Mother said, as I stood staring at a man while shopping in a five and dime store in Idaho Falls. I had never seen a black person before. I stood fascinated in my mom-made bib overalls, until Mom lifted her eyes from the school supplies to her six-year-old son—who had stood too still, for too long, for her not to notice.

A few years later, my dad related a story to me. At Simplot’s dehydrating plant, Dad tended two boilers to steam the water from potatoes for soldiers during World War II. An African American began working on the potato production line, and in a few weeks, Dad looked out his window and saw a policeman by his motorcycle talking to the black man on the sidewalk. Days later the black man stopped coming to work. The policeman had asked him politely to leave town as soon as convenient. Decades later I learned that the town fathers had the police do this to discourage blacks from settling in Blackfoot.

On Saturday nights in 1950, Blackfoot teens gathered inside and outside of Roy’s Ice Cream parlor. Once, two black men came walking west along Bridge Street, heading out of town. Eric Sims spotted them first, ran after them, and ten kids followed. The black men began singing and put a shuffle in their steps. We kids did likewise, singing and shuffling along together down the middle of the street. When we tired of this venture, we turned around and skipped back to the ice cream parlor and the blacks walked on west out of town.

In 2019, I wonder how these black men felt. Did fear force them to sing and shuffle while walking briskly out of Blackfoot away from 5,800 whites in 1950?

Going south, only the Blackfoot River separated Blackfoot from the Shoshone-Bannock Reservation, and many Indian kids attended Blackfoot schools. Families like mine bought wagonloads of hay from Indians as well as deerskin moccasins and gloves. Stores also sold their products. In the lower grades at Irving Elementary, some of us played cowboys and Indians during recess and lunchtime. I recall being a cowboy and fighting real Indians led by Emery Chico Tendoy, who was a year or so older than I. We were all friends, never hurt one another in our war games.

The sleazy bars along Main Street, one owned by a Hansen relative, a family secret, had signs on the door, "No Indians or Dogs Allowed." Discussing this as students at Idaho State College, my friend Bill Christenson and I laughed as he said, "What dog would enter those bars anyway?"

Upscale bars, such as Snowballs and the Silver Spur, had no such signs. During the annual layoff at the cheese factory one winter, my dad tended bar at Snowballs and told our family about men crowding around a billiard table to watch Henry Blackhawk aim his cue stick at the cue ball. Blackhawk was Blackfoot's champion snooker player. In high school we elected Wyman Babby to be president of my senior class, and after high school three females in my class married Indians. I believe all of these Native Americans, regardless of their tribe, lived on the Shoshone-Bannock Reservation.

I graduated from Blackfoot High in 1953, worked the summer spiking rails to ties for the Union Pacific Railroad, and became a blacksmith apprentice in the fall. I worked with a Pentecostal preacher, who invited me to visit his chapel one Saturday afternoon, who read me Bible verses, and who mentioned a concept new to me: the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints did not ordain negroes. Next day at church, I talked with returned missionary Doyle Elison. We discussed ordination, and at age eighteen I learned we did not ordain blacks. I do not recall the scripture he read to me to support this policy.

After serving an LDS mission in Canada and receiving an AA from Ricks College, I attended Idaho State College and joined the debate squad in 1960. My partner Paul Defosses and I entered the prepared speech contest during a debate meet at Utah State College. While awaiting our turn, we watched a girl from Westminster College give a speech in which she compared blacks to silkworm pupae and the LDS Church to silk producers, who boil the silkworm cocoons to kill the pupae, who unravel each cocoon into a single silk thread hundreds of feet long, and who process the thread into silk.

In an hour Paul and I finished our speeches and saw the silk lady walking out of the building. Paul ran to catch her and I followed. He said to her, "You're just the lady we've been looking for." He praised her speech and invited her to a party he invented, saying we needed a date for an invented black male on our debate team. The invitation to date a black student stunned her, and she stammered she could not. Did she deliver her silkworm oration again?

Upon my graduation from Idaho State in the spring of 1961, my wife Carol and I moved to Virginia and began seeing blacks daily. In the fall, I was working at Potomac Electric Power Company. Returning from coffee break one morning, I was in a deep discussion with coworker Stan on an elevator with a black operator. "Nigger" slipped from my lips and conversations ceased. The riders covered themselves in a silence unknown since before the Big Bang. Moments passed, the elevator stopped, and Stan stepped out, holding his hand over his mouth to curb laughter. I was walking behind him, red-faced, hoping to self-evaporate.

I noticed my changing sensitivity to race when Blackfooter Delwin Daniels visited us in the summer of 1962. He arrived in DC with a delegation from Blackfoot's Chamber of Commerce and visited the office of Congressman Ralph Harding, where Carol worked. A school-mate through grade eleven, Delwin had become the jovial, 300-pound owner of a small grocery store. As we dined out that evening, I recall

my dismay on hearing him say, "There's sure a lot of niggers out here," but I knew his Blackfoot idiom did not intend meanness. I related to him the moment when this word had departed from my mouth on an elevator with a black operator.

In 1962, a few months into my first career job, a contract negotiator for the Navy, Glen Roane joined my group of ten negotiators. We purchased underwater ordnance, such as nuclear torpedoes for the Polaris submarine, and related research, such as sonar to discern between ships and large fish. Our manager assigned Glen a desk next to mine. We shook hands and I began associating with the only black person in our office and learning his life stories. Glen became my window into his world. I learned he had received his law degree in 1957 and had taught high school and carpentered until 1961, when pressure from the civil rights movement enabled him to secure a professional job. In the 1990s, I interviewed Glen and learned the following details of his life.

Glen Roane was born July 26, 1930, the seventh of ten children. With five brothers and four sisters, he had grown up on a 58-acre farm in Westmoreland County, Virginia. The family raised tomatoes, corn, and wheat for cash and all types of vegetables for the table. A mill ground their wheat, four or five bushels at a time, and his mother, who had a fourth grade education, made biscuits every morning for her ten children.

Glen's father, who had finished the seventh grade, worked on and off the farm, had built the family's house, had constructed other houses in the area, and had taught his sons carpentry. Glen used these skills to earn money for college and to support his family for a few years after his marriage.

In Glen's experience I see my own. My mom and dad finished the eighth grade, and we lived on seven acres where we produced most of what we ate: milk and meat from our cattle and pigs, fruit from our apple trees, and vegetables from our garden. Mom canned fruit, meat, and vegetables for our winter meals and baked our bread. During my childhood, cash came from my dad's jobs: Kraft Cheese, Union Pacific,

Simplot Potatoes, and for a year or so he owned a truck and hauled milk from farmers to the cheese factory.

On the side, Dad bought and operated a sixty-acre farm with my grandfather during World War II. He sold it after a year, bought a forty-acre farm, raised a crop or two, sold it, and then increased the number of hogs and cows raised on our seven-acre lot located one block from the city limits. Then Blackfoot passed an ordinance against raising pigs within the city limits.

I could not understand. Why not ban cows too? Did the influence of our neighbor, who had a large pine-post corral and shipped cattle between California and Idaho, affect the decision to exclude pigs, but keep cows? If my dad had fought for his rights, would pigs still have been allowed? The only animals we raised during my last years at home were milk cows and a steer a year for meat.

A couple of Glen Roane's aunts and his step grandmother taught school, and they encouraged him to get an education. Glen memorized their most quoted phrase: "If you're going to make a living in this world, you've got to have an education." After leaving A. T. Johnson High School in 1946, Glen entered Virginia State University, a school for blacks, where in 1952 he became a Distinguished Military Graduate with a degree in agronomy and a commission as a second lieutenant. Then Glen entered the Army for two years.

I grew up among people with manual jobs; I had limited exposure to professions. Uncle Calvin, the only degreed person in our family, taught physics at Blackfoot High School and had to work a second job to meet his bills. Other teachers did the same, so I had no incentive to become a teacher. Doctors, dentists, and lawyers lived on the east side of the tracks, the side with paved streets, indoor toilets, and toilet paper instead of pages from the Sears Roebuck catalog. I grew up seeing myself incapable of pursuing their educations and professions.

In high school I had little interest in knowledge and had a 1.5 GPA my senior year. My first bout with college came when the railroad

changed from steam to diesel engines and some blacksmiths lost their jobs, as did I—the last apprentice hired. I attended Idaho State winter semester of 1954 and dropped out. As I prepared to enter the Army in December of 1954, my bishop, Clarence Cox, encouraged me to serve an LDS mission. I believe the divine entered the process that led me to sell my '50 Ford convertible with a Lincoln engine and begin a two-year mission in Canada in March of 1955.

On my mission, what I learned, I taught, and knowledge took on value. Barnard Silver—my second missionary companion, who had completed two years at MIT—said I could memorize scriptures and poetry as fast as he, that I had a high IQ. He urged me strongly to return to college after my mission. A year later the mission president called me to serve as district president of Calgary, an oil-rich area with many educated Mormons, including the mayor.

Soon, I found myself having lunch on Sundays with Apostle Benson's daughter, Barbara, and her husband, Dr. Robert Walker, who became a nationally known cardiovascular specialist. My calling also gave me the opportunity to meet often with a lawyer, a stockbroker, and a petroleum engineer. Nine months in this context left me comfortable associating with educated people and a desire to attend college.

It seems a paradox that growing up in a black environment gave Glen Roane access to a larger view of reality than white Blackfoot gave me. His experience also seems superior to mine in preparing a person to value education and to survive the move from high school to college.

After Glen's army service, he attended the Howard University School of Law on the GI Bill and received his JD degree in 1957. Glen said this happened next:

I graduated and went to Baltimore to take the Civil Service exam for claims examiner. I passed it with an 88, got five points veteran's preference, which gave me 93. They interviewed us en masse and there were seven or eight people, maybe ten, two blacks in the group. They asked me one question, "Do you think you would like this job?"

I had already gone there for two interviews. I had taken the exam and then came back for another interview. Of course I would like the job. That's the only thing they asked. But they did not give me a job. When I went back to see why I did not get a job, they said, "Yes, you passed and got 93 with the veteran's preference, but we did not think you could make a satisfactory adjustment to the duties of a claims authorizer."

What adjustment are you supposed to make? Those were the days before the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Glen also applied for jobs at the Library of Congress and the Justice Department with the same result, no job. And he took bar exams. "I tried to pass the Virginia Bar . . . and hit the Virginia Bar at the top of massive resistance," Glen said. "They would let one black pass the Virginia bar—two pass, zero pass, one pass, two pass, zero pass. They did that for about six years after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954." This Supreme Court decision made separate schools for blacks and whites unconstitutional. All justices supported this decision, voted nine to zero—and in Virginia, blacks suffered consequences. Of these consequences Glen said,

Until 1954, 50 to 65 percent of Howard graduates passed the Virginia Bar, just like the whites, same percentage almost. In 1955 and after, the Blacks who took the bar exam ended up taking it again. We were just piled up on top of each other. They were examining more blacks than whites because we were taking it over and over again.

So I never did pass the Virginia Bar. I took it three times and quit. I failed the DC Bar right out of school in '57, but I had prepared for the Virginia Bar. I did not prepare for the DC Bar; I just sat for it. In 1960, I took the DC Bar again, passed it, and was admitted to the bar in 1961.

While pursuing a law-related job, Glen also had to find ways to feed his family. In 1957 he taught chemistry and general science at Pomonkey High School in Charles County, Maryland. The next year he taught the same subjects at A. P. Johnson High School in Westmoreland County, Virginia. In 1959 he began teaching at Northumberland High School,

but quit after fall semester to earn more money at a carpentry job in Washington, DC. Glen was earning only \$3,500 a year teaching school.

I asked how he got his job with Veterans Affairs before transferring to the Navy Department. Glen said, "Well, in 1961, I visited the VA, something connected with my insurance, and I saw these jobs for adjudicators. I am dressed casual, like a carpenter, reading the duties of an adjudicator. This guy sees me and comes over, tries to steer me to the list of manual jobs. I tell him the adjudicator job looks more interesting, and I look at him and he says, 'You don't have a law degree, do you?' I say yes and he fumbles for an application and asks me to complete it."

Since Glen had filled out applications before without receiving results, he said in frustration, "I am not filling out any more applications. You do not intend to hire me simply because I am black. I have filled them out before, got my hopes up, and got nothing." The two talked on, both embarrassed because of people gathering to listen to them. Finally, Glen agreed to fill out the forms and take the examination again. He passed another exam, but this time he got a job!

One night, Glen and I met one of our contractors at the stadium in DC to watch the Senators play baseball. The game ended and Glen invited me to stop by his house in DC on my way home to Greenbelt in Maryland. Before entering his house, he walked me around the block under the streetlights, showing me the manicured yards of his neighbors. He said, "Now, why can't we live in your suburbs?" I shrugged. Inside his home, he tossed his baby into my arms, and maybe I appeared to cuddle the child in stride, but inside I felt a happening. I had not touched a black baby before. Holding the child kindled feelings I cannot describe and may not have mentioned before. Prejudice—or just a new experience?

I became president of the elders quorum of the College Park Ward in Maryland and began a series of Sunday firesides presented by known Mormons such as J. Willard Marriott and Senator Wallace Bennett, as

well as their wives, and lesser-knowns such as June Thane and Dwayne Stephenson. No one objected until I invited Stephenson.

Lynn, a law student, complained to the stake couple in charge of firesides, Robert and Della Stilmar, saying Dwayne had communist ideas, implying he was a sympathizer with our archenemy at the time, the Soviet Union. The fireside couple, a lawyer and his wife, discussed the situation with me; I did not know Dwayne but he seemed okay. I urged them to attend the fireside so they could discuss it with knowledge if Lynn made it an issue.

Dwayne told his story about the newly formed Peace Corps. He had learned French on his mission, had graduated from BYU, and had become active in politics as a Kennedy Democrat. After Kennedy established the Peace Corps, Dwayne applied for the position of director in a French-speaking country in Africa. The hiring process included a series of interviews. One interviewer noted Dwayne was a Mormon.

This interviewer said she had met only one other Mormon in her life, said she had met him at a leadership conference for college students. In a bull session at the conference one evening, the topic turned to blacks, whom some believed inferior to whites (at the time, some states used this notion to justify separate schools for each race). The Mormon student body officer from BYU said he did not think blacks were inferior; he knew they were inferior, and for that reason his church did not give them the priesthood.

This statement had upset Dwayne's interviewer; she recalled not only the statement but also the religion and school of the author. Dwayne told the interviewer not to judge all Mormons by one student. Dwayne said he believed blacks were equal to whites and he would change the priesthood policy if he could. Dwayne left this interviewer with little hope of being hired.

The interview process ended and Sargent Shriver, the first Peace Corps director, invited Dwayne to his office. Shriver said Dwayne had

impressive French and the best credentials for the position—but it was too risky to hire a Mormon for this high-profile director job. Upon arriving in the African country, a reporter with Marxist leanings would surely interview Dwayne at the airport, ask the name of his state (Utah), his religion (LDS), and ask him about Utah: how it was settled, the dominant religion. Eventually, the reporter would ask questions regarding the LDS policy toward blacks and the priesthood. Shriver offered Dwayne a stateside job as director of community relations.

News of the unequal priesthood policy of the LDS Church had reached the arena of international politics.

The Stilmarcs attended Dwayne's lecture and found it interesting and beneficial. Lynn the law student did not attend the fireside. In 1992 the Church called Dwayne to serve as president of a mission in Africa.

In the elders quorum one Sunday, the topic turned to proselytizing blacks and Irving Kelly, former agnostic and adult convert, held up his hand. He had a sharp mind, ruminated before speaking, and maybe had no second thoughts about what he said.

Recently, a black coworker had told Irving he was looking for a church and asked if Irving had one. "I am a Mormon," he said, and they talked church. Before the conversation ended, Irving had told his black colleague the virtues of the Seventh-day Adventist church and suggested he check it out. We expected surprises from Irving, but this dumbfounded us. Irving simply said he did not want the man to study our church and end up disillusioned by our priesthood policy.

I changed jobs and transferred from the Navy to the State Department, leaving behind Glen Roane, my only black friend. His daily influence had provided me with the capacity to build empathy for American blacks, who have been evolving from the ashes of slavery toward freedom since the 1860s. I saw evidence of their limited rights to schools, housing, and jobs based on race. This evidence seared my conscience into action and I joined a friend to seek signatures for open housing in Northern Virginia.

At one house the door opened and a familiar face invited me in—he was a member of the elders quorum in my new Arlington ward. My petition surprised him; he would not sign it, said the Church was against civil rights, and asked me why I was supporting it. Other Latter-day Saints had asked me too, and it made me, a believer, uncomfortable.

This elder probably reminded me that Ezra Taft Benson, an apostle, had alleged civil rights advocates were connected with the communist conspiracy. Since Benson had served eight years as Secretary of Agriculture under President Eisenhower, his opposition to civil rights gained national attention. I told the elder this was a matter of my conscience, and I knew that Apostle Hugh B. Brown and Seventy Marion Hanks also supported civil rights legislation. The elder still refused to sign my petition.

My friend Dee Henderson managed the critical issues program at the Agriculture Graduate School in DC and I attended some of his seminars. As he told me his story about civil rights leader Vernon Jordan, I could feel regret in his voice. On their way to Dulles Airport after a seminar, Jordan had said he could not understand the Mormon policy on blacks. Dee, a returned missionary and a PhD candidate in political science at American University, said he was a Mormon and he would try to explain the policy.

During his explanation, Dee realized he had never broached this topic with a black before. He told me the dynamics proved so different he lost faith in the logic he had used with whites. Dee left the airport humbled by his performance. He wondered what impact the conversation would have on Jordan's opinion of the LDS Church and he vowed never to volunteer to explain this policy again.

During the break between my classes in economics in the evening, I often talked with a student who seemed on his way to a career in demonstrating, which caused him to miss classes regularly. He paid a buck a year to belong to the Socialist Party, and he also belonged to the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. One day as I walked down the stairs to the diplomatic entrance of the State Department, I spotted his red head among a dozen other students staging a sit-in.

Since rumors abounded of a march on Temple Square in Utah, I broached the rumor with the demonstrator one night between classes. He said it was all talk to pressure the LDS Church into changing its priesthood policy; a grand march on Salt Lake City was not feasible. As he talked he said the Mormon doctrine of continuing revelation should facilitate the change, said this doctrine was unique, provided great flexibility and power, and he praised on. His degree in philosophy may have spurred him to examine ideas and to resolve social issues nonviolently.

Wednesday, August 28, 1963, arrived: the day of Martin Luther King's March on Washington. Early that morning, I felt diffident as Carol and I left our two-bedroom row house at 13Z1 Hillside Drive in Greenbelt, Maryland. We did not encounter rush hour traffic as we drove our little '61 black Beetle down the Washington-Baltimore Parkway toward the nation's capital. The capital, almost free from traffic, conjured up a ghost town at midnight: quiet, eerie, tense.

Carol left me at the State Department building and drove on to the House of Representatives. My boss, Jack Owens, entered my office and said our building was closed for the day since it was less than a block from Constitution Avenue, the parade route. I had the day off or I could work, but only employees could enter our building: no contractors, no outsiders. I called Carol at Congressman Harding's office. She had to work, so I wandered to Constitution Avenue and awaited King's parade.

Standing at the curb as the parade approached, I saw a man break from the front row and run forward—toward me? I watched the figure as it turned into Glen Roane running. He shook my hand and said, "Join us." Glen led me to the front row of the moving parade and introduced me to the leaders; Martin Luther King Jr. was in the middle. I shook hands as I walked among men I admired and said, "Pleased to meet you." My debut done, I linked arms with two in the front row, one arm in Glen's, and marched to the Lincoln Memorial. At the Memorial the parade diffused into individuals walking off in all directions and I lost Glen.

I stood watching and listening to the program in a white shirt, dark suit, and tie. I watched King prepare to give his speech. People were gathering to listen to him, the largest, most diverse group of humans I would ever see. The reflecting pool and Washington's obelisk were at my back as I gazed at Lincoln's statue and meditated. For this event, was Lincoln's consciousness able to enter his statue, nineteen feet tall, carved of twenty-eight blocks of white Georgia marble, sitting in an uncomfortable stone chair, his hands forming an "A" in sign language?

Thinking from 2019 back to King's dream, I imagine what God foresaw that I could not. I did not realize Glen's influence on me; I did not know King was leaving his prepared speech to preach his oft-repeated message, "I have a dream"; I did not know I was hearing the best American speech of the twentieth century. I did not foresee King's death in less than five years, did not see Glen and I joining the Foreign Service, serving in embassies around the world but never together again. I did not foresee myself serving more than eleven years in Bolivia, Ecuador, Paraguay, and El Salvador, and my family helping to establish the first LDS mission in each of the first three of these countries.

And what pleases me most that I could not then foresee? Apostle Spencer Kimball would live with us for a week in La Paz, Bolivia, and learn of my career problem: my mother-in-law wanted our family to stop living abroad and settle near her in Blackfoot, Idaho. Kimball's letter to her dated 6-6-66 said the Church needed more families like her daughter's to work abroad and support missionaries and converts, and our being in La Paz seemed "quite providential." She complained no more: the Foreign Service became our career, and the letter became her keepsake.

And I did not know that Apostle Kimball would become president of my Church and stand tippy-toed on the branches of the bush that had refused to bend, reach his hand way up into heaven in 1978, and grasp a scroll that read, "Give my priesthood to all worthy men."

Moreover, I did not foresee what must have pleased Glen Roane most: his state of Virginia, repenting for Glen's pain at the bar exam and

passing House Joint Resolution No. 340 in February 2012, celebrating the life of Glenwood Roane shortly after his death.

WHEREAS WHEREAS WHEREAS

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the General Assembly note with great sadness the loss of a distinguished and singularly accomplished Virginia native, the Reverend Glenwood Paris Roane

Back to August 28, 1963. King's speech ended and I found myself baptized in emotion, immersed in feelings of peace still flowing from "I have a dream." I found myself wandering east along the reflecting pool toward the Washington Monument in a sea of humanity, no destination in mind, found myself alongside an old black man in coveralls, a cap, and knee high rubber boots, swinging a radio as we walked along, listening to music on station WAVA.

The music stopped for news and both of us heard, "The march on Washington is turning out as peaceful as a family picnic on a Sunday." The old man said, "That's just the way we wants it. That's just the way we wants it."

And we became one.

TO THE BISHOP WHO CONDUCTED MY FATHER'S FUNERAL SERVICE YESTERDAY¹

Kif Augustine

As part of your opening welcome over the pulpit, you announced to us that filming and photography were not allowed in the chapel. We had just gathered there in front of my father's closed casket after the family prayer in other still-sacred space in the church house. Both I and Sofia—Lloyd's grandchild, my oldest, the one with the tripod and camera set up to make a visual record of the event at Grandma's request—received your words not as welcome but as unworthiness. You could not have known that Sofia had not been in a Latter-day Saint chapel for years, that other messages of unworthiness and unwelcome had sent them seeking elsewhere. You also likely did not know of the new widow's request to her grandchildren to honor their grandfather based on particular talents. Sofia's is film. In either case, you should not have to know to respect the grief bare before you. Despite your prohibition, I turned from my pew and nodded at Sofia to keep going.

Then, after the hymn and prayer, were you so focused on our disobedience in not packing up the camera—and others not turning off their myriad phones—that you somehow missed my reading of the obituary across that same pulpit? Did your heart not hear how “Lloyd's spirit, breath, and body unbundled in excruciatingly slow motion over the past five bedridden weeks and the decade before”; how our souls craved every positive memory, every possible record,

1. Winner of the 2019 Eugene England Essay Contest.

the slightest glimmer of hope against the violence his Alzheimer's, his depression, and his hearing loss had inflicted on our family? Did you misapprehend the gaps in the family gathered before you, the absent grandchildren scattered around the world—New Zealand, Japan, Virginia—who could not possibly be in attendance?

As I finished reading the obituary and stepped shakily down from the stand, you returned again to the pulpit and stopped the service. Your words demanded obedience: No recording. No photography. No filming. Not in the chapel. My already-battered heart exploded in disbelief. Sofia leapt up from the left, tears streaming, to protest. Loud across the hushed chapel, I barked at my child to sit down, then turned to look up at you. I spoke. "We are doing it. We filmed at my mother-in-law's funeral in the chapel. We are recording now." I sank into my seat between my oldest sister and my husband, scarlet and shamed that your insistence required my open, loud defiance in front of the entire congregation. A man in a plaid shirt and jeans strode up from the back, past my sobbing Sofia, and counseled with you across the front balustrade. When I thanked him later, I learned he is a high councilor in your stake who shared with you a recent message from the stake president. Yes, the rule is no recording in chapels, but there are times to let it go.

Sofia told me later that it was good that I ordered them to sit down. After quickly editing out the vulgarities, they would have roared, "My grandmother asked me to photograph. Hers is the only authority I recognize." My second brother told me something I missed in the confrontational moment; that you too were looking at my mother when you stopped the funeral, shaking your head "No," as if to both recognize her matriarchal authority and subvert it to your priesthood in the same instance. She stayed silent, her gaze low on her hands.

To have a funeral service in an LDS chapel, the Church requires the home ward bishop or one of his counselors to conduct. But, given the geographical nature of LDS congregations, yours was not the home ward of either of my parents when my father died. We had moved him

to the Veterans Affairs home in Payson in January when his deluded violence made it no longer safe for my mother to care for him alone. She moved to independent living apartments in east Provo in July. Post-move boundary changes in southwest Provo meant that their marital home ended up in your ward, but neither of them had ever actually worshipped under your ecclesiastical stewardship. Thank you for your expansive interpretation of ward membership and the hours you gave on a Friday afternoon to conduct a funeral outside the formal responsibilities of your calling. I am grateful you followed the counsel of plaid-shirt-and-jeans man and allowed my father's funeral services to proceed with Sofia's camera clicking and multiple phones recording. At the same time, I so desperately needed you to respect the collective authority of our familial grief, to honor the unworthiness of our sinful mite of film and photography, and to empower my newly widowed mother, rather than conceding only to patriarchy. I needed you to see us.



The perversity of that confrontation in the chapel distills my relationship with my father and the institutional Church. One evening last November, I took a tentative step towards him as he stood in his living room. With the brutal honesty that Alzheimer's delusions afforded him and unimpeded by normal inhibitions, he screamed truth: "You terrify me." He staggered backwards, cowering, hunched against the terror I, his second daughter, invoked. When people ask me if Alzheimer's changed his personality, I say no. Dementia took dark slivers of his character—fear, insecurity, misogyny—then replicated and refined them to a purity that gradually, then completely, overwhelmed the good. Close to a decade before his death, he had become so vicious with me that my husband suggested I never see him again as I drove us home one Sunday night, devastated again after yet another fraught dinner at my parents' house.

In the waning days of my father's life, my mother first asked me to write and deliver his obituary at the funeral. I told her no. "He didn't much like me," I explained painfully when she queried by phone the refusal I sent in an insomniac email at 3:00 am. "Oh, Tig," she implored, calling me by a childhood nickname. "He loved you. He was so proud of you. You have done so much for him. You have been there more than any of the kids." My gut clenched. "That may be," I grimaced. "Perhaps he loved me, but he did not like me. I was not what he wanted. I am a girl. I was not submissive. I would not do what he asked." I launched into all my failures to please and obey him across the years, the ways I disrespected the patriarchal authority to which he clung, both before and after the creeping loss of Alzheimer's.

In his worldview, my talents—on a girl—were both threatening and invisible. He invited a visiting son-in-law and grandsons to the university where he taught, but left me—his only child with a graduate degree approximating his PhD—out, convinced I would not be interested. Because money and management were male domains, he took my attorney-husband aside in private to ask him to be the executor of my parents' estate, leaving attorney-me standing with my mother in the kitchen. He pushed back, hard, on my plans for a mission, a priesthood responsibility.

After my older sister also said no to writing and delivering the obituary for her own reasons distant from mine, I relented, acquiescing to duty as I have so often done over so many years. On the day of his death, I sat on the sunless rumpled bed of a budget hotel room in Guadalajara, Mexico, where I had flown for a conference on migration and family separation. For five hours, I wrote and rewrote, crying and writing, while my mind darted between English and the Spanish necessary for my next presentation. I dug through the life story that my mother had cajoled from him and transcribed into hard copy, searching for the evanescent goodness of which I had lost hold. He was Dr. Wigglestein concocting special drinks for his children from random items in the fridge, telling stories to his grandchildren while he rubbed their feet. He saw prophecy

in common words, in his friend Bob Comisford's dark joke about car accidents. He drove, the only one who would, in a blinding snowstorm in the middle of the night to rescue Cheuk Chan, stuck with a broken car at the top of a pass between Beaver and Fillmore, Utah. He was the Gospel Doctrine teacher in the Seattle 3rd Ward who rolled a car tire into the room and put it on a folding metal chair in front of the class. He used words rather than the razor strap he suffered as a child when one of his children, throwing lit matches out a second-story bedroom window, started the shake roof on fire in the split-level on Jonquil Avenue.

When I finished with his life story, I read the tributes that began to appear on Facebook and the mortuary website. He taught his young nephews Jacob and Gordon how to tie their shoes; with each success, he moved the boys up a cool basement step towards the sunny kitchen in his parents' home in Mansfield, Ohio. The eight-year-olds in his Primary class in the Lafayette Ward were the best prepared ever for baptism. He inspired countless university students in speech and language pathology, acting as a surrogate father to many who doubted themselves. I wrote the obituary, knowing deep down that my visibility in the task, my step towards him outside patriarchal order, would have threatened, terrified him still.

In a similar manner, I, and women like me, seem to threaten the Church. That foreboding is constrained, in force and frequency, to those rare moments when we, schooled so deeply in duty and obedience, gather enough gumption to step forward out of institutional invisibility, as I did when I spoke loud across the hushed chapel at my father's funeral, as Sofia did when they left the camera up. Unlike my father, however, the institutional Church does not flinch or cower, or even speak the terror visible daughters can invoke. When people ask me if I have changed, I say yes. I could recount my lived decades of orthodoxy and orthopraxy in the exquisite detail that scrupulosity demands: early morning seminary, mission, temple marriage, childbirth and miscarriage, scripture reading, volumes filled with journal writing, fasting, prayer, and monthly testimony

bearing. I am not sure what more I could have done, believed, or been over the course of my extant decades to demonstrate my faith, to recoup the self that was gendered, silenced, and undercut by that first endowment session in the Dallas Temple in July 1985.

What I am is not what the Church appears to want or need. Such talents—on a girl—are invisible, largely unusable. Our status as women is auxiliary, unnecessary to the core administrative and spiritual functioning of the institutional Church. My invisibility is neither theoretical nor abstract, but reverberates as chronic pain, gut wrenching at times, and sharpened now by no ward calling for fifteen months. Like the young women of the Church, I can recite the theme: “We are daughters of our Heavenly Father, who loves us, and we love him.” “That may be,” my heart responds, “but it is not clear, to me at least, that He likes us.”

THE ABSURD IN ART AND MORMONISM

This issue marks the first time that a Dialogue cover has ever had an LDS Church President riding on a dinosaur. Or a spiral jetty made of salt-water taffy. Or green jello stacked on a train. Utah artist Kent Christensen's remarkable triptych painting on our cover has all of these things and more. So much more. In June, Dialogue's art editor Andi Pitcher Davis sat down with the artist and two of the smartest critics we know—Rita Wright, director of the Springville Museum of Art, and Kristine Haglund, Dialogue editor emeritus—to discuss Kent Christensen's "Secrets of the Great Salt Lake."

ANDI: I think that a lot of people, when they look at this painting, will see similarities with Hieronymous Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights*. Just on the big, structural level, the painting seems to call out to Bosch, with three distinct panels and a lot of religious imagery mixed in with complicated symbols. Were you thinking about Bosch when you painted this?

KENT: Very much so. I saw this project as a way for me to have a conversation with Bosch's painting, which I first saw in Spain when I was twenty-two years old and have been obsessed with ever since. It is a brilliant piece of narrative painting, and a lot of the narrative is indecipherable. People have been trying to decode it forever. I don't want to tell a story that everyone gets as soon as they see it. I want them to really struggle with it and figure out what it means to them.

RITA: I see this very much as a creation story. I love how Kent has that primal cosmic mount coming out of the water. I don't know if any of this is intended. But when you do a myth-ritual reading, you do see much embedded here, as in Hieronymus Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights*. It is the creation. It's almost as though, if you put those two side parts of the triptych together, you would see what Bosch has there. You'd have an

earth that is just barely taking form, but is still just a void, and the waters. And then you open the panels up, and this is the world that you open up into that happens to be this place.

ANDI: I like the way that the painting plays with the sacred and the profane—even in its form. On the one hand, it looks like a sacred altarpiece. But on the other hand, it reminds me of those back-cover foldouts that we used to do every month in *Mad* magazine. This duality of the formal triptych composition plays with our contemporary worship of pop-culture iconography. In this way, Kent reflects a duality in Mormonism between doctrine and culture and the way that we sometimes give doctrinal status to phenomena that are really just part of the culture. Funeral potatoes as a sacrament.

RITA: It is so wickedly funny. That's what I keep coming back to. It's wickedly absurd, but it's also very endearing. There is something about each of these images that Kent found someplace in his heart and wanted to share.

ANDI: So, what exactly makes it absurd? I can see how Brigham Young on a dinosaur is absurd in the way that people normally use the term. But how does it fit into the philosophical or artistic concept of absurdity?

RITA: That's a really good question. In absurdist philosophy, the absurd arises out of the fundamental disharmony between the individual's search for meaning and the meaninglessness of the universe. Philosophers like Kierkegaard and Camus usually talk about three solutions to the problem of absurdity. First is suicide, which Camus calls the "one really serious philosophical problem." We can decide that there is no point to living a life without the possibility of meaning and simply choose to escape existence. The second solution is religion, or a belief in a transcendent realm, being, or idea. Even though we can't find meaning neatly packaged in the world, we can take what Kierkegaard called a "leap of faith" and make a conscious choice to believe in something transcendent. The third solution is to simply accept the absurd and continue to live in spite of it.

As I see it, Kent's painting gives us all three options. We can take the option in the right panel and just give in to the forces of death and

destruction. Or we can take the temple, or the statue, or other religious and cultural symbols and construct some kind of system that weaves everything else together into a coherent, transcendent system. Or we can just enjoy the images and the colors and the humor inherent in the painting for what they are.

KENT: I think that's right. I wanted to show images that don't always make sense rationally but that are beautiful nonetheless. I've always had trouble with people who say, "I don't believe in religion, or Mormonism in particular, just because there are things that can't be true—so much magic and mysticism that just doesn't make sense." Well so what? I went to Bali a couple of years ago. I was just so transfixed by their brand of Hinduism. It was just so beautiful, but a lot of it was absurd too. Mormonism has all of this messy stuff—stuff that doesn't make sense when you put it under a microscope. But you just have to look at it as something beautiful overall, as all part of a satisfying whole. I don't like to strip away the mysticism. I think it's really important to keep that in there.

KRISTINE: There is always a tension between mysticism and form. You have that at the beginning of Mormonism with Joseph Smith. In some ways, he was a radical mystic insisting on the possibility of personal connection with the divine. But he also insisted on loyalty and obedience, and he tried—not always successfully—to construct a form to contain his mystical experiences. Then you had Brigham Young, who was great at the form and lousy at the mysticism.

In the German form of absurdism, which I am most familiar with, the playfulness of absurdist art comes exactly at the moment when the forms cease to be able to contain the meaning that they used to be able to. You can see this in the painting too. You can see it in the railroad, which, in some ways, is a very simple form. It is rigid, and they eye kind of moves across this form. And then the spiral is also a form, but you are playing with it and you are undoing it and you're taking, you've got this sort of mystical experience, and these forms that are crumbling, but then reconstituting them in different ways.

ANDI: If you look at the art that is specifically labeled “asburd,” you see all kinds of strange things—melting clocks, men with apples for noses, and that sort of thing. But if you look at early Christian art, or Greek vases, or Neolithic cave paintings, you see strange things too. Why isn’t that earlier art called “absurd”?

KRISTINE: I think it might be that absurdism (as a deliberate construction) arises in a moment when strangeness isn’t just strange—it’s an existential threat. That is, the strangeness people encounter and imagine after the world wars is of a sort that makes ordinary, meaningful human existence seem alien and unattainable. Strangeness in a frame of normalcy is different from a world where everything is suddenly strange.

RITA: You know, that’s interesting. I’ve been preparing for education week, where I’m doing a session on the arrival of Christianity within the context of Classical art. And I love—absolutely love—when Jesus is depicted as a magician with his wand. And Kent’s work is so so similar. There is that sense of mystical thought; once it gets worked into an approved form, accepted by authorities, you start getting more rigid boundaries on those forms, and they become iconic, and the iconography is what carries forward, losing the meaning that it once entailed.

Now you compare that to doing temple art today. I’m telling you, there is nothing I do throughout the year that leaves me as confused and frustrated. I have to sit and listen while correlation people say things like, “You have to make sure, first of all, we’re not showing God the Father, but we want to show Jesus. And so, we sit there, and this gets back to talking about depictions of Jesus. In the medieval period, you could actually depict God the Father as a mortal. Sometimes, depictions of the Holy Trinity give a body to the Holy Ghost. And all this is wrestling with the nature of God through artistic representation. Kent’s piece would be the most productive kind of thing to have in the temple because you have to work for any meaning that you get, not that it would ever happen, but it’s interesting to consider if there ever might be a place for that kind of contemplative prompt, if not necessarily that style. It doesn’t just hand

you a correlated narrative with cross references to scriptures and General Conference talks. You have to wrestle with it and make the truths that it yields your own.

ANDI: I think you are trying to reconcile something important. Our principles are abstract. We have this deep, rich cosmology. Art, as I often say, is the Ikea instructions to our abstract principles. We have a God who is endless in variety and incredibly abstract, and yet we want to reduce that God to the few simplistic forms and religious stories that we already know so well.

When I grew up, I was a classical violist. I was playing a Bartok piece at home. It was this contemporary, broken music. And my dad came home, after a long day of work, and walked in and said: “Andi, from now on, you can only play music that I can whistle.” I think that we are too often looking for a God that we can whistle.

KRISTINE: But that isn’t always a bad thing, is it? Sometimes religious forms work best when they are simple. Intellectually, we like complexity because we are thinking people who like art and who like the mystical and like things exploding our forms. We want sophistication and complexity, so we can kind of make fun of “a god we can whistle.” That seems simplistic rather than simple. But because you mention whistling, I have an experience to share.

Several years ago, we had a stake conference. It snowed hard before the evening session, and right before the meeting started the power went down. So we had stake conference in the dark, which was amazing and magical. We had a musical number from one of the Spanish branches in our stake. Their choir was terrible in every Western musical sense that I know how to measure, but that night it was actually lovely. We were close to each other and intimate—hearing each other breathing in the dark—and it’s beautiful, even though it’s wildly out of tune. Then, during the last verse of the song, I heard a noise that I couldn’t place. I’ve heard them rehearse, and I know all the instruments they are using, but I just can’t identify the new noise. After about three measures, I realized that

they were whistling. The women were singing harmony, and the men were whistling And it was gorgeous. They took these old hymns and these stodgy western musical parts, and it made them utterly magical.

So, I think there's this way that we need—humans can't cope with complexity and sophistication, and the mystical all the time. We just can't function. There's a way that these simple forms can become re-animated and enlivening. So I love the spiral because it gets at that sort of thing that happens where the simple all of a sudden becomes the most profound thing we are capable of.

ANDI: I've been kind of dancing around the question of perspective. When I look at the picture, what I see is a sort of "eye of God" view. I can just imagine Him sitting up in heaven and saying, "OK, well it's kind of darling. Look what they've done with it." Is this what you were going for? Or do you see this is the view from the inside out?

KENT: I think it's consciously trying to depict both of those things.

KRISTINE: The absurd depends entirely on our self-consciousness. You can't think about suicide and escape or any of those things if you're not aware of yourself from the outside. Because, animals don't commit suicide generally, apparently because they don't have that capacity to see themselves from the outside. It totally screws us up!

KENT: Yes, and for cultures, there is always a tension between the outside and the inside. This is what I was trying to show with the trains. The happy train is coming from the West, from California, and the scary train is coming from the East Coast. I saw this as a depiction of how Brigham Young handled influences coming in from other places. Some were embraced, a lot of them were not. Unfortunately, we embraced a lot of the negative things and not so much the positive things, so we are always retrenching. We build Salt Air because we don't want people going to those other, naughty beach-side resorts on the lake. We create ZCMI because we don't want people shopping with gentiles. We still haven't figured out what parts of the world we want to embrace and which parts we want to reject.

RITA: So When did you first decide you were going to put Brigham Young on the back of a dinosaur. This is probably the first thing that most people will see in the painting, and it is a central part of what makes it absurd? Did it come to you early or late in the process?

KENT: That was the first thing that I thought of: the dinosaurs, the temple, and Brigham Young.

RITA: Has your approach to that figure changed? Does it still represent what you felt was going on in that initial framing?

KENT: Yes, the main thing that I wanted to emphasize is the way that we Mormons mix up our history, our folklore, and our doctrine into kind of this one big stew of things that becomes inextricable after a certain point.

KRISTINE: Except for the things we leave out, like Brigham Young railing against pollution and destroying the environment We have conveniently forgotten about that.

RITA: I think that is a big part of the absurdity in our culture. Mormons came into the Salt Lake Valley saying, "We're going to change it. We're going to make it blossom as a rose." And then, we actually ended up doing harm. And this is where we are getting into Kierkegaard's version of absurdity. Are we absurd enough to think that we are really all there is, and that somehow we have this special connection to the divine? And we try to impose that perspective on the divine that is already in the creation.

ANDI: As I read this painting, one of the things that I keep going back to is the snake. This is such an incredibly powerful image, which takes us back to the Garden of Eden and the fall of Adam and Eve. But this snake loops back into the center panel, which if we map it onto Bosch, represents earthly delights. Could the fact that the snake loops back around be seen as an expression of hope? Yes, all will burn, but is there a hope that we can come back to a true celestial nature?

KENT: Yes, I wanted to connect the ideas of peril and hope in the same image. Living in the mountains, in a liminal space, I've noticed that when

you are right on the doorstep of global warming, you keep thinking, “Why doesn’t the Church realize that there is a problem about any number of issues until it has become almost too late?” And so here’s the coal fire, the smoke from the power plant, and the rattle shaking around the temple.

ANDI: So much for my optimism!

RITA: I actually see this as a very optimistic work. The optimism isn’t in the situation that the painting presents, but in the responses to the situation that the artist encourages. And I think that this is the key question with absurdism: “How do you approach the absurdity?” Do you approach it with hope? Or do you just adopt a nihilistic stance and say that nothing matters? I see this as being very hopeful.

KRISTINE: I think one of the things that characterizes absurdist art is slipperiness—that is, objects (or actions) slip out of the ordinary conceptual categories we use to assign meaning to things. It reminds me a little bit of the curse Samuel the Lamanite describes to the Nephites, when he says their treasures will become slippery, so that they cannot hold them. There’s a way in which that slipperiness might force you to pay attention, to really look at a thing and figure out how it works and what it’s for, to come up with a new container for whatever meaning is there. What I love most about Kent’s painting is that it takes some of the cultural and historical and even doctrinal riches of Mormonism and forces them out of the contexts and containers we’re used to. It opens up the possibility of seeing them without the cloudy lens of familiarity, figuring out what they really mean, learning how they might function in building Zion if we found new ways to hold and treasure them.

On Truth

George B. Handley. *If Truth Were a Child: Essays*. Provo: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2019. 253 pp. Paperback: \$19.95. Kindle: \$9.99. ISBN: 9781944394738.

Reviewed by Madison Bowman

Taking the word “essay” in its root meaning as “an attempt,” BYU humanities professor George Handley’s new book of essays *If Truth Were a Child* comprises the attempts of the author to reconcile intellectual curiosity and criticism with religious faith. The result is an illuminating perspective on how Latter-day Saints can move forward thoughtfully and compassionately in a polarized and polemical culture.

Handley grew up in an unconventional LDS household, with parents he describes as “[not] exactly the most active or model Latter-day Saints, [though] anyone who knows them, knows them to be profoundly Christian.” In the most personal essay of the collection, “On Criticism, Compassion, and Charity,” he describes his childhood with great fondness and admiration for parents who were patient, open-minded, and committed to exposing themselves and their children to cultural experiences and diverse people.

As a teenager, Handley lost one brother to suicide, and this loss comes up in several essays as a catalyst for receiving spiritual comfort, personal revelation, and a deeper understanding about the wide range of struggles faced by fellow Church members, no matter how homogenous they may seem. His other brother is gay, and when Handley discusses painful policies and cultural elements of the church, it’s clear he’s felt that pain personally.

Though intellectually rigorous, Handley is clearly much more preoccupied with living the doctrines of the gospel than with knowing them. Religion, he says, is more about staying “focused on being as true to truth as I am on knowing it.” This is the most refreshing aspect of the book: Handley is willing at all points to accept that he often doesn’t have the answers to

the most pressing questions of the Latter-day Saint truth-seeker. “I don’t always understand how I should feel about every controversy or doctrine, but it is not hard to receive revelation about what I should think of Christ or how I ought to be living my life.”

Indeed, Handley expressly encourages readers to be more willing to say “I don’t know” and to focus on living up to the principles and covenants they already have. In everything, he values the primacy of relationships: with God, among families, and as a body of Saints. He says, “Truth is no trophy you can hold up. Its value isn’t in possessing it. Its value is the love we muster to build relationships in its pursuit.”

In the essay “A Poetics of the Restoration,” Handley makes an argument for why the humanities are not only useful in understanding and applying gospel principles, but are actually essential: “Because the passion, or suffering, of Christ is *compassion*—a suffering *with* all of humanity—cultivating the mind of Christ means developing an increasingly profound understanding of how the gospel relates to the diversity, range, and levels of human experience.”

Our studies of secular subjects, particularly the humanities, give us what Handley terms an “amplified vision of possibility” that allows us to more fully recognize the relevance of our faith to the world, and the personal and cultural weaknesses we bring with us in our understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ: “Belief in Christ . . . requires vigilant awareness of what we do not know and cannot be separated from a vital interest in the world, in the affairs of men and women, and in the many cultural expressions that shed light on the human experience.”

In the title essay, Handley encourages the reader to handle political conflict with greater charity and willingness to learn. He says:

As the world clamors for our attention, we do well to remember that we don’t need coherent arguments so much as self-coherence, and until and unless we give our attention to this essential work of knowing and healing ourselves, our arguments about the world and all of its problems are likely to be based on faulty perception. In other words, our tendency to see the world polemically is a symptom of our failure to see ourselves and others wholly. . . . Faith is both a trust in God’s light to assist me and a distrust in my own capacity to make sense of things. To be religious means I must be willing continually to self-examine and self-question.

In another essay, Handley writes about how to find renewal in church attendance, especially when our religious practices begin to feel stale or we feel out of place among fellow church members. Other pieces range from textual analyses of the Book of Mormon to discourses on finding wonder in the world.

Handley's intellectual curiosity, commitment to charity above all, and forthright humility make *If Truth Were a Child* an inspiring and mind-expanding read for any Latter-day Saint. Handley gives hope and encouragement to those who might not see a place for themselves in the culture of the Church; he is understanding of this position, but immensely encouraging toward increased commitment: "The question . . . becomes whether or not we are willing to take the moral risk of seeing an institution through to realize its potential." Handley offers a model for how a person can find balance, peace, and delight in the world as a disciple, a scholar, and a seeker of truth.



Crossings

Melissa Wei-Tsing Inouye. *Crossings: A Bald Asian American Latter-day Saint Woman Scholar's Ventures through Life, Death, Cancer & Motherhood (Not Necessarily in that Order)*. Provo: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2019. 288 pp. Paperback: \$15.99. Kindle: \$16.99. ISBN: 9781944394806.

Reviewed by Allison Hong Merrill

Most books serve a specific purpose: to provoke emotions, to educate, or to entertain. Rarely do I find a book that's simultaneously evocative, educational, and entertaining. *Crossings* is one of the few. From researching in China to gardening in New Zealand, from running in Taiwan to commuting

in Hong Kong, from Chinese history to Mormon beliefs, from family love to cancer treatment, from pencil drawings to annual newsletters, Inouye shares her observation and understanding of life from various angles, touching on common aspects of our shared humanity. The result is *Crossings*, a hybrid-genre collection of literature and art, biographical accounts, and research topics. Inouye has masterfully crafted this book with her heart, soul, and a brilliant intellect.

Melissa Inouye is an American scholar of Japanese and Chinese descent who teaches at the University of Auckland, New Zealand. Her rich cultural heritage, combined with her profound life experiences through extensive global traveling and academic research, enrich her writing and will ensure that it resonates with readers from all backgrounds.

I can relate to most parts of *Crossings* because I, too, am Chinese, a wife, a mother, a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and a returned missionary who served in the Taiwan Taichung Mission. At times I feel that Inouye wrote *Crossings* with me in mind, carefully choosing the messages that I needed to read. But I'm sure a Buddhist monk who lives on a high mountain in Tibet or a Muslim woman in the Philippines will find Inouye's message just as relatable. After all, life, death, and love are universal themes in our human experiences. Which is to say, this book is also for *you*.

You might say, *Yep, that's right*, as you read her words, "In fact, your priorities will become who you are. They will shape your impact on other people and the legacy that you leave behind" (173).

You might nod in agreement as you read, "The main historical legacy that each of us will leave this world will be in the form of our influence in the lives of others. *Precisely because of us*, the lives of our parents, siblings, children, friends, and fellow students will be distinctly better or worse" (182). *Crossings* is evocative.

The essay "What Ana Said" is Inouye's response to eleven-year-old Ana's comment "But girls don't get the priesthood. The men are in charge of the women" (124)—about a phenomenon in the Mormon Church. In a comprehensive explanation, Inouye takes the reader on to a complex exploration of the Mormon belief and practice of the priesthood. She states

that patriarchy is harmful for everyone, but she is “certain that leaders with authority to direct the Church are committed to addressing structural imbalances within our fellowship” (136).

Inouye discusses women’s influences in the Church, and her research on the subject of Heavenly Mother is exceptionally insightful. For example, she mentions that David Paulsen and Martin Pulido reviewed over six hundred references to Mother in Heaven in the Church literature. Apostles such as John A. Widtsoe and James E. Talmage declared, “[We have] a mother who possesses the attributes of Godhood.” And that Brigham Young taught, “We were created . . . in the image of our father and our mother, the image of our God.” Inouye suggests that, “Men, who hold the levers of institutional power, can conscientiously ensure that women are included in opportunities to speak, teach, give spiritual counsel, participate in collective decision-making, and receive visible respect. . . . Both women and men can . . . invoke the love and divine parenthood of both Heavenly Father and Heavenly Mother” (142). *Crossings* is educational.

But this book is in no way a collection of didactic doctrinal theories or preachy religious arguments. You’ll be delightfully surprised to discover Inouye’s humorous tone as she introduces her husband and their four children by using their botanical nicknames. Throughout the book, she expresses her love for them with heartfelt written words, as well as lifelike pencil sketches. I especially love Inouye’s use of drawing to illustrate her sixteen-month-old boy’s favorite forbidden activities: foraging in the delicious trash can, splashing in the delightful toilet, and gnawing on the enticing power cord. She takes a gentle approach to write about delicate family matters. For instance, her four-year-old daughter fails the admission-screening interview of a prestigious preschool in Hong Kong; her husband’s never-ending workload in a Hong Kong law firm leads to their decision that she accepts a teaching job at the Auckland University in New Zealand, where he becomes a stay-at-home dad. There’s no resentment or bitterness in the narration, only pure light-hearted fun, making me smile here and chuckle there. From Inouye, I learned to look at life’s challenges through different lenses: humor, humility, and hope. *Crossings* is entertaining.

Inouye shows her intelligence, spirituality, and genuineness in *Crossings*, and these qualities made a lasting impression on me. This is a five-star book, feeding me the knowledge for which I didn't know I hungered. I highly recommend it. Ask your book club to read and discuss it. For birthday, Mother's Day, Father's Day, or Christmas, give *Crossings* to your spouse, parents, friends, or anyone else who already has everything. Happy reading!



"Is this the Promised End?"¹

Steven L. Peck. *The Tragedy of King Leere, Goatherd of the La Sals*. Salt Lake City: By Common Consent Press, 2019. 250 pp. Paperback. \$12.95. ISBN: 978-1948218016.

Reviewed by Kylie Nielson Turley

Steven L. Peck's *The Tragedy of King Leere, Goatherd of the La Sals* is, like many of Peck's works, almost impossible to categorize. Is it a modern-day ecological interpretation of the famous Shakespearian familial tragedy? A dystopian novel that will haunt the reader with visions of a post-apocalyptic future in which greed reigns, goats have human skin, and a "handibot" can misunderstand a metaphoric command and surgically remove human eyes in 2.1 seconds? Perhaps it is a tragicomedy set in such realistic relief against the geography of southern Utah that the reader will cry about the seemingly inevitable destruction and simultaneously laugh aloud at a "retired" demon's wit—as well as surreptitiously check over her shoulder to see if the demon or the Knowledge Enabled Neural Tactical (KENT) Banefinder BattleDredge is following her home.

1. William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, Act V, Scene iii.

Then again, perhaps this book is a purposeful contorting of the Bard's plot into a tool for cultural commentary—a tool that slices and dices casual opinions about contemporary romance and sexual mores, religion, politics, ethics, family relationships, and the environment. Or maybe it is an ironic parody that warps Shakespearian dialogue into outrageously discordant genres and diction as characters square off against each other in cowboy-cussing slang, philosophical soliloquy, plagiarized essays on love, blank verse rantings, religious computerized ponderings on grace and ethics, romantic innuendo, trash-talk texting, binary computer code and prose.

My answer to these questions is this: whatever this book is, it is well worth reading.

If Peck's title, *The Tragedy of King Leere*, does not broadcast this text as a creative and modern re-envisioning of Shakespeare's *King Lear*, then readers should suspect that after casually perusing the list of the "Dramatis personae." Peck introduces themes of gender, religion, and post-apocalyptic future from these first pages, prior to the narrative's technical beginning; in the list of characters, the Shakespearian Lear's three daughters Cordelia, Goneril, and Regan become the Peck-ian Leere's daughter, Delia, and his two sons, Neril and Regan; Lear's Fool becomes Leere's Botavita, an ex-Mormon bishop; and Lear's Kent becomes Leere's "KENT" aka a military-grade killing machine who decides what liberties he can take with commands with his ethically-challenged and frighteningly religion-laced logic. Interestingly, readers could overlook what becomes the book's leading thematic concern—the ecological fate of the earth—since the theme is only hinted at by King Leere's description as the "Landholder of the La Sals" and a "goatherd" (xiii). But whether the list of characters provokes thoughts about ongoing themes or not, it should at least let the reader know that what follows will not be a simplistic re-hash of Shakespeare's famous tragedy.

Rather than jumping right into a parody of *King Lear*, Act I and Lear's infamous love contest (in which his children must declare how much they love him to gain his kingdom), Peck's Act I introduces "Asmodeus," who—after a few pages of reflections—properly introduces himself as the

author and “omniscient narrator” of this text. He is a “daemon by trade” (3), though he has retired, thanks to Nietzsche’s philosophies; Asmodeus believes that it makes more sense to move “beyond these senseless categories of good and evil” (5). He has determined he no longer “serve[s] Satan” or “fight[s] against the Almighty One” (4). Readers would do well to question how trustworthy this smooth-talking, reflective demon is, especially since he tells readers, “And I am a trustworthy [narrator], for I always speak the truth, even when I must lie to do so” (6). Trustworthy or not, the demon is delightfully snarky and sarcastic, guiding readers through the murk and mire of *Leere* and its telling of a “possible future. One that might be. Or might not be” (6), all while flirting with Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, and its dysfunctional relationships, epic characters, and tragic conclusion.

Like Shakespeare’s *Lear*, *Leere* catalyzes the plot when he prematurely and immaturely decides to make his children compete for their inheritance, not realizing that giving his money means giving away his power and any claim on a relationship with his spoiled and greedy children. Unlike *Lear*, who asks his children to speak the extent of their love for him, *Leere* asks his children to write an original essay saying how much they love the land. Neril and Regan produce plagiarized essays, not that *Leere* notices the falseness of their expressions since he is caught up in their hypocritical professions of love. Delia refuses to complete. In what readers assume will parallel Shakespeare’s *Lear*, Delia announces that she has “nothing” to read, that she cannot provide even a draft of an essay. However, then Delia (unlike Cordelia) surprises everyone with her video presentation about the La Sals and their former beauty, one of a number of plot differences between *King Lear* and *King Leere*. Though she says relatively little, her video presentation is not the same “nothing” as Cordelia’s.

Of course, much of the plot remains the same; Peck stays with Shakespeare’s plot in most of the drama’s most memorable moments: for example, in both, the youngest child’s refusal to satisfy her father’s strange love contest results in disinheritance. Another character (*Lear*’s King of France; *Leere*’s Ellie) accepts responsibility for and offers love to the disinherited child,

and the remaining children display their true temperaments as soon as they acquire their father's money. Those who have read *King Lear* will enjoy parsing Peck's book, noting the intriguing ways in which the plot mirrors and breaks with Shakespeare.

Given his decision to limit his story by remaining within reasonable Shakespearean plot parameters, Peck of necessity created characters who behave anywhere from poorly to murderously. With the possible exception of mother-daughter pair Hester and Ellie (who each have tragic flaws and blind spots but are, ultimately, decent people), as well as the family's cowboy robot, Bob (who loyally stays beside Leere, swearing like a salty sailor until the bitter end), Asmodeus may be the most likeable character—demon—in Peck's novel. Leere, for example, is at least as unlikeable, rich, and arrogant as his namesake, Lear: both are too wealthy and too blind to realize that their blatant favoritism fractures families, that they have merely "bought" the seeming love of their children with money and the associated power.

Arguably, the only real relationship Leere has is with Hester, his common law wife, who admits that she "found him arrogant and overbearing" when they first met, and has worked to "bring that goodness" in Leere "into the light" because "there is more to him than [the] darkness" that everyone else sees (32). If not for Hester's love of him, Leere would be even less likeable. Unfortunately, Hester's love is questionable. Though Asmodeus interrupts to make sure readers understand that "Leere's own dementia" is metaphorically tied to the "planet's demise" (16), it is also possible to read the goats as symbolic of Leere. Even Hester "hates those goats" (30)—as do Leere's sons, and daughters-in-law, the ranch neighbors, and in many ways, Leere himself. He is the goatherder of these genetically-altered animals and their horrifying human skin, skin that was somehow acquired during the "war" with the "Oceanic people" (31). In a psychologically insightful comment, Hester explains that Leere fought in the war and feels intense guilt for the "terrible things" he did to the Oceanic people—but rather than making him repentant, Leere has "transferred his guilt into an ugly hatred for the people he's caused to suffer" (32). Even as the book draws to a close, it is

difficult to find anything to like about Peck's racist and unforgiving landholder, although his counterpart, Shakespeare's Lear, seems to attract some amount of pity by the conclusion.

This may come about because of a simple flip: whereas Shakespeare uses the dividing of the land of England as a mechanism to display and comment on family and relationships, Peck foregrounds family and relationships as a means of commenting on the land and the environment. These decisions necessarily alter characters and the plot such that the two stories diverge in increasing degree as they move toward their respective conclusions. In particular, Peck risks altering Delia. He has her present her video of the La Sals, for example, rather than speaking "nothing" like her counterpart, Cordelia, which inevitably changes Leere, Delia, and their relationship—and that cannot help but alter the story. Peck's decision to follow Shakespeare's plot conjoined with his decision to write a story about the environment means that even when plot markers and characters appear to be parallel, they are not doing the same work. These stories may have less to say to each other than readers might expect because Shakespeare's *Lear* is ultimately about people and relationships, and Peck's *Leere* is ultimately about the "La Sals . . . dying slowly. . . slowly enough that humans will feel justified in their determined perplexity about the change" (213).

Or is it?

Steven Peck may be the only author creative enough to dream up the idea of recreating a classic Shakespearean play and setting it in a dystopian future in the La Sals of southern Utah; staffing it with human-skinned goats, BattleDredge robots, and human characters that readers probably won't like very much; and framing it with commentary by a sarcastic and sincere (?) demon narrator. Doubtless, Peck is the only author with the capacity, literary and scientific background, and personal love for and knowledge of that landscape whose attempt at such a wildly creative story would yield *The Tragedy of King Leere, Goatherd of the La Sals*. While the tale is an obvious reworking of Shakespeare's epic, Peck's *King Leere* does not need to be propped up or only read as a comparison—it is a well-written and thought-provoking tragedy that can stand solidly on its own.

Embraced in Love

Eric D. Huntsman. *Becoming the Beloved Disciple: Coming unto Christ through the Gospel of John*. Springville, Utah: CFI, 2018. 158 pp. + xviii. Appendix A (The Logos Hymn), appendix B (Outline of the Gospel of John), bibliography, index. Hardcover: \$19.99. ISBN: 9781-462136100.

Reviewed by Jenny Webb

In *Becoming the Beloved Disciple*, Eric Huntsman successfully navigates a complex text, bringing clarity, insight, and charity to the Gospel of John in a way that will appeal both to those already well versed in the various textual and historical issues surrounding the Fourth Gospel as well as those who are less familiar with its contents. Huntsman begins with an introduction to the Gospel of John itself, noting the text's additional material (absent from the synoptic gospels), its use of symbolism, and its high Christology before zeroing in on the theme that will sustain the majority of his focus: discipleship.

Huntsman sees discipleship in John as a highly developed and broadly inclusive concept. In Huntsman's reading, John

illustrates the principles of discipleship through sharply drawn characters who all experience the journey of belief, action, and becoming differently. These include not only individual members of the Twelve . . . but also an assortment of other well-described, non-apostolic characters—including Nathanael, Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman at the well, Mary of Bethany, her sister Martha, and their brother Lazarus. By not focusing only on the special witness of Jesus, John succeeds in providing us with a variety of accessible models for discipleship. (8)

The various characters in John thus represent humanity as a site of rich variety, differing experiences, and thus multiple modes of faith, testimony, and discipleship. In a day and age in which so many conversations revolve around difference as grounds for exclusion, Huntsman's project here to

articulate the space of discipleship in terms of positive difference is both encouraging and necessary, and ultimately makes this book required reading for anyone seriously committed to the idea of global sisterhood/brotherhood in a world-wide church.

The bulk of the book is made up of seven chapters, each of which concentrates on a connected series of events and people in order to explore how they present and develop discipleship in their own way. Chapter 1, “The First Disciples: Come and See” addresses the way some of the first disciples (among them, Andrew, Peter, Philip, and Nathanael) came to accept Jesus “simply by their accepting in faith what they heard” from others sharing their own witness and invitation. Huntsman reads John as emphasizing these particular examples in order to “provide us a mirror in which we can view our own walk with the Lord, seeing how the seeds of our testimony were planted and how we can share that witness with others” (17). Chapter 2, “The Mother of Jesus and Mary Magdalene: Women as Witnesses” focuses on the importance of women’s witnessing in order to “show us the importance of every person’s discipleship—regardless of sex, ethnicity, economic status, or other background” (29). The readings here are nuanced; Huntsman consistently reads traditionally sticky or problematic points (such as Christ calling Mary “woman”) in ways that favor opening the text to the widest possible audience, or to the reading that witnesses Christ’s divinity. The devotional tone is clearly established from the onset of the book, but it is clear by this point in the text that for Huntsman, devotional does not mean skimming over difficult questions or ignoring current scholarship. Rather, each of the chapters develop their themes carefully through reading the text, asking questions, and then seeking for ways to understand the passages in terms of developing faith and sharing one’s individual witness (i.e., the journey of discipleship).

Thus, in chapter 3 (“Nicodemus: How Can These Things Be?”), the uneven trajectory of Nicodemus’s journey is cast in a positive light as providing an example of discipleship where “we have a desire to believe, but our questions take us along a different path. . . . Still, though our path may

be different than the paths others follow, when we come to know Jesus for ourselves, our discipleship can be no less genuine—and in the end, no less saving as long as we still come to Christ” (41). Likewise, in chapter 4, which takes up the Woman of Samaria at the well, Huntsman emphasizes the way the narrative promotes “Embracing Those Who are Different” (65; the title of the final section in the chapter) by framing the Samaritan woman as “the first truly successful missionary in John” even though she was not “someone that people in that time and culture would have either expected *or* respected. Likewise, today we must often set aside our expectations and our own biases to let Jesus be the Savior for *all* the world” (65).

The final three chapters continue to develop the theme of positive difference within discipleship as they focus on the crowds to whom Jesus preached as a type of character who respond differently to the hard sayings of Jesus (chapter 5); Mary, Martha, and Lazarus as the friends of Jesus who still each have distinct, individual responses and witnesses (chapter 6); and Peter and Thomas as disciples who come into focus in the latter half of the gospel in order to show “the contrast between their early failings and later, complete restorations” in order to provide “a powerful example of Christ’s grace that can give us hope and encouragement” (108). Huntsman continually emphasizes the way the variety of characters he discusses “can reflect the variety of ways people respond to the saving message of God’s Son in our age. . . . Seeing this vast array of believers and their varied responses underscores that diversity in the family of Jesus Christ is real—and good” (123–24).

The skillful reading and underlying scholarly preparation in this book are put to good use here by Huntsman—this is a book that can profitably be read by a wide variety of people with differing experiences, preparation, and beliefs. In short, I’m strongly recommending it to any and all who wish to gain a greater appreciation for John, and beyond that, a better understanding of the way the gospel of Jesus Christ preaches both diversity and unity together. My quibbles with the text itself were relatively few: at times points made in earlier sections were repeated without much variance in the wording (e.g., page 127), and the endnotes to each chapter, while helpful,

were problematic in terms of their inconsistencies and unfortunate errors (e.g., “Julie A. Beck” instead of Julie B. Beck on page 39). If this book were being presented in an academic setting, these issues would raise more concern given Huntsman’s credentials and expertise, but as a book designed for a popular audience, their presence simply surprised me. And one would be remiss to allow these minor issues to detract from what Huntsman achieves here: a concise, yet thorough, reading of the Gospel of John that brings to light its powerful witness of Jesus Christ as a figure whose life, ministry, death, and graceful atonement are offered to the diverse identities, backgrounds, and choices made by every member of the human race. It is a particularly beautiful envisioning of both divinity and humanity, and it is not to be missed.

RACISM¹

James C. Jones

Brothers and sisters, when I was a teenager, my favorite apostle to listen to was Dallin H. Oaks. I appreciated that he was to the point, kept his sentences on the shorter side, and didn't mince words. One of my favorite memories from back then was when he began a talk about divorce by saying, "I have felt impressed to speak about divorce." I appreciated that he was willing to speak on a topic that he acknowledged evoked strong feelings, and I appreciated that he threw it out there at the beginning. Ironically, this is my way of letting you know that I have failed to find a delicate way to introduce my topic, which similarly tends to evoke strong feelings.

So, brothers and sisters, I wish to speak frankly about the subject of racism. Part of me wants to discuss it because we don't really talk about it a lot in the Church. If you open your Gospel Library app right now and search general conference for the word "racism," you'll get three results. One is two sentences from 1995, and the other two, while more recent, are one sentence each and say the exact same thing because one quotes the other. Now, if you search for "pornography" in general conference, you'll get results for days. I can tell you that I know pornography to be an issue, not only because many are deeply affected by it, but because it's something that we regularly talk about. However, because racism isn't mentioned regularly in conference, we may not be well equipped to deal with issues of race inside or out of our chapels.

The other reason I want to discuss this issue is that the gospel of Jesus Christ is all about reclamation. Jesus Christ came to reclaim us from sin and death. The four-fold mission of the Church can be summed up as

1. Given during sacrament meeting at the Longfellow Park meetinghouse in Cambridge, Massachusetts on February 24th, 2019.

reclaiming our ancestors through temple work, reclaiming ourselves by perfecting ourselves, and reclaiming one another by helping the poor and needy and preaching the gospel. I know, brothers and sisters, that that last one won't happen unless we rid ourselves of racism and take steps to help others do the same. Let me tell you how I know this by telling you what I learned about sheep recently.

The first thing I learned was that for every hundred sheep, God creates a black sheep (or brown or gray or spotted). The second thing I learned is that the black sheep are how shepherds know how many sheep they have. So if you have five black sheep, you have 500 sheep. The third thing I learned is that in the old West, the black sheep were called "markers" and were used the same way shepherds used them. An old saying they used was, "once your markers are in, your flock is in." This last piece gave the parable of the lost sheep a whole lot more meaning for me. I'd like to believe that the shepherd in the parable knew his flock was incomplete because his marker was missing. He left the ninety-nine not only because every sheep is valuable, but because the flock would not be complete otherwise. That's important. The flock is not complete without the black sheep.

Brothers and sisters, I'm not concerned with talking about why racism is bad. I believe I'd be hard pressed to find anyone in this room who feels otherwise. Plus, the Bible, the Book of Mormon, the leaders of the church, even the whole of the gospel of Jesus Christ declare that "God is no respecter of persons," that "the lord looketh on the heart," and that "all are alike unto God"—"black and white, bond and free."

What does concern me is that I don't see more people who look like me in this room. According to the Higher Education Research Institute, black folk are the most likely to seek religion, and they rank highest in eleven of twelve spirituality categories. Since the Church regularly ranks high in growth, it would stand to reason that there would be more of us here, yet here we are not.

What does concern me is that when the subject of the priesthood and temple ban comes up, there are still people comfortably affirming belief in divine authorship despite there being no evidence of the same and much evidence to the contrary. Additionally, one should consider the spiritual and emotional implications of blaming God for the spiritual dispossession of black saints. To accept that God wanted us to suffer for 126 years without the blessings of the priesthood and temple is to accept Brigham Young's original, though now disavowed, reasons for that suffering. "If there never was a prophet or apostle of Jesus Christ spoke it before, I tell you this people that are commonly called Negros are the children of Cain, I know they are; I know they cannot bear rule in the priesthood, in the first sense of the word." We cannot put that on our Father in Heaven, brothers and sisters.

What does concern me is that too often our missionaries and members are not prepared to have conversations about racial issues in the Church's past with black members and investigators. Why isn't the ability to talk openly and honestly about this a priority, especially when it's such a stumbling block for black Saints and investigators?

What does concern me is that there are additional stresses on the black member of the Church that have spiritual as well as mental and emotional implications. To demonstrate this difference in experience, I borrowed a list of questions, modeled after the prompts in Peggy McIntosh's essay "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack." These questions are meant to determine from their answers alone whether or not the one answering is a Mormon of color. For example, do you worry about the racial attitudes of your leaders, teachers, and peers? If you forget to do your ministering, don't respond to emails, show up late to meetings, or otherwise make mistakes, do you worry that people attribute these things to race? If you behave in ways that don't fit the church norm, do you worry people attribute it to your race? Do you see yourself widely represented in Church materials and other media? If you feel isolated, out of place, outnumbered, unheard, held at a distance,

or feared in the LDS community, do you fear it's because of your race? When you think of pioneers, do those people look like you? Can you choose whether the Church's legacy of racism will affect your religious experience? Would anyone tell you that your skin color is the result of sin? Do you experience the dissonance of attending church with people who support political policies or other rhetoric that oppresses people of your race? I'm quite certain I answered those questions differently than most of you and that does concern me.

What concerns me is that a common lament I hear from black Saints is that we feel alone or invisible in the very places we surround ourselves with those who have covenanted to be their brothers' keepers. A friend of mine told me a story where she visited a predominantly black ward on the same weekend that black men Alton Sterling and Philando Castile were killed by police officers. Many in the congregation were still shaken by the events. The counselor conducting the service told the congregation that the bishop, who happens to be white, would like to address the congregation after the final speaker. Brothers and sisters, there was an audible gasp in that chapel. Again, this is a predominantly black ward three days after these high-profile killings that have traumatized much of black America. The anticipation was palpable. The bishop got up and began addressing the congregation with the words, "I'd like to tell you about a trip my family and I took to Idaho . . ." I don't know how Jesus felt when he came across Peter after the latter had just denied the former three times, but I suspect it was something like what the black members in that room felt. This happens often enough on a macro level as well. For example, when the Church released a statement on the Paris terror attacks, but not the ones in Kenya around that same time, or when the Church released a statement on the Vegas and synagogue shootings, but not the Charleston Nine.

What concerns me is that, despite early Saints being subjected to racially motivated and state-sanctioned violence in Missouri, I see today

a disturbing number of Saints who are apathetic or hostile toward racial minorities who seek redress for the same.

In summation, what concerns me is that despite the gospel of Jesus Christ condemning racism, despite just about everyone in this room agreeing that it is bad, and despite the fact that even the white Mormon pioneers experienced racial violence, the Church is still significantly affected by racism, which raises the questions, “Why is this the case?” and “How do we address it?” I’m only interested in answering the former question inasmuch as it helps us answer the latter, and I want to point to Brother Darius Gray—former president of the Genesis Group and spiritual mentor to many black Saints—for some answers.

He writes in an LDS.org blog post on healing the wounds of racism that we must first acknowledge racism. Like I said at the beginning, we don’t really talk about this issue as a church, and contrary to what some may believe, no problem as significant as racism goes away by ignoring it. Ida B. Wells—educator, journalist, and cofounder of NAACP—adds her witness that the only way to right wrongs is to shine a light upon them. Silence is not an option. Silence is complicity with the status quo and an affront to our covenant to “stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places.” It is an affront our covenant to “comfort those that stand in need of comfort.” It is an affront to the second great commandment to love our neighbors as ourselves. Brothers and sisters, while I can acknowledge the discomfort of engaging in this difficult conversation, are our covenants not worth far more than our comfort?

The next thing Darius suggests is taking personal inventory and recognizing racism in ourselves. It’s important to note that most racism isn’t as overt and hostile as wearing a Klan hood or having @apurposefulwife’s Twitter account. Darius gives some examples of what this kind of racism looks like, and I added some more personal examples for good measure: It looks like being proud of yourself for behaving well with someone of a different race. It looks like less compassion toward those of a difference race when they experience poverty, war, famine, crime,

etc. It looks like jokes and disparaging remarks related to someone's race. It looks like being quick to blame the Spanish-speaking ward when something breaks or goes missing in a multi-unit building. It looks like a mission president honoring a request from an investigator to dismiss a brown missionary so he can be taught by two white ones instead. It looks like an apostle complimenting African members on their innate enhanced spirituality without acknowledging that their spiritual resilience and strength may be a natural consequence of surviving centuries of exploitation and colonization. It looks like a white person submitting unsolicited criticism to the seven black women who put on the black LDS legacy conference because she didn't feel represented. It looks like refusing a deeper look into the gospel and the Church as they relate to people of African descent because we don't feel that affects us. As King Benjamin said, "I cannot tell you all the things whereby ye may commit sin; for there are divers ways and means," but we have been counseled to come unto the Lord that he may show us our weaknesses with the promise that he will "make weak things become strong" unto us if we humble ourselves before him. The last tip Darius gives aids us in that pursuit.

We must listen to those whom we regard as the other. Many years ago, I sang in the BYU Men's Chorus under the direction of Rosalind Hall. A common word of advice she gave us was to listen louder than we sang. Being able hear those around us put us in a better position to blend with each other, which consequently made us a better-sounding choir. How much better would we be as a church if we listened louder than we sang? I can tell you this is easier said than done, but I must acknowledge that it may be our best shot at reclaiming one another. I bear testimony that this work is honoring our baptismal covenants, it is fulfilling our mission to proclaim the gospel, and it is fulfilling our mission to perfect ourselves and complete our flock that is the human family.

WRESTLING WITH THE RACISM OF THE BOOK OF MORMON

Margaret Olsen Hemming and
Fatimah S. Salleh

My talk today is about how to wrestle with passages of scripture that may test our faith. There are many sections of scriptures that I find troubling, including the sanction of genocide in the Old Testament, Paul's calls for women to be silent in the New Testament, and the explanation of polygamy in the Doctrine and Covenants. I am about to read one of the sections of scriptures I have wrestled with the most in my life. We don't talk about these verses often, but my talk is about why we should and how we can do so productively. But I also know that these words are very painful for some people in this room, so I want to apologize in advance for reading them and ask for your patience as I explain my wrestle with them.

And he had caused the cursing to come upon them, yea, even a sore cursing, because of their iniquity. For behold, they had hardened their hearts against him, that they had become like unto a flint; wherefore, as they were white, and exceedingly fair and delightsome, that they might not be enticing unto my people the Lord God did cause a skin of blackness to come upon them.

This sermon was given by Margaret Olsen Hemming in the Chapel Hill First Ward, Durham Stake in North Carolina on February 10, 2019. The narrative and structure of the article are hers but the theology and exegesis comes from a forthcoming book authored by Rev. Dr. Fatimah S. Salleh in collaboration with Margaret Olsen Hemming. The book, a social justice commentary of the Book of Mormon, hopes to provide readers with tools to read LDS scripture in new ways.

And thus saith the Lord God: I will cause that they shall be loathsome unto thy people, save they shall repent of their iniquities.

And cursed shall be the seed of him that mixeth with their seed; for they shall be cursed even with the same cursing. And the Lord spake it, and it was done.

And because of their cursing which was upon them they did become an idle people, full of mischief and subtlety, and did seek in the wilderness for beasts of prey.

And the Lord God said unto me: They shall be a scourge unto thy seed, to stir them up in remembrance of me; and inasmuch as they will not remember me, and hearken unto my words, they shall scourge them even unto destruction. (2 Nephi 5:21–25)

I clearly remember the first time I read these verses and had them truly sink in. I had gotten my own set of scriptures for my twelfth birthday, and I was reading through the Book of Mormon on my own for the first time. I read these verses, froze, read them again, and felt a wave of confusion and fear wash over me. For me, the crux of the problem these scriptures present is that Nephi, a prophet, uses words and ideas that are contrary to how I understand God—a God that is no respecter of persons and who is deeply offended by any ideas of white supremacy. Where do I go with that?

When I was twelve, I went to my parents and asked them about it. They had two different answers. My father said that he thought Nephi's words were meant to be metaphorical. He said that when Book of Mormon prophets write about people having hard hearts and stiff necks, we don't take them literally, thinking that someone's neck actually became difficult to move or that their heart became like concrete. We understand that these are words invoke the body but are meant to describe the spirit. He believed that it was our cultural obsession with race, our society that categorizes people by the color of their skin before anything else, that led to us reading this passage as if it is actually about skin color. I'll admit that I was skeptical then, and I'm skeptical now

of that answer. But I think it's certainly an interesting explanation to consider, and it may work for some people in this room.

My mother had a different answer. As a convert to the church, she had many unanswered questions about doctrine and policies. She frankly told me that she didn't have an explanation for these verses, although she found them as upsetting as I did. She reminded me that we learn "line upon line, precept upon precept" (2 Nephi 28:30), and that we should not expect to have all the answers during our lifetimes. It is okay to sit with some discomfort and some lack of knowledge. She described it, metaphorically, as having shelves in our brains in which we can set down some issues and let them rest until we have some inspiration or greater knowledge that can help us progress on that issue.

For the next ten years, I used these two explanations. When I read the Book of Mormon, I skipped over these verses that I found so troubling. I didn't have an answer, and I didn't feel any direction to help me find an answer, so I put the question on my mental shelf to think about later. Then, in my early twenties, I moved to inner-city Baltimore. I don't have the right words to describe how much I loved that ward. It was the closest thing I'd ever experienced to church being, as Elder Uchtdorf described in a 2015 talk, a service station instead of an automobile showroom. People were honest and open about their struggles and shortcomings, which gave the community opportunities to speak about how the Atonement was an ongoing force in their lives. The vulnerability that people shared led to me loving my fellow ward members in a deeper way than I had previously experienced. It was a time of intense spiritual growth for me as I confronted what I truly believed and grew to be grateful for the diversity of spiritual journeys—a multiplicity of paths that all led back to God.

The ward was about forty percent people of color, including a large number of refugees, immigrants, and African Americans. In my work in the Primary and Relief Society presidencies, as well as a visiting teacher, I went into many women's homes all over the city. On more than one

of these visits, I had the experience of an African American woman confronting me with these verses from 2 Nephi. In one case, I gave her the answer that my mother had given me: it's okay to not have answers; sometimes we just need to sit with things. I will never forget her response. She told me that her husband was white and her children biracial. She asked me if I thought, in their family scripture study, that they should read these verses together. "I don't have the luxury of simply not thinking about these words," she said. "They are about me and my family."

I realized with shame then that I had let my mother's explanation of sometimes not having answers evolve into simply no longer searching for answers. I had grown lazy with the issue because wrestling with it made me uncomfortable. I felt like it was time to take these verses off my mental shelf and start working on them more actively again.

Although I read, pondered, and prayed quite a bit, I didn't find any answers for another ten years. Sometimes that's the way it is.

This past year, I spent three weeks working intently on just 2 Nephi chapter 5. I read it half a dozen times out loud. I pondered and prayed. I worked closely with Fatimah Salleh, a friend of mine who is a woman of color and who lives in our stake. I called on everything that I've read and studied about these verses for the last ten years. Here are the observations and conclusions Fatimah and I reached.

First, some of what Nephi writes here contradicts things that he has previously written in his own account. In verse 24, Nephi writes, "And *because* of their cursing which was upon them they did *become* an idle people, full of mischief and subtlety" (emphasis added). Nephi is stating that the dark skin came first, then the sin. He is saying that they became sinful *because* of the darkening of their skin. But Nephi's own narrative contradicts this. We know that Laman and Lemuel were idle and mischievous *before* their skin darkened, when they had white skin. Not only that, but from Nephi's account, we observe Laman and Lemuel engage in extreme violence, multiple attempts at murder, disobedience, and cruelty—all while inhabiting white skin. Nephi's claim that one

followed the other simply doesn't follow what we already know about this family. It's not coherent. So Nephi is not seeing completely clearly.

The second claim that doesn't ring true is that the Lamanites were idle. Nephi contrasts the Lamanites to his own people who were, as he writes, "industrious" (2 Nephi 5:17), as they built a complex society with cities, government, a military, and far-ranging communication. Yet we will read in the following pages of the Book of Mormon that the Lamanites will build a society that rivals that of the Nephites. The two groups of people are so evenly matched, in fact, that they will jostle for power for the next several hundred years. Out of the wilderness and starting from nothing, the Lamanites, like the Nephites, managed to construct a government, cities, a military, and a flourishing community with a booming population—a population that actually becomes much greater than the Nephites, as the Book of Mormon tells us repeatedly. Nephi's proof of his own people's industry also seems to apply to the Lamanites. So, without evidence of idleness, it's hard to maintain this claim.

The final claim here that is strange, given Nephi's own account, is his condemnation of the Lamanites for hunting in the wilderness for food. We know that Nephi used his bow to hunt for food and that God guided him in those efforts. Why is hunting for food suddenly a sign of immorality? It doesn't make sense.

It may seem at this point that I'm mired in details. But I believe that examining these details is crucial. These details help a careful reader understand what is lying beneath the surface of Nephi's angry accusations. It appears that Nephi continues to resent and fear his brothers and their families. This is understandable, as Nephi endured so much trauma at their hands. Nephi's brothers beat him terribly many times. They tried to kill him multiple times. They were emotionally, spiritually, and physically abusive. After enduring years of trauma, it is not surprising that Nephi would feel resentful or have hard feelings toward them. I do not believe that we can take Nephi's words out of the context of the years of violent abuse heaped on him.

What Nephi seems to be doing here is taking his lingering resentment and building a case against the Lamanites. He is reframing the narrative, attributing their behavior to skin color when his own account states otherwise, and pointing out every possible trait he can criticize. It's such a universal human reaction that I think everyone in this room can identify with what he's doing. Anyone who has looked up a former high school bully on Facebook and taken a small pleasure in finding a photo of him with stupid shoes and an ugly cat can relate in some way. Anger is often the manifestation of deeper feelings that are harder to confront. In Nephi's case, his anger reveals the grief he has never finished processing. He never had the chance—he has been fighting just for survival his entire life.

Everyone on this earth struggles with the limitations of human nature—including prophets. Of all people, Nephi is the most aware of his own failings. There are multiple times in his account that he writes about his own humanity, saying, "And now, if I do err, even did they err of old; not that I would excuse myself because of other men, but because of the weakness which is in me, according to the flesh, I would excuse myself" (1 Nephi 19:6). He's saying, "I am human. Please understand that as you read this text." As readers, I think we can reasonably give Nephi space for his feelings of resentment and residual anger. I believe that even God understands those feelings. If anything, reading these scriptures with that context of his life history and the emotions he has increases my sense of empathy for him. Like me, like you, like all of us here, he is a flawed person working his way back to the divine, doing his best with a limited understanding. That is beautiful to me.

So I don't believe that Nephi's feelings are wrong. I do believe that he makes a terrible error when he attempts to enlist God in cosigning on those feelings. When he writes that God caused a skin of blackness, when he writes that God sees people as loathsome, when he writes that God has cursed them, he is doing something very disturbing and problematic: he is couching his anger in theology. Seeing God's punish-

ments in other people's struggles is a very dicey thing to do, and humans are not particularly good at getting it right. It would, after all, be easy for an outside observer of Lehi's family to see years wandering in the wilderness, living in tents, and eating raw meat as evidence of God's displeasure toward Lehi. And yet, we know that's not the case—Lehi's family's suffering was the result of obedience, not disobedience, to God's commandments. The scriptures are full of righteous people suffering. We know from the New Testament that lepers were considered cursed and that Jesus Christ upended that cultural idea. The same thing is true for the woman with the issue of blood and the man who was blind and deaf. Humans are simply not good at correctly identifying the objects of God's wrath, so we probably shouldn't try.

Nephi's effort to have God endorse the lingering effects of his own trauma is deeply destructive. Nephi chooses not to limit his pain to his personal journey. The moment he takes his disgust and deep hurt and decides to stamp God's name on it, he does theological damage. Serious harm can come from not being able to separate personal bias and feelings from the divine. Those who follow God need to strive to recognize their own prejudices, their own human inclination to exclude people or withhold compassion. It's our own natural faultiness as humans. But *do not* ask God to endorse our taking our hurt, disappointment, and fear, and weaponizing it against another human being.

So where do we go from here? I believe that Nephi's words present readers with two important challenges: to offer empathy for his humanness, and to refuse to elevate his words to doctrinal status. I'll discuss the second one first.

For much of history, readers of the Book of Mormon took Nephi's words seriously. The Nephites certainly did, and I wonder if perhaps that prejudice added to the centuries of violent conflict between the two peoples. I suspect that it influenced the Nephites' disregard of the words of Samuel the Lamanite—they would not hearken to or record the words of someone who they believed was inferior to them. In more modern

times, members of the Church, including Church leaders, believed and taught these ugly words as God's truth. This was unequivocally wrong. It harmed people. It continues to harm people. Recently, Church leaders have frankly acknowledged that those teachings were wrong. In the Church-published essay "Race and the Priesthood" (which I strongly encourage you to read if you haven't yet), we read, "Today, the Church disavows the theories advanced in the past that black skin is a sign of divine disfavor or curse, or that it reflects unrighteous actions in a pre-mortal life; that mixed-race marriages are a sin; or that blacks or people of any other race or ethnicity are inferior in any way to anyone else. Church leaders today unequivocally condemn all racism, past and present, in any form." And yet, in my experience, because Nephi's words make us uncomfortable, we tend to simply try to ignore them. I agree that they are painful to read. Yet we need to be very careful to not just pass these verses by, but to pause and say, "No. That is not what we believe. These words are wrong. We're sorry for anyone who was or is hurt by them."

This brings me to the second challenge of these verses: to stretch the bounds of our human compassion and offer Nephi understanding for his mistakes. In this process, we learn to offer one another a small part of the grace that God offers us. This experience of wrestling with these verses has changed how I think of Nephi. I no longer think of him as the muscle-bound hero of an Arnold Friberg painting. But I think I understand him better. I see his humanity, and I see the way God took an imperfect person and performed miracles through him. I see how his own path toward God was sometimes indirect but that he was always trying to be better. Just like the people in our ward in Baltimore whom I loved so much, it is when I saw Nephi's vulnerability that I came to truly love him, not just admire him.

I want to make it clear that I'm not saying that I have *the* answer to understanding these scriptures. I believe that there are many possible answers to every hard theological question and that different times of our lives will yield different meanings. The only claim I am making is

that we ought to dig into our holy texts in a sustained effort to understand more than is what is on the surface. Read boldly; the scriptures can take anything we throw at them.

Finally, I want to note that Nephi's story also reminds us that people can change. We can repair past mistakes. We can draw closer to God. We can do better. After all, it was Nephi, the same man who wrote these troubling verses, who also wrote, closer to the end of his life, "For none of these iniquities come of the Lord; for he doeth that which is good among the children of men . . . and he inviteth them *all* to come unto him and partake of his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female . . . and *all are alike unto God*, both Jew and Gentile" (2 Nephi 26:33, emphasis added). And to that I can only add: amen and amen.



Casey Jex Smith
White
collage on paper, 2009
11" x 8.5"

CONTRIBUTORS

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Casey Jex Smith
 Ties (church drawing)
 pen on paper, 2013
 8" x 6"

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