

# DIALOGUE

A JOURNAL OF MORMON THOUGHT





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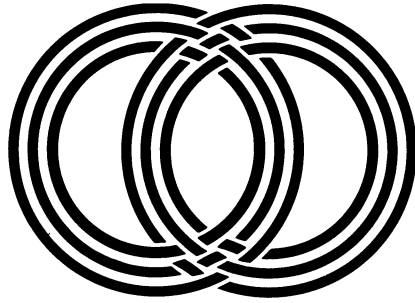
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# DIALOGUE

A JOURNAL OF MORMON THOUGHT

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

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### *Passing the Baton*

It's with selfish sorrow that I note that Ross and Mary Kay Peterson will be passing the editors' baton. I've read *DIALOGUE* from the beginning and know that the Petersons follow in the tradition of good people who have shared their interests and talents with and for the benefit of all of us. I'd like to commend them for the general quality of the materials that have appeared but say that I particularly enjoyed the Winter 1991 issue. It was provocative and satisfying, and those two do not always go together.

Bill Knecht  
Moraga, California

### *Spirited Stories*

Amen! to paper shuffler Neal Chandler's assessment of Abish, Ammon, and Lamoni. He puts flesh and blood as well as spirit in the Book of Mormon stories. My three favorite scripture stories are the Sermon on the Mount, Song of Songs (Solomon), and David and Jonathan. Each has a glimmer of heaven on earth. But what would you expect from someone who gets as much out of a thirty-minute soak at a mineral hot spring as out of three hours in church?

Howard W. Johnson  
Thatcher, Arizona

### *Feeling Conservative*

I struggle as I wonder whether I am liberal or conservative. In secular circles, I do my best to battle the abortionists, stop government's frivolous spending, and keep Planned Parenthood from teaching sex to my children in school. I also try to further missionary work and be a decent example of a Latter-day Saint. However, in Church circles, I lean toward unorth-

odox ideas: in addition to King James, I study from the NIV and NAS versions of the Bible; I listen to "Christian" radio stations; and I even promote *DIALOGUE* sometimes.

After reading Neal Chandler's article, "Book of Mormon Stories That My Teachers Kept from Me," I find myself feeling very conservative. I hesitated to write this letter when I realized the purpose of this article was to promote letters to the editor (I thought I could hear editors, "We need a good scandal to keep interest up"). After all, the "Letters" section has begun to be monotonous with all those "I'm-so-thankful-for-*DIALOGUE*-because-it-has-rescued-me" letters. From his first paragraph, we see that Chandler expected a scandal (or was that artistic tongue-in-cheek?).

We've seen great things come out of *DIALOGUE*. Whether or not my conclusion was correct about the purpose of printing this article, Editors, please use more discrimination in the future. How does this piece "foster artistic and scholarly achievement" (from the *DIALOGUE* mission statement on the first page)?

What was the purpose? I waited for Chandler to give us a constructive conclusion, but after all his criticism, I am left wondering what he would have us do. Are we to petition the Lord to reveal another scripture prepared with divine aid by a different people since this one doesn't read like a Robert Ludlum novel?

I just reread Chandler's article to make sure I didn't miss something. If I did, I missed it again. Somebody tell me if the article isn't just a skeptical portrayal in pejorative, albeit clever terms (the brother of Jared's "Tupperware boats") of what most LDS people consider holy.

Chandler's skill with words is unquestioned, but I can think of pictures that should never be painted, even if with great



skill. Artistic merit cannot redeem an objectionable subject. Writers and artists are free to produce what they wish, but we do not have to publish it.

Please Editors, I know *DIALOGUE*'s agenda is not the same as the *Ensign*'s, which is fine, but do we need to print works that only complain and deride?

Kevin Bergen  
Lomita, California

### *Constructive Deconstruction*

I fear I'm a little flattered at having been branded—sort of—the Robert Maplethorpe of Mormon letters, even if this suggestion only demonstrates that real Mormons can make scandal out of warm milk and muffins. Brother Bergen imagines “pictures that should never be painted”: buggery, I suppose, chainsaw mayhem, child pornography, and, apparently, ennui in 2nd Nephi. My own imagination and my index librorum prohibitorum are grantedly thinner here. My purpose in writing the essay was to confront, to think through and try to explain, at least to myself, an unhappy circumstance in my own reading. I had, in fact, thought I was being constructive, upbeat, making the best of an awkward situation. And it seems to me even—or perhaps precisely—in light of Brother Bergen's objections that my purported offense lies not in misrepresentation, but rather in having said something out loud which in our eyebrow arching culture goes carefully and almost universally without saying.

More than one person has approached me to express relief that someone else, someone finally vocal and incautious, has also experienced a stupor of attraction to the Book of Mormon and, moreover, that he may have identified reasons not automatically reducible to personal sin. We have most of us long since been conditioned to believe that if the speaker be dead, his victim is at fault. And this, as history and regular sacrament meeting attendance will attest, is an enlightenment

sure to produce both bad speakers and bad listeners. I do not expect the heavens to retract and rewrite the Book of Mormon. But I wonder if acknowledging its shortcomings as well as its certified perfection might not make it more accessible, more approachable, richer with possibility. Imperfection, in fact, demands more: more energy, more creativity, more honesty and critical attention of the reader. Someone feeling a little less conservative than Kevin Bergen wrote to say that he had read my essay several times and was “both delighted and dismayed at its content.” I cannot imagine a better tagline for the Book of Mormon.

Neal Chandler  
Cleveland, Ohio

### *“Kicking Against the Pricks”*

After reading “The Grammar of Inequity” by Lavina Fielding Anderson (Winter 1990) and subsequent letters to the editor (Richard C. Russell, Summer 1991, and Robert McKay, Winter 1991), I feel compelled at last to comment.

In considering the language of prayer, Anderson acknowledges that the singular pronouns “thou” and “thee” were the intimate pronouns of seventeenth-century England; that “ye” and “you” were the formal, proper, courteous plurals; and that “the attachment of any special reverence or respect to ‘thee’ and ‘thou’ is based on historical ignorance, a reading backward into perfectly ordinary grammatical construction of a magical meaning” (p. 90). But then, despite this “historical ignorance,” Anderson persists in ascribing the word “formal” to “thee” and “thou.”

Granted, many define these old, singular pronouns as “formal,” “exalted,” and “special,” because they are now used almost exclusively in addressing Deity, but they are, in reality, intimate forms that have become uncommon in modern English—abandoned in favor of the formal, polite “you.”

Anderson quotes a grammarian who considers this polite substitution to be of

questionable value, for "our language has thus lost whatever advantage it had gained by having a polite as well as a familiar form of address; and unfortunately the form that has survived is ambiguous. . . . The English language is, in respect of clearness, decidedly the worse for the change" (pp. 91-92).

The surviving, ambiguous form is "you"—ambiguous, because in assuming the several functions of singular/intimate and plural/polite, "you" has become incapable of referencing any of them—intimacy, formality, politeness, or number.

Thus, modern English is truly lacking. Our intimate form is unfamiliar to us, and our common form is ambiguous. Yet, it is this ambiguous form that Anderson recommends for seeking intimacy (and gender inclusion). She writes, "I suggest that we start praying privately in our own normal speech, using 'you' and 'your.' It will make these prayers more intimate, more natural, and more loving" (p. 88).

If there is logic in this conclusion, I do not follow it. How can a pronoun of ambiguous usage be more intimate or loving? It would seem rather that in ambiguity and universality, "you" has lost all value save as a verbal pointer, while "thee" and "thou" yet retain strong underpinnings of original intimacy. It is still possible (though unusual) to use "thee" in speaking to a friend, but to use "thee" with a stranger or enemy would be unthinkable.

If we are to achieve a true understanding of modern pronoun usage, we have to be consistent and accurate when discussing origins, meanings, and ascriptions. Intimate words do not become formal words by confining them to a narrower range of original, intimate usage; nor does a formal, polite word become intimate by expanding its usage.

I do not deny that the narrowed application of words can make their use less natural and comfortable. It was partly for this that I, too, continued to pray in my mission language (Italian) for a long time, because it offered me what English did

not. When I address God, it is with strivings toward intimacy—often in the agony of not understanding the course and pain of things. "Thee" and "thou" were the most intimate pronouns I had until the Italian "ti" and "tu" introduced me to a deeper intimacy. I soon realized that "ti ringrazio," "ti prego," and "t'amo" had no adequate English rendition. The English translations, "I thank thee," "I ask thee," "I love thee" do not convey for me the intimacy of the Italian forms: first, because "ti" has a contemporary usage which "thee" had lost; and second, because the English pronoun "I" precedes and interferes. In Italian, the verb identifies me in its conjugation placing the one I address foremost, thus making communication most personal and compelling.

English, however, is the mother tongue of many, and if some, like Anderson, cannot find intimacy in the narrowed usage of "thee" and "thou," perhaps alternate usage is a matter left to them and God, though let us not confuse matters further by accusing the Church of inconsistency when the intimate "thee" and "thou" and possessives "thy" and "thine" are the preferred, counseled forms, whatever attributions some make of formal or special prayer language. "Thee" and "thou" were never formal pronouns and should we review Church translation work, we would find the corresponding, intimate, second person singular in place of "thee" and "thou" every time.

It may not be easy to learn uncommon forms, but millions do it—mastering their own and new languages and seemingly endless verbal conjugations. Communication takes effort. It is to use words and meanings which the one addressed understands—not the ones we insist they understand—and though God understands all language, perhaps there is preference for the intimate forms, despite their lack of modernness. And if prophets counsel such use, whether founded in custom or revelation, and whether it would make any real difference to God, perhaps the difference it does make is, in a sense,



"Adamic" and "Abrahamic." Why do we do these things? We know not (we would not), save the Lord directs us.

This speaks as well to Anderson's greater concern of gender inequity. I am convinced that in time the Gods will reveal themselves concerning female inclusion. I have long desired an immediate cure for this world's inequities and for a myriad of other painful things, even though I know that much of what we endure (what the Gods allow) has parallel in the Jewish legend account of Israel in Egypt. Slavery, too, is morally wrong, yet Israel was left to endure the injustices until the time for liberation was right. Those who determined to leave according to their own timetable perished, and those who waited for the appointed time were led, both by day and by night.

This does not mean we err to feel great anguish or to plead for change. God certainly knows my feelings and frustrations. I feel accepted until I begin to take things into my own hands. In my own "kicking against the pricks," it has become evident that there are countless, unseen considerations in establishing timetables for justice and change; and that every time I push beyond my stewardship, I am giving the wrong answer to that eternal question: whose will and timing in this matter shall govern?

Susan Mariah Smith  
Cardston, Alberta

#### *Non-Mormon Contributor*

Having read and enjoyed Marc Schindler's lively and thoughtful review of *The Mormon Presence in Canada* (Winter 1991), I must point to certain errors. While three of the volume's editors are "well-known LDS academics in Canada," a fourth has been tentatively described by one of his fellows as "a former Mormon or ethnic Mormon, not . . . a practicing one," and a fifth is not Mormon. I too am a non-Mormon—one of three contributors of articles who are not in any sense "LDS academics." Still, let me say that your

reviewer's misapprehension in this regard strikes me as a compliment!

Keith Parry  
Lethbridge, Canada

#### *The Utah Gambler*

Please thank the Utah Gambler for me (Summer 1991). His article stirred memories and made me want to write some reminiscences. Good writing does that. It makes you think. It makes you feel. It makes you want to do something good yourself.

Larry Day  
Pensacola, Florida

#### *Easier Asserted Than Achieved*

May I respond to the concluding point of Marjorie Newton's "Australian Viewpoint" regarding Mormonism becoming mainstream (Winter 1991). Newton apparently objects to a "middle class" proselyting emphasis in contrast to an "all-class" emphasis.

Our nineteen-year-old son, born and reared in the wide-open freedom of southern Utah, spent two years preparing for and proselyting in Sao Paulo, Brazil, frequently in the *favelas*, primitive housing areas, usually on hills. His mission instructions were, "Don't go in the *favelas* unless you have a referral, but if you do have a referral, follow it up." Mormon missionaries are extremely conspicuous in the *favelas*, where the only white shirts are worn by "rich Americanos" or the hated *policia*.

Our son, despite the "low profile" provided by his Brazilian companions, was spat upon and robbed at gunpoint. One companion's life was threatened by a drugged-out contact, and while serving as a zone leader, our son was intimately and inadvertently involved in a double homicide which occurred at his feet in the Praca da Republica. While the Republica is not a *favela*, time spent with the *favelados* was consistently high risk, low return. Meanwhile, for three months, we

received consecutive letters and certificates of achievement from his mission president, acknowledging our son's proselytizing success among people in middle-class areas of Sao Paulo. He made and retains many friends among these people.

So if we are to go beyond baptizing just Newton's "middle-class nationals," if we can indeed find out how to help the prostitutes and drug addicts, and I don't question that it needs to be done, let this proselyting be done by someone else's children, not mine.

My point, of course, is that no one wants to send their loved and vulnerable young people into these situations. This being the case, how should we reach out? How should we reach out when a European mission call is cause for rejoicing and a South American mission call is cause for commiseration and sympathy? I know this happens because we have sent sons both places. "Pure religion" is easier written on paper than performed.

Gwen Sandberg  
Cedar City, Utah

### *In Support of Fathers, Husbands, Brothers, and Sons*

I particularly enjoyed Lola Van Wagenen's "In Their Own Behalf: The Politicization of Mormon Women and the 1870 Franchise" in the Winter 1991 issue. Van Wagenen is to be commended for her writing and for her research.

Her article was of particular interest to me because I dealt with similar information while researching a history I was writing. Material I quoted was perhaps a little more pithy than what Van Wagenen shared.

"Indignation" meetings in response to the Cullom Act cropped up throughout the Territory, and "In support of fathers, husbands, brothers, and sons" seemed to be the battle cry. Such a mass meeting of the ladies was held in the tiny settlement of Mona, Juab County, Utah, settled in 1860. The meeting was reported in the *Deseret Evening News* of 1 February 1870

and taken from the Documentary History as follows:

The ladies of Mona, Juab County, ventilated their respect for Messrs. Cullom and Cragin in a mass meeting held on the 26th of January. . . .

Speeches strongly condemning the Cullom Bill were made, and a string of resolutions expressive of the indignant feelings of the ladies in regard to all such interference passed. The resolutions condemned the measures proposed to Congress as unworthy of the consideration of American statesmen; and the ladies expressed their determination to support their fathers, husbands, brothers and sons in discharging the sacred duties which devolve upon them.

On Monday, 1 August 1870, the newly enfranchised women participated in their first territorial election—to elect a delegate to Congress. The *Salt Lake Herald* of that date (recorded in the Documentary History) commented:

Brief visits to the polling places gave us to understand that a large number of ladies were exercising the lately granted right of the franchise. And although there was considerable good humored chaffing, the utmost respect was shown by all to the ladies for whom a separate entrance to the place of voting was provided.

This election will be memorable in the history of the Territory as the first Territorial election at which women exercised the franchise. There have been municipal elections in different places, since Hon. S. A. Mann attached his signature to the Act conferring the suffrage upon them; but this is the first time the women of Utah have had an opportunity to express by their ballots their sentiments on a leading public question—whether they, the parties most deeply concerned, would sustain polygamy or repudiate it; for this question has been logged into the election and forced upon the voters by a few who believed in a fight, no matter how great the fizzle they would make. The result of the polling when known, will show that the women emphatically sustain their husbands, fathers, and brothers, their domestic institutions[,] their hearths and homes every time before a few dissension breeding "carpet baggers." Hur-



rah for the women of Utah and their choice for Delegates, the people's choice, Hon. Wm. H. Hooper.

The settlement of Mona cast 109 votes. All of these without exception went to the people's choice, delegate Hooper, and by association supported polygamy.

If that is surprising, then so are the following votes, all in support of the people's choice: in Nephi, 267; Levan, 133; St. George, 311; Beaver, 281; Filimore, 197; Payson, 483; Spanish Fork, 365; Lehi, 353. In Springville one vote out of 340 and in Provo 25 out of 612 opposed Hooper.

M. Clark Newell  
Mona, Utah

### *Cure for Loneliness*

I love reading DIALOGUE and am very thankful that you have survived all these years. When I feel lonely with my thoughts, because I cannot talk about them in my ward, I turn to your journal and find relief in the conviction that I am not alone with my ideas.

Rolf Maichel  
Pinneberg, Germany

### *Well Done*

Once again, thank you, thank you, thank you. Just one of your essays is worth the entire year's subscription cost.

We hope the new editor will continue in your "visionary" footsteps.

Patricia Skeen  
Eugene, Oregon

### *Christ's Way*

In response to the essays by the Vandagriffs, Tolk, and Schindler, and the letter by Webster (Winter 1991), all on the Gulf War: President McKay's 1942 address has been cited often by Mormon defenders of the Gulf War, but if read carefully in entirety, it provides much more support for condemning the Gulf war than for justifying it. President

McKay reviews the general gospel principles of opposition to war and concludes, unequivocally, that "war is incompatible with Christ's teachings" and that "it is vain to attempt to reconcile war with true Christianity" (*Improvement Era*, May 1942, p. 276). He then very cautiously defends the Church's support of the Allies at the beginning of World War II under the unique "conditions" that existed then, including the criterion cited by David Vandagriff, "*possibly . . .* defense of a weak nation that is being unjustly crushed." But even this equivocal support for the Gulf War is removed when we read President McKay's strong statements about when war is *not* justified—especially when it is "an attempt to enforce a new order of government . . . however better the government" (p. 340).

As Tolk's essay shows in detail, that was precisely our main purpose in the Gulf War, a purpose that, entirely apart from and even *after* the liberation of Kuwait, produced enormous destruction and suffering to civilians and tens of thousands of deaths. That same purpose, as the Vandagriffs seem to understand, made Vietnam wrong. Have they changed their opposition to such wars, simply because we won the Gulf War—or because so few Americans were killed in what was still an enormous slaughter and environmental destruction? Does might make right?

Three other false ideas seem to sustain Mormon support for this recent war: (1) That our government will not lie to or manipulate us (as we now know it did in Vietnam). This time it followed "proper constitutional norms" (Vandagriff quoting Walter Shapiro); (2) That negotiation was tried and failed (Webster [p. 9]); and (3) That pacifism means passivism; to oppose war means to favor doing nothing or, conversely, the only way to oppose evil is through violence. These errors can be corrected with a study of historical facts and clear scriptural teachings:

(1) *None* of the wars we have fought in the past forty-five years has followed the clear Constitutional demand that Con-

gress, after unlimited debate with full access to the facts and options, make the terrible decision to go to war. In August and September 1990, without Congressional approval, President Bush committed hundreds of thousands of troops to Desert Shield, claiming the force was only for the purpose of defending Saudi Arabia. About 15 October 1990, as Bush talked of going on the offensive and public demand for Congressional debate was growing, Henry Kissinger, former secretary of state under Nixon, claimed that now that President Bush had deployed over 200,000 American troops in the Gulf, there should be no public or Congressional debate. That huge presence was a concrete reality, he argued, and it must be used to forcibly extract Hussein if he would not back down—or else our credibility with Middle Eastern nations and our allies world-wide will be irreparably damaged.

Bill Orton, new Congressman from Utah, spoke for the first time on the House floor during the debate about whether to support Bush's ultimatum of 30 November. "In the final analysis," he said, "the success of the President's diplomatic strategy requires the credible threat of force. I will give President Bush my trust and my vote and my prayers" (*Deseret News*, 12 Jan. 1991, A-1). I respect Orton's decision, which clearly was made after deep soul-searching, to support the best chance he could see for peace. But he never should have been put in that position, one which amounted to Presidential blackmail: Bush, on his own, created the huge build-up in the Gulf and set the deadline and nonnegotiable ultimatum intended to force Hussein to back down.

Congress was not asked to debate the advisability of declaring war, of sacrificing American lives, freedoms, and resources to achieve ends that were clearly understood and that were "just" because all other options had been exhausted. They were merely asked whether they would support decisions already made; not

to do so, supporters claimed, would have undermined the last chance for peace—that is, a unified show of force. Even so, the vote was close; many said they supported Bush mainly to send such a "clear message to Hussein." Clearly he didn't get the message, because he didn't back down from our threats, and we fought a war, unconstitutionally begun by the president rather than Congress, instead of seriously attempting available nonviolent efforts.

(2) On 12 August 1990, Saddam Hussein broadcast a speech, (published in the 13 August *New York Times*, p. A-8), in which he offered to withdraw from Kuwait. His conditions: Recognition of his need to resolve certain grievances with Kuwait and resolution of "all cases of occupation . . . simultaneously and on the same principles and basis that should be laid down by the Security Council"—in other words, that Syria, Israel, and Iran meet Security Council resolutions for withdrawal from lands they had occupied by force. Though this proposal certainly has flaws and may even have been cynically made, it is rationally and morally defensible as a beginning point for negotiation. However, our government made absolutely no response and, as Tolk shows, refused ever to even consider such "linkage" (what others might call moral consistency) between the various evils of the Middle East. There was *never* any negotiation (which implies recognition of others' grievances and creatively suggesting options). There were simply unconditional demands on our part, which even escalated so that when Saddam finally, after the air assault, offered to withdraw unconditionally from Kuwait, even that was not enough. As Tolk shows, by then Bush had become intent on destroying Hussein's army and government.

(3) Webster characterizes my position as "passivity" and warns that "to have ignored the invasion would have been perilous" (p. 8). "Ignoring" is not what I would want, and it is not the only alternative to war. Christ did not say, "Ignore your enemies," but rather, "*Love* your

enemies"—a very active process that includes "doing good," "showing mercy," and many other positive, nonviolent actions included in what President Kimball called "taking the gospel to our enemies that they may no longer *be* our enemies" (*Ensign*, June 1976, p. 6, my emphasis). Christ did not say, "Ignore evil," but rather, "Resist not evil" (Matt. 5:29), or as Paul amplified this idea, "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:21).

Our policies in the Middle East have long been based on evil means—on pitting people against each other, on power and force rather than good. We have acted without justice, shifting support to and away from Iraq, the Kurds, Saddam himself, continually tilting toward Israel, allowing it to commit raids and invasions we have condemned—and violently punishing similar acts by Arabs. Why can't we use our enormous resources to support nonviolent efforts to resolve boundary disputes, to establish a Palestinian homeland, and to achieve equitable use of oil resources—the "doing good" that Christ has said would bring peace?

We do not partly because we persist in believing that certain people are too evil to respond to good, but Christ has

never given us that excuse. He did not say love and negotiate with your good, reasonable enemies or use Christian ideals only on those who "respect" (Webster, p. 8) such ideals.

Christ's commands are absolute, and he has promised us that he would provide a way for us to obey his commands—if we were willing. But first we must stop demonizing others. I believe that the greatest delusion the devil creates is *not* in convincing people he doesn't exist, but in convincing some that he exists in the tangible form of a certain person or group—which we then can declare war on and destroy without any restraint of Christian teachings. The gospel constantly reminds us that evil and good are in all of us and that the same principles apply to all—including the command to do good to all and to never use evil means to try to combat evil. Whenever we think we must "fight to resist evil" or engage in "war for peace on earth," as the Vandagriffs put it, we have disobeyed Christ and have already begun to do evil to destroy peace. It is true that evil triumphs when "good men do nothing" (Vandagriff, p. 140), but evil simply triumphs immediately when good men do evil to fight evil.

Eugene England  
Provo, Utah

## CALL FOR PAPERS

The 1992 Northwest Sunstone Symposium will be held  
23-24 October at the Mountaineers Building,  
300 Third Avenue West, Seattle, Washington.

Proposals for papers should be submitted by 1 August 1992  
to Molly McLellan Bennion,  
1150 22nd Avenue East, Seattle, WA 98112  
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## The Wake of a Media Crisis: Guilt by Association or Innocence by Proclamation?

*Rebecca Worthen Chandler*

ON 4 JANUARY 1990, police following a tip dug a family of five from a common grave in a barn in Kirtland, Ohio. Dennis and Cheryl Avery and their three young daughters, hands, feet, and faces bound with duct tape, had been shot at close range with a .45-caliber pistol. In the days that followed, police learned that the Averys had, in fact, been executed by members of a religious commune to which they had belonged. Commune members viewed the murders as a required sacrifice for the purpose of “purifying” the group. God, they claimed, had commanded the slaughter through divine revelation to their leader, Jeffrey Don Lundgren. Lundgren, according to press reports, was somehow connected to the Mormon Church.

The arrest and eventual trials of the thirteen commune members implicated in the murders was front page news in northeastern Ohio for two solid weeks and then resurfaced intermittently for almost two years as indicted commune members came variously to trial. Jeffrey Lundgren’s lawyers eventually attempted to obtain a change of venue, arguing that because of extensive media coverage in and around Lake County, he could not possibly obtain a fair trial there. Of 201 Lake County residents questioned in a survey commissioned by Lundgren’s defense team, all 201 had heard of Lundgren, and fully 70 percent wanted him executed. The methodology and validity of the survey were later challenged by a prosecution expert; as a result, local television, radio, and newspaper representatives were subpoenaed to document the amount of publicity given the Lundgren case. As of 10 August

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1990, a total of 1,786 news accounts of the case had been published, including 492 television reports, 944 radio broadcasts, and 350 newspaper stories. It is of concern to Latter-day Saints living in Ohio that a fair number of these stories linked Jeffrey Lungren and his activities in some way to the Mormon Church.

The first sketchy news reports indicated that Lungren had formerly been a Mormon and that the lives of local Mormon leaders had been threatened. In fact, he had been a member of the RLDS Church and at one time a tour guide at the Kirtland Temple. Eventually, however, he broke off on his own to become the self-proclaimed founder and prophet of a new religious commune. Discipline was stringent. Church members who broke away to follow him “did,” according to one account, “what he told them to do. Two families could not even talk without him being there. He took the money. He did all the shopping. He decided when they could shower and what jobs people had to do” (*Plain Dealer*, 6 Jan. 1990, 9-A).

Lundgren was preparing his followers through blind discipline, paramilitary exercises, and ritual murder for a trek into the wilderness which was supposed to lead them to salvation, prosperity, eternal life, and the second coming of Christ. After slaying the Averys, he led his commune off into one of the most remote regions of the East. They moved to an area deep in the depressed and thinly populated coal-mining country of West Virginia, where Lundgren decided to take one of his followers, a married woman with children, as a polygamous wife and led the group there on a religious quest for the “mystical sword of Laban” (*Plain Dealer*, 8 Jan. 1990, 1-A).

The initial formal confusion between the LDS and the RLDS churches was cleared up almost immediately and has not been a problem since. However, for reasons that really aren’t very surprising, reporters in search of related feature material, especially staff writers for the Cleveland *Plain Dealer*, encountered Mormon culture and Mormon doctrine. They asked—along with everyone else—how such horrible murders could happen and wondered if there wasn’t something in Mormon doctrine or practices that encouraged members to follow a leader without question and to execute any “commandment” he might issue. Was there something in the Book of Mormon itself that encouraged or condoned ritual violence?

Former cult members remembered Lungren often quoting 1 Nephi 4:13: “It is better that one man should perish than that a nation should dwindle and perish in unbelief.” It seemed that the five members of the Avery family, killed in a cleansing ritual, had apparently become victims of some twisted application of that passage of scripture. The *Plain Dealer* quoted this and other scriptural texts in which the sword

of Laban figured prominently. In a feature article on the slayings on 13 January, Michael Norman and John S. Long described the doctrine of blood atonement as taught by Brigham Young, and that article was followed on 25 and 26 January by a long, two-part series on the cult phenomenon in general and on cults with roots in Mormonism in particular. Another article set forth RLDS claims that their doctrine, theology, liturgy, and history were far more “mainline” than those of the “Utah Church.”

In researching these stories, Michael Norman ran across my husband, Neal Chandler, whose book *Benediction* had recently been published. A review by a staff writer for the Associated Press had been released to the AP wire. Neal, who was willing enough to talk with him, found Norman very well prepared for the interview. He was aware of the Lafferty and LeBaron cases and had spoken with Sandra Tanner in Salt Lake City and with Jan Shipps in Bloomington, Indiana. In addition to blood atonement, he was aware of the gestures that, at that time, still accompanied oaths and covenants in the temple ceremony, and he even asked if there weren't a teaching in the Church that when the leaders had spoken, the thinking had been done.

Neal did what he could to stem the tide, reminding Norman that Lungren, as a former member of the RLDS Church, had no historical allegiance to Brigham Young and that ours is a church that has always championed education and the free exercise of individual agency. While most of what he said never actually appeared in print, the resulting article was, we felt, relatively balanced with no outrageous assertions or major inaccuracies except that Church membership was pegged at 3.5 million instead of the 7 million the Church claimed in 1989. The story itself ran on the front page where related stories had run for over two weeks. The inside page spread included a picture of Neal, looking thoughtful and concerned, with the following caption: “Mormon author . . . has come to dread the reports of cults with ties to Mormonism because of the misunderstanding they generate about his faith.” Unfortunately, that picture was juxtaposed with one of Ervil LeBaron, looking depraved and demented, with a caption referring to his conviction in the 1977 shooting death of Utah polygamist leader Rulon Allred. But you can't blame a reporter for what's in the files.

Our rather sanguine attitude was not shared by local Church members who were dismayed at the suggestion of any association at all between mainline Mormonism and the actions of radical excommunicants of another, although related, church. Missionary referrals, we were later told, dropped dramatically, and convert baptisms, never statistically impressive in the Kirtland Stake, were running half of what might normally be expected. Interestingly, as preoccupied with

the situation as members were, it was never discussed in church from the pulpit or in quorum meetings throughout the four or five area stakes until 2 February, when President Zane Lee broke the silence at a Kirtland Stake leadership conference and addressed the issue directly. He expressed the concern of the stake leadership about false and misleading newspaper stories. Stake leaders had, he said, contacted Jack Anderson, who was now serving the Church in an official capacity as advisor on media relations. They had also contacted Church Public Relations director, Don LeFevre, in Salt Lake City for advice. They had also contacted the *Plain Dealer* to voice their displeasure. Church members were to be comforted, these were trying times, but the gospel was true. Members were to refer all requests from the media to a newly appointed stake public communications director. A “media offensive” was also announced, which would include a number of special activities to which the media would be invited and a special *Plain Dealer* supplement which would feature the family of Cory Snyder, right fielder for the Cleveland Indians and a member of the Cleveland Stake. Stake leaders hoped this approach would help recoup what they felt had surely been lost over the incident, and perhaps mitigate—or at least balance—whatever poor publicity was yet to come.

The following morning, fast meetings were held throughout the stake, and members in several wards referred to the situation in some way in testimonies. One sister in my ward proclaimed these to be the last days and said it had been prophesied that latter-day persecution would begin in Kirtland (she did not cite references). This was “It,” she said. We were on the cutting edge of Armageddon.

Now, I have recounted all of this, not because I am particularly interested in cults or even in media perceptions of cults and Mormonism, but because I am interested in Mormons, and in their reactions to public scrutiny. It would clearly be an understatement to assert that the Church has, since its inception, had intermittent public relations problems. Indeed, much of the nineteenth-century persecutions either originated with or were aggravated by attacks in local newspapers. A historian could probably also show how that persecution was, at times, exacerbated by official and member overreaction to media attacks. What I would like to do is choose two national media crises that have occurred within my own adult lifetime and examine how those crises have affected us institutionally and personally. I think there are lessons to be drawn for the Kirtland unpleasantness.

The crises to which I refer (and by “crises” I mean those situations which received widespread, prolonged, and negative attention) are the boycott of BYU athletic teams in 1970 by many schools in the Western Athletic Conference and the resulting charges that Church theology



and policies promoted racism; and, second, the excommunication of political activist Sonia Johnson in 1979 coupled with the visible and official Mormon lobbying against the Equal Rights Amendment and the resulting charges that ours was a patriarchally repressive church. You may be able to recall other situations to add to this list—perhaps local issues that affected smaller groups of Church members but that perhaps affected them all the more dramatically because they were close by—just as the Kirtland killings have affected us in north-eastern Ohio.

When we are being attacked, for whatever reason, the most elemental, most natural, and widespread reaction is, of course, to defend ourselves. Sometimes this defensiveness is accompanied by bewilderment: How can people say such things about us when we are such nice people? We are God-fearing, upright individuals who spend our lives doing genealogy and compassionate service and going to meetings. Why can't they leave us alone? Why don't they ever print the *good* news about us? Defensiveness sometimes takes the form of anger—even outrage. I spoke with a leader in the Kirtland Stake who expressed this point of view: Newspaper reporters ought to know better. They are professional journalists, and they should be aware of the Church as a worldwide presence that couldn't possibly have ties to anything that happened out there in that barn. Newspaper publishers are greedy. They just want to sell papers. They don't care if they're being fair or whom they hurt. It's all filthy lucre. Stake leaders were also resentful that they had not been contacted for comment when these stories were prepared. They complained that reporters had spoken only to non-Mormons or to excommunicated Mormons. (I don't know into which of these two categories they placed my husband.)

Our good friend Keith Norman was upset. He wrote a reasoned and, I thought, persuasive six-page letter to the editor of the *Plain Dealer* pointing out that Mormons hadn't exactly invented violence and suggesting that it might be as profitable to blame the Catholics who, after all, conducted the Inquisition or even the Jews, who perpetuated the violent stories in the Old Testament. His letter was returned with thanks and apologies that there had not been space available. There must have been many other letters written and submitted, but one of the few that were published is, I think, instructive:

I am a native-born Clevelander. I have earned a bachelor's degree in psychology, a master's degree in U.S. history, teaching certificates in social studies and in learning disabilities, and I am working on a second masters degree in education.

I did the majority of my coursework at Cleveland State University. Because of a high grade-point average, I was awarded a graduate internship. All this, in

spite of the fact that I am a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons).

I work for Cuyahoga Community College where I develop and implement special education/training programs for our inner-city youth. I also teach history at the Western Campus of CCC. In addition, I own and operate a successful private tutoring agency. All this, in spite of my activities as an active member of the Mormon Church.

After going on to assert (without documentation of any kind) that Mormons have the highest per capita income in the state (a statistical profile that could not possibly have included my ward) and that our Church has more doctors, more lawyers, and more Cleveland Indians than anyone else in the area, the writer denies all charges unequivocally. Mormons are peace loving. They do not, never have, never would, never could teach or subscribe to anything like a doctrine of blood atonement. And the temple ceremony is completely peaceful. To suggest otherwise is total sacrilege. While this gentleman, whom I do not know—the address given is outside my stake—may be commended for putting on the “whole armor” of God, for not being ashamed of his church and for being willing to leap to its defense, there are problems with his printed protestation. Many members, and I suspect many more non-members, were offended by the self-congratulation and the condescension in his letter. Moreover, there are serious problems with accuracy—first, in the financial profile he presented, but more important, in the denials he sets forth.

It does not take a great deal of historical research to unearth disturbing references to or proclamations of blood atonement. Indeed, such pronouncements are far more easily explained in the context of the times by the tribulations and the temperaments of the men who delivered them than they are disavowed. And, as secret and as sacred as we like to think the temple ceremony is, it is remarkably easy to obtain a fairly accurate description of what goes on behind those walls. The penalty oaths, only recently removed from the ceremony, were still in place at the time these articles were written, and were, in fact, what remained of oaths of vengeance that were once a part of the temple endowment and that were, in fact, echoed in many of our latter-day hymns until the most recent revision of the hymnal. To deny that such ever existed doesn't change the facts.

Particularly Mormon is a defensive posture that recalls the persecutions of earlier days: This is the work of Satan. Newspaper and television reporters (possibly unwittingly, but nonetheless in all actuality) have become tools of the devil. This whole atrocity was concocted solely to keep the work of the kingdom from rolling forth.

Well, maybe. But these are serious charges, and before we lay satanic discipleship at the feet of a journalist who may, in fact, simply be doing his or her job gathering available information and trying to meet a deadline, we need to consider a few things. Perhaps some of us feel a little cheated at having missed the major persecutions of a century ago. Perhaps we feel a kind of survivor's guilt about escaping the tarrings and featherings, the Haun's Mill Massacre, the expulsion from Nauvoo, and the trek across the plains. We feel deeply indebted to those who have gone before and have a nagging insecurity about ourselves. How would we have fared in the face of such trials? Perhaps we have a need for latter-day trials of our own. Perhaps we devise early morning seminary, or roadshows, or ward building committees, for example, so we can rise to the occasion and learn what the trek across the plains taught the pioneers. And we comfort ourselves with predictions of trials in the Last Days. And so, we are always watching and waiting. And often finding persecution where none was intended.

To legitimately lay claim to persecution, I think we would have to first show malice aforethought—that a given reporter or publisher or producer is actually trying to defame us in some way, to destroy our missionary program, to run us out of town. While there are groups that have dedicated themselves to producing anti-Mormon literature for the public, there are also plenty of journalists who report on Church activities because that is what they've been assigned to do. They have no deeper, no particularly ulterior, motives. The other circumstance that would suggest genuine persecution is the singling out of our Church for this treatment. A cursory look at the stories that get printed about virtually any church you can name belies that assertion. Just as we don't often see banner headlines that proclaim: "Compassionate Service Hours up by 50 percent in Shaker Heights Ward" or "Fathers Included in Merrie Miss New Beginnings Program," neither do we see well-positioned stories on bingo revenues in the local Catholic parish or read about a bumper crop of Bar Mitzvahs this year in a nearby synagogue. These happenings are of interest to local congregations, and they may be reported in local church newsletters, but they do not make news! What does make news is seldom complimentary to *any* denomination. I have read, in the last several months, articles on the "graying of Christian Science" that suggest that this religious movement is losing its young people. I have read of a number of Catholic priests charged with molesting young boys (all that celibacy seems unhealthy). Do such articles indicate that the religious denominations in question are being persecuted? I hardly think so. And we would, I think, dismiss charges to that effect as pure paranoia. It seems perfectly logical to us to look for answers and explanations in the Koran if

something happens in the Arab world that we don't understand, but no one thinks of that as persecution. It is simply an attempt to shed some light on a perplexing issue. But, somehow, when it's Mormons in the news, when the Book of Mormon is involved, we apply a different standard.

Two years ago, Lou Chandler, a public relations director by profession, who has also served as public communications director in her stake in Philadelphia and who also happens to be my sister-in-law, suggested in a Washington, D.C. Sunstone Symposium a more productive response to institutional criticism. Difficulties occur, she said, when there is dissonance between what is perceived by a given audience and the image an institution is trying to project. She explained that one primary task of a public relations department is to assess public perceptions, determine if those perceptions are in accord with the image that is desired, and then figure out what to do about changing those perceptions if they are not. Interestingly, she illustrated her premise with the rather widely held, but totally erroneous perception that the Mormon Church is, itself, a cult. She had encountered this perception quite by chance in a private conversation and had spent some time reading up on cults. Every book she found on the subject mentioned the Church at least in passing. Many devoted considerable space to the assertion that the Mormon Church is one of the major cults in America.

As she continued her research, she learned that cultologists or whatever such experts call themselves have more or less agreed upon fourteen characteristics that generally typify cults, and she spent considerable time matching up public perceptions of the Mormon Church with those characteristics. And she found plenty of dissonance. Just one example: The first five items on the list have to do with control—mind control, control of time, of personal property, and so on. Lou cited a number of references most of us would recognize to support the assertion that Mormons believe in something called free agency. Indeed, Mormons consider free agency to be central to their theology. Free agency is to die for. There was a war fought in heaven over free agency. Casualties were high. And yet, when questioned about the issue, the vast majority of those she contacted outside the Church didn't have that perception at all. They perceived the Mormon Church as incredibly controlling—as an institution that very definitely limited the agency of its members. Her methods were admittedly far from statistically reliable, yet her findings are not very surprising and could very likely be corroborated in a more tightly structured survey.

So here we have what appears to be a public relations problem: theological commitment to a principle and a public perception of just



the opposite. The task at hand, clearly, is to find a way to correct that misperception. Just as clearly, we can't do very much about correcting misperceptions if we don't know what people think of us. Perhaps the place to start is to listen to what outsiders say. Or possibly to read what they write about us. And if we can listen and read with some degree of objectivity, we can help deal with the misperceptions that will inevitably occur with an institution as large and as complex as the Church has become.

Interestingly, when Lou performed an in-house survey, asking some Mormons she knew about *their* perceptions of the free agency issue, her findings were similar to what she had found in her nonmember group. Many avowed and card-carrying Mormons she talked to perceived that their own church limited, in many ways, their own individual free agency. When even devout Mormons share in a "misperception," perhaps the problem is more than one of perceptual dissonance. Is it perhaps true that many Mormons feel entirely free to do exactly what they are told?

This leads, of course, to the possibility that while we are examining an issue for perceptual dissonance, the perceptions will be found to be valid, and the problem elsewhere. I hope it is not presumptuous to suggest that in the past two decades, negative press has sometimes served to show us problems that do merit our attention. During the seventies, for example, it became increasingly difficult for Church members to respond individually and institutionally to charges of racism. We were, in fact, practicing a kind of spiritual apartheid that troubled many of us.

The changes in institutional and individual response to this issue have been nothing short of phenomenal for those of us who remember what it was like before, and I can't help wondering if the timing of these changes hasn't been affected by the very negative image we found ourselves projecting prior to the announcement on 8 June 1978 that all worthy male members of the Church could now hold the priesthood. That this change would one day come we had all been assured, but my generation of missionaries speaking face to face with General Authorities in the temple were told "not in my lifetime, young man—or yours," and were further counseled to "avoid the seed of Cain" in their proselytizing efforts. The issue was one of interest, but not of great concern to most Church members, and it wasn't until later that we began to hear more equivocal and more hopeful answers to questions about the priesthood and temple ordinances for black members of the Church.

For a period of time, the pressure from outside the Church was constant and was intensified by publications within the LDS commu-

nity questioning the theological foundations of the policy and calling for a change. Perhaps that 1978 announcement was not a direct response to such media-generated pressure, perhaps the timetable had simply always been misunderstood, but the public relations crisis surely had an impact. It demanded that we examine thoughtfully a situation that was in need of change. Whether we like to admit it or not, it pointed the way to repentance.

Our response to various women's issues has not been as dramatic—at least not on an institutional level—but changes are beginning to occur. Special women's conferences, a garden full of statues glorifying women's roles may be thought of as mere window dressing, but they do represent an acknowledgment that women's issues exist.

Speaking only from my own experience, I can say that it is a great deal easier to be an active Latter-day Saint woman now than it was fifteen or even ten years ago—especially for those of us who are a bit off the beaten track. The track to which I am referring is, of course, that eternal round that leads from the kitchen to Relief Society to Primary and pretty much back to the kitchen without passing Go to collect a pay check or stopping off anywhere along the way to drop off a child for day care. When I left my daughter, now a high school sophomore, at the age of five weeks, to go back to the classroom, I had either the scorn or the maudlin sympathy of virtually every sister in my ward. Relief Society met in the daytime, and I was necessarily excluded from activity or association with the main body of the ward sisterhood.

Now, well over half the women in our ward work outside their homes, and those who don't are likely to be caring for the children of those who do. There is an attitude of mutual support that is as refreshing as it was unaccustomed in the 1970s. I am fully aware that Ezra Taft Benson has spoken out against the economic decisions many families are making today and has urged young mothers to stay at home with their children whatever the cost, but this is one time when the prophet has spoken and the debate has only begun—at least in my stake. In March 1991 the *Ensign* ran a four-page article on child care. More and more we are seeing and hearing Church leaders urge young women to take education seriously and to prepare themselves for the economic realities of the future. More attention is being paid, in meaningful ways, I hope, to single, widowed, and divorced women, and more efforts are being made to include a variety of lifestyles within our very family-oriented church. It seems to me that men are more reluctant to voice dictatorial or chauvinistic views (if they still harbor such) than they once were—I haven't found myself and women like me the subject of a diatribe from the pulpit for quite a while. There is much

that remains to be done, and I'm sure more in some wards and stakes than in others, but we have made a start.

Again I suggest that all the attention generated by the ERA issue and by Sonia Johnson's excommunication forced Church members in family groups and in Relief Societies and quorum meetings throughout the Church to take a hard look at the real status of the average Mormon woman in the Church—either that or stand proudly convicted of media charges.

Now we face yet another barrage of criticism. This time the issues seem to be that the Mormon theology and the Mormon Church somehow create automatons—people who are trained to act without thinking on the say-so of anyone they accept as a religious authority over them, and then that our theology and culture somehow encourage or condone violent acts if they are undertaken for a higher purpose. While we are defending ourselves against such charges, we may want to ask ourselves a few questions on the off-chance that some changes are due.

How do we understand the principle of obedience? What do we mean by words like “sustain” and “support”? How as teachers and leaders do we teach that principle to our children and to other Church members? What degree of individual responsibility do we allow for ourselves and others when it comes to “following the brethren”? And what about violence? Are we troubled by the numerous acts of violence we can witness daily on television? Are we more concerned about an “R” movie rating because it is likely to indicate explicit sexual content than because the movie may have scenes of explicit violence? How do we present stories with violent overtones from the Old Testament and the Book of Mormon to our children or to classes we may teach? How do we feel about them ourselves? How glib is our justification of the shedding of blood? How do we feel about pacifists? (Two of my friends who considered themselves conscientious objectors to the Vietnam War were nearly hounded from the Church during the 1970s by ward members who equated Mormonism with unquestioning patriotism. I have often wondered how representative their experience was.) How do we deal with war and military service generally in our conversations with others? Do we ever think past the familiar platitudes of patriotism? There are other questions to be raised, but these suggest a place to start.

In the final analysis, the Church will be judged far more by who we, as individual Church members are, and by what we do in our places of work and in the community than by anything that our friends and associates read in the paper. As long as we have confidence in ourselves, in our restored gospel, in our testimonies, in our community of believers, it is unbecoming for us to become overly defensive when

we are criticized. We can do more for the Church we love by listening and learning. It goes without saying, I hope, that we need to be well informed as citizens of the kingdom of God and as citizens of the world at large. We need to be aware of what is going on, and we need to know our own history. In the long run, we may be able to do more to enhance the image of Latter-day Saints by simply living decent and generous lives than by anything we say.

This premise bears out in small, unobtrusive, individual ways, and I think it would work on a larger scale as well. On Monday, 30 April 1990, the *Plain Dealer* reported that three thousand Mormons had gathered the previous day in the opulent State Theater in Playhouse Square to extol the values of the Christian family. Featured speakers had included Cory Snyder of the Cleveland Indians; Steve Young, quarterback for the San Francisco '49ers; and Sharlene Wells Hawkes, former Miss America—all Latter-day Saints and proud of it. I'm told that activities like these do bring results—that inquiries soar and the missionaries get very busy for a period of time after a telecast or a conference such as this. Perhaps. I'm pragmatic enough not to want to argue with success, but I also can't help wondering if we could generate as much publicity by actually *doing* something besides grandstanding. Take a look at the activity schedule of almost any Catholic parish or Protestant church, and you will see public service activities of all kinds scheduled throughout the week—day care, rummage sales, support groups of all kinds, musical rehearsals, and more. Our buildings sit almost vacant nearly six days of most weeks.

Last spring it was announced in local newspapers and on the radio that two Clevelanders were in need of bone marrow transplants and that a satisfactory match had not been found within their families or among donors then registered. The public was invited to donate blood samples to be typed and catalogued for these and other patients with similar needs. This massive public screening was held at Park Synagogue. During one afternoon, over two thousand people stood in line and hung around for nearly an hour each filling out forms and leaving blood samples. The Red Cross did the actual work of drawing and typing blood, but the Reformed Jewish congregation provided their building. I doubt they were looking for converts, but they certainly found friends—and a spot on the evening news and in the morning paper. Why, I wondered, and the question cuts two uncomfortable ways; why didn't we think of that?



# Wilford Woodruff and the Mormon Reformation of 1855–57

*Thomas G. Alexander*

FOR ABOUT TWO YEARS after the Mormon pioneers first began to enter the Salt Lake Valley in 1847, they devoted themselves to the dual jobs of developing the territory and promoting the interests of the Church. Joseph Smith's September 1830 revelatory proclamation that "all things unto me are spiritual" (D&C 20:34–35) gave the Saints a singleness of purpose and imbued their struggles for financial and territorial security with spiritual meaning as they sought to build a holistic, temporal, and spiritual kingdom.

As life became more routine and economically stable by the mid-1850s, some of the General Authorities came to believe that many Church members and leaders had fallen spiritually asleep, becoming more enamored of materialism and the other trappings of Babylon than of building the kingdom. Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, and Jedediah Grant attributed the crop failures and grasshopper plagues of 1855 and 1856, in part at least, to a decline in faithfulness (Peterson 1981, 40–45; Woodruff 1983–85, 4:316, 398, 421). Young preached that such plagues seldom visited the truly faithful. Such trials could, he said, prompt members "more fully to lean" upon the Lord (Peterson 1981, 49–50). Members seemed less committed and

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enthusiastic. Not that prosperity itself was bad; but the Saints seemed unable to maintain spirituality in the face of increasing prosperity.

Like egg-sucking foxes, avaricious members seemed to have left a material shell drained of spiritual substance. Summing up the feelings of a number of the Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve, Brigham Young said that many members thought only about "how they can get this House built or a farm, Horses cattle &c. Their whole soul," Young opined, "is in the work of the world not the building of the kingdom of God." In commenting on this tendency, Young warned: "Any man that gets property upon this principle it will Carode him" (in Woodruff 1983-85, 4:506).

During the early 1850s, Church leaders, with no apparent dissent, concluded that the Church needed a "Reformation" (Kimball 1981, 207-8). In 1855 they proposed structural reforms in the organization of congregations to try to reinfuse the temporal shell with spiritual substance. At the October 1855 general conference, President Young outlined a system of home missions. In contrast to traditional proselytizing work, these missions were designed to reactivate the Church members in Zion rather than to convert Gentiles.

On 6 October, President Young called Orson Pratt, Parley P. Pratt, and Wilford Woodruff from the Quorum of the Twelve to supervise the program, and several lay members assisted them. Following President Young's instructions, on 15 October these men, together with George A. Smith and Erastus Snow, both of whom had been called on foreign missions, met to divide Utah into six missionary districts and to appoint home missionaries—usually members of teachers quorums—to serve in each district (Woodruff 1983-85, 4:338-39). Local Church members labored as missionaries in the various wards and communities while the Twelve functioned as traveling supervisors, conducting quarterly conferences in each stake and reporting to the First Presidency and the Twelve on the spiritual condition of the Saints. Working with the local missionaries, the Twelve preached, exhorted, held Church courts in difficult cases, and tried to instill obedience and commitment in the minds of the people. One of the leaders in this reform movement, Wilford Woodruff, began his first assignment on 19 October 1855 when he accompanied Thomas Kingston to a quarterly conference in Farmington (Woodruff 1983-85, 4:339). Through the fall and winter of 1855, Woodruff visited Ogden, Tooele, Provo, and Bountiful, usually accompanied by Orson Pratt and Parley P. Pratt (Woodruff 1983-85, 4:339, 353-59).

In establishing this supervisory process for the home missions, Church leaders broke with the tradition of congregational autonomy that had grown during the eight years settlements had spread into out-

lying areas. Previously, although President Young and other members of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve had made occasional excursions to the settlements and members of the Twelve often supervised the establishment of towns, local settlements had enjoyed a high degree of freedom from central supervision.

By early March 1856, Brigham Young's own observations together with reports from members of the Twelve led the Church President to believe that the structural changes had not prompted a spiritual rejuvenation among the Saints and that even more intense measures would be required. Being a pragmatic man, he decided to take measures certain to elicit a response. Charging the "people," presumably leaders and followers alike, with sleeping on the job and "working wickedness," Young called upon the elders "to put away their velvet lips & smooth things & preach sermons like pitch forks tines downwards that the people might wake up." Heber C. Kimball, Young's first counselor, followed the President's lead, but it was second counselor Jedediah M. Grant who really led the rally, sometimes attacking the Gentiles but usually raining pitchforks on the Latter-day Saints (Woodruff 1983-85, 4:405). The Reformation entered a second phase.

In early September 1856, Brigham Young said that he planned to take up a mission throughout the territory. He and his counselors would visit the Saints, exhorting them to repent and rededicate their lives to the gospel. He called upon the Twelve to do the same (Woodruff 1983-85, 4:445). To begin the work, Grant, Joseph Young of the First Council of the Seventy, and four home missionaries headed north to Davis County. Young returned to Salt Lake by late September, but Grant remained until general conference, returning again at times he felt the people had awakened to the spirit of the Reformation (Sessions 1982, 203-27).

On 21 September, Presidents Young, Kimball, and Grant preached sermons in Salt Lake City which "sent arrows into the harts of men." In the morning, Young called upon the congregation to covenant to keep the commandments, and in the afternoon he preached the doctrine of blood atonement, denying the full effectiveness of Christ's resurrection, saying that "for some sins [such as murder] no blood would be acceptable except the life & blood of the individual" (in Woodruff 1983-85, 4:451; CHC 4:126-27). In 1854, Jedediah Grant had preached a similar doctrine, and at various times during the Reformation, other Mormon leaders preached similar vengeful doctrines (Peterson 1981, ch. 9; Sessions 1982, 125-29).

Though Young's references to blood atonement were probably hyperbole, they may have prompted some overzealous members to put the doctrine into practice. In March 1857, William Parrish and several

of his family and friends decided to leave the Church and the community at Springville. They were murdered under suspicious circumstances, and although the perpetrators were never found, a number of commentators associated the deeds with the doctrine of blood atonement (Furniss 1960, 88–89; CHC 4:176n).

Clearly, Church leaders promoted spiritual reform hoping to restore the spirituality that the Saints had enjoyed during the hardships of Kirtland, Missouri, Nauvoo, and during the exodus and the early settlement in Utah. After preaching reformation in Bountiful and other Davis County settlements, Church leaders recognized that they would have to goad others into accepting their point of view. They began to work the Reformation among their own number. At the October 1856 general conference, they dedicated a new baptismal font on the east side of the Endowment House on Temple Square. As an example of the recommitment demanded of Church members, President Young rebaptized his two counselors along with Wilford Woodruff, Lorenzo Snow, and Franklin D. Richards, the only members of the Twelve not out establishing settlements or supervising proselyting work. In the days afterward, Church leaders called others to accept rebaptism (Woodruff 1983–85, 4:458–61).

October conference continued for several days, and the calls for reformation became increasingly intense and personal. In a severe and pointed attack on 7 October, Grant, Woodruff, and a number of the other authorities met in the Old Salt Lake Tabernacle with the seventies quorums. Joseph Young, senior president of the First Council of the Seventy, who had helped Grant inaugurate the Reformation in Davis County, conducted the meeting, calling for contributions to sustain the missionary work. Few offered to donate money. Grant then rose to speak and said he would not recommend that they call the presidents of seventies to preach, since, he said, “they would Preach the people to sleep & then to Hell.” Calling several of the presidents including Henry Harriman, Albert P. Rockwood, Zera Pulsipher, Benjamin Clapp, and Horace S. Eldridge by name, he accused them of committing adultery or some other serious sin of commission or omission, and he urged Young to “cut them off & prune the trees around him” (Woodruff 1983–85, 4:468). Several of the presidents spoke up to defend themselves and deny the charges. Woodruff then took the pulpit to reinforce Grant’s accusations, announcing that he “would like to bear testimony to what [Grant] . . . had said.” He then “said to the people that I wished them not to trifle with the teachings of President Grant for what He has said was true.” Woodruff urged them to repent and to “get the spirit of God” (Woodruff 1983–85, 4:469).

In the attempt to reform the Church by promoting spirituality and eradicating what they perceived as exclusively temporal activities, Grant and Kimball took the pruning shears to the community's one thriving literary and performing arts organization. On 20 December 1854, a group of Saints had organized the Polysophical Society to foster the arts and humanities. The group also promoted a children's auxiliary to acquaint the younger generation with those subjects. Meetings consisted of presentations and discussions in the performing and literary arts (Beecher 1981, 146-53). The society held its meetings at Lorenzo Snow's home in a fifteen-by-thirty-foot hall he had outfitted as a theatre. Eliza Snow noted that the meetings were "sacred, elevating, [and] refining" (1884, 253). Participants included General Authorities Wilford Woodruff, Amasa Lyman, and Orson Pratt; prominent laymen David Candland, John Hyde, W. G. Clements, Isaiah Coombs, Henry Naisbett, Samuel Neslen; and prominent women such as Hannah Tapfield King, Alice Young, Charlotte Cobb (later Godbe), Laura Hyde, and Martha Spence Heywood (Woodruff 1983-84, 4:333, 398, 403, 407; Beecher 1981, 148).

However, Jedediah Grant did not share their enthusiasm for the organization. Perhaps he thought these programs detracted from spirituality, perhaps he thought listening to music and reading poetry and literature were frivolous uses of time. Grant said the Polysophical Society was "a stink in my nostrils" and was filled with an adulterous spirit (Beecher 1981, 145). Heber C. Kimball concurred, the official pruning shears nipped at the society, and it died.

It is possible that the two counselors were more zealous in their efforts than President Young would have been. Maureen Ursenbach Beecher reports that Young said he had no objection to literary and musical presentations "if they can be conducted in Righteousness" (1981, 145). He did, however, recommend that they get a globe and "give Lectures upon Geography History & science" (Woodruff 1983-85, 4:479).

Caught up in the movement to increase spirituality by securing individual repentance and commitment, Wilford Woodruff took the Reformation to his own family. On 14 October he called his families together. Confessing his own faults, he "told my families theirs," exhorting them to accept his counsel. They covenanted to do so (Woodruff 1983-85, 4:474).

From his family, Woodruff turned his attention to the Salt Lake City Fourteenth Ward, which he attended. On the evening of 16 October, Woodruff and Apostle Franklin D. Richards, who was also a Fourteenth Ward member, took Grant to a Reformation meeting at the ward schoolhouse. Grant opened the meeting by reproving Bishop

Abraham Hoagland. Then he began to search the spirits of the bishop's counselors, members of the teachers quorum, and "all the people" in the ward with what Woodruff called "the Light of truth & the Candle of the Lord." Grant left the service shortly after he had finished his exhortation, but F. D. Richards, Woodruff, Phineas Richards, and Bishop Hoagland took the pulpit, bearing testimony to Grant's rebuke (Woodruff 1983-84, 4:475).

Grant led the assault on the spiritual condition of the Saints for only a short time. On 22 November 1856 his wife, Rachel, gave birth to a new son whom they named Heber Jeddy. Apostles Woodruff and Richards came to see the proud parents and were shocked to find both the new mother and the father extremely ill. Rachel recovered, but Jedediah had contracted typhoid fever and died the first of December from complications including double pneumonia (Sessions 1982, 247-51).

After Grant's death, Woodruff and other Church leaders continued the Reformation. Citing Grant, whom they accounted a martyr to the cause, as the genius behind the movement, Church leaders devised several catechisms and assigned the teachers to administer them to local members as a test of orthodoxy and faithfulness. These catechisms reminded the members of the spiritual impact of such temporal matters as murder, adultery, profanity, and even paying debts, bathing and cleanliness, and branding animals that belong to someone else (Brooks 1962, 12). In a letter to George A. Smith dated 2 February 1857, Woodruff described the catechism as "containing a part of the law of God, and," he wrote, "we are weighing up all the Quorums of the Church, especially the Seventies and dropping the number who have stood for years as a dead letter upon the books."

Woodruff continued his efforts to keep his own ward in shape. On 6 December, two days after laying Jedediah Grant to rest, Woodruff attended a meeting of the bishopric and priesthood of the Fourteenth Ward. Convinced that Bishop Abraham Hoagland had perverted the meaning of the Reformation, which was to revive spirituality among the Latter-day Saints, he rebuked the bishop for sending teachers to preach and catechize gentile shopkeepers. Calling the merchants "wicked & Corrupt," Woodruff said sending priesthood holders to preach to them "was like casting pearls before swine." The Reformation, he said, should focus on awakening the Church membership, not on admonishing Gentiles in the Mormon kingdom. Franklin Richards supported Woodruff. Bishop Hoagland took offense at Woodruff's challenge to his authority and rose to defend himself. Woodruff thought that the "devil had ensnared" Abraham, when the bishop pointed out that he, not Woodruff, presided over the Fourteenth Ward. He said

that he had sent the teachers out to preach, and he expected them to go to Gentiles as well as to the Saints (Woodruff 1983-85, 4:500-501).

Woodruff and Richards called to complain to Brigham Young about Hoagland's attitude. Young then sent for Hoagland, reprimanded him, and told him that "the Twelve held the keys of the Kingdom of God in all the World where the presidency are not, & that No Bishop presided over any one of the Twelve in any place" (Woodruff 1983-85, 4:500-501).

The next day, Sunday, 7 December, Hoagland asked Woodruff to be the concluding speaker in sacrament meeting. While still pressing the Reformation theme, Woodruff's speech nevertheless signalled a change in the tone of the Reformation—in effect opening a third phase characterized by love and concern. He called upon the ward leaders to repent by removing "the fog & darkness from your own minds & then you can see clearly to remove the darkness from the minds of the people." Woodruff also exhorted priesthood leaders to deal with the Saints in "the spirit of God." They did not, he said, need to "knock the people in the Head in order to wake them." Rather, he suggested, they ought to "get a Fatherly feeling & try to save" the Saints. The ultimate purpose of the Reformation, he said in an apocalyptic vein, was to prepare the people "for the great things of God which are Comeing upon the Earth & upon this people." Then he urged the "people to repent & do the works of righteousness" and live their religion. He spoke encouragingly to the members but left the ward leaders with no doubt that the Lord required strict obedience of them. Following the meeting, he called the priesthood leaders together privately and instructed them on the improper course Bishop Hoagland had taken in denying the authority of the Twelve. Since the Reformation intended internal reform, it did not involve calling local non-members to repentance. Falling into line, Hoagland recanted (Woodruff 1983-84, 4:502-3).

The rift between Woodruff and Hoagland did not prove insuperable. On 17 December, Woodruff and former United States Attorney Seth M. Blair went to see Hoagland. Finding the bishop sick with rheumatism and "much troubled with Evil Spirits," Woodruff and Blair laid their hands on his head, rebuking the disease and the evil spirits (1983-84, 4:517).

In speeches following this Fourteenth Ward message, Woodruff continued to recast the Reformation in terms of personal improvement and the need for love and kindness rather than raining down pitchforks with imprudent charges of adultery. He found a perfect forum for this change in emphasis as the keynote speaker in a conference of Salt Lake home missionaries and bishops on 8 December. At the



meeting, Young and Kimball represented the First Presidency, and Woodruff and Richards represented the Twelve. Woodruff emphasized that the teachers should go to the people of Salt Lake to “preach the gospel of salvation & repentance.” First, however, each man present should purify himself. Then, recognizing that the First Presidency could not carry the burden of the entire Church, each bishop and missionary should “put on the whole armor of God” (Eph. 6:11). “The people,” he told them, “will live their religion when you live it yourselves” (Woodruff 1983–85, 4:501–5).

Seconding Woodruff’s keynote speech, Young urged each of those present to put his own life in order. Keep the kingdom of God rather than personal prosperity first in mind, Young urged. Fill your hearts with love for God and your neighbor and live together as the Lord’s people. Husband your resources and keep them available for God’s work. Kimball followed, emphasizing a similar message (Woodruff 1983–85, 4:505–12).

The harsh second phase of the Reformation continued as the milder, third phase built up steam. Later in December, Brigham Young resumed his attack on certain Church leaders. Already upset with Orson Hyde’s cooperation with Federal Judge W. W. Drummond in Carson Valley, Young said that Hyde was “no more fit to stand at the Head of the Quorum of the Twelve than a dog.” Later he said Hyde “had lost the spirit of his office & was of no account” (Woodruff 1983–85, 4:477, 501). Hyde returned to Salt Lake City on 11 December 1856 and in a meeting with the Church leaders on the twenty-ninth, Young told Hyde that he had “not the spirit of your Calling upon you” and accused him of “trying to build yourself up & not the kingdom of God.” At the same time, he said that if Orson Pratt did not “take a different course” in his philosophy and reasoning, “he would not stay long in this Church” (Woodruff 1983–85, 4:523).

By the following day, Orson Hyde had caught the spirit of the reformation and asked to be rebaptized. A revival mood was also sweeping the Utah Territorial Legislature. That day, fifty-five legislators met on the Temple block, filled the baptismal font with buckets of water from City Creek, and were rebaptized and confirmed, along with Orson Hyde (Woodruff 1983–85, 4:524).

Some priesthood leaders were still ready to disfellowship or excommunicate unrepentant sinners. A congregation of Saints meeting on 16 December cut off some members who had left the valley for California. And “a house full of the presidents of the 70” excommunicated Federal Judge George P. Stiles for adultery (Woodruff 1983–85, 4:492–519).

The Reformation continued throughout the remainder of the winter but on a much less intense level. On 7 January 1857 in a letter to the *Western Standard*, Woodruff said that an atmosphere of change had settled on the community. "The Saints," he said, "are living their religion and the power of God is resting upon them." On 8 February 1857, Brigham Young pulled back somewhat from his harsh preaching of blood atonement by saying, "*In the name of the Lord, that if this people will sin no more, but faithfully live their religion, their sins will be forgiven them without taking life*" (CHC 4:132-33, italics in original). Woodruff's journal tells that in June 1857 after George A. Smith, John M. Bernhisel, Charles C. Rich, and Amasa Lyman returned to Utah from their various duties outside the territory, they applied to Brigham Young for rebaptism. Young administered the reformation catechism and authorized the baptisms (Woodruff 1983-85, 5:64).

Later in January Woodruff even felt relaxed enough to add a bit of levity to one of his sermons. Speaking to the High Priests Quorum of the Salt Lake Stake, he said that "if you were to drive Methodist, Baptist, Catholic, and Presbyterians, &c, &c all to heaven together it would make a *hell* of a *heaven*."

As the third phase of the Reformation continued into the spring of 1857, Woodruff continued to seek mercy for repentant sinners. A brother from Parowan wrote to Woodruff on 26 March 1857 reminding him of a talk the two had had earlier about a transgression—probably adultery. The man said he had spoken to the woman in question but was afraid to go to his local leaders, who seemed less understanding than Woodruff; however, he would do so if Woodruff asked him to (Dalton 1857). Woodruff had spoken to a high priests quorum on 3 January 1857, reminding them of the need for mercy and telling them never to reveal the name of a brother who had transgressed except to the proper authority. This attitude fostered a feeling of safety and freedom from reprisals that marked this phase of the reformation (Salt Lake Stake).

Nevertheless, by January and February of 1857, the harsh preaching and calls for increased spirituality of the Reformation had created some unexpected problems. The pressure to conform prompted unprecedented numbers of men and women to apply to Brigham Young for permission to enter plural marriages as evidence of their obedience and righteousness (Ivins 1976, 312). In addition, large numbers of deacons, teachers, and priests—members of the Aaronic Priesthood—sought ordination to the Melchizedek Priesthood.

Wilford Woodruff and Lorenzo Snow recognized the potentially disruptive consequences of such large numbers of new plural marriages. On Sunday, 1 February, Woodruff noted a large company of

men and women coming from the President's office and commented that Young had to turn away many whom he could not seal on that day. Woodruff and Snow met the next day with the seventies quorums and addressed themselves to the potential problems created by the mass entries into polygamy. Snow led out, observing that plural marriage entailed more than simply getting sealed to a new wife. Men who entered patriarchal marriage needed even more spiritual power and patience "to preside over that Household" than "to go to the nations & preach the gospel" and organize and administer new branches. Large families with multiple wives placed considerable strain on the marriage relationship because of demands for clothing and other goods and because of jealousy and family disputes. Presiding over multiple families required, Snow said, "Great wisdom [like Brigham Young's] in the perfect order of Government" (Woodruff 1983-85, 5:13-15).

Snow's and Woodruff's predictions proved prophetic as the 65 percent increase in new plural marriages during the Reformation led to a subsequent escalation in the divorce rate (Peterson 1981, 115, 117).

Soon Brigham Young and other Church leaders began to recognize the problems created by the desire of members to demonstrate faithfulness by entering plural marriage. But despite Woodruff's own concerns about polygamy, on 17 February 1857, he offered Brigham Young his fourteen-year-old daughter, Phebe Amelia, in marriage. Young did not wish to marry any more young wives but promised Woodruff he would help his daughter find a husband in due time (Woodruff 1983-85, 5:22). Later, when one otherwise unidentified as "Old Father Alread" brought in three young girls between the ages of twelve and thirteen for sealing, Young refused to perform the ceremony, saying that they "would not be equally yoked together" (Woodruff 1983-85, 5:58).

During the year, Woodruff proposed to enter two plural marriages himself. On 23 January Young gave Woodruff permission to marry Lydia Maxline (Woodruff 1983-85, 5:11). However, there is no available record that this marriage ever took place. On 31 July 1857, Young sealed Woodruff to Sarah Delight Stocking, who had turned nineteen three days before (Woodruff 1983-85, 5:70).

Though Woodruff's first wife, Phebe W. Carter Woodruff, later attacked the practice of plural marriage in print (Van Wagoner 1989, 101), she seems to have approved his entry into plural marriage at this time. On 2 January 1856, she wrote a letter to Woodruff saying that if he felt "like getting 1 or 2 of the &c and see any one or two that will answer your purpose please do so. . . . I do not wish to prevent it in any way."

On reflection, Woodruff would see some humor in the old men chasing adolescent girls with marriage in mind. In a letter to George A. Smith on 1 April 1857, Woodruff talked about the Reformation and said that “all are trying to pay their tithing, and nearly all are trying to get wives, until there is hardly a girl 14 years old in Utah, but what is married, or just going to be.” The pressure to perform sealings had placed a considerable strain on Brigham Young who “hardly [had] time to eat, drink, or sleep, in consequence of marrying the people and attending to the endowments.”

Woodruff also saw the problems created by the pressure to prove loyalty by entering the Melchizedek Priesthood. Although some boys were called to the Aaronic Priesthood as early as 1849, Brigham Young discouraged the practice, urging instead the calling of Melchizedek priesthood holders as acting teachers. Not until 1877 did Brigham Young formally change the policy and urge the calling of boys to the Aaronic priesthood. The teachers were assigned to preach within the organized wards and stakes; they did most of the home missionary work during the Reformation (Hartley 1976, 375–90).

However, the spirit of the Reformation pressured many men to seek the Melchizedek Priesthood as a way of demonstrating their increased faithfulness. This created problems for the Church leaders. No sooner did they organize a teachers quorum than those teachers petitioned to enter the Melchizedek Priesthood. Since the practice of ordaining teenage boys to the Aaronic Priesthood was not common as it is today, soon there were very few adult male Aaronic Priesthood holders to administer the home missionary program. The result was that many of the Aaronic Priesthood responsibilities were shifted to the Melchizedek Priesthood. Woodruff also noted in his journal that sometimes seventies encouraged teachers to apply for the Melchizedek Priesthood, and that too often bishops called seventies to serve as counselors, thus requiring their ordination to the high priests quorum. Woodruff, who had filled his first mission as a teacher, called upon members of the Church not to “despise the lesser priesthood, for it is honorable & if they fully magnify that office they will have great power & many blessings” (5:16–17; Hartley 1976, 392–93).

How do we assess the Reformation? Like many other enthusiastic movements, the Reformation had created unanticipated disruption within the community as lay members scurried to prove their loyalty and faithfulness. The harsh discipline and Brigham Young’s exercise of power in demanding obedience during the second phase of the movement provoked excessive demonstrations of loyalty and consequent disruption. The destruction of the Polysophical Society temporarily stymied the development of the humanities and fine arts in the com-

munity. The sermons on repentance and blood atonement seem to have led members to confess to sins they had not committed and may also have incited a few fanatics more orthodox than the General Authorities to murder dissidents (Larson 1958, 54). The emphasis on the visible trappings of orthodoxy that fueled those new plural marriages led inevitably to divorce or unhappy homes among the unprepared. The effort to achieve status in the kingdom or to demonstrate loyalty and spirituality by seeking advancement to the Melchizedek Priesthood disrupted the normal functioning of the Aaronic Priesthood quorums. Moreover, the excesses of the second phase of the Reformation added fuel to the charges lodged in Washington against the Mormons that led to the Utah War.

On the other hand, in spite of the harsh beginnings and in spite of the excesses, the reformation produced some worthwhile reforms. One of these was the increased emphasis on kindness and love in the third phase. This emphasis on love and charity may have contributed to the revival of the Female Relief Society in early 1857. Joseph Smith had first organized the Relief Society in Nauvoo on 17 March 1842. Although some Church members had organized Relief Societies to provide charitable help for Indians as early as 1854 and some general purpose Relief Societies had been organized as early as January 1855, the larger association authorized by Joseph Smith had remained dormant since the exodus from Nauvoo (Jensen 1983, 105-25).

When the Reformation turned from raining pitchforks to urging love and charity, local leaders revived the organization to aid the poor in a number of wards in Salt Lake City. The Salt Lake Fourteenth Ward furnished some of the leadership of this movement. On 14 February 1857, Woodruff, Hoagland, Joseph Horn, and Robert L. Campbell attended the organizational meeting. Bishop Hoagland had called Phebe Woodruff as president, and Mary Isabella Horn and Mary Southworth as counselors. They and the other sisters in the ward spent their Relief Society meetings quilting, sewing, and making carpets for the poor. By June 1857, they had clothed all the poor of the ward and made a sizeable donation to the Perpetual Emigrating Fund (Woodruff 1983-85, 5:20, 59-60).

The home missionary system of the first phase inaugurated an effort at cooperative revival that promised much for the future and undoubtedly contributed to the development of a Godly community. Regular visits to the homes of members by such priesthood holders and Relief Society women as home teachers, home missionaries, and visiting teachers have provided a sense of concern and connection with the larger community of the Saints.

In summary, the Reformation moved through three overlapping phases—a structural reform phase, a phase of intense demand for a demonstration of spiritual reform, and a phase of love and reconstruction. In the first phase, Church leaders tried to achieve reform through the home missionary effort. After Brigham Young and his counselors had become convinced that the missionaries had not achieved the desired result, they pressed the movement into the second phase. Missionaries continued to preach as the leadership rained pitchforks on member's heads and hearts. Generally loyal to their leaders, members scurried to prove their faithfulness by confessing sins and asking for rebaptism, entering plural marriages, and seeking advancement from the Aaronic to the Melchizedek priesthood.

As Wilford Woodruff nudged the Reform movement into the third phase in December 1856, home missionaries continued their labors, and some of the effects from the second phase continued. Newly inaugurated reforms such as the revival of the Relief Societies and the emphasis on love and forgiveness helped moderate the residual excesses. Fortunately for the stability of the community, the excesses of the second phase eventually receded, and the community resumed its normal life.

What role had Woodruff played in the Reformation? During the first phase, he had helped to organize the home missionary districts and to supervise the work of calling members to repentance. During the second phase, he served as loyal follower. Woodruff supported Young and his counselors by chastising the Saints and calling them to repentance. Loyally, he stood by and watched without comment as the Polysophical Society, to which he belonged, died.

After Jedediah Grant's death, Woodruff assumed the role of leader he had relinquished during the second phase. Attempting to reconstruct the community, he spoke out with love, concern, and charity. The third phase more than any other bears the mark of Woodruff's character. He was essentially a moderate.<sup>1</sup> Loyal to a fault, he followed Young, Kimball, and Grant, working as a leader in the home mission movement and calling for repentance during the first and second phases of the Reformation. After Grant's death, however, Woodruff's 8 December sermon keyed the third phase.

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<sup>1</sup> Philip Greven discusses types in *The Protestant Temperament: Patterns of Child-rearing, Religious Experience, and the Self in Early America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), especially 13–14. Greven outlines three types of temperament that he saw in early American Protestants: evangelical, moderate, and genteel. None of these temperaments quite fit the Mormon leaders, in part because Mormons were not Protestants. Moreover, none of Woodruff's colleagues had ever exhibited the "genteel" temperament. Jedediah Grant seems to have come closest to the evangelical temperament, and Brigham Young was closer to it than Woodruff.

Preaching moderation and love, he encouraged charitable works and reconstruction.

Although he was somewhat inconsistent—for instance, offering Phebe Amelia to Brigham Young as a plural wife and taking at least one other wife himself while warning of the hazards of polygamy for the unprepared—during the third phase of the Reformation, he sought to moderate the excesses of the second phase. He and Lorenzo Snow tried—rather hopelessly because of the overwhelming desire of the Saints to prove their spirituality—to discourage the unprepared from entering plural marriage and to encourage Aaronic Priesthood holders to magnify their callings rather than to seek ordination to the Melchizedek Priesthood.

On balance, then, Woodruff proved himself both a loyal follower in a movement that led to excesses among the members and leaders, and a moderate leader who attempted with modest success to refashion the Reformation through an emphasis on the virtues of love, charity, and reconstruction.

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# Coney Island Hymn: Shore

*Glen Nelson*

They clap their hands together  
and shout out  
and sing the same song

They rise up and sway with the tide  
Arms reach up  
to clouds while

their own bare feet dangle  
to scrape bottom  
and make tornadoes of sand and salt

You sit where probing waves  
nearly reach  
your tanned toes

and hum the same song  
And you think  
that if you could either slide

quickly in with them  
and sing out  
or race to the Boardwalk

it would be better than sitting there  
poised for worship  
in a dry swimsuit

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*In addition to poetry, GLEN NELSON has recently published essays and interviews in regional magazines. His texts for an opera and a cantata will be performed this year in New York City and Pittsburgh respectively.*

# Thoughts on Mormonism in Latin America

*David Knowlton*

OVER THE LAST QUARTER CENTURY, the Church has experienced tremendous growth in Latin America and elsewhere in the so-called Third World, a relatively sudden surge that has received little scholarly attention (Grover n.d.). In the following essay, I do not develop any formal argument regarding Church growth in Latin America based on exhaustive research; nor do I take the opposite strategy of thoroughly examining some specific aspect of Mormon emergence in these nations. Instead, I have written a “thought” piece suggesting possibilities for further study. And while I draw on my research on Mormonism and Protestantism, here I focus on conceptual issues, such as the general images, ideas, and understandings that form our intellectual tool kit for understanding the Church abroad (Knowlton 1980a, 1980b, 1982, 1988, 1989a, 1989b).

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has gained a surprisingly high profile in much of Latin America—witness the increasing guerrilla attacks on Church property and personnel. In Chile, the country with the highest incidence of Mormon chapel bombings, Church membership constitutes a greater relative percentage of the population than it does in the United States (2 percent as opposed to 1.7 percent, 1990 figures). Furthermore, despite increased missionary

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efforts in Asia and Africa, Latin America, as a whole, comprises the largest Mormon population outside the United States—27 percent of total Church membership in 1990. In contrast, the United States had 56 percent (*Deseret News Church Almanac* 1991). When one considers these figures in light of the ever-increasing Church growth rate, even in the face of terrorist resistance, it becomes evident that Latin American membership may soon constitute almost half of the total Church population. Thus, it is increasingly important for Latter-day Saints to understand both the social situation of Mormonism and the phenomenon of Mormon growth in Latin American society.<sup>1</sup>

As I write, I live in Argentina, a country whose once-promising economy has fallen prey to the world-wide financial crisis. The Church has built a strong base here. Third-generation natives now comprise a significant portion of the vital and visible LDS population. They have developed a sense of religious and historical pride, are involved in writing the history of the Church in Argentina, and engage in oral history research. To them, Church growth has resulted from a combination of their individual and collective struggles, the work of foreign missionaries, and a substantial outpouring of the Spirit.

Other Argentines, however, hold less positive views of Mormon growth. For example, I recently delivered a series of lectures in the city of San Juan. Among other things, I discussed the emergence of “new” religions in Bolivia, and the topic of Mormons frequently arose. A number of students and faculty explained that the Church had appeared quite suddenly in their town, beginning with a “massive invasion” of young, blond Americans traveling in pairs. With amazing rapidity and an apparently tremendous infusion of capital, these newcomers built a “huge,” “lavish” chapel. Although these people were impressed with the Church’s missionary, financial, and political power, as evidenced by this building project, they were also deeply suspicious, wondering why the Mormons had expended so many resources just to come to San Juan. Did this expansion fit into some

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	LATIN AMERICAN CHURCH MEMBERSHIP			
	1960	1970	1980	1990
<b>Total</b>	22,503	160,355	519,626	1,949,400
<b>Percentage of total Church membership</b>	1.3	5.5	11.2	26.7

(Includes Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, Venezuela.)

Source: 1990/91 *Deseret News Church Almanac*.

larger geopolitical strategy? Was the Mormon incursion just another example of U.S. political and economic imperialism (Knowlton 1989b)?

The San Juaninos' attitudes reflect a common concern for much of Latin America. After years of foreign manipulation and multinational corporate exploitation — involvements which often precipitate short-term economic booms at the expense of long-term prosperity — the indigenous populations have become understandably suspicious of foreigners' motives. Bolivian scholars and social critics describe this conflict in terms of "external enemies" and their "internal allies" (see Arguedas 1967; Francovich 1979; Klein 1982). They view much of Bolivian history as an attempt by foreigners to exploit the country's resources for selfish ends, leaving it perpetually impoverished. It should surprise no one that Bolivians would also apply this same paradigm to the LDS Church.

In order to fully appreciate this fear, we must understand the traditional role religion has played throughout Latin America. Religion is not, as we experience it, a circumscribed institution which attends strictly to spiritual affairs, leaving secular, particularly political and economic, matters to the government or the private sector.<sup>2</sup> Rather, religion has historically been inextricably intertwined with both the government and the economy. The civil wars of the last century often hinged upon what role, if any, "The Church" (the Catholic Church) should take in national affairs. Ironically, this same conflict lies at the heart of popular struggles currently facing many Latin American societies — provision of education and social services, liberalization of the economy, abortion, the death penalty, class inequalities, indigenous population rights, and guerrilla movements. Although the Catholic Church is fragmented and is itself the object of internal strife, it still exercises enough political power to defy the religious separatism imported from the United States. Moreover, many Latin Americans regard "The Church" as simply another means by which foreign powers attempt to control their society. It is simultaneously the guarantor of national identity, the manifestation of national complexity, and an

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<sup>2</sup> Jürgen Habermas, a noted German social theorist, writes about the historical differentiation between the public and private sectors in modern society, a process which develops differently in Latin America than in the United States (in McCarthy 1982). The U.S. has a rich literature on the place of religion in national life (see, for example, Bellah 1967 Bellah et al 1985). Latin America has less. We need studies comparing the historical development of religion in terms of the wider societies for both regions of the American continent. Octavio Paz, the Nobel prize winning Mexican poet and social critic, inevitably marks the way with his penetrating analyses of Mexican and U.S. societies (1985a, 1985b).

example of foreign interference.<sup>3</sup>

The Mormon Church, whether it wishes to or not, finds itself defined in terms of the same place religion occupies generally within Latin American societies. Although it comes trailing clouds of North American society and culture, upon arrival it enters a social geography which constrains and, to some degree, probably transforms it. No longer does its presence signify simple spiritual concerns, those regarding the relative “truth” or “falsity” of individual beliefs. Natives perceive it as an imperialist presence involving relationships between foreign powers and coopted nationals who, for one reason or another, desire to restructure society in ways benefiting themselves at the expense of everyone else.

Despite the fact that many Latin Americans adopt specific religions primarily for ideological reasons, matters of belief, or ideology, are partially defined by the larger society or by previous experience. For example, an Argentine anthropologist researching Judaism in her native country related to me the story of an ultra-orthodox Sephardic rabbi who was born and raised in Brazil, trained in Israel, and who subconsciously expanded Jewish practice to include Afro-Brazilian spiritualism. It is likely that Latin American Church members will similarly reconfigure Mormonism to reflect both their native culture and their society. Although some scholars discuss the syncretic aspects of these “new” religions on Latin American society, most focus primarily on their political or sociological impact—the damage or benefit they have for the various national structures and institutions—than on matters of belief.

The empirical facts regarding the claims of both our Argentine members and the students from San Juan could make for hours of intense scholarly discussion. Both outlooks are necessarily reductive and partial. It would be faulty social science to wholly subscribe to either. Instead, we should locate them firmly within their social contexts and accept them as the emic, internal, subjective perspectives they are. In response to the Mexican version of the “external enemy” thesis, for example, the Mexican scholar Jean Pierre Bastian describes Protestantism in terms that apply equally to the common perception of Mormonism:

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<sup>3</sup> One of the most important social movements today in Latin America stems from the Catholic church—liberation theology. Although it is widely contested within church discussions its importance illustrates the continuing, albeit contested, role of the church in the continent’s affairs. See Bruneau 1980, 1982; Bruneau, Mooney and Gabriel 1985; Lancaster 1988; Lernoux 1982, 1989; Levine 1985, 1986; Mainwaring 1984 for works on Catholicism in Latin America.

The proliferation of Protestant sects in Mexico during the last few years has called the attention of various investigators. The phenomenon has been too quickly judged (and not studied) as the vanguard and instrument of an imperialist conspiracy against Mexico. . . . The kinds of analysis that might be legitimate in the case of the Summer Institute of Linguistics as a religious transnational, are completely wrong when extended to the totality of Protestant sects in Mexico. *The diffusion of these sects is due to factors endogenous to Mexican society* and not to an inferred conspiracy of North American imperialism. (1985, 177, emphasis and translation mine)

Nor, I might add, can we attribute religious conversion and Church growth exclusively to the movement of the Spirit with no consideration to the social factors motivating these individuals, factors with which their religious and political institutions are inevitably intertwined. In order to more fully understand the LDS emergence in Latin America, we need a series of monographs relating this growth to "factors endogenous to" these societies, but which also consider the dynamics of Mormonism's North American origins.

Bastian's assertion should be particularly relevant for those studying LDS expansion in Latin America. The rapid growth of Mormonism developed as part of a broader social process wherein non-Catholic groups have moved from being numerically and socially marginal to positions of significant demographic and social power. For example, during the last Peruvian elections, evangelical groups provided a critical organizational base for the successful dark-horse candidacy of the current president, Alberto Fujimori. Latin American Mormon spread cannot be understood except as part of this complex and important shift (Martin 1990; Stoll 1990).

Five dynamics which explain Protestant expansion are especially relevant to any discussion of Mormonism's growing popularity. First, Protestantism has traditionally associated itself with conflicts over education and social-service provision—whether the state or the Catholic church should provide them and whether they should be religious or secular (Boots 1971; Hamilton 1962; O'Shaughnessy 1990; Wagner 1970). As a result, Latin Americans have continually connected Protestantism with these and other aspects of socioeconomic development.<sup>4</sup> These peoples place similar pressure on the Church to

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<sup>4</sup> Since Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, there has been a huge and often confused debate about the role of Protestantism in economic change. The growth of liberal capitalism, a cash economy, and sudden urbanization with its explosive informal sector, are undoubtedly related to the same factors that militate for the growth of Mormonism and other religious groups. Exactly how they are related remains to be thoroughly explored. See Muratorio 1980 for an exploration of Weber, Protestantism, and economic change among Ecuadorian peasants; and Willems 1967 for a discussion of the relationship of Protestantism to specific socio-economic sectors.



provide these same fundamental social services. In Bolivia the Church pioneered literacy campaigns, organized Church schools, almost began a health clinic and colonization project in the tropical lowlands, and currently funds other development projects throughout the country. In fact, I was informed that one of the Bolivian government's conditions for granting the Church official recognition required it to provide this type of assistance.

The ongoing discussion for and against liberation theology, with its advocacy of preferential treatment for the poor and its emphasis on social change through improved living conditions, further intensifies the development pressures that these governments bring to bear on the Church—it cannot remain neutral.<sup>5</sup> Its efforts to either aid development or avoid it will be soundly criticized in terms of a polemic and a history in which it has marginally participated, and to which it does not feel that it belongs.

The second dynamic relative to Mormon growth involves the widespread politicization of religion throughout Latin America. At the end of the nineteenth century, liberals allowed Protestantism to flourish in order to strengthen their political position against Conservatives. Governments have often played the so-called "Protestant card" in their efforts to preempt what they perceive as the frequently leftist bent of the Catholic church. In Central America, this conflict has been brutal and bloody. Latin American governments have viewed Protestants, particularly fundamentalists and Mormons, as conservative and have officially encouraged them as part of their efforts to undercut the rebels challenging their authority.

The Church's role in these struggles, whether overt or incidental, remains unclear, particularly when one considers local LDS leaders' political positions, positions which undoubtedly taint both their religious and civic commitments. This ambiguity raises significant questions concerning the differing opinions that these nations hold towards Mormonism. Why have the different governments variously allowed,

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<sup>5</sup> Liberation theology argues, among other things, for a restructuring of the Church's position in society so that it no longer supports the social status quo but takes a "preferential option for the poor." This theological and practical movement has spread throughout the world (even to Utah) in both Catholic and non-Catholic circles. If nothing else, it has thoroughly revitalized religion. In the United States, this movement has often been misunderstood as being primarily Marxist in orientation (see for example Michael Novack's polemics). This corresponds more to North American (and some Latin American) demonology rather than to an adequate exploration of this important religious movement. For information see Berryman 1984, 1987; Lancaster 1988; and Lernoux 1982 and 1989.

encouraged, or impeded the spread of Mormonism in their countries? What political connections were formed between Church leaders and national politicians? What impact, if any, has the number of U.S. Mormons occupying diplomatic, military, and CIA positions in Latin America had on Church growth? How have Latin American members holding military and governmental positions influenced the Church's growth and standing in their respective societies? In Bolivia, for example, leftist president J. J. Torres planned to have the Church expelled from the country, along with the Peace Corps. When Colonel Hugo Banzer Suarez, known to be a friend of the Church, deposed Torres in a coup, President Kimball is reported to have been pleased, calling Banzer "the best president Bolivia has had."<sup>6</sup> One wonders what political contacts and discussions were behind these events.

A social-science study of Latin American Mormonism, then, must question how the Church figures into the political calculations of various national and international elites and what impact this has on Church growth generally and on the political position Mormons hold in these countries. We should further examine the LDS process of choosing Church leaders and how their personal political actions affect the broader Church membership. The many rumors concerning LDS leaders' political activities tacitly intermingling church and state, which one hears while crossing the continent, must be disentangled from fact since, true or false, they inevitably condition the growth of Mormonism in these countries.

A third dynamic concerns the structural components of the "new" religions, particularly those which retain elements of congregationalism emphasizing lay leadership and local control. Some scholars argue that the Protestant and neo-Catholic penchant for teaching organizational and leadership skills has inadvertently contributed to the formation of both radical and reactionary groups (see Levine 1985). In fact, the various positions these religions represent, liberal or conservative, may be the critical factors influencing adherents' decisions as to the groups with which they will affiliate themselves. Once the organizational structures are in place, we should not be surprised to find individuals exploiting them for purposes that are not necessarily in accordance with the plans of church leaders.

For example, in one Aymara-speaking community in Bolivia, the Mormon branch organization also functions as the *de facto* government for one segment of the broader community (Knowlton 1982). Similarly, the Methodists faced a serious schism when their Aymara pas-

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<sup>6</sup> Personal communication from members present at his public address.

tors and congregations became the instigators and protectors of an ethnic revitalization movement against both the Spanish-speaking church and the society at large.<sup>7</sup> Ironically, the very leadership and organizational skills people learn in their respective churches may unwittingly connect their denominations to social events far removed from their stated religious objectives. Furthermore, outside groups often try to manipulate these congregations for their own partisan ends. This reportedly took place in Central America where individual governments used the Mormons and other religious sects to "control" the lower classes.

Bastian's depiction of the Summer Institute of Linguistics as a religious transnational radically different from other Protestant groups forces us to note the similarities between the Church and other multinational corporations (Aaby and Hvalkof 1981; Stoll 1982). Like the multinationals, it has significant financial and property holdings, having built numerous chapels, hired employees, and involved itself in the gathering and transferring of merchandise and funds both within and out of the country. In addition to political arrangements, Church leaders cultivate economic relationships with businesses and business leaders who benefit materially from the Church's presence. We need to explore the ways these social networks condition LDS activities and growth in given countries. Moreover, our analysis should probe the economic as well as institutional structure of the Church without ignoring the conflicts that inevitably arise between these forms and its ostensible spiritual aims.

In many countries, LDS ecclesiastical leaders are also Church employees, most often employed by the Presiding Bishopric's office. This means that, in effect, the Church creates a form of professional clergy; the hope or expectation of Church employment fulfills an important spiritual function for Latin members. Testimonies run the risk of becoming dependent on employment and on the continued maintenance of the bureaucracy. In fact, this sort of spiritual nepotism could lead to nascent corruption, especially if the Church bureaucracy follows regional cultural norms. Gossip is rife within local Church circles about just such cases.

As a result, we must see the Church in Latin America as more than simply a spiritual organization to bring about the salvation of humankind. Its economic and organizational structure, within the Latin American context, must also be taken into account. Probing the transfers of funds and information and the professional castes that benefit from the organization, we find tensions and issues beneath the surface

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<sup>7</sup> The Methodist scholar and pastor Jorge Panteliz made this point in a public lecture on the history of Protestantism in Bolivia (La Paz, Bolivia, July 1985).

calm. The Church may appear to be the same everywhere; yet fundamental differences and conflicts are inevitable. And those conflicts reveal the Church's deep organizational structure, uncovered by superficialities, in action (Turner 1974).

Mormonism is a power structure in dynamic tension, seeking its own maintenance and expansion (see Adams 1975, 1981). This fact is not necessarily incompatible with the idea of spiritual leadership. But understanding it as a power structure helps us understand some of the difficulties resulting from growth.

For example, members of the Aymara congregations of Bolivia feel that leadership positions should rotate annually and that branch leaders should be selected by the congregants. Church officials have been at a loss to understand this point of view, in conflict with Mormon tradition (Knowlton 1980b and 1982). Tension has been inevitable. In one case, Aymara members threatened to abandon the Church if changes weren't made. A compromise allowed the Church to continue but with a substantial loss of members. Church officials may have had spiritual reasons for resisting change, but the situation can only be understood and resolved by acknowledging the role of power and authority in the community and the mission (see Albo 1972, 1975, 1977, 1984).

Issues of power and authority within a local social context often affect the Church. In Huacuyo, Bolivia, for example, Church growth was connected to residents' conflicts with the governmental/religious center in nearby Copacabana. They sought different connections with national power bases, hoping to further their community's and their families' development (Knowlton 1982). For example, the Church helped the members of Huacuyo in their conflicts with the provincial elite in Copacabana by giving them direct connections with national governmental and economic agencies. Although the people of Huacuyo express their testimonies in standard terms, they also clearly state that the Church's economic assistance and its help in empowering them vis-à-vis local elites were fundamental components of their decision to join and remain in the Church.

A fourth dynamic involves culture and class. Mormon proselyting, like that of other denominations, tends to be selective, seeking out converts of certain cultural and class origins. We do not really offer the gospel to everyone, despite our intentions to do so. Though social factors predispose people to conversion, the cultural canons of the missionaries and mission leaders also come into play. As a missionary in Bolivia from 1974–76, I was actively encouraged to convert "leaders." Work among the poorer, more "Indian" Bolivians was thus deemphasized. We focused on middle-class and upper-middle-class men: their education and cultural traditions fit them easily into the Mormon con-

cept of leader and gave them the leadership qualities necessary in the Church's bureaucratic system. Missionaries were also strongly discouraged from working with Quechua-speaking villagers, who constituted 35 percent of the nation's population, unless they came to the city.

When a Church draws its members from one social sector, conflicts and tensions among members limit conversions from other social sectors (Hamilton 1962; Nordyke 1982). The students in San Juan told me that the Church has a *facho* image: in Argentine usage that can mean middle class, although elsewhere it also means "right wing." This is a rather accurate description, it seems to me, of the cultural norm and of the social pretensions and desires of many, if not most, Latter-day Saints on the continent. The Church is different from groups that direct their attention to the poor, whose worship reflects the experience and culture of the poor. Even in poorer Latter-day Saint congregations, I have heard dreams of upward mobility and a distinctly middle-class message.

Cultural differences, as well as social differences, can be the root of conflict and misunderstanding. Every Latin American society is socially and ethnically plural, and wide cultural gulfs separate one region from another. At one point, Church leaders called an Argentine to be the mission president in Bolivia. Because the cultural norms guiding his behavior were foreign and often insulting to Bolivian members, they disliked him. Even within Bolivia, the gap between an upper-middle-class, Spanish-speaking leader and the rural Indian-speaking congregations can be filled with misunderstandings.

The fifth dynamic is the role of belief and creeds in religion. Like many Protestants, Latter-day Saints tend to define themselves in terms of their beliefs. Beliefs stand as emblems that distinguish us from other groups and form the ostensible focus of missionary work. Nevertheless, this kind of belief is a relatively new concept in much of Latin America (Knowlton 1988). Protestantism has spread there simultaneously with political groups, who also identify themselves by their beliefs and their ideologies of nationalism and individualism. These have been built out of the religion of the masses, which focuses on quasi-magical practices and festivities.

How has Mormonism fit into this religious and social frame? Is Mormonism contributing to the growth of individualism, and hence to the fragmentation of society? How important are Mormon beliefs in the context of our religious practices? How do Mormons separate or integrate their Mormonism with other aspects of their life? What among Mormon beliefs do Latin Americans select as they reconstruct Mormonism to make it meaningful to them? How does Mormonism relate to popular, folk religion? Is our ideology really the most important

thing we have to offer? How do Latin American Mormons understand belief and faith and their relationship to deity, society, and salvation?

To answer these difficult questions, we must approach Latin American Mormonism on its own terms, rather than from the perspective of Anglo-American, Wasatch-front Mormonism. Because Latin Americans generally use the rituals and words within the Church that we have taught them, it is easy to assume that they attach the same meaning to them. This is not necessarily the case. For example, an Aymara Indian may say "nay krítwa,"—I believe—based on the loan word "Kriyiña" from the Spanish "creer." Yet because the word and concept of belief does not exist in the Aymara language, this expression may simply mean, "I am a Protestant/Mormon," rather than saying anything about a mental relationship with religion (Knowlton 1988, viii). When we explore the internal dynamics of Mormonism in Latin America, we must be sensitive to the subtleties of syncretism and reformulation in the Latin American social context.

In summary, the Church in Latin America is part of a complex social movement that goes beyond the limited dynamics of the Church, as we commonly understand it. The Church missionary program has been tremendously successful; in many countries Mormonism is second only to Catholicism in numbers. Its important presence within Latin American society has not gone without notice among local scholars. In Jujuy, Argentina, I met an Argentine anthropologist who is studying a Mormon congregation. In San Juan, the sociology department has formed a study group to investigate Mormons as well as other sects springing up there. In Bolivia, and in other countries, the Catholic church is financing sociological studies of the "problem of the sects," and they consider Mormonism a part. Mormon scholars should be involved as well, exchanging insider and outsider perspectives, working toward an adequate understanding of the Church's growth and its role in struggling Latin societies.

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# Sexual Hegemony and Mormon Women: Seeing Ourselves in the Bambara Mirror

*Kathryn Lindquist*

AT FIRST GLANCE, people from a middle-class, educated, medically, technically, and industrially sophisticated country may be tempted to see the culture of a developing country as not merely different but as a polar opposite. We immediately see people who are impoverished, malnourished, illiterate, and perhaps barbaric, if we follow media accounts of bloody revolutions and coups. We might even seduce ourselves into believing that, if we could nourish these bodies, we could possibly nurture their souls, teach them “right” thinking and acting—more like ours. The apparent oppositeness between them and us would decrease; we could all live peacefully and healthily as sisters and brothers—one family—on this planet.

It was with the intent to better combine the human family—to encourage cultural interaction between two disparate countries and to work physically and economically as partners with the people of Ouelessebouyou Province, Mali, West Africa—that the Ouelessebouyou-Utah Alliance was formed in Salt Lake City. Since 1986 the Alliance has raised money to finance development projects like well-digging, fence-building, and health-care training. The purpose, of course, is to enable these agrarian villagers, Malian by nationality and Bambara by culture, to sustain life on their drought-ravaged land and to improve their health and literacy while becoming increasingly independent of outside help.

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Any project in a developing country relies upon its primary laborers to initiate and effect change for the community. In Ouelessebouougou that is the women. They maintain the family's private garden while assisting their husbands with the planting, weeding, and harvesting of village or money crops; they are the water-carriers, the millet-grinders, and the fuel-gatherers; they tend the animals, cook the food, and care for the children. Women are not only central to health-care change but are also more likely than men to direct their educational and economic skills toward their family's welfare. However, second-class citizens in their own country, the women of Ouelessebouougou have, until recently, been ignored by male-dominated development groups, who prefer to work with other men.

The Ouelessebouougou-Utah Alliance board, whose membership was 90 percent male until 1989, has not been insensitive to Malian women's involvement in sustenance development. Male fact-finders traveled from Utah to visit with village leaders in 1985 and 1986, and they invited women as well as men to contribute to a needs assessment. In 1988 the board became convinced that, because of Bambara cultural prohibitions, Utah women would be needed to mediate with Mali women, so they established a separate women's board to advise them on related issues through the voice of its representative.

It was the Ouelessebouougou Women's Board that decided to sponsor the expedition of March 1989, in which I participated. Four board members and the female project director formed the nucleus; they were joined by the executive board chairman, his wife, and two other women—I was one—connected to the project only by interest. The expedition was designed to accomplish two main goals: (1) the women, all from Mormon backgrounds and seven of us unmarried and professionally employed, would participate in medical or construction projects and hold discussions with Bambara women; and (2) the Alliance board chairman, a former LDS bishop, would introduce the expedition's female contingent to leaders of this patriarchal culture and evaluate the newly hired Malian director's management effectiveness.

We eight women did not know each other well. A latecomer to the expedition arrangements, I assumed that the others clearly understood our goals. Only well into the trip did I realize that they were making the same assumptions. Still, I think it is fair to say that we were all anxious to involve the Malian women in the neglected but critical planning stage of production. We hoped to be able to live with them briefly to observe their routines, to gain their confidence in our commitment, and to ask them to prioritize their needs. Bambara and Mormon together, we thought, could create substantive ways to address women's concerns. In actuality, the closest we came to staying with

villagers was sleeping and eating for four days in our own compound within the largest of the seventy-two villages. Consequently, our knowledge of the Bambara people could never surpass the superficial. I suspected this; but I did not expect how profoundly our presence among them would allow us to view our selves against their images.

This essay reassembles the images I collected of Bambara and Mormon women. It is not an anthropological report but a simulation of the process we use to define personal identity. We all rely upon reflecting devices like language and other people to create a temporary image of the self. Seeing the Bambara women, interacting with them, and attempting to understand them forced me to look at my self in my own culture from a new angle. This essay is my attempt to make meaning of both cultures. It is natural for both mirror and reflection—in this case the Bambara and the Mormons—to resist specular penetration. People desire to create and project an image integrated, impervious, and perfect according to their own standards. But we all have edges that somehow become exposed and thus vulnerable to scrutiny. By exploring values, motives, and discernible differences and similarities beneath the dense gloss, it isn't difficult, eventually, to dissolve opposites. These particular Bambara and Mormon images are two-dimensional and fragmented because my own vision is slanted, limited, and determined by a multitude of influences, including education, religion, and experience. Far from ultimate reality, this paper is yet another slivered and splintered pieced-together truth, a momentary reflection from my astigmatic feminist third eye.

Our first sight of Ouelessebouougou villages confirmed previous knowledge of the Bambara people and their living conditions: The women were straight-backed and beautiful, and, like us, of multiple colors, but darker—warm bronze to velvety black to dull ash—some gaunt-faced and thin, others round-faced and sturdy, all thick-necked and strong-armed, muscles distinct beneath scant and often ragged, bright motley cotton prints wrapped around. They were encircled by and balancing on hips or backs numerous wide-eyed children, and all worked against a backdrop of single-roomed mud and thatch huts on dry red dirt where bony oxen and goats roamed at will.

Other information about the Bambara, the most populous culture in Mali, we had accumulated earlier: They are mostly Muslim, a male-dominated and conservative religion which in Mali sanctions a man's having as many as four wives. Since France granted them independence in 1960, they have lived under a harsh dictatorship that has deprived them of modern medical, educational, and sanitation facilities. (Currently Mali is controlled by a transition government, having endured a revolution in early 1991, and the people are trying desper-

ately to make democracy a reality.) Ninety-five percent of the women are illiterate, unrecorded numbers die daily of traumatic childbirth, and the infant mortality rate is the highest in the world (Population Reference Bureau 1989).

We saw, then, a people and land opposite from our suburban life glutted with brick and glass homes, multiple vehicles, sprinkling systems, hospitals, schools, dance lessons, contraceptives, and eye-glasses. Major distinctions seemed clear: They spoke colloquial Bambara and, if educated, French, a hold-over from colonial days; we spoke English. They were impoverished; we were wealthy. They polygamous, we monogamous. They politically oppressed, we free to vote for laws and people to represent us. They were Muslim, we Christian. Finally, obviously, they, the Bambara, were needy, we Mormons appeared need-fulfilling.

Our group arrived at the village of N'Tintoukoro and jumped from the back of our pickup truck, anxious to meet the people and address those needs. Our job was to help build the first village chain link fence in Ouelessebougou, its purpose to prevent animals from grazing on vegetables the people needed year-round. A throng of women, children, and men surrounded us, all shouting *I ka kene* ("greeting") and extending calloused hands to shake. As our chairman and Malian interpreter busied themselves with the men, we women pretend-worked, danced, joked, and spoke with the village women. The old women laughed delightedly at our ineptness with their musical instruments; they gently poked and patted us and teased us for mispronouncing their names while indicating that our names were too strange to repeat. The young women smiled shyly, some handing us their bare-bottomed babies to hold and admire.

Each village, like N'Tintoukoro, greeted us ceremoniously. Men led us to seats of honor under a shady tree where they and the older boys sat, grouped age-ascending, around us. Females and infants formed a separate circle or worked at household chores outside the gathering. First the community leaders—the chief, patriarch, and priest—welcomed us with speeches and gifts of peanuts and live black-and-white-speckled chickens inert from hanging upside-down. Then our chairman accepted the gifts and replied: "We are happy and grateful to be here with you. We come from a country and a city where there is a lot of money. But there isn't the happiness and the caring for each other, and the feeling of unity that we feel here."

Although I was uncomfortable, even angry, that our representative had clearly designated our culture as generally rich, uncaring, and unhappy, I understood his observations about Bambara connectedness. Each time we traveled from one village to another to visit a garden, or when we strolled among the huts, shaking hands and scaring

toddlers with our whiteness, I watched the women, particularly, about their chores on property without boundaries. They exhibited a camaraderie we Americans could not see within the walls of our closed homes and a casualness we saw missing from offices intense with concentration.

They worked together. They jointly bathed howling babies in plastic buckets, painstakingly and intricately corn-rowed each other's hair, and walked arm-in-arm to the wells or fields or far into the bush for fuel. Some strolled down rutted roads three or four abreast while balancing immense loads of laundry or firewood on their heads, babies bound to their waists with swaths of brilliant cloth, and they laughed and waved to people passing. Standing side-by-side, the women pounded millet fine three times daily in huge gourds, tossing the heavy wooden pestles high to clap rhythmically before catching them mid-air or gracefully trading for a neighbor's, never missing a beat.

I saw how simple and uncluttered life could be without carpools and balance-books, without furniture to clean and appliances needing repair. Garbage was nearly invisible because every item—each cloth or chicken bone or empty can or broken rubber thong—was used and re-used in new form until it disappeared. This was subsistence-level living. Our group, resting in the cool of our compound's mango tree, agreed that it appealed to a part of us—to a purer, more basic desire that sought freedom from the labor and drive of conspicuous consumption.

On the other hand, we all observed through Western eyes, this life did not offer much choice. Books, ballet, symphony, paper and pen, crayons, fancy foodstuffs, canvas and oil paint also did not exist. How sad for the painters and engineers and mathematicians among these women, I thought, who would never, lacking time and material, know and express their talents. Concerned with feeding their children and following culture-prescribed duties, they largely ignored the outside; they accepted some goods and services offered but otherwise kept themselves distinctly different. Only fragments of Western civilization intruded: the plastic buckets, an occasional bike, a Mickey Mouse T-shirt, traditional and European prints combined into one body wrap.

In short time I realized that simple living was for them a creative enterprise. They transformed their hair and bodies into works of art; they recited stories and sang both traditional and occasion-inspired songs, danced alone and in human chains at public gatherings, and chanted as they swept the village grounds and cooked, washed, and weeded, the older women accompanying the workers with rattling gourds and thumping drums. Their expressive mediums were natural,

less dependent than ours on supplies manufactured and purchased in the market.

We interlopers thus noticed fewer opposites than simple difference in surface detail between the two cultures. We discovered that our feelings were ambiguous. We admitted our appreciation for opportunities at home that Bambara life could not provide, even as we felt a bit of guilt for our self-indulgence. But our entry into the Ouelessebougou villages also resembled, I see in retrospect, what James Clifford has called an allegorical retreat to the garden (Clifford 1986, 113–14).

Village life seemed a refuge, an Edenic sanctuary from civilization, a momentary satisfaction of nostalgic yearning for something gone, for life simple and primitive, uncluttered by industrial effluvium, motors, and material possessions, but replete with communal affection, innocence, and benevolence. Here we could understand why our expedition leader's wife said that these people possessed "peace of mind, companionship and a oneness with [themselves]." Women chanting and cleaning, preparing food in pastoral quiet, colorfully wrapped or unabashedly bare-breasted, babes on backs or playing peacefully with older siblings, chickens underfoot and donkeys rummaging, life natural, classless, outside of time—surely this was life lived the way God had intended.

For we have been taught—here in Western civilization, particularly in America where the agrarian myth helped blaze the trail across the continent, opening the frontier and domesticating the land; perhaps especially here in Utah where we revere pioneer ancestors for making the desert "blossom like a rose"—we have been taught that people close to nature's heart, tillers of the soil performing the most useful and necessary of labors, are people most integrated, closest to their authentic selves, to their core, to God.

Perhaps because we desired to adopt some of that "authenticity" in addition to substantiating memory, we Utahns collected evidence—photos, recordings, Bambara blankets and carvings, all kinds of material images and objects—to certify our presence in this recent Edenic past—a presence and past both disintegrating as we lived them. Metonyms of something larger, frozen paradigms of gestures, feelings, and relationships too brief, the physical evidence stands for the "something" we desire; we desire the illusion of peace and unity portrayed by and transmitted through association with a less sophisticated and more pristine people.

Wanting to capture and hold something so elusive yet so "essential" as integrity is only human. Yet the very words "capture" and "hold" indicate a problem. For by photographing the Bambara women at work and recording their music on tape, by hanging upon Salt Lake

City walls their images and cultural artifacts, I see how we convert them into permanent objects for review. The mementos, which radiate a facsimile of the aura possessed by the too-fleeting, too-perfect moment, become fetishes, as psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan explains: they substitute for that something—the sense of wholeness—impossible for us as human beings in constant transformation to realize. And they thus provide narcissistic pleasure through identification (see Wright 1984, 93, 127, and Gallop 1985).

The paradox is that while the displays objectify people who are living and vital, they also mean hope. For me these visual icons—the photographs of Bambara and Mormon together dancing, working, playing, laughing, watching—serve an idealistic purpose: rather than emphasizing radical difference, they capture in a single frame the integrated image of mirror and reflection. They celebrate the idea of synthesis, the reconciliation of such Western-conceived dichotomies as black and white, pagan and Christian, ignorant and learned, poor and wealthy, student and teacher, receiver and benefactor. The photos and memories honor equally the most common of Western symbols, dark and light. Dark, of course, connotes everything unenlightened and therefore evil as opposed to things white and radiant and therefore good. The idea of uniting these disparities feels good to someone, like me, who desires to accomplish both world-wide human commonality and individual spiritual wholeness.

However, as the pictures and recordings naturally gloss over the heat, sweat, smell, and physical discomfort we Utahns experienced, so, too, we know, life is not so ideal. Evidence proves that beneath Malian nature's pastoral surface lie other, less savory aspects. Parasites and worms forage in human stomachs; malaria, cholera, and yellow fever attack and meet no resistance; domestic animals such as oxen, chickens, goats, and sheep contaminate water with feces and trample or eat vegetables tenuously cultivated for children's nutrition; rain falls too infrequently and sometimes too harshly when it comes; dust suffocates, clogs nostrils and lungs, permeates clothing and interiors; and heat bakes the earth too hard for tilling.

I learned that beneath the Bambara surface of real human kindness, graciousness, beauty, and intelligence, other factors exist. Hiding behind the romanticized noble savage image of gentle fecundity—numerous children hand-holding, arm-entwining, baby-balancing—is the reality of child mortality: two deaths out of five before the age of five. These are due largely to birth complications, measles, and dehydration caused by diarrhea; infection runs rampant because uninformed mothers harvesting grain, hauling water, and chopping wood with a new infant suckling have neither the time nor means to treat a sick



toddler. When we examine reasons for obedient and stoic children and hard-working, cheerfully working, obedient women, we find culturally sanctioned child-beating and wife-beating. And we discovered, to our horror, that the beautiful harlequin *boubous* (robes) or skirts on adoring mothers concealed mutilated, infected, genital organs.

It is customary among the Bambara, like some other African and Middle Eastern cultures, to circumcise young children of both sexes. While the ritual usually is performed at least by age fifteen, it may take place when the child is an infant. Eight is the typical age. We learned these facts with great distress a few days into our visit. Circumcisions are not primarily religious—Islam does not require it—but cultural, originating back in the days of Egyptian pharaohs. Their avowed purpose is to mark the flesh with a sign of the culture. Boys are circumcised by removing the penile foreskin. Girls are “circumcised” by slicing out the clitoris and inner labia at the very least; more commonly, in the villages, it means removing the entire vulva, all the external genitalia.

Male circumcision, while painful, reduces neither the ability to reproduce safely nor to experience pleasure in sexual activity. Radical female excision eliminates both. Performed with the same blade that dismembers the chicken for dinner, the excruciating excision immediately inflicts upon the unanesthetized girls infection and constant bleeding. Bleeding is exacerbated by continual ritualized scrubbing throughout the weeks set aside for healing. Later, coupled with the Bambara compulsion to produce innumerable children whose births are endured under conditions at best nonsterile and usually medically unassisted (if the mutilation has not rendered the woman infertile), the excisions subject the women to genital tearing and an inhibited delivery that may result in death for either the infant or mother. Frequently, the women hemorrhage constantly, inevitably suffering a painful and early death.

Female genital mutilation imbues the popular Western feminist idea of “liberating the clitoris” with new meaning (see Moi 1985, discussions on Lacan, Cixous, Kristeva, Derrida, and Irigaray). Possessing a clitoris connotes the ability to actualize sexual pleasure. More important, in theory formulated by these Western women and men, its presence emblemizes a general female desire for psychic freedom, for desire and expression outside the control of the male economy. This is the freedom to become the subject in one’s own discourse rather than the object in an other’s. This is the freedom to speak and act and think for the self and to fulfill the self’s desire for creative, sexual, intellectual, and spiritual expression. The clitoris represents the desire and possibility of a woman to be more than solely a helpmate, a per-

son of secondary importance: first the object of the male gaze and thus the object of his desire and then the support for his psychic and sexual fulfillment.

We women know the boundaries of psychic freedom, what we call "subjectivity." From the teachings of psychology, which defines "subject" according to grammatical terms as the doer of action, we realize that even if we possessed political and economic freedom equal to men's, we would not really be subjects absolutely free to make unlimited choices, as we would like to believe. We are instead, just like men, subjected to and determined by internal and external—physiological and social-historical—factors that reduce "free" agency to a margin perhaps no broader than a thread. But the human impulse, the ego's drive, is to assert subjectivity nonetheless. To deny it is to be psychotic, to live forever in an imaginary realm where we are kept, non-functioning, little more than fetishes like our photos of the Bambara women—possessions to be collected and exhibited, or used and ignored, and eventually forgotten.

We Western women know, too, that no one can "liberate the clitoris" for another. To assert herself as a subject, an agent with the power to act, a woman must freely acknowledge, whether or not she possesses a clitoris, that she does indeed desire and that she must consciously and actively pursue whatever might satisfy that desire rather than to depend passively on another.

I have been speaking of the clitoris metaphorically as much as literally. Obviously, even though the Bambara woman's desire for sexual pleasure may be removed before she is old enough to recognize that it exists, she feels desire and experiences other pleasures. She enjoys her own realm of power. However, it is generally the case that her economic and intellectual freedom are as controlled as her sexual activity.

She learns early that her body has many uses, primarily in a practical realm since book-learning and speculation are considered superfluous, even physically impossible for her sex. If she survives to the age of five, when she begins carrying pots on her head to strengthen neck muscles, her body will serve others. From this time on she works alongside her mother to produce the means to clean and feed the family. She and her mother will eat only after the men have their fill. As she approaches the age of fifteen, her parents select her husband, and her body earns the father a bride-dowry, providing she is a virgin and her vaginal region is, according to our Malian interpreter, "clean"—acceptable to a male, purified of excess flesh. A thorough excision will guarantee pain during intercourse, discouraging promiscuity, and thus reassure the groom that his property of wife and offspring will remain

in his possession. For the real reason for the excisions, the interpreter eventually admitted, has been control.

The honeymoon reinforces the Bambara girl's knowledge of her body's duties—to satisfy her husband's sexual desires, to exhibit his virility, and to begin to reproduce both the parents' labor pool and their chance for immortality (as the more offspring that survive, the more likely the parents will be remembered through the generations). To stimulate procreation immediately, two days before the marriage ceremony the bride is given an herbal medicine that induces diarrhea to make her internally "clean" and outwardly "docile." During the honeymoon week, a first bride and groom, accompanied by their female teacher to instruct them in sexual matters, stay in a hut where others provide them food. Among the food is hot cereal for the bride to heighten "athleticism" and sour milk for the groom to increase his potency.

The girl will generally have a child within the year and another each year or two until death or menopause. Her body will likely deteriorate quickly due to malnutrition, disease, exhaustion, the stress of multiple births, and continuous bleeding resulting in severe anemia. The Bambara female, then, knows early, probably unconsciously, that her body is a tool to raise capital and to provide labor, status, immortality, and pleasure—perhaps for herself, but first for father, brothers, and husband.

Ouelessebougou meant physical and psychic exhaustion: dancing in temperatures that reached 115 degrees, sleeping on hard ground with goats baaing and cocks crowing at first light, bouncing in the bruising back of a pick-up truck over rutted donkey paths enveloped in fine dust, communicating in languages unwieldy or totally unlearned, and feeling overwhelmed by a flood of sensory details and emotional overload. It was only after leaving Ouelessebougou that I slowly perceived how unmistakably I, a Mormon woman of dissimilar appearance and opportunity, am psychic sister to these Bambara women.

In more subtle ways our bodies also become material means for illustrating a male's power, beginning with the ritual of the father's bestowing, without the mother, his own name upon his infants. A proper surname assigns place, confirms genealogical belonging. Later, we are taught as adolescent girls to heed a Young Women officer's warning that honorable young men do not want to eat "the doughnut with the frosting licked off" or "the Twinkie with the filling sucked out." We could discuss the perversions beneath the Mormon surface, some of them applicable to any community, many of them inherent in a patriarchal society: the incest, wife-beating, rape, lower wages for women, the scarcity of women in management positions, white-collar

crime, and coercions by General Authorities to hide or neglect an incriminating fact. But I am more interested in exploring examples of Mormon women—particularly those of us who consider ourselves liberated from overt male control—who recognize and attempt to satisfy our desire to assert autonomy and then unconsciously excise the means, thereby thwarting our own purposes.

Although Mormon women sometimes exhibit signs of physical and sexual abuse, genital mutilation is not culturally mandated or acceptable. The clitoris's presence does represent possibility. Metaphorically, we women on the Ouelessebougou expedition realized many of these possibilities. First, we were in Africa. Thus, we had the freedom to travel beyond our domestic environment. Except for the board chairman's wife, who came primarily to accompany her husband, each of us knew that we were able to be there because we had economic means derived from an education and the ability to use skills to earn and manage an income. Granted, our group was not typical; again with the exception of the chairman's wife, we others were all single and over thirty years old; only two of us had children. Had we been married, most of us likely would not have been on that expedition. We seemed free from the sexual hegemony that marks the Bambara women both psychically and physically. Yet we are only slowly admitting that Mormon sociological patterns for both sexes may be psychically suffocating and ultimately destructive. Witness documented depression among housewives, fear among homosexuals, and attempts to suppress symposia and honest speaking from people who believe that the glory of God is intelligence. Furthermore, sexual hegemony exists no less in the Mormon culture than in the Bambara. Regardless of secular leadership possibilities open to women, authorities in the LDS Church feel more compelled now than ever before to control Church structure, capital, ritual, and administration. And LDS women feel compelled, no matter how "liberated" we may regard ourselves, to allow men that privilege.

Frustrated by the sexual discrimination she observed in early twentieth-century America, anthropologist Elsie Clewes Parsons noted that "women cooperate in their own subjection . . . by trying 'hard to live down to what is expected of them'" (in Rosenberg 1982, 172). Philosopher Antonio Gramsci observed that hegemony works from both directions: a group dominates only with permission from subgroups. Subordinate groups, be they racial, ethnic, religious, economic, or gendered, may resist suppression with language and action, but until they actually revolt (and risk becoming tyrannical themselves), they primarily acquiesce to or support the ruling order (Lears 1985, 568–78).

For us the ruling order is a white, Euramerican, middle-class, male-dominated, capitalistic system within which we have grown up and which therefore appears perfectly natural—thus God-created rather than manmade—though not many of us believe God personally provided us with language, the basis for law, interpretation, and symbols—hence, meaning. It is impossible for language and meaning to be fixed ideals, transparent to truth; they are dynamic like the people who write and interpret them, constantly changing and expanding with knowledge and cultural needs. And the people who control them control the culture.

While we Mormon women might condemn Bambara women for permitting their daughters' sexual mutilation to continue, we, too, cooperate in shaping the language and culture that in turn shape us. As socially constructed beings, we, too, must negotiate for personal identity within our culture's bounds. And on the Ouelessebouougou expedition of March 1989, we eight women contributed actively to male domination, as do our sisters in our own country, no less than the Bambara midwives who perform the sexual excisions in dirt huts with dull knives for economic, traditional, and social reasons.

In the process of sorting out the implications of Bambara tradition, I recalled incidents and relationships from my notes that illustrate our group's participation in female suppression. For instance, the Mormon bishop's wife, having learned her part from many years of following direction and former models, played sentinel for her husband. Two of us in the group, reduced to six women when two departed earlier as planned, expressed not only grief but outrage when we learned of the culturally sanctioned genital mutilation. Our first impulse was to do something—anything—to stop it. Although vocal about our feelings in the privacy of our compound, we had sense enough to realize that revealing our knowledge and extending our anger beyond those walls would only result in our being expelled from the "garden."

Nonetheless, when this newly observed, order-threatening "feminism" was exposed, the wife took it upon herself to keep the situation in order: "Don't you think we're being divisive, only talking to the women?" she said to us after we insisted on holding discussions with the Bambara women focused on their needs and issues against her husband's obvious wishes. "Shouldn't we give the men equal time?" Forming her objections as questions rather than assertions, she signalled her own uncertainty while remaining dutiful to her role.

A guardian mentality assumes the position of surrogate super-ego; its function is to remind offenders of cultural obligations, its "shoulds" and "should nots." It also reports to the patriarch when his presence is required to keep ideas in line: "Do I need to be here?" her husband

whispered over her shoulder when momentarily visiting one of the Mormon/Bambara women's meetings. "No," she whispered back. "They're the same questions as last night." Safe questions, her response suggested—not related to male supremacy and female slavery as he might have expected from radical feminists, and therefore non-inflammatory.

The meetings were, indeed, safe. We Mormons sang songs—"Frère Jacques" and "Itsy Bitsy Spider"—we thought they might know or mimic. The village women explained their daily work patterns and we described ours. Their list of needs always centered on the children, but we were troubled by their reluctant personal complaint of backaches, stomachaches, and "inside" pains (our translator did not know the English word for female organs). They were troubled by our situation as women without husbands and children. One woman sweetly (and jokingly) began to arrange a marriage between me and a young man of "great courage."

I was impressed by the intelligence of another woman on the expedition who demonstrates her social autonomy by having established a home and directing a major business department, the latter a task requiring strong administrative and arbitration skills. She has chosen to devote her life to teaching young people to become professionals, to working for environmental safety, and to leading women's organizations in the Church. Yet on the expedition she protected the bishop/chairman's indiscriminate right to lead by smilingly obeying, not protesting, when he told us we should not engage in the women's discussions—one of the journey's original goals.

This woman has never, to my knowledge, discussed the Bambara female sexual excisions. However deplorable she finds the practice, she avoids the issue altogether and thus inadvertently protects the practice. Silence, somehow, makes it bearable. Fearful that the Alliance might intrude into the sacred realm of cultural tradition, she believes we should not interfere, even through Bambara channels, by supplying health information or specific medical assistance.

I am troubled by her attitude, even as I acknowledge that the Alliance must carefully approach any proposed change in Bambara life. We not only do not want to disguise American cultural colonialism as altruism; we also do not want to offend the people and eliminate the opportunity to help. But our presence is already an intrusion. Any change in procedure from gardening to hygiene alters traditional Bambara methods. We must constantly draw lines between assistance and interference. And we cannot ignore a blatant assault upon the

human right to have a whole and healthy body.<sup>1</sup> It was recognition of that right that originally propelled men from Utah to seek out the suffering and starving in Mali.

Given our motivation for being present in the Ouelessebouyou region, why then does an educated and sympathetic woman not speak out about this problem? Does she fear addressing the topic of women's mutilation because our culture has inured us to it in other forms? Do an American woman's motives for not interfering differ substantially from the Bambara mothers' who accept their daughters' continuous and extreme agony because they consent to life as the only way they have known it for centuries? Or, on the other hand, and more pragmatically, do they recognize that disobedience would socially punish their daughters by forever excluding them from the marriage market—forcing upon the daughter ostracism or lifelong parental dependence and upon the parents unbearable humiliation and financial loss?

Another young expedition member is a doctor. She used her medical knowledge and skills decisively and expediently in Mali when she administered care to a taxi driver who had inhaled too much dust through the car windows and was suffocating to death. She saved the man's life. We women were promised during the expedition that we would be invited to join the Alliance board of directors. Yet after four months of complaints and no action, the doctor advised that we be patient, not "too pushy."

At that time the active Alliance board, purportedly a community organization of more than twenty members, was 90 percent male, 95 percent LDS, and 100 percent white-complected. Although a separate women's board existed, the dozen women who comprised it shared a single vote. (I was not even a member of that group.) We women who had physically and emotionally committed ourselves to an expedition and to the people of Mali at our own expense wanted an expression of the self. We wanted for our own selves what we desired for the Bambara

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<sup>1</sup> A case illustrating a twenty-one-year-old Mali woman's defiance of mutilation now stands before the French court. The court must decide whether to award Aminata Diop, from the village of Sikasso, refugee status. Diop fled Mali, fearing for her life, when she "scandalized her village and enraged her family" by refusing to submit to the blade. Her father had to return the money paid by her fiancé at the betrothal four years earlier. Diop said, "Each rainy season in my village, they perform excisions. Girls scream, suffer, are terrorized. One of my girlfriends was excised on a Thursday; by Sunday, she was dead." This case presents a problem to the court because the Geneva Convention protects refugees persecuted for political and religious reasons, but not for issues of gender. Diop's attorney, Linda Weil-Curiel of France, says, "This would be the first acknowledgement of a woman's right to flee patriarchy" ("Women Right Now," *Glamour*, Nov. 1991, 118).

women: self-representation in development planning as well as production. We wanted to speak and to vote. Do the doctor's reasons for tolerating men's rudeness and neglect and promoting women's passivity—moves contradicting her professional behavior—differ from the Bambara woman's who has submitted to playing a silent and obedient role in organized village politics—a role outside the inner circle—that she accepts because it is what she has been taught and what she knows her leaders, all male, expect of her?

Two other women on the expedition hold professional positions by right of education and experience in powerful LDS Church community institutions. One has also fought to retain her briefly held assignment as first female in a traditionally male-occupied Church position. When this woman reported to the former Alliance board of directors on the information gained from the Bambara-Mormon women's talks, she omitted any mention of female clitoridectomies and associated physical problems, although women's health has an obvious and direct bearing on their physical ability to carry out development goals. Did she fear the information might offend delicate ears? (Incidentally, the board agenda scheduled the women's report, supposedly the most important item from the expedition, for the end of a long meeting; many members had left before it could be delivered.)

The other woman works for the *Deseret News*. Although she resists intimidation from political figures to stay silent on volatile issues, she succumbs to pressure from editors to censor her own work if she wants it printed. She knows which point of view must be ignored and which prioritized. If she feels a story requires true but abrasive information that might challenge LDS values, she knows she must bury it toward the story's end. Might the motives behind these two women's solicitude resemble the fear underlying even educated Bambara mothers who submit their daughters to mutilation because they themselves are silently threatened with beatings or loss of financial security?

It is impossible for me to omit my own complicity in the scheme of things. At the beginning of the expedition I felt like an outsider; I lacked recognized authority and knowledge of administrative channels; I was careful not to offend. I allowed the board chairman to order me not to participate in a short but important information-gathering excursion that would have inconvenienced no one. Even though the man offered no viable reason for his command, I meekly descended from the truck and returned to my "proper" place.

I was a woman too respectful of propriety, one who does not protest loudly or vehemently enough about injustice until she feels sure that her remarks are appropriate or valid. Until she feels safe from



recrimination. I could have stopped the process and asked for clarification about expedition objectives and procedures. I could have challenged assumed authority. Instead, a woman acting as I did habitually confirms the existing hierarchy that categorizes her female self as subordinate. She frequently acts too late to make a difference.

I struggle, against my own rage and outrage, to be fair, to keep situations in perspective. Certainly all these women I have described, including the Bambara, have also contributed to improving women's status. We all have some power. A lack of certain body parts, while restrictive, does not determine complete social impotence. We all have found the means to exert individuality, a small degree of autonomy, an important measure of subjectivity. We have power to heal, to create, to nurture, to perpetuate and change cultural *morés* and traditions through story, to barter in the marketplace, to feed the world, to politic on both formal and informal levels, and to manipulate others, even men, for selfish or altruistic reasons. Yet we all generally behave as though moved by fear: fear of punishment—job loss or beatings or embarrassment—fear of hurting our children, fear of drastic change, fear of not gaining eternal salvation, fear of ostracism, fear of not pleasing others, or fear of being marked different and therefore evil.

It is my observation that behind all these fears lies another: fear of knowledge. If we, and this "we" certainly includes men as well as women, give or take the wrong information, we face the aforementioned penalties. If we would survive in our culture, we must constantly hide or refrain from listening to information that would make people squirm. We must stay silent or relegate facts to back pages and ends of meetings. We must constantly question any authority except that which our culture—the Mormon or Bambara—has deemed the highest on earth. Even God or nature, whoever or whatever gave woman a clitoris and invited her to desire, plays absent composer to the patriarchal conductor.

Bambara and Mormon alike contribute to societies that have created, according to Kenneth Burke, a "conspiracy of piety, a conspiracy about 'what properly goes with what'" (in Gunn 1987, 81). We devote ourselves to honoring practices like sexual excisions and ritualized violent gestures at one time performed during sacred endowments. We sustain these rituals in the name of religion or tradition because they demonstrate our loyalty. The word "piety," Burke says, "'contributes to the desire to round things out, to fit experiences into a unified whole'" (in Gunn 1987, 81). With women's cooperation, our culture conspires against the yearnings of the self and builds a network of systems to make sense of a chaotic world. This kind of unification requires a plan, a network composed of taboos and expiations, defini-

tions of proper behavior and thinking to keep people straight. It requires a bureaucracy headed by a logic-directed order such as the Mormon priesthood organization and Bambara social structure whose members also fear something—perhaps the exuberance, the unruly desire, even the climatic moment, of women.

All this looking behind must bring us back to the mirror's face; through scrutiny the self does not disappear into the reflector but becomes more visible, its qualities magnified. We see then that it is only the degree of any quality or characteristic—hair texture, eye and skin color, manner of dress, body condition, intelligence, need, intellectual or spiritual freedom—that determines the differences among people. We know that world cultures, represented by Bambara and Mormon, are not opposite; we, looking like the speckled chickens the villagers gave us, coexist as black and white together and a bit insensible from hanging upside-down too long. Certainly we create different cultures based on circumstance. But we also exaggerate difference in order to stand apart, to justify hierarchies, to create a special identity.

Each people must be the Dineh, as the Navajo call themselves: The People. Each must be, like the Jews, the Chosen. Each must follow, like the Muslims, the Prophet of the One True God. Each must inherit, like us, the Church of the Sign of the Greatest Good, for us Jesus Christ. The need to be special is why many Bambara women support the sexual excisions, a Malian female friend confides: they see their absent genitals as the sign of a "true" woman, a Bambara woman courageously facing pain and physically distinct, in a secretive, personal way, from a white Western woman. For similar reasons—to set themselves apart and to confirm oaths of fealty—Mormon men and women wear garments with their own hidden markings. And in order to feel securely embraced by the eternally protective aura of their religious leaders, most Mormon women, even the "liberated" ones, actively support their own subjugation. All people desire to assert an agency, a subjectivity that declares we not only exist but are absolutely essential to life and truth. A collective subjectivity, provided by membership in a community, increases our power. We suffer psychic or physical mutilation for the privilege of belonging.

To merely reflect upon the image in the mirror is not difficult. But if we would go further and be "intensely reflexive" as defined by Victor Turner—first look beneath the surface, then probe and analyze what we see and, most importantly, act upon our knowledge—we must sincerely ask "Who are we? Who am I?" (Turner 1982, 104). And in our need to negotiate identity with the people around us, we confront the three possibilities defined earlier by Gramsci: acquiescence,

support, and resistance. No easy solutions exist. Sometimes we compromise the self's desires for the sake of our selves and our children, for the sake of living harmoniously in the community. Often we have enough faith in the principles behind the system that we stay and work, we speak out, to create space for greater agency within it: we protest or rebel in hopes of transforming. A fourth alternative is necessary for some: the whole is altogether too unbearable and must be deserted. Whatever our act, we can at least be honest about our motives. Whatever our decision, we can recognize that we need and use others, our own kind and opposites, whether gendered or racial, to confirm our identity, to confirm what we see is our goodness by comparison.

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# The Extraordinary in the Ordinary: Women's Stories, Women's Lives

*Julie J. Nichols*

[Because] so much of women's history . . . is sewn into quilts, baked in breads, honed in the privacy of dailiness, used up, consumed, worn out, . . . [reading and writing it] becomes essential to our sense of ourselves—nourishment, a vital sustenance; it is a way of knowing ourselves.

(Aptheker 1990, 32)

The personal essay, unlike personal journals, letters, and oral histories, is not an artless form. It transforms the raw material of personal experience in the double crucible of carefully chosen language and the light of mature retrospection. A finished personal essay requires revision—a literal re-seeing. Not only does the product enlighten and engage its reader, but the process of writing and revising also generates changes in the writer as she re-views herself, her place in her community, and the meaning of her experiences.

Carol Bly, author of a fine collection of essays, *Letters from the Country*, points out that in our time, women are socialized to write their stories: "We must write our stories so that we have them, as athletes must have muscle" (1990, 247). At the same time, Bly notes, men are discouraged from writing theirs, precisely because writing one's story requires a certain amount of evaluation and self-judgment. The implication is that, in writing their stories, women are already prepared to evaluate and judge, hence are better prepared to recognize and help counter the ills of a male-dominated world.

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But certain aspects of the LDS culture can bar even women from enlightening themselves through personal narrative. Since 1984 I have taught English 218R—Introduction to Creative Writing, with an emphasis in literary nonfiction—at Brigham Young University. In these classes, I have watched men and women resist coming to terms with the contradictions of their lives. For Latter-day Saint women, in particular, such resistance comes from three general sources: lack of time, because setting aside large blocks of quiet, self-reflective time is difficult when you're busy rearing children, caring for a home, and more often than not, working; lack of knowledge about women's stories, which are infrequently mentioned in the scriptures and only recently making their way into Church lesson manuals; and fear of recrimination from family or from official sources for expressing negative emotions, disagreement, or deviant thought processes.

Both men and women grapple with these problems, but Latter-day Saint women may feel more pressure to keep busy, write the family documents, perfect themselves, and nurture. The positive public image many women seek leaves little room for inevitable negative personal experiences or emotions.

In my classes, I try to help would-be memoirists overcome these barriers by providing structured time, abundant reading material, and plenty of theory and practice. Working together, we establish the personal narrative as the prototypical discourse (Langellier 1989, 243). We learn that telling a story forms the basis for *all* discourse. We read the works of women writers whose lives shape their material, from Julian of Norwich and Margery Kemp in the Middle Ages to Annie Dillard and Alice Walker in twentieth-century America, to Latter-day Saint women writers such as Emma Lou Thayne, Mary Bradford, and Helen Candland Stark. We perform writing exercises that allow memory and feeling to rise to the surface and find form in words. (The suggestions in Natalie Goldberg's *Writing Down the Bones* and *Wild Mind*, and in Gabrielle Rico's *Writing the Natural Way* are my personal favorites.) Though these exercises are not always successful, when my students finally push through their resistance and produce fine essays similar to the ones that follow, we all reap remarkable rewards.

The first reward of producing a polished personal essay is pleasure—on many levels. Lorinne Taylor Morris took English 218R twice because the first time she took it, she struggled with an essay about her mother's death for months, saying to me several times, "I don't even know what I'm trying to say here." I encouraged her to continue to work with it, praising the understated tone and the importance of the story itself. When she finally came to a satisfactory ending, she said, "Now I know what I meant. I thought I was writing about how I

always felt left out and how I tried to let my dad's efforts be enough. But I needed my mother to help me know who I was. I know that now. This is an essay about me as a woman."

### Regeneration *Lorinne Morris\**

I was five years old when my mother died. Her death didn't seem to change my world much then. I just received more attention from relatives and neighbors, was all. In the two years since she had been diagnosed, she had evolved from my caregiver to a sick person whose bedroom I had to stay out of while the cancer ate at her body. I learned over those two years she could not care for me, so by the time of her death, I thought I had become used to living without her.

My father had begun taking over for Mother by making the family meals. He also woke us up and got us ready in the morning. I insisted on having my hair in ponytails like my two older sisters, and though he tried to part my hair into even halves and get the ponytails straight, they always came out crooked. After he left the bathroom I'd climb onto the counter and tug up on one ponytail and down on the other. It just wasn't the way it was supposed to be.

As the years passed my needs changed, and so did my father's role in my life. In junior high one day I received a wink from a boy who sat a row in front of me. My friends told me this was because he liked me and wanted "to go" with me, but I didn't know what "to go" with someone meant. I found Dad that evening outside doing chores just as the sun was setting and leaving just enough light to see his faint shadow. I guess he sensed the seriousness in my voice, because he put down the bucket of feed and sat on the upper rail of the fence while I unfolded the dilemma of my day. I can't remember now what he said, but it was dark before we came in.

When I became a quiet, emotional teenager, I realized my mother's death meant her absence from my life. During my high school years when I wanted some comfort, I often imagined what it would be like to have a mother. I would sit at night on the front steps and imagine my mother coming outside to sit by me. She would quietly open the front door, sit down next to me, and put her soft, middle-aged arm around me. I wasn't really sure what she would do next, maybe tell me not to cry or listen to me for a while. I would eventually stop my dreaming and go to find my dad.

But last summer the absence was relieved for a moment when I learned to bottle tomatoes. I used the old empty jars that had been on the shelves in my grandma's fruit room for years. They were covered with dust and spider webs. Some even had tiny dead bugs in the bottom. It took me hours to wash them all. Then I took them to a neighbor's house where she taught me how to blanch the tomatoes to remove the skins, then to quarter them and press them into the bottles. She showed me how to take a knife to remove the air bubbles before steaming them to seal their lids. Together we bottled over a hundred jars.

I took my bottled tomatoes back to my grandma's fruit room, and one by one I placed them on the dusty shelves. As I bent over, picked one of the bottles up, and placed it on the shelf, I saw my mother. Like me, she bent to pick up a

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\*Student essays used with permission.

bottle, placed it carefully, and stood back to admire the work she had done. At that moment she was there with me, doing the things she had done that I was now beginning to do. I understood that we are connected in ways that go far beyond death, and I whispered, "Welcome home, Mom," and she whispered, "Welcome home, Lorinne."

Pleasure, the first reward of a story well told, is not only cerebral but often physical—leaving both writer and reader feeling peaceful and relaxed. Lorinne experienced further pleasure; as she wrote, she discovered a new sense of herself, a sense that she belongs, even though her mother died long ago, to the community of mothers and daughters participating in rituals many Utah LDS mothers and daughters share. For the first time, she recognized her rightful place in that community.

Anthropologist Barbara Meyerhoff has formulated the notion of "the great story" (in Prells 1989), the set of stories by which we live our lives. LDS women may be centered by stories such as: "women should be in the home," "church attendance is a measure of spirituality," "families are forever," or "repentance and change are always possible." Lorinne's essay partakes of the "great story" that says, "Everyone needs a mother; no one can take a mother's place." Meyerhoff goes on to say that personal narrative is a "little story," a story that is true for one person rather than for an entire culture. People's "little stories" can have conservative or radical effects on the "great story." The following untitled essay by Kathy Haun Orr can be called conservative because it corroborates the "great story" that mothers are perfect. Like Lorinne's essay, it also provides pleasure—in this case, the pleasure of humor:

My mother can do everything. Every year my sisters and I got Easter dresses made especially for us, and dresses at Christmas for family pictures. She made the bridesmaid dresses for my oldest sister's wedding because they couldn't find any they liked in the stores. The dresses were lavender with white lace trim, tea length with a long, full ruffle and a v-waistline to match my sister's wedding gown. Then there's me: I've never even touched a sewing machine except to turn my mom's off when she forgot. The first time I sewed a button on was last semester when it came off my coat and my roommate wouldn't do it for me.

My birthday cakes were always decorated with whatever I requested, from Mickey Mouse when I was three to a two-tiered cake with frosting floral arrangements when I turned sweet sixteen. I did take a cake decorating class with my best friend our senior year of high school. I loved the class, and the teacher, but my roses looked like big lumps of lard, and my clowns always fell over like they were too tired to sit up.

My mother is the very definition of domestic goddess in the kitchen. Leftovers taste great, everything's nutritious and yummy, and she can make desserts that make your mouth water just looking at them. Until I left home for college, the only things I could cook were toast, grilled cheese sandwiches, and chocolate chip cookies. When I got up to school, my roommates mocked me in the kitchen and gave me quizzes on all the different utensils and their true use.



My mother is into all sorts of crafts, like grapevine wreaths and quilts and the artwork for her silkscreening business. I know how to use a glue gun—I used one once to hem some pants.

Kathy concludes the essay by saying that despite the gaps between her mother's achievements and her own, her mother's love and encouragement are qualities she fully intends to pass on. The essay is fun to read and allowed Kathy to safely express her marginal position within a pervasive "great story."

Both these essays focus on a key role in a woman's life: the mother role. Being a mother is a pinnacle of accomplishment for a Latter-day Saint woman. Unconsciously or consciously, many LDS women examine their own propensities for this role with varying degrees of satisfaction or trepidation, seeking first (like Lorinne and Kathy) to connect with their own mothers and then to come to terms with the differences between their own mothers, their own individual leanings, and the "great story" about motherhood. Writing personal narrative encourages and facilitates this process.

It is especially liberating for my women students to realize that personal narrative needn't always agree with the "great story." According to Meyerhoff, the "little story" can also radically question the "great story." Often its power lies in its ability to interrogate and correct the inadequacies in the larger cultural narrative. When Nellie Brown was my student, she tried to write pieces about her frustration with what she saw as the voiceless, nameless position of women in the Church. Not until she wrote "There's No Place Like Home" (DIALOGUE, Spring 1992) was she able to connect her childhood experiences, which don't fit the LDS "great story" about women as good, nurturing mothers, and her current discomfort. In all of her efforts, Nellie sought to name the origins of her wounds and to find balm for them. It was this essay, written after our class was over, describing in fearful detail moments of abuse and denial, which finally had the power to initiate real healing. It is a moving and powerful piece in which Nellie interrogates two "great stories." The first is that mothers are perfect (Kathy's essay also corroborates this). The second is what Nellie's mother told her: little girls shouldn't speak about wrongs done to them. Fear of reprisal may have silenced Nellie until she wrote this essay, but her story powerfully imagines a better way. "Do I dare / Disturb the universe?" asks T. S. Eliot's Prufrock (1971, 4). Nellie and other writers like her do so dare, aiming to change the universe for the better. Toward the end of her essay, Nellie says:

I am ashamed of [these memories of cruelty.] [They] force me to admit that my mother was a child abuser. . . . I feel that I should say I love my mother, that

she was a good woman just trying to do her best. . . . But I can't defend her. Saying those things doesn't change our relationship. It doesn't make the memories go away. . . . It doesn't change my fear of having children, . . . [N]ot because I can't overcome my past, but because maybe, without knowing, I haven't overcome it yet. (1992, 5-7)

Writing the essay, for Nellie, was a step toward overcoming that past, a step toward creating a new future, a healing act that helps heal readers as well.

Personal narrative can also teach. Kristin Langelier notes that family stories may inspire or warn family members about the consequences of certain activities and also keep stories alive that are important to the family's solidarity (1989, 262). Such stories might begin with a question: why are things the way they are in this family or community? Telling personal stories that pursue answers may clarify complex questions. Beth Ahlborn Merrell's essay does just that.

### No-Name Maria *Beth Ahlborn Merrell*

Ten years after my own baptism I buried myself in the waters again . . . and again . . . and again. It was a great opportunity for me to recall the importance of baptism. I did my best to prepare myself, that the spirits waiting on the other side would not be mocked.

I was baptized thirty-seven times for Maria. She had no last name. No birth date or place. No family information. Only the location of her grave.

I inquired of these Marias. A temple worker told me that these Latin-American women had been buried in graves without proper markings. Because there was no information, they were baptized with the symbolic name, Maria. I couldn't help but wonder if I had done any good in being baptized proxy for thirty-seven women who had no names.

Before leaving the temple, I received a printout with the information on the thirty-seven women I had served. No need looking over the names. All Marias. But I did look at the locations. Panama, Guatemala, Nicaragua—almost all Central American countries. At the bottom of the list were five women from Tegucigalpa, Honduras. My heart jumped and burned.

August 29, 1924. Tegucigalpa, Honduras. Julia Eva Valasquez, seven years old, stood on the banks of the mountain river that ran through her family's estate. Her older brother, Roberto, fished while Julia twirled on the banks, watching the ruffled layers of her silk dress floating like magic in a rippling circle. Confident that she would dance with the best one day, she moved to the Latin rhythm that played inside her head. Bending close to the water, Julia smiled at the face she saw mirrored on the glassy surface of the pond: dark hair curled daintily around a heart-shaped face the color of creamy coffee. She flirted with her reflection, placing a lotus blossom behind her ear.

Julia never heard the revolutionist behind her. Perhaps the music inside her head played so loudly that it drowned out any snapping twigs that might have warned her of the silent murderer. One moment she was looking into the reflection of a smiling girl, the next she was seeing the reflection of a revolutionist

raising a machete over her body. His double-edged knife whistled as it fell toward her head.

Instinctively she rolled, blocking the blows with her right arm. Roberto flew to protect himself and his sister, but his struggle was brief against the attacks made by men who came to proclaim their right against the suppression of Honduras' upper class. I've never heard anything about how my great-grandmother and Uncle Roberto found help. Roberto carried deep scars in his skull for life. Julia's dreams of dancing were shattered; she lost her right arm from the elbow. Their white mansion burned to the ground; their parents and siblings died in the flames.

I often wonder how my great-grandmother managed without two good arms and without the extended family support upon which Latins depend. But the details of my heritage are scarce. She died before I learned to speak Spanish. She died before my first-generation LDS mother taught her the gospel. She died without telling us the names of her parents and siblings. She died, and this is all I know of her life.

Records in Central American countries are incomplete at best. Government documents are burned periodically in the chaos of political revolutions. And when the fires die, the dead who leave no families are often buried in common, unmarked graves.

I look back at my printout. I asked to be baptized for a relative, but my mother told me it was impossible given our dead-end genealogy. I did not receive a heavenly visitation from a member of Julia's family; I have no physical proof that I served a relative in the temple. But in my heart I am grateful that gospel blessings are not limited to those who have proper burials or grave sites. I look forward to the day when I can perform temple ordinances for another no-name Maria.

In this essay, Beth understands that the rituals performed in the temple are not in vain. She also establishes connections with the community of her family, as did Lorinne and Kathy, as well as with the community of Latter-day Saints who work in the temple. Like Nellie, Beth also negotiates with a puzzling aspect of the "great story," and she asserts herself as a writer who can respond to her circumstances with a story that provides answers for her as it holds and moves its readers.

Further, by making her story a woman's story, Beth refutes the "great story" that assumes that canonized writings (scripture or official Church histories or manuals) are the only authoritative ones. Writing ordinary women's lives thoughtfully and imaginatively makes them extraordinary, gifts not only for posterity (the *raison d'être* for most injunctions to write personal narrative) but also for interested contemporaries.

Similarly and finally, a carefully written personal narrative can inspire other Latter-day Saints. Linda Paxton Greer's essay-in-progress is too long and still too rough to reproduce here except in summary, but her story is remarkable. She explains that she had seven living children and had just learned of her unexpected pregnancy with another when she was diagnosed with cancer that needed immediate and

prolonged chemotherapy. Medical professionals advised her to terminate the pregnancy. Though both Church counsel and reason reassured her this was an acceptable way to save her own life, she furiously rejected such a course of action. Over several weeks she wept, consulted authorities, and prayed. Finally she had an experience in which she saw an image of herself interacting with her posterity and profoundly regretting the absence of one lost child. The image helped to clarify her path. She chose neither abortion nor chemotherapy; eight months later she gave birth to a large, healthy boy, her cancer in complete remission.

I do not see this an anti-abortion story. Instead it affirms the reality of the Spirit, even and perhaps especially for women in anguish about their roles as mothers. Women, too, are heirs to the gifts of heaven; it is a woman's privilege to defy "reason," conventional wisdom, or male authority, and to hold fast to her inner sources of light. Stories like this one belong in the *Ensign*, in Relief Society manuals, at the General Conference pulpit—as do all the essays recounted here, and myriad others written in my classes and elsewhere, and those as yet unwritten. For the Latter-day Saint, writing personal essays like these yields the rewards of pleasure; an increased sense of a valid place in the community; the opportunity to participate in the "great story," either conservatively or radically; and the chance to heal, teach, and inspire. Personal essays make available the "little story" and empower readers and writers to live fuller, more productive lives.

To overcome two obstacles to receiving these rewards—lack of time and lack of knowledge—LDS women (and men) can take classes, ask for or make for themselves protected time, and form writing and reading groups. They can make solitary commitments to write, read, and honor the personal writing of other women (and men). Writers can enter the essay contests offered by *Exponent II* and the *Ensign*, submit work to LDS and non-LDS publications, and require that more illustrative stories in Relief Society manuals be by and about women. But in order for that to happen, of course, the stories need to be discovered and written.

Overcoming fear, the third obstacle to producing personal narrative, may take more concentrated effort. It helps to know that even professional writers feel fear when faced with the task of writing personal narrative. When Bulgarian linguist and psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva was asked to contribute a brief sketch to a book of women's autobiography, she protested that it is nearly impossible to write about one's own life accurately: "The disturbing abyss between 'what is said' and undecidable 'truth' prevents me from being a good witness," she said (1987, 219). But, in spite of her discomfort, ultimately she agreed.

Latter-day Saint writers, perhaps especially women, might take her words about personal narrative as their creed:

Should I shy away from it? I think of Canto III of Dante's *Paradisio* where the writer, having had visions, hurries to push them aside for fear of becoming a new Narcissus. But Beatrice shows him that such a denial would be . . . a mistake [precisely] comparable to the narcissistic error. For if an immediate vision is possible and must be sought, then it is necessarily accompanied by visionary constructions that are imperfect . . . fragmentary, schematic. . . . Truth can only be partially spoken. And it is enough to begin. (1987, 220)

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# My Mormon Grandmother

*Kit G. Linford*

“Another girl.”  
Unheralded birth  
Beginning nothing.

Wee spurts of joy.  
“Service.” Never served.  
“Nothing important.”

Impacted years  
Endured day by day.  
Lonely. Not alone.

Sweet death’s release  
with nothing to end  
a life not lived.

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# Hazardous Duty, Combat Pay: Working in the Primary

*Versions of the following essays were delivered at the August 1991  
Sunstone Symposium, Salt Lake City, Utah.*

## Of Primary Concern

*Susette Fletcher Green*

THE FIRST CHURCH I REMEMBER ATTENDING as a child wasn't a church at all—it was the Odd Fellows Building in the heart of rundown, downtown Wilmington, Delaware. It was a spooky (at least to me) old three-story brick structure. Every Sunday morning, three or four members of our small branch would arrive early to sweep the floor, dump the overflowing ashtrays, and set up slat-backed wooden chairs.

This was twenty-five to thirty years before the consolidated church schedule; but because a number of our few members came to church from considerable distances—some even from neighboring states—we held our meetings back to back, much as we do now. I'm fairly certain the meetings lasted closer to two hours than three—I remember no agony of endless sitting. After our Sunday School opening exercises, we children, along with our leaders, threaded our way through a dark hallway and down an elevator to another floor of the building to have our meeting—I can't remember whether we called it Primary or Junior Sunday School.

Though probably no more than fifteen children hurried through that hallway, we looked forward to our time together and knew that we were very loved. I lived in terror that I would somehow become lost and wouldn't have dreamed of negotiating those halls without holding tightly to my teacher's hand. I was very young and remember little of those meetings, yet what I do remember seems significant to me now.

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One Christmas, Helen Candland Stark, a woman of legendary gifts and energy, wrote a wonderful Christmas play for the children to perform on the Sunday before Christmas. The story told of a little girl going to feed the animals in her father's stable on Christmas morning and finding the Christ child and Mary and Joseph. Somehow I had the good fortune to be chosen to act the part of the little girl. The details of the performance blur in my memory now, but I do remember that we practiced and practiced. I felt honored and loved to take part in it. We offered our performance with great awe and reverence. It may have been my first experience in feeling touched by holiness.

Another thing I remember is my younger sister, attiring herself in one of my mother's house dresses and high heels. She would strut and shuffle through the house with a worn purse slung over her arm, pretending she was "Sister Thompson," her Primary teacher. She adored that woman and fought to sit in her lap whenever she was near.

Our branch parties were held at the Stark's home—a Revolutionary War-era rock and frame house on five wooded acres. The time spent with other Mormon children was precious. My sisters and I had no LDS classmates in our grade school, but our little branch offered unfailing support and stability. My grandparents lived in far-off Utah, but one older couple, Leo and Bea Stirland, invited my sister and me to spend summer weekends on their Pennsylvania farm. As surrogate-grandparents, they willingly loved us and welcomed us into their home.

I have taken you on this rather long, nostalgic sidestep into my past because these very warm memories form the foundation of my vision of a church community. These memories and feelings have been with me for a lifetime. They enriched my childhood and gave me a love for the Church that is powerful and enduring, more powerful than any doctrinal concept or theological system I learned in a classroom. This love is something that I would like to pass on to my children and to other children in my ward.

In the middle of December 1988, I was asked to be the Primary president in my Salt Lake County ward. I was just cranking out the spring issue of *DIALOGUE*, my eight-year-old son had an undiagnosed lump on his left temple that would require surgery, Christmas was looming in front of me, and I was overwhelmed by anxiety. My husband, Fred, who had been asked to attend this "calling" meeting, carefully explained to the bishop, when asked his opinion, all the reasons why I was in no shape to take on the heavy responsibilities of a Primary president. He exaggerated nothing. The bishop, without responding directly to Fred, looked me in the eye and said, "My counselors and I have prayed about this, and we feel very strongly about this calling." I had never refused a call to serve, and I heard myself saying, "I'll do



my best,” much to my husband’s dismay. I’m sure he envisioned me with a nervous breakdown and our family in chaos.

But overwhelmed as I was at that moment, during the next few days I had a chance to think about what I had to offer to this calling, to the children of my ward. It was obvious that I didn’t have much time, with a family of seven to care for, a job with unrelenting, stress-producing publishing deadlines, and volunteer service commitments in local schools. I’ve always marveled at Primary presidents who create beautiful visual aids, dazzling bulletin boards, or cute little handmade items for children to take home. I have neither the time, patience, nor aptitude for those kinds of things—and now, with the Church budget changes, I don’t have the funds either. Neither did I seem particularly suited for a leadership position where I needed to delegate authority—I have a very hard time asking people to do things. I also become easily overwhelmed and discouraged. But what I did have were my memories of warm acceptance in my own childhood and a sure love of my my Heavenly Father and of his children. I believe that we have much to give children in our Church, and Primary is a good place for them to be.

More than anything, in those pre-Christmas musings, I wanted—and still want—the children to enjoy being in Primary, to feel good about themselves, to have fun. I want them to learn more than to just sit quietly in seemingly endless meetings. I want them to be involved. When they answer questions, I don’t want pat recitations: “Jesus,” “Heavenly Father,” “Be reverent.” I want the children to think and to know what they think. I want them to feel free to ask questions. They are our future as a church; we need to take good care of them. I want them to stay with this cause, to understand what they believe. I want them to laugh, to be naughty sometimes as children need to be, to listen when it’s time to listen, to be kind to each other, to want to serve. I want them to look back on their Primary years in my ward and know that they were loved.

This is not easy to accomplish. Children get restless. Children get bored. Some children are afraid to say anything, and others want to say too much. Some of them intimidate others. And, as much as I want to focus on the children, I am often so inundated in administrative details that I find little time to relate directly to the children. Counselors help, especially filling in where I am weak, but choosing counselors has not come easily for me, and I have worn out six in my two and a half years. I remember hearing Sharon Swenson speak about choosing counselors as a Relief Society president several years ago—writing names on a piece of paper, then driving up to Park City and knowing by the time she got there just who her counselors should be. I tried for similar inspiration but drew a blank. Finally, I made the

best choice I could — under the stress of having to staff almost an entire Primary right at Christmastime. Both women I requested accepted. The day after we were sustained, my second counselor had an emotional collapse and had to be hospitalized for several weeks. The bishop released her immediately. So much for my inspiration.

During the years I have served, some of the callings I felt most inspired about did not work out well, and some I had doubts about have been wonderful. I have learned that calling someone is usually not a good way to strengthen their activity. Often their commitment is less than it should be, and the children suffer. Over the years I have had support and love from counselors, and I have experienced stress and strain. I have come to appreciate steadfast workers who offer unwavering support and understanding. The two counselors I work with now are much younger than I am, with more time and energy, and we have bonded very well.

I wondered when I was called just how well I would work with the authority figures in my ward. I tend to be a little more outspoken than most of the women in my ward, and I bristle at even the suggestion of unrighteous dominion. I need not have been concerned. The bishopric counselor whose jurisdiction was the Primary let me know right from the start that he defined his job as serving us. He was a man of his word. Each Sunday he came into the Primary, often with a hug, and asked what we needed him to do. And he really meant it. He led songs, helped with Sharing Times, flipped pancakes and played with the children at activity days, and taught classes when we were short-handed. He was open-minded and easy to talk to, an incredible support and blessing. I always had the feeling that he would rather be in Primary than any other place in the building. In fact, he now works with the Young Men and Women's program, but I still find him sitting in the back in Primary from time to time.

About a year after I was sustained, our Primary was asked to oversee classes for the children at stake conference. I was totally unnerved at the prospect of keeping 100 to 150 children, many of whom I did not know, entertained for two hours. The logistics and organization required overwhelmed me. However, I dutifully prepared for the ordeal. The evening before the meeting, while I was out for the evening, someone from the stake phoned one of my counselors to inform her that the visiting Regional Representative would like to come speak to the children — five minutes before the meeting was to begin. Could we start our meeting a little early? he wondered. My counselor was irate. Five minutes before meeting time would be total bedlam. People arrive at stake conference anywhere from a half hour before the meeting to fifteen minutes after. Children would be flooding into the room. Keep-

ing them focused would be nearly impossible. She and her husband complained to the stake leaders but found no sympathy. She reached me with this bad news at 10:00 o'clock Saturday night.

The next morning, with the help of three teachers (my two counselors, the music people, and everyone else I had asked to help were late) I was frantically pinning name tags on what seemed like hundreds of small children when a member of the stake presidency brought in our Regional Representative. I'm not one to hide hysteria well, and I didn't even try. I was frustrated and out of patience with this man for imposing on us in this way, but there was no way that I could keep those feelings when he held my hand in his, looked lovingly into my eyes, and thanked me for helping to care for the Lord's children. His message to them, spoken gently through the chaos, was a message of love. He had not come to exert his authority; he had come to let the children know that they were important to him and to their Heavenly Father.

Let me relate one more surprising experience I have had dealing with priesthood members. My former bishop, a man I was personally very fond of, was quite authoritarian. Though he liked me, he often did not know what to make of me and my ideas. He believed in hierarchy, order, and going by the book. We had had a couple of uncomfortable confrontations. When I was sustained as Primary president, he accepted a calling to be the Blazer Scout leader. Almost immediately, as he got himself organized, he began telephoning me, asking my approval on this or that that he planned to do. Would I give my okay for an outing? Would I come with him to welcome a new Scout into the ward? Did I think such and such was appropriate? I was amazed. And I realized that I had misjudged the man. What I had seen as overbearing masculine muscle was really just a commitment to the order of a hierarchical system. It mattered not one whit to him that a woman was his "superior." He still wanted to go by the book, and in that book, my sanction and approval were important to him.

Of course, it is the teachers who spend the most crucial time with the children. I have been moved by the generosity of teachers who accept callings—not just because an authority figure has asked them or because the structure of the Church demands that they hold a calling but because they are committed to serving the children. Perhaps my most inspired calling was to ask my husband to teach Sunday lessons to the Blazers. He loves the boys, and they love him back. Not one of them complains now about coming to Primary. He has coaxed them to perform puppet shows, to sing (occasionally), to give serious Sharing Time and flag presentations, and to think in class. He urges them to think about what he tells them, and I often hear spirited

debate coming from their classroom. Of course, he feeds them liberally on the sly. I felt intense satisfaction when I looked back one Sunday to see one particularly introverted boy snuggling his head against Fred's shoulder.

In almost three years in my small ward, only one person has refused a Primary teaching job. That seems nothing short of miraculous to me. White-haired, newly married, single, childless, male, and female, my teachers surround both me and the children with love and support.

Something happened the other day that reminded me just how unusual this service is. I was talking to a good friend, a seventy-five-year-old woman who has been inactive since her youth. Her thirty-eight-year-old son was getting married. He and his new wife, who has teenagers from a previous marriage, have decided not to have children. He does not really regret this decision, though it means he will never father a child, because he is so used to doing things his own way—going here, going there, traveling, being responsible only for himself—that the thought of children is overwhelming.

I do not wish to pass judgment—we are all so different. But I was struck, because that kind of feeling, so prevalent in America right now, is so alien to my experience and the experience of most Church members. Serving others, serving children, is a focus for many of us. Indeed, some of us are so used to doing things for others that, when left to do something that we want to do, we are not sure what that might be. We don't really consider that we are giving up things to parent children or teach children. Our Mormon culture is solidly committed to children. It is hard to imagine life without them.

Let me give you another example. For several years, my husband's sister worked for a nanny agency in the Salt Lake valley. She spent a good deal of time talking on the phone to powerful, professional women, mostly residents of New York and the East Coast. From the stories she tells, many of these women have been incredibly successful in almost all phases of their lives—and they care about children or they wouldn't be having them. But what they want, when it comes to taking care of those children, is a Mormon nanny. That Mormonness is very important to them, my sister-in-law learned. From somewhere, they sense that we love and nurture children. They don't want our lifestyle, but they want Mormon women to care for their children. Of course, they are looking at our culture through rose-colored glasses, just as we sometimes look at theirs. We have our share of family problems. Statistics for child abuse within the Church are very close to the national average. We make lots of mistakes. And we sometimes take on more than we can handle. But within the very foundations of our faith is a strong, legitimate, enduring love for children.

Several months ago, my five-year-old daughter, Erin, and I spent some time at the North Visitors' Center on Temple Square. Ever since Erin was tiny, she has loved the Christus statue, and we had not visited it for a long time. We walked up the ramp to the statue only to find a rather large group of visitors crowded around a tour guide. Except for the guide's voice, the room was hushed, all attention focused on the statue. Erin tugged on my skirt. "Can I go up?" she asked. I hesitated. She would have to walk right through the group of listeners. She might distract the tour guide. Then I thought of the Savior: "Suffer the little children to come unto me and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God" (Mark 10:14). I nodded to Erin that she could go. She walked as close as she could to the statue and then looked up—a very long way for a small child. And then she just stood there for a very long time, minutes, looking at Jesus. She did not move. I watched her through misting eyes. I wondered if some of those visiting Temple Square for the first time did, too.

Erin knows Jesus, and she loves him. And she knows that he loves her. She does not feel alone; she feels part of his eternal family. Part of this she has learned at home, part through her prayers, and part at Primary. It is a gift to feel this way. In this troubled world, it is a tremendous gift. And I hope that if we do nothing else in our Church and in Primary, we will give each other and each other's children the sense that we are loved, that there is someone beside us as we walk over the burning coals of life. "Let us love one another:" we find in 1 John 4:7, "for love is of God; and every one that loveth . . . knoweth God" (1 John 4:7).

## Busier Than Thou: The Primary

*Dawn Hall Anderson*

MY CALL TO SERVE AS Primary president eight years ago came at a time in my life when I was especially—maybe even uniquely—unsuited for the job. I was thirty-six, married only four years. I was the ward-

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newsletter-editor type, overeducated and seriously introverted. Single most of my life, I had never before held a position of any sort in the Primary. I did have two children; but they were only one and three years old, produced in somewhat of a rush when I finally got married in graduate school. And I was very much a novice parent, unable to effectively discipline my own children, which was embarrassing to me since I had on a number of occasions sat behind families in Church and foolishly commented, "I will never let *my* children behave like that!" I received my just comeuppance and learned never to criticize people in authority for the unseemly behavior of their underlings, minions, or children—even God. I don't hold him as accountable for Stalins or Joseph Menges as I once did (or even for Church leaders who want to rid the Church of alternate opinions). My children have taught me that even though I'm bigger and smarter and The Boss, I don't know what they are going to think of doing next.

So at age thirty-six, I was frightened of children in large numbers, more than, say, three or four. Oh, and I was also two weeks pregnant, as it turned out. Frankly, I spent most of my very long year and a half as Primary president trying to avoid any direct contact with the children. I became a master delegator. I excelled at presidency meeting agendas, telephone calls, and orientation manuals.

Yet I did not accept the calling expecting to spend all my energy on administrative tasks.

We were newcomers to our Salt Lake ward, fresh from the graduate schools of Penn State University. Our new ward had an unusually high ratio of active to inactive—not to mention those stalwart souls, the overactive—members. During our one year there, I had had another calling for which I was perhaps better suited: assistant to the Table Decorations Chairman for the Relief Society luncheons. (We weren't chairwomen or chairpersons yet—not in my ward, anyway.) It was a nice, low-profile job; I mostly set tables and tied yarn bows on sixty to seventy napkins a month. After coming from a small ward where I had juggled four callings while teaching freshman literature and composition courses and struggling to keep up with graduate seminars, pregnancy, and preschoolers, I was ready to tie yarn bows on napkins into the millennium if the need arose. All my ambitions to be productive and creative had been temporarily burned out.

But our bishop was concerned that we would not feel part of our ward or that our spirits might atrophy without a chance to be of more significant service. And I believe he was right: I need to serve, and only the Church makes me stretch beyond my comfort zones. I was called to Primary, and my husband was called to the elder's quorum presidency. He was at the time a zealous new convert of three years

who compulsively signed up for the welfare farm assignments every time a list was passed. I still admire him for that.

I rarely volunteer, but I expected that I, too, would rise to the occasion of my calling. I'd been teaching freshman composition courses for five years and, after the first two weeks of stage fright each semester, I would settle into having fun with the classes. And I believed—without confirmation—that I must have been called by inspiration, since nothing else could explain it.

In the bishop's office that Wednesday evening when the call was extended, I knew that I would accept (I always do), but I asked for time to think about it so I wouldn't seem shallow and easy. Once home, I called my sister and another friend who were in Primary presidencies to ask for advice. And that is how I knew enough to say, "I think I can handle this calling, Bishop, if you can call two sharing time leaders and two Primary quarterly party specialists." In our ward, with ninety children on the Primary rolls, junior sharing time and singing were held while the CTR B on up to Blazers and Merrie Misses were in class, and then they switched for the second forty-minute period. Sacrament meeting came last, much to the parents' perpetual chagrin. I was warned that the weekly sharing times were the presidency's responsibility and took a lot of preparation since no manuals were forthcoming from Primary headquarters—only themes and an overly general General Resource Manual. Even worse than preparation time as far as I was concerned, sharing time meant regularly interacting with a large group of children—way more than three or four: children of many ages all at once, children who were not afraid I would give them a bad grade if they didn't behave, children who had *nothing to lose*, children *camouflaged* in dressy dresses and shiny shoes and shirts with collars, wanting desperately to be home doing something more fun and creative, like emptying out the garbage cans to see if there's something good in there, or making Comet-cleanser and hand-lotion footprint trails to lead to their secret hideouts, or lobbing jam-jar grenades out of the storage shelves onto the concrete basement floor—children like mine. (I told you they were out of control.)

My very supportive bishop agreed to all my requests, though I soon found out that bishop support does not mean member support. Primary service is a low-prestige, high-stress call that brings forth from otherwise sweet-tempered sisters panic responses such as, "I've already served my turn in the Primary. Let the young mothers take *their* turn now." Or as one woman said when I telephoned to welcome her to her new calling in the Primary, "Listen, Sister Anderson, I've accepted this call, but only because I've always told my own children never to turn down a calling. I'm not happy about it, and I want *you* to

know that. I'll only do it for six months—I told the bishop that—so start thinking of someone to replace me now.”

“Well, uh, thanks Sister Cromar and welcome to Primary,” I answered cheerily, on automatic pilot. (I do everything possible on automatic pilot when I'm pregnant.)

We did get two exceptional sharing time leaders. One was a recently divorced mother of two, Joanne Smith, who had just moved into our area from Detroit where she had taught art in the inner-city schools and lived to tell the tale. She was good. She specialized in managing our senior sharing time and Russell Baker, ringleader of the Blazer B rowdies. Russell was a master of preteen sarcasm and “Boy is this ever stupid” eyerolls. “It won't be so bad,” the outgoing president had encouraged me, after I sat in on her last week of conducting Primary to get oriented. “It won't be so bad. Russell's birthday is in April. Only six more months.”

A number of people told me it would “not be so bad”; but, you know, it was. It was true adversity for me. Even the second Christmas, after fifteen months to get used to it, I was noting in my journal how great it was to go visit in-laws for Christmas and escape Salt Lake and “the oppressions of Primary.” I was always afraid of innovating some new program or idea I'd heard about in stake meetings for fear I would not be able to keep up with it. I'd set the ball rolling and be crushed underneath it as the kingdom rolled forth. That scripture in Isaiah about the stone cut without hands and rolling forth to cover the whole earth always conjured up for me the opening scene from *Raiders of the Lost Ark*.

For instance, I heard of a ward that held a Back-to-Primary Night on a Sunday evening in January. Parents met their children's new teachers (or at least their teachers for the next month before burnout or a move from the ward). Teachers might even supply outlines of lesson topics from their manual's table of contents so parents could discuss topics at Sunday dinner with their children. (Yes, I was naive.)

I experimented: “Well, what did you learn about today in your class?” I asked my son Basil.

“She gave us some candy,” was his answer.

A Back-to-Primary open house sounded like a great idea, but we never had one. I could hear the immense granitic mass of the Primary thundering up behind me; it was already too near.

You can't get much out of a calling in the Primary if you are too busy to be with the children. And it is so easy not to be with the children. There is so much to keep track of, from Cub Scouts to quarterly activity days to neverending staffing problems. I have learned some things in retrospect. As I have read the New Testament along



with the rest of the Church this year, I find that I identify with the disciples. I am impressed at how often we hear of the disciples being chastised. “Do ye not yet understand?” and “Oh ye of little faith” are fairly common refrains in Christ’s remarks to them. Once he chastises Peter, “Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men” (Matt. 16:23). That is a rather stiff rebuke. No “Let me see, how do I put this tactfully” Junior League training evident here. I am grateful that the keepers of the oral tradition did not try to promote an image of Christ’s disciples as having been perfect in their understanding nor gloss over or omit their errors from the history, letting the Pharisees and Sadducees be the only ones to take the flack. Just as the disciples were easily distracted from what is really important, I as a Primary president was easily distracted from the real stuff of Primary.

The disciples seemed to think that Christ was there to set up a new kingdom on earth right away. Like the early Mormon Saints, many believed the Second Coming and the millennial order were imminent. Thus James and John were not thinking of the afterlife when they requested to sit on his right and left hand when Christ came in glory. They wanted to secure a position of importance in the new hierarchy. (In Matthew 20:20 the account has their mother urging them forward and asking the question in their behalf. She is omitted as the instigator from the Mark 10:37 account.) Christ first says to them, rather ironically I think, that they shall indeed drink from the same cup as he. He doesn’t mention it is a bitter cup. He then points out that such positions of power are not his, but his Father’s, to give anyway (Matt. 20:24).

The real issue is that they have misunderstood again. He tries to explain the distinction between the kind of power they are anticipating (the hierarchical or formal power of institutions where power resides in offices and where people have authority over one another by virtue of those offices) and the power of God, which is not the power to exert one’s will over another but to bless others through gentleness, meekness, love unfeigned (D&C 121:41).

Christ said to James and John, “Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them.” Exercising authority upon them: exercising authority *over* people and *upon* them is power as the world understands it. “But it shall not be so among you,” Christ goes on to explain to them, “but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister. And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant” (Mark 10:42–43).

The need for order and for a hierarchy in administrative matters clouds our understanding of this message that Christ kept repeating.

We sometimes confuse the Church's necessary administrative hierarchy for a tiered, pyramidal system of worthiness. For example, as Primary president I had initially asked the bishop for counselors who were experienced in Primary already and could help me figure out the program. He agreed, and I asked for one woman, a mother of eight, who had been a Primary president, ward and stake level, in Ohio. She was experienced. She was organized. She was gutsy. She accepted. I also suggested another woman in our ward who was in her sixties. She had been on the Primary or Relief Society General Board—I can't remember which—and also had served as a stake Primary president in one of the Salt Lake stakes. I wanted her expertise and advice, and I also hoped to draw other grandmotherly women into Primary. We are so often restricted to singles and to young, inexperienced mothers—or in my case, old, inexperienced mothers. However, this elderly woman refused, claiming that she was “expecting a stake call.” I assumed that perhaps children made her nervous, too, and this was simply a desperate spur-of-the-moment excuse like, “Gee, I'd *really* like to, but I think I'm going to be . . . a staghorn beetle next week.” “Well okay, Sister Kafka. Maybe next time.”

However, her excuse implied to my bishopric counselor, who was disgusted, that any stake call pre-empted in importance work on the front lines and as a mere counselor in a, let's face it, low-status ward organization like the Primary.

Her comment led me to wonder: the message of the Church is always that we should seek to be humble and serve in whatever calling we are given, since all callings are opportunities for significant service. Do we actually believe this, or do we believe that spiritual giants rise through the administrative ranks of the Church hierarchy? Christ warns us not to be too certain: the order of heaven may be a great reversal, “many that are first shall be last; and the last first” (Mark 10:31). If spiritual growth comes from blessing people's lives one on one, those in the front lines of Church service may be in a much better position to grow and enlarge their souls and not be afflicted by pride of office or insulated by layers of bureaucracy from loving relationships with those who most need and benefit from our love.

Remember when the disciples, always seeming to seek the principle, always wanting—as don't we all—to be in the right, thought they had a sure thing when they criticized the woman who anointed Christ's head with a box of “very precious ointment.” “But when the disciples saw it, they had indignation, saying, ‘To what purpose is this waste? For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor’ ” (Matt. 26:7–13). In the chapter immediately preceding is recorded the powerful parable defining who should inherit the king-

dom: "For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat. . . . Inasmuch as ye do it unto the least of these, ye do it unto me" (Matt. 25:42- 45). All Christ's sermons on not turning away from the sinners and the poor and the socially outcast emphasized the give-to-the-poor commandment, which the disciples must feel quite certain they understand at this point. Yet they are simply building a counter set of laws and rules and being as self-justifying in their application of principles as the scribes and Pharisees. They wrongly seek to use obedience to a set of rules as a way of ensuring their places in another kingdom, another status structure.

Christ's concern is not with who is right or wrong according to law but with the individual heart and its motives.

He cares about the woman and her gift of love, and when he hears that the disciples are lecturing the woman, he intervenes. "When Jesus understood it, he said unto them, Why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good work upon me" (Matt. 26:10). He does not want her to be criticized for her offering. Perhaps it *would* have been more useful to sell the ointment and give the money to the poor, but why reject her offering of love? Instead he affirms her act, her choice, her feelings. "Whosoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world," he says, "there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial to her" (Matt. 26:13). He is always life- rather than law-affirming.

Yet this must be frustrating to the disciples, who are being schooled in a new understanding of religion, power, and law that is revolutionary in a way they do not yet understand. They seek to depose the old rulers, yet inhabit the same building. They do not yet understand that there is to be no building. The scaffoldings of power will remain as organizational tools (order and reporting are necessary and important); but the power to change lives is personal, informal, and resides in the servants, not the masters, the last not the first, those without status, those in the front lines of hazardous duty in the kingdom.

Let me say on behalf of these wonderful men, the disciples, that they were teachable. They did not omit these incidents from the record. They did not insist on a "faith-promoting" version of history that kindly skipped over their mistakes. They did not *yet* understand, but clearly these men who followed Christ were determined to understand. And they were ultimately more interested in truth than in their own vanity as they sought understanding.

Like the disciples, I as a Primary president did not get the message. I continued to feel that the oil I was pouring upon the heads of the children was the waste of a valuable offering. I missed this oppor-

tunity to bless the children's lives. I did learn how to organize, and I served the Church by setting up and keeping in motion the structure where others could teach the children and learn to love them. But I missed being part of that, and that is where the real rewards of service in any Church program come—in learning to love the people we serve. Only as we learn to love them do we have an impact on their lives. The irate woman who planned to leave the Primary in six months never did. She fell in love with her CTR B class and stayed on.

As I mentioned, I did learn how to delegate handsomely and generously, especially during the nine months of pregnancy when I was too nauseated to care and the six months after that when I was too tired to care. I was only energetically meddlesome and creative for about four or five months. This, at least, proved a blessing: during those four or five months I made enough enemies to feel truly meshed in my ward. You don't really become part of a group, a ward community, unless you've offended a few people. If everyone approves of you, you're holding back your all, not risking anything in the relationship. Being Primary president allowed me to stomp on a few toes, make some serious errors of judgment, and really feel a part of my new ward family.

I also learned what it is like to be in a position of authority: how little control you really have compared to how much responsibility you are awarded for whatever happens. This works in positive as well as the more obvious negative ways. One of the children's sacrament meeting programs, "Turn the Hearts of the Children," was delightful, thanks to family portraits done by the children under the supervision of our Detroit-trained art specialist. We labeled and displayed the artwork at the end of the meeting on an overhead projector while the children sang "Genealogy I Am Doing It," their favorite song that year. Thanks to our relentlessly energetic music leaders, the singing was loud and exuberant, the juvenile equivalent to harmonious. Everyone enjoyed seeing the child's eye view of his or her own family. Humor was scripted into the program that year instead of coming only from the children's charming mistakes, always my favorite part of a children's program, and the children's speaking parts had been coached to perfection by parents. But I received compliments—"best year ever," "you are so creative." I basked graciously in the warmth of these misdirected accolades while realizing that when someone says, "I can't take credit for this," they are not being modest. They are being honest. And I wish that when Primary erupted in irreverence that day when the stake leaders were visiting, I could have modestly said, "I can't take credit for this either. I never intended them to have so much fun today."

## Jesus Wants Me for . . .

*Lavina Fielding Anderson*

WE LIVE IN A WARD on the fringes of Salt Lake City's central city neighborhood. Demographically, the ward contains a core of people who began young married life in their homes and are now slowly disappearing, a high percentage of transient young couples beginning families, and waves of people who appear briefly in search of welfare. It is ethnically and economically mixed. Paul and I moved into this ward, predictably as newlyweds, and I began working in its Primary in 1980, first as organist for three years and then as the Sunbeam teacher from 1983 until February of 1991. After eight years in that position, I was again called to be the organist, which is my current position.

By my third year, I had been in Primary longer than any other officer or teacher there but one. By my fifth year, *no* one, except some of the children, had been in Primary longer than I. I have worked in my ward's Primary for eleven consecutive years. And, speaking from the front-line trenches, I have a firm opinion about Primary.

It's this: Hierarchy may be an efficient and rational way to run organizations, but it inevitably works to the advantage of those on top—not to the advantage of those on the bottom. And children are on the very bottom of the Church hierarchical ladder.

Hierarchy means status, and children have no status. Oh, they have status as statistics (80 percent attendance in class) or as numbers ("You have how many children?") or as potentialities—as future missionaries, as future priesthood holders, as future mothers, as future tithe-payers. This attitude is so commonplace as to be a cliché requiring no documentation; but Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, speaking at the April 1991 conference, gave typical expression to it:

These little ones are like seedlings in a plant nursery. All look much the same in the beginning, but each one will grow to become independent and unique.

Saying that three-year-olds "all look much the same in the beginning" could not possibly have been uttered by anyone who has actually dealt with real three-year-olds.

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Parents and teachers should see beyond the little girl in pigtails and should not be misled by the ragged little boy with a dirty face and holes in the knees of his pants.

This statement may possibly be a variation of the “blessings-on-thee-little-man-barefoot-boy-with cheeks-of-tan” view of American boyhood. I am mystified, however, by the equation of feminine pigtails with masculine dirty faces and ragged trousers. Dirt and rags are evidence of neglect. Anyone wishing to neglect a child, however, will not undertake a project requiring the skill and patience that pigtails demand. Only love produces pigtails.

True teachers and leaders see children as they may become. They see the valiant missionary who will one day share his testimony with the world and later become a righteous father who honors his priesthood. The inspired teacher sees pure and beautiful mothers and future presidents of the Relief Society, Young Women, and Primary, even though today they may be girls who giggle and chatter on the back row in the classroom.

I think it is significant that Elder Ballard does not see becoming a Primary *teacher* as among these honored potential roles.

Sometimes people say, “Well, boys will be boys!” Not so—boys will be men, and almost before we know it. To see our children grow, succeed, and take their places in society and in the Lord’s kingdom is an eternal reward worth any inconvenience or sacrifice. (1991, 78–79)

This stress on the potential of children—and hence the necessity for deferred gratification in dealing with children—speaks volumes about the view of children as unimportant for their *present* individuality, the rewards of *present* interactions with them, and the devaluation of the *present* contributions that children make to Church. Children are valued as potential adults—not as *children*.

Think for a moment about status in a ward. Any priesthood quorum, no matter how dysfunctional, has status because men are involved in it. The Relief Society, although its members are women, has status because it consists of adult women representing other adult women. Teenagers have considerably more status than children because the most important person in the ward—the bishop—has been institutionally assigned to interview them quarterly and supervise, however indirectly, their activities. Furthermore, teenagers are not passive consumers of religion. Teenagers can and do drop out of activity and get in spectacular trouble. (Children aren’t passive either; they’re just helpless.)

But the Primary consists of women representing children—a recipe for institutional forgetfulness. Wards differ widely; bishoprics and Primary presidencies also differ widely. I do not mean my remarks as

a blanket indictment of all wards nor even of my own Primary over the past eleven years. In fact, our Primary is currently in better shape than it's ever been. We have a stellar president—energetic, clear in her goals for the children, creative, organized, loving, and gifted at communicating with children. Five of the bishop's seven children are still in Primary, and his wife replaced me as Sunbeam teacher.

But I want to speak out against the curious blind spot that Primary occupies institutionally. I have long felt the pain of what hierarchy does to women in the Church, but I have never heard anyone speak about the damage hierarchy inflicts on children. Ideally, Primary exists to teach our children gospel principles in a loving setting that will reinforce the home.

But what are the *institutional* purposes for the Primary? Obviously, the institution needs to socialize the children so that they will grow up to be dependable members of the Church—the “future value” function described by Elder Ballard. This instructional function, equally obviously, will best be met by age-grouped classes, teachers, and manuals. These requirements demand meeting spaces, budget, scheduling, and staffing, all of which involve some action on the part of the ward's male leaders. During my years in Primary, our ward has had five bishoprics. The bishops have all been sincere, committed, kindly men who have given a very tough job their best effort. I don't believe that they were unsupportive, and I willingly concede that the Primary presidency's perspective may be far more positive than mine; but from my position in the trenches, not one of those bishops gave Primary more than cursory attention aside from periodic visits by the counselor in charge and turning over one sacrament meeting per year for the Primary program.

I have few complaints about the meeting spaces and no information about budget allocations, but the hierarchy's management of scheduling and staffing I find more problematic. Given the block program, the Primary schedule is set not by the needs of the children but by the needs of the other ward members for child care. Primary lasts an hour and fifty minutes—not for the convenience of its teachers and certainly not because of the needs of the children but for the convenience of the other ward members. (Primary may be less painful for the children than many alternatives, but that's a coincidence.) This problem, manifested in our Primary, stems from the ungainly and inhumane compromise between the original organizational need to condense the Sunday meeting schedule that produced the block schedule and the fierce insistence for institutional representation that kept the Sunday School's turf more or less intact, but which required a three-hour block instead of a two-hour one. In our ward, three capable men are prevented from

doing more needed work by being designated the Sunday School presidency. Their job seems to consist of staffing the adult and youth classes, and conducting the ridiculous veriform appendix of song practice, a ten-minute meeting sutured to its unwilling host, sacrament meeting.

Staffing, however, is where the institutional rubber really hits the rocky road of reality. During my eight years as a Sunbeam teacher, I can remember nine presidencies. The problems of continuity, training, and experience are obvious, just from the math. Given the demographics of our ward, staffing would be a problem anyway; but I remember one gruesome week when the Primary president conducted, led the singing, did sharing time, and taught the Merrie Miss class. One counselor was covering the nursery, the other counselor was absent, and the secretary hadn't come either. (We had four secretaries within one three-month period.) I was teaching Sunbeams but was also pressed into service as organist.

It was not uncommon during one period for two sisters who were teaching a class of about eight children and a class of fourteen children respectively to simply not show up. I kept track one winter, and they averaged such unannounced absences one Sunday a month, or 25 percent of the time. The overburdened presidency's solution was to smile apologetically at the teachers of the classes just older and younger and ask, "Would you mind if the children came in with you today?" The presidency thus enabled the irresponsible teachers and burdened the responsible ones with the consequences. The responsible teachers also, by rising to the emergency, became enablers for a passive presidency. I was not surprised when these responsible teachers were gone by summer. When I asked the president why the two notoriously unreliable teachers were not replaced, she answered helplessly: "It's so hard to find teachers and get them approved."

She was saying no more than the truth. When my husband, Paul, a new counselor in the bishopric, went out on his first assignment to find a Primary teacher, six women straight in a row turned him down for a variety of reasons. They didn't like Primary. It was too hard. It isolated them from the other women in the ward. They didn't like children. They did not say, but I'm sure some felt, that it was also not a very "important" calling. I realize that Primary has no monopoly on teaching problems or inadequate staffing, but I suspect its low status in the hierarchy makes staffing particularly troublesome. Furthermore, many adults do not relate well to children, can't get them to behave, and don't know how to teach children effectively.

According to my observations, the best teachers in our Primary are parents concerned about their own children. That's why both Paul and I are currently in the Primary. I started teaching Sunbeams when



Christian entered the class at age three. It was an enormous class—fourteen children. The presidency said they couldn't divide the class because there weren't enough meeting rooms. It was obvious that the teacher, a sweet, ineffectual woman with an infant daughter, was completely overwhelmed. Her idea of a fun activity—to give her her due, it *was* an activity prescribed in the manual—was tossing a beanbag into the lap of each child in turn and asking a question like, "How can you help at home?" This activity might have worked with four or five children. The fourteenth, of course, was long gone by the time she got to the end of the row.

After the first visit, I announced that I would be her assistant. She didn't want me, but she was too sweet to say no. As matters turned out, she became pregnant and, while she was paralyzed with nausea, I told the president that I'd just help out for awhile. Before the baby was born, the president who had accepted my offer was released, and the teacher had moved from the ward; but I stayed relentlessly on—self-called and never set apart during the entire eight years. I liked teaching Christian's class and enjoyed a new set of Sunbeams at the year's end while he and his thirteen colleagues stumped off into Star A's.

But I watched Christian's progress for the next few years with increasing misgivings. Many times, I quietly took Christian back into my Sunbeam class as he progressed through Star A and Star B, CTR A, CTR B, and Valiant A. With one exception, I considered his teachers unsatisfactory. Many of them were totally inexperienced. More seriously many more were chronically unprepared. And most of all, there were *many*. Only once did he end a year with the same teacher who had started. In one case, his class had a series of substitutes for literally months. He became increasingly bored and actually begged to come back to Sunbeams. Talks with the presidency and the bishopric produced expressions of concern but no better teachers. During his Valiant A year, I bought the manual and gave him a choice. If his teacher was there, he could stay for class or go home to read the lesson during class time and talk about it with us at dinner. If she wasn't there, he could come with me or go home, as he chose. I explained this family policy to the Primary president. "Oh," she said vaguely, "I don't think the other parents have a problem." After this had gone on for months, Paul finally resigned from the high council to teach Christian's Valiant B class. I have a hard time believing that such teaching incompetence would have been tolerated in, say, the teachers' quorum or that parents would have been so indifferent.

On another occasion, the whole ward was anxious to welcome a young woman who was marrying a member of our ward. She was bright, pleasant, and musically gifted. Eight weeks—two full months—

before the wedding, the Primary president asked the bishop to call this woman as Primary chorister. "Oh no," he frowned. "The Relief Society will want her." And the Relief Society got her. She conducted the Relief Society's opening song, closing song, and practice song for a sum total of no more than six minutes while, next door, the Primary was faltering through opening, closing, reverence, rest, activity, and practice songs for about thirty minutes with an underqualified and unimaginative chorister.

Our nine Primary presidents have all been conscientious and well meaning, but their interest in the job and their personal capabilities have varied widely. Several struggled with their callings when they were also struggling with heavy personal burdens. The marriages of two presidents in a row—one right after the other—disintegrated, but they struggled gamely with their children, work, unhappy home situations, *and* the Primary until they moved out, simultaneous with the divorces. One struggled with a nonmember husband who resented her activity; I haven't seen her in church since she was released. A fourth was trying to sell the house and take care of four children by herself, including a handicapped child, so she could join her husband who had already moved to another state. My point is this: these women already had more than full-time jobs managing their personal lives. If the Primary offered spiritual comfort or a sharing sisterhood or support for these burdens, I might have felt differently. Perhaps their counselors supplied these emotional needs. But from my perspective, sitting with the Sunbeams, I saw them struggling to maintain the facade that all was well while they became more drawn and desperate, resorted to reading stories out of *The Friend* or showing videotapes for sharing time, and frequently just didn't come when it wasn't their turn to conduct. Everyone suffered with them, even when we didn't know the cause—especially the children.

Not all wards would experience the same staffing problems. I hope most would not. But in addition to the hierarchy's overriding concern with the bureaucratic requirements of running a program, hierarchy causes the children to suffer in yet another way. Because Primary is on Sunday and is a religious meeting, it is often conducted along the organizational model of an adult religious meeting. The children are forced to sit still, often doing little beside listening for long periods of time. They are frequently frantic with fatigue and fidgety with boredom. They are hungry and thirsty. Yet they are scolded for not being "reverent" and are told that "Jesus is very sad at what you're doing."

Having docile, passive children is a hierarchical value. It is not a religious value, nor is it a human value. I see nothing in the New

Testament to indicate that Jesus expects children—or adults either—to be passive. He was on the move constantly—striding along the roads, responding to a call for help, checking the sycamore trees for under-sized tax collectors—and it seems pretty clear to me that the people who benefited from his teachings were those who kept close to him by moving, even if they had to do some leg-stretching and panting.

This organizational model also assumes that listening is learning. Concern with following the manual leads to the distressing spectacle of teachers standing in front of the class, reading mechanical stories from the manual and asking equally mechanical questions from the “discussion” list. But what are the unintended messages that the children learn from these situations?

Church is boring.

My teacher doesn't like me enough to come every week.

Sitting still is being reverent.

Jesus loves me when I'm quiet.

Learning about the gospel means listening to someone tell me things that are boring, tedious, and irrelevant.

I have been dismayed and distressed to see how faithfully children model this adult behavior. Short talks presented by the older children nearly always consist of material mumbled and mispronounced from *The Friend* and even manuals. As a final point, the hierarchical domination of Primary is blinding because it trains adults to see the needs of the hierarchy rather than the needs of the children, those the hierarchy theoretically serves. All too often now, Primary is a place to warehouse children while the adults do adult things. What if we stood the problem on its head and, instead of asking, “What does the organization need?” asked instead, “What is best for the children?” Then Primary would be a present joy and a genuine investment in the future—a place to eliminate many of the problems that receive expensive and time-consuming attention during adolescence. Each Primary worker probably has a wish-list, but here are some items on mine of a child-centered Primary:

1. The Primary president would be the ward's best executive.
2. We'd have a schedule that included vigorous physical activity for ten minutes or so right after sacrament meeting instead of another twenty minutes of sitting still.
3. Teaching candidates would be energetic, creative, *experienced* teachers. The Primary president would have her pick of the ward. Sweet young brides, shy converts, or people who are allowed to be undependable in their attendance and erratic in their performance can also grow from Primary callings, but the focus would remain on the children, rather than on the maturing adult. Teachers would be

spiritually mature people who would really love the children—as children, not as potential missionaries.

4. The best music person in the ward would be the Primary chorister. It is my firm opinion that the chorister is a much more significant person than the presidency in terms of impact on the children. Ironically, over the past eight years, our three best choristers were all “promoted” to Primary president, again, a clear imposition of hierarchical values upon the organization rather than a concern with the needs of the children. However, Paul is the current chorister; and since men are prohibited from serving in the Primary presidency, we may be safe for a few months.

5. Obviously, teachers would be trained in and encouraged to adapt the manuals. Discussions, role-play, activity, and other, more engaging, forms of teaching than lecturing would be stressed.

6. Parents would no longer be allowed to indulge their horrifying level of indifference about the quality of teaching in their children’s classroom. A rotating schedule of visits or other involving activities might be one solution.

7. The nursery would instantly stop being a free child care facility, to be replaced by a co-op arrangement that would get parents of both genders involved and keep them involved in Primary for the next nine years.

8. The counselor in the bishopric should, in my opinion, be the standby substitute teacher whenever a teacher doesn’t show up. I think this would create new motivation to find reliable, competent teachers. Similarly, if a classroom is inadequate, that class should meet in the bishop’s office until a satisfactory solution is discovered.

9. The sacrament meeting program should be abolished in favor of having one class each month sing and give short talks in sacrament meeting.

10. And finally, Primary should involve more men. My ultimate hope for the Church is to see the dissolution of the rigid, wrongful, limiting hierarchy that creates as many problems as it solves. However, realistically, hierarchy is quite clearly a function of the current system. So let’s use it! I think that the status of Primary and attention it receives will improve in direct proportion to the number of men involved in it. More men should be called as teachers, as officers, as nursery leaders, and, ideally, to the presidency.

The first class that I taught as Sunbeams will graduate within the next year. What I wanted to teach them, and all my Sunbeams, more than anything else was that Primary was a good place to be, a place where they were loved. I hope they felt that as three-year-olds. I don’t know if they did, or if they still do. But those years made a big difference

to me. In a culture that is simultaneously sentimental about children and dismissive of them, I hope to sense the dimensions of Jesus' unsparing challenge, "Except ye be converted and become as little children. . . ."

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## Making Sense of Suffering

*Marilyn Damron White*

MY TALE BEGINS IN 1983—the year I turned thirty years old. It was definitely prime time. I had (and still do have) an incredibly fulfilling marriage with my husband, Lee. Our poverty-stricken years in graduate school with very small children were dimming, our three girls were getting settled into day care and school routines, and I was starting a part-time but seemingly glamorous and progressive job-share situation with my sister in the financial department of Huntsman Chemical Corporation.

But our 1984 Christmas letter was a catalogue of disasters. Our usually stalwart Subaru threw a rod and needed a rebuilt engine, new carburetor, and alternator. Total bill—over \$2,000. Lee had a positive job interview with the American Red Cross. However, after keeping us dangling for three months, their final answer was, “We’re hiring someone else.” After nine months, my boss told me he needed more continuity and fired me. And I spent my thirty-first birthday enduring three days of Demerol-induced hallucinations in the hospital before doctors finally operated and discovered that my appendix had been ruptured for those days. However, the real upheaval came in December of 1983 when the right half of my face became numb. When the pins-and-needles feeling hadn’t subsided by the fifth day, I pulled out the household medical dictionary, compared symptoms with a friend who had had Bell’s Palsy, and went to a neurologist. In brief, Dr. Michael Goldstein told me, “No, if you had Bell’s Palsy, the muscles in your face would be drooping. You may have one of four things: a

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brain tumor, an aneurism, multiple sclerosis, or something undefinable. But my guess is that you have MS. You should hope for MS. It's better than the alternatives. Your symptoms will get worse before they get better, but they will eventually get better. You may have a series of diagnostic tests that will cost between \$800 and \$900, or you may go home and do nothing until you experience another symptom—maybe years from now."

I placed a shaky phone call to Lee, and we decided to have the tests. A CAT scan was done immediately. After a short wait while a few doctors conferred, Dr. Goldstein told me they were going to do it over again because of "irregularities" in the read-out. This I assumed was a euphemism for "brain tumor," which made CAT number two emotionally wrenching.

Fortunately, the CAT scan ruled out a brain tumor or aneurism, but the neurologist's original suspicion of MS seemed more likely. I knew little about MS—except I surmised its victims would likely end up in a wheelchair like a woman I'd met in childhood who ultimately was unable to care for herself. Those prospects scared me more than a brain tumor, which I thought could just be removed, so I was baffled that MS would be more desirable on a list of "Top Ten Diseases You'd Most Prefer If the Choices Were Limited."

Lee had excused himself from his weekly meeting as second counselor in the bishopric to be home when I arrived after the scan, but he immediately suggested we go over to the ward and have the bishopric join him in giving me a priesthood blessing. I admit some minor trepidation in receiving a priesthood blessing. A few years of feminist consciousness-raising had left some pent-up anxiety regarding exactly what the priesthood was, how it differed from basic faith, but, more important, how I as a woman interacted with priesthood. But anxiety over probable MS far outweighed priesthood anxiety, and I wanted a miracle—not MS. If I just had enough faith to be healed, my next doctor visit would reveal no symptoms and the doctor would shake his head in amazement. I was sure I could muster enough faith. Hadn't I glued minuscule mustard seeds on 3 X 5 cards for Primary classes with the verse from Matthew 17:20 typed neatly below, telling the children with firm conviction that if they just had enough faith, nothing was impossible to the Lord? I envisioned retelling my own miracle countless times before spellbound audiences.

Soon after the blessing, I recorded in my journal feelings and even words that came into my mind during the blessing. Those words have alternately aggravated and sustained me. Essentially Lee said that I was ill, but the doctors would not be able to diagnose what I had. I remember that the thought, hope, impression kept repeating itself in



my mind, “You don’t have MS. You don’t have MS.” In retrospect I can see how easy it was to make this leap in logic—if doctors couldn’t diagnose what I had, it must not be MS. Thus, I felt assured what I had was on the doctor’s “undefinable” list. But I was nagged by the words that came into my mind during the blessing—“Even though you do not have MS, *if you do have it* or any other chronic illness in your lifetime, it will not destroy the essence of who you are, and the Lord will always provide comfort and peace—whatever the circumstances.” I was very reassured though somewhat baffled by the phrasing, “if you do have it.” I *knew* from that very blessing I didn’t have it! Looking back I realize I mixed a heavy dose of wishful thinking with the deep whisperings of my faith.

The numbness on the right side of my face and head did, indeed, get much worse and more unpleasant, as the doctor predicted. And, as Lee predicted, doctors were unable at the time to pinpoint a diagnosis. The ordeal was definitely frightening, especially when I had a few days of nauseating double vision and dizziness. But at the height of the sickness, when I couldn’t even navigate by myself down a hallway to the diagnostic area, I tested out normally on an audio-visual test for MS called “Evoked Potential.” I will never forget sitting with Lee, waiting for the test results. My head was spinning so rapidly that I could only squint at Dr. Goldstein as he strode in wearing his white coat to announce rather loudly to a room full of people and with unabashed frustration, “You have passed the Evoked Potential test. I don’t know what the hell is wrong with you.” It struck me as morbidly funny—black humor in action. And it was the first time in my life I understood that doctors were mere mortals—that they couldn’t always make everything better and were just as frustrated as I was.

Completely baffled that I passed the test, Dr. Goldstein still wanted to do a spinal tap for more definitive results. Because I was so sure a spinal tap would be unnecessary torture when the Spirit had already told me that I didn’t have MS, I declined the procedure. I have since discovered that even the spinal tap may not have been conclusive. Dr. Goldstein’s last comments, after assuring me the symptoms would diminish, were, “What you don’t know won’t hurt you. But if you ever experience similar symptoms, you should come back for the spinal tap.”

With some faint, residual numbness on the right side of my face which has lasted to this day, my life gradually returned to some semblance of normalcy. In fact, I went right from employment at Huntsman Chemical to my “job-ette” (as Lee dubbed it) for about three years as the six-hour-a-day executive secretary for Jim Kimball and Bob Guymon at Kimball Travel Consultants. The salary was good and the unequaled travel perks—to Washington, D.C., California,

Vancouver, the Carribean, London, and Switzerland—are now etched in my memory. However, mostly because of deregulation of the airlines, the days of specialized travel agencies were fast drawing to a close. Jim merged his agency with one that has since merged again. I was lost in the shuffle but kind of happy to be home with my family more.

It doesn't take long for financial realities to catch up, though, and Linda Newell (for whom I had typed the *Mormon Enigma* manuscript) took me under her wing again for part-time employment during Linda and Jack's editorship of DIALOGUE. It also seemed like a good time to have one more child. And, even though I was six months pregnant during the summer of 1987, Jack Newell offered me temporary full-time employment at the Liberal Education department at the University of Utah.

After David's birth in September, I set up shop again at home. I replaced my electronic typewriter with an IBM computer and a laser jet printer. A new baby and freelance word processing for attorneys, engineers, students, and, of course, DIALOGUE kept life at its usual frenetic pace. However, the most serious crisis of my faith was looming, when, at the end of January 1988, when David was four months old, I began to lose feeling in my right leg from the knee down. I went into an emotional tailspin. If Lee and I had known that I had MS, we would not have considered another pregnancy. (Within three to six months after a birth the likelihood of an MS attack or exacerbation increases, while during pregnancy most women improve.)

This time, medical technology had a new diagnostic tool, Magnetic Resonance Imaging. The MRI scan confirmed MS on February 5, my second daughter Shannon's eleventh birthday. Lee and I sat on the bleachers at the Cottonwood Complex, watching her ice skate with her friends and reading brochures about MS. We knew that our lives would be dramatically altered. While there is controversy about the cause, MS is a disease of the central nervous system where the fatty coating of insulation around a nerve cell (the myelin sheath) is gradually destroyed—causing paralysis, numbness, and/or impaired sight, speech, hearing, and balance. A demyelinated nerve fiber cannot carry impulses to and from the brain. Every week in the United States an average of two hundred people are newly diagnosed with MS.

According to the literature and my current neurologist, Jack H. Petajan, patients face one of three futures: (1) about one-third experience exacerbations but recover completely and retain a high level of function, (2) about one-third do not recover completely from exacerbations and acquire neurological deficits over time, and (3) in about one-third, the disease progresses slowly without remission and may

increase in severity as well. Also, exacerbations decrease over time: two to three episodes per year during the first one to three years and less than one per year by the fifth year. The long-term course of the disease is established by three to five years in most people, and a young female has the best prognosis for recovery even though twice as many women as men contract MS. In males the disease is more likely to be progressive. Despite some lingering neurological deficits, it appears I am in lucky group number one, but at the time I was unaware of my ultimate providence.

For the next five months, I cycled through the symptoms. Most of them lasted about six weeks, a new one emerging just as another was subsiding. Here are some excerpts from a brief medical history my mother encouraged me to record as soon as I felt well enough. Since manifestations of this disease are never the same, I don't list these symptoms as a guide or as a comparison to anyone else but simply to provide a sense of what transpired in my case:

February 6-7—Major bout with dizziness and vision distortions—most comfortable on floor (as opposed to water bed); even slightest movement of eyes nauseating. Overwhelming fatigue—sleeping 10-14 hours per day.

Feb. 11—Still trying to complete an Honors Fine Arts Liberal Education class this quarter. Went to *Giselle* with Shannon for extra credit, but holding onto handrail and very dizzy and weak. Stupid thing to do. Did not drive after that night for three months. Feeling guilt about inactivity as Young Women's first counselor, but unable to let calling go just yet.

Feb. 18—Left ear starts ringing. By the 28th both ears ringing loudly during the day at a constant high pitch. Fatigue is so overwhelming, though, can usually block the ringing enough to sleep.

Feb. 25—Called an ear, nose, throat physician who informed me coldly over the phone, "MS patients can go deaf." First time I realized I was probably losing a portion of my hearing. Handwriting shaky and hands trembling at computer.

March 15—Went with Lee to see *Death of a Salesman* [that Lib Ed credit was hard to give up] but left after first act because of hearing distortions. Shooting pains down back, arms, and legs. Lee leaves town for three days. Assured him I'd do OK and call relatives for help if needed but spent scary nights as equilibrium still poor and David still nursing but not sleeping real well.

April 1—Mom comes from California. Must hold onto people to move.

April 8—Slurred speech begins. Now in addition to referring to me as "Sidewinder," we laugh through our tears as family mimics the unintelligible syllables.

I gradually improved over the summer, and even though I haven't had any major exacerbations in the last four years, I constantly have what I've dubbed "gentle reminders" (and one not so gentle) that the illness still lurks. And, I've lost a slight percentage of normal capacity in specific areas that were affected in 1988—vision, hearing, walking

(I drag my right leg after about twenty minutes of walking or light exercise). I also have poor balance and general klutziness.

This disease is particularly insidious, though, because it looms like a coiled snake biding its time before striking. One of the most poignant descriptions of MS I've ever read was written by an unidentified woman in Bernie Siegel's book, *Peace, Love and Healing*. She compares MS to "an inactive volcano. . . . At first it sits there blowing just enough smoke to be irritating. And I feel safe during these times. When the main eruption begins, I want to flee and get off the island. [But] there is no place to escape to" (1989, 54). I know that fear, that frustration, that terrifying helplessness of not knowing what damage will be done or how long it will last.

Two episodes have affected what sense I can thus far make of what happened. The first was a comforting experience with prayer, which came the day after the diagnosis was confirmed—when I was still asking, "Why me?" instead of "Why not me?" Not only was my right leg completely numb, but the dizziness and loss of equilibrium had begun. I was alone at the kitchen table—confused, depressed, and ill. I prayed that I would be able to cope with whatever came but wanted some relief, too—or at least an indication that the Lord had not abandoned or betrayed me. When I finished the prayer, an unusual sensation filled my body, and I felt the symptoms lift. My leg felt whole, and the dizziness stopped. I walked around the room normally for a moment. While I was marveling that this had happened, an even stronger impression consumed me. I sat back down. Somehow, intuitively but inexplicably, I knew that this absence of symptoms would only last for a few minutes, that it was strictly a gift to let me know the Comforter was near. I felt a caution, too, that almost bordered on rebuke, that I should not ask inappropriately. When we agreed to come into mortality, we accepted that conditions would not always be easy. I wept and silently said another prayer of gratitude for the knowledge that the Lord was with me no matter what I experienced in this life. In only about five minutes the symptoms returned.

I have analyzed—perhaps even overanalyzed—this experience. Was I part of the "wicked and adulterous generation" that seeks for a sign? Was my motive pure? Was I seeking for a sign or just some comfort? Besides, can we really ask "inappropriately" for relief? Aren't we supposed to "ask and it shall be given," or are there some things in life we should just accept as gracefully as possible even though life is not fair or easy? How do we know when we're asking for too much? Should we know God's will *before* we ask? I have no answers, only more speculation and more questions. I do know that I received a sign and witness of God's love, a very personal and sacred experience for me. I hesitate

sharing it publically since I can't adequately explain the impressions, but I've finally stopped trying to scrutinize. I just gratefully accept that specific communication to me as a gift.

The second incident happened the very next day on Sunday, 7 February 1988. The incongruities make this incident especially ironic, instructive, and poignant for me. I was lying on my bathroom floor, so dizzy and weak that I could not stand. Even shifting my eyes triggered nausea. But I was mentally composing yet another letter to my stake president, who was being released that morning after ten years of service. This president and I agreed on very few issues. But we had developed a tolerant, and even friendly, relationship over the years—especially after I learned years before to save time by addressing letters to him with copies to Gordon B. Hinckley and Thomas S. Monson because letters to them would just be channeled back to him anyway. That way he wasn't caught off guard quite so dramatically.

Lee and I had been to see him just before David was born to discuss a letter I had written, asking permission to stand in the blessing circle when Lee named and blessed our child. President Z, as I will call him, read to us a letter signed by Ezra Taft Benson, Gordon B. Hinckley, and Thomas S. Monson telling him to instruct me that I was not to participate in any way in my son's blessing and explicitly stating that he was to *read* the letter to me; under no circumstances was I to have either the letter or a copy of it.

President Z then defended the Church's point of view, which was also his own. He believed the Church should never have allowed nonmember or inactive fathers to participate in blessing circles and hoped the policy would shift back to allow only Melchizedek priesthood holders. He further hoped I would not worry about women and the priesthood and added that the most important thing to worry about was having a healthy baby. Despite my disappointment, I, as usual, felt his sincerity, guileless nature, and deep love for the members of our stake. He never seemed contrived or manipulative. Invariably when bearing his testimony at stake conferences, he would choke up with emotion and conviction. Before being called as stake president, he had been our stake patriarch—a calling which carried a lot of spiritual clout for me.

At the end of our discussion, to emphasize life's fragility and to help me see that a healthy child was more important than the form of a blessing, he shared a personal story. With tears flowing, he told how his own son, a star of Highland High's football team, died of a blood clot during his senior year. President Z had felt no sense of urgency when he went to the hospital to bless him and had no idea his son would be dead within a couple of hours. Just a couple of months ear-

lier, President Z had healed another boy of rheumatic fever after the doctors had indicated there was no hope. Surely the Lord would indicate when there was trouble in his own family.

Lee and I left this interview frustrated, as usual, but, also as usual, not bitter. I was thinking about President Z's son as I lay on the bathroom floor and composed my letter. When I could sit straight, I typed it out. I related the details of my first blessing from Lee four years earlier and then asked how he reconciled his blessing of his son with his death. A few days later, in response to my letter, President Z telephoned, then came to see me. He asked if he could give me a blessing. I said yes. He blessed me that the disease would not seriously debilitate me, that I would "have the desires of my heart granted" and "live to raise my children." At that part, I began crying, yet I had never seriously thought MS would kill me early. My patriarchal blessing promises, "You shall not die before your time." I had always laughed about this line. When your "time" comes, don't you go—whether you're young or old? Yet in my illness and at the time of that blessing, I interpreted it to mean I would have a long, full life.

In conversation, President Z speculated that the reason the MS could not be diagnosed in 1983 was that the Lord wanted to send us David. Even though that explanation is a comforting one, I think it's too easy. The God I believe in would not deceive me about an illness to ensure I would get pregnant later because he's assigned us one more spirit. The misunderstanding was my error, not God's deception.

So where am I now? Do I feel blessings don't work? Let me say that my understanding of blessings has changed, but my faith in them has not diminished. I had two more blessings from my husband during 1988 when I became so depressed I contemplated suicide. Those blessings unquestionably calmed me. I now feel blessings are basically intended to console and comfort. Occasionally we might experience a healing miracle—but we should accept it as that—a miracle. You can hope for a miracle, but you can't make one happen. And you're not a failure if a complete healing isn't forthcoming. Harold Kushner in his book *Who Needs God* thinks that miracles also come in other forms when death and other devastating events occur:

The miracle is that the faith of the community survives, that they are able to go on believing in the world and the value of prayer, even when they have learned that this is a world where innocent children die. . . . I have seen weak people become strong, timid people become brave, selfish people become generous. I have seen people care for their elderly parents, for brain-damaged children, for wives in wheelchairs, for years, even decades, and I have asked myself, Where do people get the strength to keep doing that for so long? (1989, 137)

Kushner concluded that strength comes by turning to God. I wholeheartedly agree and would add that strength and miracles also come from long discussions with caring, supportive people—whether it be friends, relatives, or medical professionals. Once, when I felt I just couldn't hang on any longer because of the continuous ringing in my ears, Lee encouraged me to “dig deeper” than I ever had before to find the resources to deal with physical and emotional pain. That conversation, probably as much or more than the blessings, helped me cope.

I also discovered that there are some facets of my illness I can control and some I can't. I can strive for peace of mind even though I am panicked. I can choose to be loving instead of embittered. But I have less or no control over what the disease does to my body. Special diets, primrose oil, and visualization didn't work well for me. I couldn't stop my ears from ringing or my head from spinning. And I came to the realization that more faith, more family home evenings, daily scripture reading, or more dedicated visiting teaching wouldn't have made any difference to the progress of the disease. Those are good things to have and do, and I want to be diligent. But I don't believe there's a direct link between a checklist and a conduit to heaven.

I'm also getting more comfortable with the notion that I will never completely make sense of the suffering I see in the world. Life is not fair, and there are myriad shades of gray. The pressing question becomes, can I accept the ambiguity and vulnerability of this life without needing absolute, comprehensive answers? Since I'm not a very patient person, it is hard for me to accept the waiting and uncertainty which this position imposes. But I also cannot accept the converse, dogmatic position that Mormons have the answers to all of life's complexities and a monopoly on truth. Can we as thoughtful, believing Mormons be content with *not* having answers to everything? I hope so.

I have emerged from this ordeal convinced that God does not grant us life with a full script from start to finish. We need to define the meaning of our lives according to our individual experiences. We not only experience life differently; we interpret our life experiences differently. But it is that interpretation which strengthens our individuality and defines our very being.

Gilda Radner, during her struggle with cancer, wrote:

I wanted a perfect ending, so I sat down to write the book with the ending in place before there even *was* an ending. Now I've learned, the hard way, that some poems don't rhyme, and some stories don't have a clear beginning, middle and end. Like my life, this book has ambiguity. Like my life, this book is about not knowing, having to change, taking the moment and making the best of it, without knowing what's going to happen next. Delicious ambiguity. (p. 268)

That quote accurately sums up my feelings. I don't think I'll ever make complete sense of suffering or comprehend the intricacies of priesthood blessings—and I desperately want to make sense of those things. I want tidy answers to theological paradoxes. I relish spirited religious debate and feel compelled to write letters to authority figures when I perceive injustices in my Church. However, no longer do I think criticism of Church leaders (constructive though it may be) or vociferous opposition to them will ultimately effect changes. What I have learned dealing with multiple sclerosis convinces me that I must learn to truly accept and even celebrate life's delicious ambiguities, injustices, and imponderables.

I feel with Kushner that looking for answers means looking at what we mean by "answers":

If we mean "is there an explanation which will make sense of it all?"— why is there cancer in the world? Why did my father get cancer? Why did the plane crash? Why did my child die?—then there is probably no satisfying answer. We can offer learned explanations, but in the end, when we have covered all the squares on the game board and are feeling very proud of our cleverness, the pain and the anguish and the sense of unfairness will still be there.

But the word "answer" can mean "response" as well as "explanation," and in that sense, there may well be a satisfying answer to the tragedies in our lives. The response would be . . . to forgive the world for not being perfect, to forgive God for not making a better world, to reach out to the people around us, and to go on living despite it all. . . . I think of . . . all that . . . life taught me, and I realize how much I have lost and how much I have gained. Yesterday seems less painful, and I am not afraid of tomorrow. (1981, 147–48)

My hope and prayer and blessing for all of you is that you can look ahead with optimism, forgiveness, and love. And I bless you that, difficult as it may be at times, you can savor the ambiguity that life holds in store.

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# Out in Left Field

(*A true story*)

*Joleen Ashman Robison*

WITH APPREHENSION I AGREED to allow the new girl at Manetamers to cut my hair. Really I had no choice. My hairdresser had run off to Texas with one of the sales reps in the middle of the week, and I desperately needed a cut. I sat fidgeting as she combed through my hair and asked the usual questions about what hairstyle I wanted.

As I answered, I noticed her hair. For fine hair it looked good, quite good. That was reassuring, and she nodded agreeably to my requests for no hair spray, for plenty of hair to hide my ears, and for a little backcombing around the face. Maybe she'll be okay. In an hour or so I will know. Stop worrying, I told myself. Even if it turns out terrible, hair does grow out.

Leaning back into the shampoo bowl, I decided if she was going to be my regular hairdresser, I might as well find out something about her; after all, I'd be seeing her once a week. While she lathered the shampoo, I learned that her name was Sheryl and that her husband had come to Lawrence to finish a doctorate in biology at the University of Kansas. They had no children, had married a year ago, and used to live in Georgia, where they had both grown up.

"What is your husband studying for his dissertation, Sheryl?" I asked for lack of something clever to say.

She answered, "Marmots."

With the water running in my ear and with her sugary Southern drawl, I heard her say, "Mormons."

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What? I reared up in the chair. My eyes flew open in spite of the shampoo. In the mission field, meeting someone with a tie to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is a rarity. Just as I was going to tell her I was a member of the Church, she flipped me upright in the chair, wrapped a towel around my head, and began dabbing at drips of water rolling down my forehead.

"Mormons?" I mumbled limply.

"Yes. I don't know a lot about them. They give me the creeps. You want about an inch taken off?" she asked as she combed out my wet hair.

"Yes, about an inch." Give her the creeps? Uh-oh. I'd better bide my time before mentioning I'm LDS, lest I risk getting scalped. First I'll find out more about her husband's research.

"What sort of things is he hoping to find out?" I asked.

"For one thing, he wants to learn more about their eating habits," she said in her pecan praline accent. "There's lots of literature on the subject, but no one has actually gone out in the field, observed, and taken notes. Bob thinks lots of the old research came from armchair scientists who have never actually lived in their communities."

I should have known, I thought to myself as Sheryl began parting off sections of my hair. The outside world makes such a big deal about the Word of Wisdom. Important doctrines such as temple ordinances take second place to whether or not we drink a cup of coffee.

She went on, "Bob's out in the Rockies now. I hate being dumped here not knowing a soul."

Hmm. Could this be my golden opportunity for missionary work? She may think we are creeps now, but stranger conversions have occurred. Mustn't move too fast. Just calm down, I told myself. She's not going to get away. Your hair isn't cut yet, and it will need to be blown dry and curled. So I asked another question, "How come you didn't go with him to the field and then both of you come here in the fall?"

She smiled, "I really can't blame Bob. I'm the one who wanted to do it this way. I detest living in the mountains among them, and the work is incredibly boring. I tried it last summer and hated every minute. Besides, none of them wanted their hair done, so I didn't have a thing to do." With that remark she burst into laughter.

I slumped in the chair unamused. That was an insult to LDS women. I failed to see the humor. My reflection in the mirror must have shown I was perturbed, but Sheryl didn't seem to notice. As she whacked at my hair, she glibly babbled on in her ridiculous drawl, "You are the only person besides my husband's supervisor who has ever acted remotely interested in the subject."

"Oh, I'm interested all right," I assured her. As she concentrated on cutting the hair at the nape of my neck, I began to wonder if he was doing the study in my home state of Utah. "Is he perchance in Utah?"

"No, he's working at a rather elaborate base set up years ago in Colorado where he can be totally unobtrusive. They don't seem to know he's there."

I'll bet, I thought to myself. Any small Mormon community, whether in Colorado or Utah, will be well aware of an outsider living in their midst. I wasn't ready to divulge my firsthand knowledge of the subject yet, so I urged her on. "What other things will he be doing?"

"It is a short season, but Bob also hopes to do some reproduction charting. You know, they reproduce like rabbits."

Now I was downright angry. Not all Latter-day Saints have large families. And those who do have chosen to because they are providing mortal tabernacles for waiting spirits. Perhaps right now I should explain.

Sheryl grabbed the blow dryer and began running her fingers through my hair, lifting it to allow the hot air to circulate. The noise made it impossible for either of us to talk and be heard. Good. I'd heard quite enough anyway. Next week I'll change shops, find a new hairdresser, and I won't leave a tip today. So there.

With that idea, I relaxed and began leafing through this week's *People* magazine, but my mind refused to concentrate on the latest Elizabeth Taylor crisis. Before I walk out of the shop, I'll let her know that I am Mormon. And if her husband is so hell-bent on doing actual observation, I'll invite them to attend the Lawrence Ward.

After Sheryl turned off the hair blower, she said, "One of the most interesting things Bob is able to do with actual observation is study social structure. They organize around family units. It gets rather complicated when you get several generations, as you can imagine, prolific as they are." She laughed again.

I nodded and thought, ah yes, families are forever. For a while longer, I must converse with this girl, even though she has certainly tested my patience. "How did your husband become interested in his dissertation subject?"

"This professor he likes has studied them for years, and he got Bob interested."

I thought to myself, Wonder if it's someone I know. None of the professors in the ward are in biology. And I'm sure none of them study members of the Church. "Who is your husband's professor?" I asked.

"Dr. Armitage. He's world famous," she said twisting my hair in the sizzling hot curling iron.

I thought, Armitage . . . never heard of the man. If he's done any great studies, you'd think I'd have seen his name in *DIALOGUE*, the *Ensign*, or *Sunstone*. This is puzzling. Well, here goes.

"You know there are some living in the Lawrence area," I said.

"You have to be kidding. Are you absolutely certain?"

Before I could answer, she went on talking, yanking my hair as she backcombed vigorously, "I will call Bob first thing tonight and tell him. That is amazing. I had no idea they ever got to this part of the country. Mrs. Robison, how come you know something like that?"

The time had come to tell her. I took a deep breath. Yes, and I was ready, "Because I am one."

That shocked her. For sure! She had bewilderment written all over her face. And what is she going to say now after all the mean digs she gave the Church?

"A marmot?" she asked incredulously.

"Marmot?"

"You know, little fat furry animals."

"Oh. No. I thought you said Mormons."

Between hoots of laughter, she doused my hair with hair spray, making it stiff as a helmet. I sat in silence.

"Oops. You don't use spray," she said apologetically. "Tell you what. If you come back next week, I promise not to spray your hair and to listen while you tell me all about Mormons. Y'all come back, hear?"

# Form and Integrity

*Jack Harrell*

I'VE ALWAYS WANTED TO BE AN ARTIST. Somehow I thought that meant that I had to live like an artist—to find a lifestyle and an art form that is consistent with the ideals I want to express.

I grew up in Parkersburg, Illinois, a town of about 250 people in the southeastern part of the state. My parents, grandparents, and some of my aunts and uncles were self-taught folk musicians and artists. I grew up loving art, though I never had any formal training.

When I was fourteen, I began to teach myself to play the guitar. Every day after school, I practiced on my bed in front of my amplifier. I read rock-n-roll magazines and album covers to learn everything I could about rock music. Before long, some friends and I formed a band of our own. We tried to be honest about who we were. We even wrote our own songs, trying to establish an individual voice. Everything we did, from the tennis shoes and t-shirts we wore to the old Chevy I drove, reflected our feelings about music.

However, as I saw the forces that moved some bands to the top, I began to feel that money corrupted music. Record producers seemed especially guilty of promoting only the bands that would sell. I mistrusted any influence business had on music. Many of my opinions came from the songs I listened to. "Piggies," by the Beatles, likened businessmen to pigs who stir up dirt and "go out for dinner with their piggy wives / Clutching forks and knives / To eat the bacon." Pink Floyd's 1975 "Have a Cigar" tells of a greedy record executive who takes a sudden interest in an upstart band. In one verse, the executive says:

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*JACK HARRELL recently graduated from BYU with a degree in English and intends to begin graduate studies in the fall. He, his wife, Cindy, and their three children live in Provo.*

We're just knocked out.  
 We heard about the sell-out.  
 You gotta get an album out,  
 You owe it to the people.  
 We're so happy we can hardly count.  
 And did we tell you the name of the game, boy,  
 We call it Riding the Gravy Train.

Songs like these made me cynical about anyone who wore a suit and tie and represented the business world.

By the time I was eighteen, I often talked with my friends about the evils of commercial music aimed at the lowest common denominator of intelligence. My attitude may have been narrow, but it was what I believed: If it's on the radio—don't listen to it! I had a vision of what rock-n-roll should be like. I believed in what I thought was “art for art's sake,” that a musician's personal voice should never be restricted for commercial advantage or to fit some kind of model, and that even “established” musicians had to guard against stagnation within their own niche.

I realize now why I admired certain rock groups so much: they'd found an art form that was true to their lifestyle. The sound of their music, the way they dressed, and their personal values all created a consistent expression. While I didn't always agree with their standards of morality, I could see that their music had a kind of integrity. It was true to itself.

When I was nineteen, I moved to Vernal, Utah, where my sister's family lived. Work in the oil fields there was plentiful, and I wanted to get out on my own. Again I started a band. In time I came in contact with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Vernal, and I was baptized two weeks after my twenty-first birthday. After that I played with my band at a few parties, but I began to feel out of place performing at beer parties and bars. It was especially difficult for me to change my old habits while working with people who were drinking, smoking, and using drugs. Finally I quit the band and prepared to go on a mission.

As a new convert to the Church, I was full of enthusiasm. I read every book on Mormon doctrine I could find time for. My desire for knowledge about life and the gospel was very strong, but I faced a dilemma: how to appropriately express my new feelings about the gospel and my new perspective on life. At first I wondered if I should give up the guitar altogether. A well-meaning older man, whose family had fellowshiped me during my first months in the Church, nearly convinced me that any music with a drumbeat was immoral. I

composed a few songs on the acoustic guitar; but I had been emotionally uprooted, and nothing I wrote felt right.

While helping at the church farm that summer, I met someone who gave me an article from *BYU Today* about problems facing LDS artists. Though I no longer remember the author or the title, I do remember the ideas expressed. The article pointed out that art is often born of sorrow resulting from sin or misconduct. Many, perhaps most, Latter-day Saints don't want to admit that sin and misconduct are a part of our lives. Counting our blessings may make us feel better, but it doesn't always make great art. I agreed. The article only reinforced my anxiety about the connections between Christian life and art.

I served a mission, then married and attended two Utah community colleges. My wife, Cindy, and I bought a multitrack recorder that enabled me to record the songs I'd written. I could record several guitar, bass, and vocal tracks onto one tape and do a one-man-band kind of thing. I had fun with this, but it didn't seem to be leading me anywhere. I wasn't interested in becoming a part of the LDS popular music industry; I had never liked the "easy listening" pop music that their songs are styled after. I was also uncomfortable with the casual way in which they dealt with sacred things. I didn't want to start another rock-n-roll band because I knew the commitment in time and money would not be worth the outcome. However, I had become very interested in writing and literature, so I enrolled at Brigham Young University as an English major.

At BYU, I was inspired by President Spencer W. Kimball's speech, "The Gospel Vision of the Arts" (1977). He said that a great artistic movement could grow out of the restoration of the gospel. I also began reading the writings of Flannery O'Connor. I knew that if O'Connor's strong Catholic voice could be recognized and appreciated by the secular world, there was hope for LDS artists, too.

In the university environment, I made friends who were also interested in art. Todd Stilson, a member of my ward, was working on a degree in fine art. Together we looked over the paintings and drawings in an issue of the *Ensign*. He explained that most paintings in the *Ensign* are really illustrations, designed to give an immediate and clear message. I learned that illustrations don't stand up to additional viewings; once you've got the message, there is nothing more to be gleaned.

Another friend, Ken, who worked at the grocery store where I had taken a part-time job, had a bachelor's degree from BYU in theater and drama. I had lengthy discussions with Ken about art, philosophy, religion, and LDS society. He was passionate and often harsh in expressing his point; and because he had recently been through a very painful divorce, he was cynical about a lot of comfortable LDS traditions. He

would say things like, “The Church promotes ignorance and mediocrity in culture and art”; “The gospel admonition to not be of the world is fulfilled by the members shunning secular learning”; “The Church has accepted the gospel of the American dream and exalts the commonplace”; or “LDS bookstores are filled with poorly written prose by Church authorities and the spiritual wet dreams of writers of popular Mormon fiction.”

I usually defended the Church, saying we should be hopeful and give other members the benefit of the doubt, if for no other reason than because being too critical of fellow saints seemed wrong. Ken insisted that this attitude only fostered their mediocrity. At times I would think to myself, “Ken is on the road to apostasy; don’t let him drag you down too! Just forget it. You know how he talks. He gets so angry, he couldn’t have the right spirit about him.” On the other hand, I wanted to deal with this conflict. I wanted to know the truth. After talking to Ken, I would struggle all day with what he had said—trying to refute his arguments, trying to understand what he had said, trying to find out what was right.

Sundays were not the same. Everything I heard and saw at church now seemed shallow. I wanted people to tell the truth, not sugar-coat reality. Even the cover of my priesthood manual irritated me. The illustration of the young, biblical Daniel turning down the meat and wine offered by the king by holding up his hand in a halting motion reduced the simple honesty of Daniel’s example to a trite, sentimental message.

I began wondering: If this is the Lord’s church, why don’t we want to tell the truth? Why does the official Church foster art without conflict, when conflict is an integral part of our growth toward salvation? Why do we act like the key to salvation is merely to ignore anything evil or unpleasant, when evil is all around us, and inside us, and is the opposition against which we work out our salvation? Is the truth simply that the world’s standards are evil, even when it comes to good art? Can an artist please the world and God at the same time, or does the very nature of telestial life prevent that? Why do we feel that artists who acknowledge doubt, immorality, and sin are risking their salvation?

While reading an interview with Hugh Nibley, I found mention of a BYU master of fine arts thesis written by Lori Schlinker entitled *Kitsch in the Visual Arts and Advertisements of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (1971). “*Kitsch*,” a German word, describes art that is of low quality, unoriginal, and sentimental. The thesis focused on the way Mormons and other Christians debase Christ and his mission through cheap artistic representations. I began to realize that kitsch is not just an LDS phenomenon, but a universal problem.



The United States is a good breeding ground for kitsch art. Our democratic politics and our laissez-faire economics exalt the commonplace and the profitable. Nineteenth-century American immigrants were often poor, uneducated people looking for a better life. Blending in the “melting pot,” these individuals produced a culture rich in individuality but poor in traditional artistic standards.

If the United States of the nineteenth century was the “dumping ground of Europe,” as one of my political science teachers termed it, what was the LDS Church? The early Church was the outcast of the United States! The Prophet Joseph was murdered, and the Saints were sent into exile in the desert. Artisans were sprinkled among the early Saints, and some fine architecture and crafts were produced under Brigham Young, but the principle business of the Saints was simply survival in a harsh and unfamiliar land.

Although the early Church’s attitude toward America could be typified as “Zion against Babylon,” political and economic concerns led the Church in the early twentieth century to officially and unofficially seek the approval of the American people. This meant capitalism, not cooperatives, and a host of American values. By the 1960s and 1970s, Mormonism and Americanism had converged.

As a result, many members of the Church have placed little value on a responsible attitude toward art. They don’t realize that art is more than just entertainment. Latter-day Saints could use art to help them live the gospel. In accordance with our reverence for the earth, we could learn to value the materials of the environment. By crafting and buying things that will be long-lasting, functional, and beautiful, we could promote quality craftsmanship in our communities, develop our aesthetic senses, and have more joy in the atmosphere of our homes. As we each consider the struggles of living the standards of the gospel in a telestial world, we could tell the truth about the joys and sorrows of discipleship. After all, what house built on half-truths has ever stood? Actualizing a culture like this would make us a peculiar people indeed.

The spirit that troubled me after my conversations with Ken is gone now. It has only been a few months, but I can hardly remember the pain I felt. My thinking has not changed. I still believe that we deny reality, that we try to drown evil with a flood of sentimentality; but I don’t feel bad about thinking that way now. Maybe it’s because I’ve given up my naive, false beliefs about the total accuracy of the LDS world view. Or maybe I’ve only accepted the standards of the world.

I do know that the questions I’ve asked are at the heart of Mormonism. God has intentionally placed us here on an earth where we can come in contact with good and evil. We have the chance to taste

the bitter and the sweet so we will know which to prize. When I joined the Church, conflict did not end for me; it began. I was living easy outside the Church, because I could always find a way to escape. Now, in the Church, I have chosen to face conflicts, make sober decisions, and deal with the consequences.

While I'm still baffled about appropriate kinds of musical styles for LDS expression, I have learned a lot about the literature of the Latter-day Saints. In my literature classes at BYU, I've read volumes depicting the LDS experience in honest, inspiring, faithful, and sometimes even painful ways. For me, literature is the best place to begin to study and learn about art and life and Christianity. I now know that many good things are happening in LDS art, more than what can be found at Deseret Book or in the *Ensign*.

Distinguishing between art produced or commissioned by the Church and art produced by individual members is also necessary. When commissioning art, the Church's goal is to convert and strengthen, so Church-commissioned art is bound to be didactic. Expecting the *Ensign* to be an artistic magazine is wrong. Expecting the General Authorities to write fine literature is wrong. As individual members work on their own to discover the Spirit, they may make mistakes with their art (being either too didactic or too risqué); but with effort and patience, these mistakes will work themselves out.

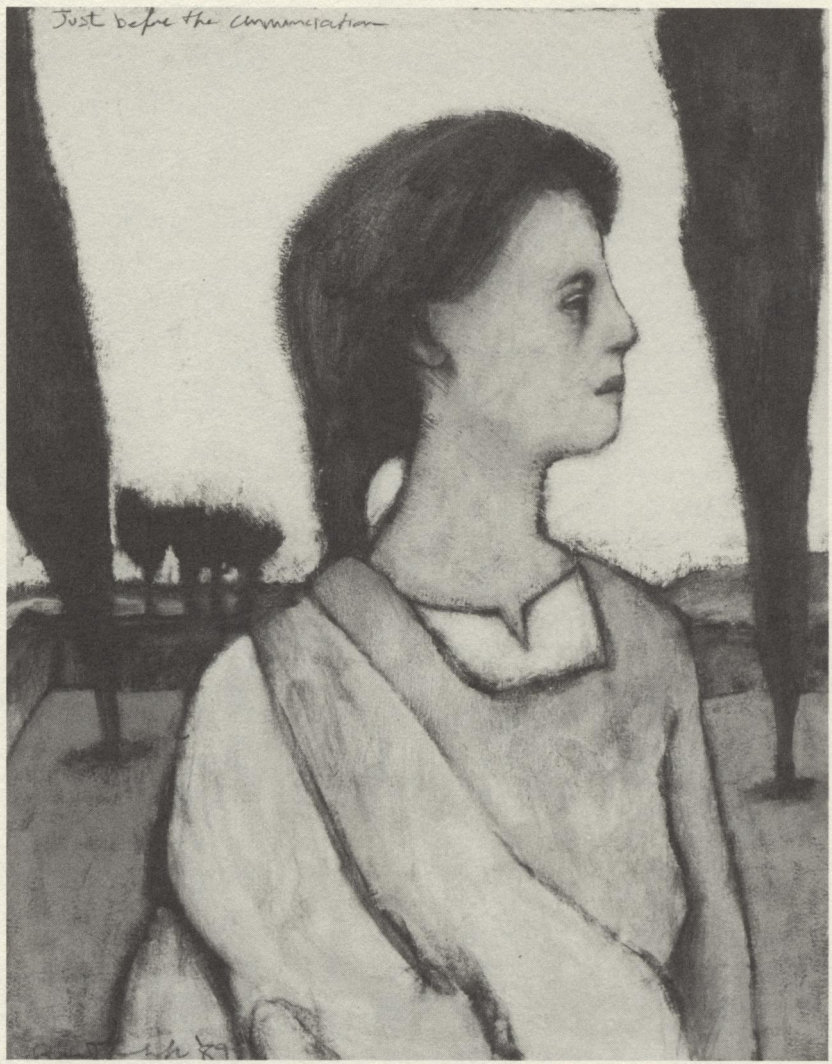
I have not completely worked out my feelings about art and the Church. What line separates a truthful depiction of evil from a glorification of it? Where do sexuality, nudity, or profanity fit in art, if at all? Perhaps these questions have no absolute answers. Perhaps the Spirit dictates differently in each individual situation.

Even though I question, I still have a testimony of the gospel vision of the arts. I believe in Orson F. Whitney's words, "We shall yet have Miltons and Shakespeares of our own" (in Cracroft and Lambert 1979, 32). The gospel of Jesus Christ is rich enough to enable those who have received it to reveal further light and knowledge in the form of literature, music, and other arts that can bring truth, beauty, and understanding to the lives of all people. Good art always does something to help us understand life, and I think that those who know God can understand life better.

Whether I will become the artist that I hope to be, or just provide encouragement from the sidelines, I know that President Kimball's words will be fulfilled: great works of art *will* come from the Latter-day Saints someday. I believe that "praiseworthy" art will be produced in our future—art that praises God, enlightens humankind, and wins the praise of people outside and inside the Church.

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# Art and Half a Cake

*M. Shayne Bell*

On Saturday mornings, mother baked good bread.  
She always called my two sisters,  
My two brothers, and me  
To come and eat the crusts hot,  
Spread with butter and strawberry jam  
Made from strawberries she had picked and washed.

Then she cooked thick pies  
Filled with fruit and cinnamon  
Or cakes and cookies rich with chocolate,  
Dates, and walnuts to be eaten  
With bottled peaches or raspberries topped with cream.

In the afternoons, she took a roast from the freezer—  
Usually beef but sometimes pork—  
And left it in the sink to thaw.  
After that, she stirred a jello salad (maybe the orange one  
Mixed with pineapple and grated carrots)  
And put it in the fridge, by now too full.

At six o'clock on Sunday mornings, after working until late  
Saturday night to clean a house already clean,  
She'd make herself get up to "put on the roast,"  
Timing the oven so the roast would be well done  
When we got back from church.

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Then she'd scour the potatoes  
And sometimes bake them with the roast,  
Sometimes bake them wrapped in tinfoil  
So the skins would all be soft,  
And sometimes bake them unwrapped on the racks  
So the skins would all cook hard and thick.

Father would leave for his meetings;  
She'd wake us up, make breakfast,  
And as we showered, listen  
To the Tabernacle Choir  
While she washed and tore the lettuce,

Diced carrots, radishes, green peppers, and an onion,  
Chopped tomatoes and arranged these  
In the dull yellow bowl that survived the flood  
(We found the bowl chipped and filled with mud  
But still a bowl),  
Then put that salad in the fridge, under a pie.

After church, the house smelled like Christmas.  
We'd change out of our Sunday clothes  
While mother hurried to wash her hands,  
Put on her apron, and start boiling peas  
Or beets and carving cheese.

Meantime, my sisters spread two linen tablecloths,  
One across each half of the table, while my brothers and I  
Carried china plates, silver forks, spoons, knives,  
And crystal glasses filled with ice and water:  
Forks on top of the napkin to the left of the plate,  
Knife and spoon on the right just below the glass.

With that complete, mother sent us carrying bowls  
And platters heaped with food to the table,  
And she managed to scoop plum jam into the serving bowls  
Or pile the relish trays with pickles and black olives  
Faster than the five of us could carry them away.

Then she whipped the cream with sugar and a capful of  
vanilla  
And covered all her pies with it but left them in the fridge.  
Last of all she set the platter, with the roast,  
Across my father's plate, for him to cut.  
Then we'd wait.  
Church work always kept my father late.

But after two minutes of watching the steam  
Rise up from her food, she'd sit down.  
"Let's eat," she'd say, "or this will spoil."  
So we'd pray and pass the food.  
Then he'd come.

"I knew it," she'd say. "We'd start and then you'd come."  
We'd eat.  
She'd sit proudly by, urging us to eat more,  
To pass my father the corn, to eat more.  
Someone would smell the forgotten dressing,  
And she'd rescue it from the oven.

Afterwards, we'd sit, too full, till she'd stand  
To clear away the food. We'd try to make her rest,  
But she worked with us, always, till the end.  
We hoped to save a pie or half a cake  
For Monday's supper. By night on Sunday it would all be gone.

# Wild Blossoms of Faith

*Mary B. Johnston*

WHY DO I BELIEVE? For many years I did not feel comfortable answering this question. I would explain that my ancestors were among the first members of the Mormon Church and were important religious leaders as pioneers and as missionaries. I said this because my relatives, living and dead, have provided me with admirable models of dedication to God, family, and church. I could not have assembled a group of individuals whose integrity, faith in God, and selflessness had inspired me more about the power of righteousness and the possibility for love and cohesiveness in a family. So when asked why I believe, I would explain that belonging to this tradition was central to my happiness, identity, and sense of security.

I also appealed to reason and would try to explain the logical necessity of Christ's atonement, the Godhead as three separate beings, a modern-day prophet, and baptism for the dead. I tried to convince myself and my audience that I had a foolproof belief system. But on some level, both my audience and I sensed that my efforts to justify my belief, though earnest, did not reflect an authentic faith.

I had little difficulty accepting and living a Mormon lifestyle. I had, for example, seen too much sadness come from drinking, smoking, and taking drugs to be tempted to join many of my peers. I was, however, borrowing a tradition and a set of convictions that were not yet really my own. It is convenient and sensible to stay in a church

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when one knows that breaking a strong and successful legacy will scar family relationships. More to the point, if security is at a premium and the idea of being independent and different is frightening, then borrowing someone else's scaffold to build one's own house feels like a wise thing to do. However, to rely on others' experiences and decisions to determine one's own convictions is to live life vicariously.

There was much in the faith of my fathers and mothers that I loved and believed, but I had too many questions and too few personal spiritual experiences. About four years ago, in an effort to discover a richer and more honest life, I undertook a spiritual journey, bound by three requirements. First, I wanted to start with no assumptions, no core beliefs. Second, I would not predetermine where I might or might not find truth. Third, I could claim a belief only if I had personal confirmation of its truthfulness.

These were frightening and liberating standards for a pilgrimage. I let the world be my sanctuary and let my responses be my compass. I hoped I would find truth and God's hand at church, in the scriptures, and during prayer. I did. But even more compelling was that almost everywhere I looked, I was brought to my knees in gratitude for the extravagant abundance of spiritual truths I discovered. Capturing these truths in words is a task beyond my limits. My feelings reach past the edge of my logic and transcend the boundaries of organized religion—so what I share here are wild blossoms of faith, not a canonized, ordered bouquet.

I began my journey by talking with people from all different faiths and visiting their services. Rather than comparing and contrasting Mormon beliefs and practices to whatever I observed, I tried to be true to these requirements: What moved me? What felt true? At the African Methodist Episcopal Church, I found black gospel music, which—more than any other religious music I have heard—pierced my heart and filled my whole being with its melodic, impassioned prayers to God. The sermons there began softly and slowly and then crescendoed to a thunderclap, opening my heart to the word of God. I listened attentively because the method of delivery awakened my senses and gave me ears to hear. The spontaneous “amens,” “alleluias,” and applause from the audience gave sound to my reverence for God. Partaking of this new type of spiritual language and ritual helped me return to my own chapel to see the familiar, but now fresh, beauty and power of Mormon hymns, sacrament, and prayers.

Another adventure enriched me spiritually. Last summer I participated in a service project in Poland. Side by side with 120 people from Japan, Africa, Thailand, India, Syria, Australia, and Europe (representing varieties of Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Christianity, and



Buddhism), I dug ditches to supply a water system for a small Polish village. The Lord blessed us in our efforts to break down barriers created by cultural, political, and religious differences. Israeli Jews worked, ate, and sang with Muslims from the Middle East. Despite the years of bloodshed because of their conflicting religious and political beliefs, they learned, with difficulty, to embrace one another.

Other barriers came down too. One evening a Ugandan, a Kenyan, and a Cameroonian told of their respective countries' histories of oppression while under white colonial rule. A white American woman began crying, for although she was thirty-five, she had never been taught this side of African history. She wept at her ignorance and at her own country's history of ugly racism. The black Africans expressed their love for her and then turned to a white South African woman and said, "You are also an African. You are also our sister." I beheld the power of forgiveness, a divine principle for which Christ bled.

Let me relate another story. Sharif, a Muslim from Syria, was my companion on many afternoon walks after we finished our work. We shared our experiences of fasting, praying, reading the scriptures, learning from prophets—and in the process developed a deep spiritual kinship. One day I told him how I struggled to feel connected to God when I prayed. Sharif explained to me how his spiritual teachers taught him to focus mind and body on God. A few days later, all 120 of us dedicated a day to silent prayer and contemplation. I tried what Sharif had suggested. I experienced a holy festival in my heart that day because of the intimacy I felt with God. Though I had heard about prayer all my life and had mouthed words to God in public and private, it took a Muslim man from Damascus to teach me how to unlock heaven's gate with faithful, reverent prayers.

When I returned to my own Mormon congregation in the United States, I could testify that God's hand reaches to touch the whole world with its sweet pressure, and his voice resonates in the throats of many worshipers. Though our paths and theologies may differ, I knew that all the friends I met in Poland yearned to be righteous, to serve humanity, and to feel God's presence in their lives. As I learned from people of other religions, my love and respect for them and their faiths grew, as did my commitment to and appreciation of my own religion.

My quest also called me to the streets. In offering community service there, I found miracles. In homeless shelters I met people who had committed grievous sins, had repented, and now relied on the Lord to give them strength and hope to carry on in a painful recovery process. This reliance humbled me and took me to my knees to find a similar devotion.

One evening I felt particularly discouraged when I arrived at a shelter. David, a dynamic thirty year old going through the drug rehabilitation program, sensed my mood and asked how I was. I was taken aback, as I was usually the one to ask that question. But I found that I wanted to talk. I shared with David my feelings of loneliness and discouragement. In turn he told me how he had turned to Christ. While earning money as a pimp and drug dealer, he had come very close one day to killing a man. Realizing how corrupt he had become, he knew he had to change. Unemployed, illiterate, and drug addicted, he felt hopeless. As a first step toward change, he decided to learn to read. The tutor he found chose the Bible as their text. Almost immediately David began to read and then to recite verses. The more he read, the more evil habits he eschewed. He rejoiced in his change of heart, in Christ's infinite compassion, and in his opportunity to share his witness of his Savior's grace. And as he related his story, rich in metaphors lifted from Old Testament prophets, I felt as though God had sent me a modern-day psalmist to sing a comforting song of salvation.

A month after our discussion, David moved to a halfway house where he could receive further treatment. A few weeks later, I called to arrange a visit. Much to my disappointment, I learned that David had relapsed and had been expelled from the program. There was no way to locate him, no way to know how he was. I could only have faith that his conviction and Christ's love would somehow continue to work a change in his heart.

While such experiences move me deeply, nothing compares with the joy I feel as I watch my high school students serve in the community. Alone and in small groups, they tutor school children, visit guests at shelters, take care of children with AIDS, and volunteer at hospitals. Over the past five years, they have helped more than one hundred service organizations. These young people learn to consecrate their lives to others and mitigate their fears and prejudices of people whose economic status, education, health, nationality, and habits may differ from their own. I see my own capacity to listen, empathize, and counsel improve. I feel the power of Christ with me as I do this work. His fearless service and ministry—healing lepers, associating with social and political outcasts, forgiving an adulteress, asking a tax collector to be an apostle—made him unpopular and endangered him. His teachings and atonement, both evidence of his unconditional love for all of his brothers and sisters, give us hope in our own striving for personal change and salvation.

Most important, his example invites us to consecrate our lives to serving in order to help break such barriers as class, race, and nation-

ality. As our love for others deepens, we begin to fathom the Father and the Son's love and concern for all of us. Then indeed we are pressing forward with steadfastness in Christ, with a perfect brightness of hope guided by a love for our Lord and for humanity.

Today, more than four years after my journey began in earnest, I rejoice in the opportunity to say why I believe. When I pray, I am often filled with light and inner peace. When I read the scriptures, their words emblazon truths in my heart. When I meet members of other faiths, I learn from their convictions, experiences, and wisdom and share my insights with them. When I feel the depth of my parents' love for me, I am overwhelmed with gratitude for such a gift and begin to understand how much God and Christ must love me. These are the divine experiences that now fill my life. Finally I know that God lives. I feel his power and love flow through me almost every time I ask to know he is there. I see now that all matters can be spiritual. Studying and teaching literature, building friendships, resolving conflicts with colleagues, fasting for a loved one, recovering from a serious illness, and raising children; the list is endless. All these activities can be spiritual because they can involve the Lord's hand; have healing, sanctifying powers; and give us a glimpse of our own and others' divine potential.

And what of my original questions and doubts about Mormonism? Some have been solved, others now seem insignificant, a handful remain, and a few new ones have surfaced. My guess is that questions and doubts will always be part of the luggage I carry with me on my journey. I also suppose that Mormon chapels, Muslim Mosques, African Methodist Episcopal churches, Quaker meetinghouses, and homeless shelters will continue to offer me wild blossoms of faith.



# Because I Was a Sister Missionary

*Tracie Lamb-Kwon*

I AM A FEMALE RETURNED MISSIONARY. A decade has passed since I returned from my mission in Germany. Since then I have finished graduate school, lived in Korea for a while, married, had two children. Yet my mission is still a constant in my life. More than by any other event, I measure my life by what happened before and after my mission. It is a pivotal point for me, as though I were a different person when I went out than when I came back. And my mission experience grounds me, not because of what I did so much as what I became and the relationships I acquired. Many of my closest friends come from my mission. Many who know me as I truly am knew me then.

My mission helps me in my work setting. I teach English to foreign students, and learning another language and having lived in another culture enhances my ability to relate to them. I am more patient with their timidity and uncertainties, more willing to overlook what seems like rudeness, more careful to understand them and make certain they understand me.

Of course, my mission influences my spiritual life. My belief and understanding go deeper because of it. When I have doubts or bureaucracy clouds clarity, I can cast my mind back to the time when the Lord clearly and unmistakably spoke peace to my soul on my mission.

But perhaps the area where I feel my mission affects me most is as a woman in the Church. I have a courage and a confidence I doubt I would have had I not served a mission. For example, in Sunday School

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class, I frequently express my opinion—sometimes any opinion—just so the voices in the class are not exclusively male. The women in my ward offer bright, intelligent comments in Relief Society but rarely speak out in Sunday School. Perhaps they are intimidated by the quick, sure answers of the men. But I worked with men like these when they were just nineteen. Call me a sister missionary who lived to tell the tale.

Missionary life began for me, as it does for most missionaries today, in the Missionary Training Center (M.T.C.) in Provo, Utah. It was a grueling two-month ordeal, even longer than basic training but serving much the same purpose, I'm sure. It was there I learned something of mission organization. First was the companionship: we were never, Never, NEVER to leave our companions. Then came the district, made up, in the M.T.C., of four companionships. In our district, we had three elder companionships and one sister companionship. A zone of maybe five to ten districts came next, and finally the mission.

In a companionship, one missionary was designated "senior." In the M.T.C., seniors were chosen by alphabetical order the first week, and then changed each week. My companion and I never worried much about the title. In the mission field, however, the senior companion was usually the one who had been there the longest and, therefore, theoretically had the most experience and wisdom as well as more responsibilities such as filling out reports and planning schedules. It was an honor to be called as a "trainer," which meant that a missionary was deemed worthy, kind, and knowledgeable enough to train new missionaries, or "greenies" as they were sometimes irreverently called.

Each district also had a leader. These leaders were responsible to and for the missionaries in their particular district. Usually, as was our experience in the M.T.C., a companionship of sisters served in a district with companionships of elders. The district leader, an important position, would be one of the elders.

Even more prestigious was the position of zone leader. Two zone leaders worked as companions. Unlike most missionaries, they had a car. They were the trouble-shooters for the missionaries, helping with problems or finding help. They informed missionaries about transfers, picked up new sisters and elders, organized and conducted zone meetings, and were liaisons between the missionaries and the mission president.

Assistant to the president (A.P.) was the highest position to which elders could aspire (although, of course, as with any other Church calling, they weren't supposed to). Generally only the very finest, most dedicated, and diligent missionaries became A.P.s. They helped the

mission president in numerous ways and were examples to all the other missionaries. By and large, the A.P.s I knew deserved the respect they received.

In the M.T.C. and in most missions, sisters served as senior companions and trainers, but elders held all other leadership positions. I don't know whether this was a directive from above or simply tradition. I do know, as a result of subsequent experience, that it can be different, but it usually isn't.

My experience with my district in the M.T.C. was a very positive one. We grew very close and generally worked well together. All eight of us were going to German missions, the elders to Hamburg, and we sisters to Munich. The elders valued us sisters and learned to appreciate the qualities we brought to the district. One day after my companion and I had been sick and had stayed in our room, the elders told us how much they appreciated our usual quieting effect on them. While we were gone, they had messed around so much that they had gotten little accomplished. They appreciated our femaleness and the influence it had on the group.

Though the elders may have been partial to women anyway, my companion and I earned the respect that they gave us. Our teacher at the M.T.C. challenged our district to memorize all of the discussions before we left for Germany, a feat not often accomplished by an entire district. But we did it. We competed with one another to be the first to pass off a discussion after we had memorized it. My companion and I were always among the first four to finish. The elders jockeyed back and forth for the other two positions.

My companion was very smart. Though she was the only one in our district who had never studied German, she memorized the discussions as quickly as anyone—usually more quickly. Our teacher confided to me that she was the only sister missionary he had met who didn't have problems of some sort. At the time, I thought that he was complimenting both of us. Later I realized he hadn't included me in his observation. As I've since thought about his comment, I've decided that it is a key to many of the challenges sister missionaries face. Although attitudes toward women going on missions seem to have changed in the last ten years, I believe sister missionaries still encounter many of the same problems.

I think our teacher admired my companion because she was so unlike the stereotype of a sister missionary. She was sinewy and athletic, although not masculine. Mostly she just didn't think like a female. She valued thought over feeling, analysis over instinct. As I think of it, though our teacher thought she had no problems, she was a real pain during the hour of physical recreation for the sister missionaries.

She was tough and stubborn, which served her well getting through the M.T.C., but she didn't mesh well with the rest of the women. She didn't like the emotional, teary, lovey way sisters sometimes acted. And she refused to go along with the group. She was not flexible and conciliatory. She didn't follow the rules of female interaction.

I think our teacher liked her because she thought more like an elder than a sister. She wasn't as different from elders as most sister missionaries are. And that difference between sexes is, I think, the crux of many problems sister missionaries face. The mission is a male organization where men tend to view female differences not as assets, but as problems—not only different, but defective.

On my mission, once in a while I found elders who appreciated and even liked sister missionaries because they liked women. I also learned that the attitude of elders toward sister missionaries directly related to the attitude of the mission president.

Since my mission, I've learned that many of our priesthood leaders don't know much about women and see our differences as problems to be endured or invalidated through sentimentality rather than diversity to be used to advantage.

Fortunately, not all priesthood leaders are like that. My first mission president, F. Enzo Busche, loved the sisters. He often said that the sisters were the best missionaries in the mission. And so, of course, we were. President Busche was tall with thinning sandy hair and a strong square jaw. He had been a successful businessman in Dortmund before he was called as a General Authority and always wore neat, dark suits.

He was kind and loving to us. In my first assignment, I was fortunate to be in the same ward with him and his family. We saw him frequently, and it was always a pleasure to be around him. His love refilled our reserves emptied from a week of rejections and disappointments.

Sister Busche felt a special responsibility for the sister missionaries and invited us to dinner from time to time. This was such a contrast to the rest of my mission experience when most members assumed the sisters could cook and take care of themselves; then the elders got most of the dinner appointments. But Sister Busche was a wonderful cook, and she took care of the sisters in Munich. We had the best of everything there. We were respected for our work and looked after with loving concern. Paradoxically, later when it seemed female abilities were suspect from every corner, we were expected to fend for ourselves more. Perhaps it had to do with value. When we were valued, we were treated well in all areas.

When he was called as mission president, President Busche did not speak English as well as he wanted. To improve his skills, he



insisted that the elders working in the mission office speak English, and even set aside time for lessons. He was very anxious to be able to communicate with missionaries in their own language during interviews. He even spoke in English at zone conferences because the majority of missionaries were Americans. He was very concerned about us individually, and we felt it.

A serious problem with the circulation in his legs prevented President Busche from sitting for long periods. So for our zone conference interviews, he would take a walk with each missionary, even when it was bitter cold outside. We all sensed his ability and concern and had absolute confidence in him as a leader. And he had confidence in us. During my first personal interview with him, in my greenie zeal, I said, "President Busche, what do I need to do to be a good missionary? Just tell me, and I'll do whatever you say." I have since often thought of his response when struggling with programs or correlation. "Sister Lamb," he said, "follow the Spirit." He had enough trust in his missionaries and in the Lord to believe that would really work.

Stories about President Busche continuously circulated throughout the mission—tales he had told in previous zone conferences, experiences individuals had had with him. According to one such story, he had sent only one missionary home during the almost three years he was president. It was said he would do almost anything to help a missionary complete an honorable mission and only let the one go home because the missionary had threatened suicide. It was very reassuring for me to know that if I messed up or my endurance weakened, my president would support me.

I began my mission just as President Busche was initiating an innovative program of sister districts, and I was made the companion of one of two sister district leaders. Being new, I didn't appreciate just how bold a move this was, nor how much confidence it showed. Working in a sister district was as normal to me as anything else at the beginning of my mission.

My sister trainer, Sister Burton, deserved every bit of confidence President Busche had placed in her. She worked hard and took very seriously her responsibility as district leader. She watched out carefully for the two other sisters in Munich, making sure they were as healthy and happy as possible. They seemed to have fewer dinner appointments than we did, and I remember feeling somewhat envious when she often invited them along with us.

Sister Burton was tall and thin—so thin that the batch of no-bake cookies we made and ate every night hardly made a difference in her shape, while I got a good start on a thirty-pound weight gain. This culinary habit was the one bad lesson she taught me. Whenever I

think of her then, I picture her in a blue plaid A-line wool skirt and the turtleneck she always wore with it. At first I teased her about wearing the same thing all the time, but I soon learned that you come to wear what is comfortable and warm or comfortable and cool because as a missionary you are prey to the elements.

Understanding this reality of missionary life, we sister missionaries laughed when some new sisters came to our mission with the news that the wife of the M.T.C. president had instituted a new grooming and etiquette class for the sister missionaries there. Those of us who had been in the mission field even a short time wondered if it taught how to gracefully chase a bus or how to stay neat and well groomed while out walking in the rain all day with a broken umbrella. We thought a grooming class was very funny, but we also found it insulting, implying by its very existence that women did not know how to groom themselves or that their appearance was not adequate.

And where was the grooming and etiquette class for the elders? After all, they were the ones who were only nineteen, who were often just learning how to wash and take care of their own clothes, who were often somewhat obnoxious. What about their appearance? What about their manners? Obviously, those in charge at that time at the M.T.C. placed greater emphasis on women's appearance than on men's. This seemed to coincide with what I heard frequently once I received my mission call: Elders didn't mind having sisters in the mission field; sisters were nice scenery.

Fortunately the elders in my M.T.C. district and in my mission under President Busche weren't able to dismiss sisters so blithely because we were the standard by which they were measured. Many sisters didn't have such an encouraging start, however, and were reminded from the very beginning that their appearance was what mattered.

My missionary experience was the opposite of Sister Burton's. She began her mission with slow days, crying companions, and judgmental elders. My experience with disturbed companions and critical elders would come later. Sister Burton had learned that to earn the respect of the elders with whom she worked, she had to work harder than they did—and never cry in front of them. For some reason, most elders thought crying was a sign of weakness instead of what it usually was: the result of fatigue or frustration, or excess water in the tear ducts.

I learned this lesson from her so thoroughly that once when I could not keep myself from crying in front of an elder (my zone leader no less), I told him how sorry I was and asked him not to think of me as a silly woman. He, being more compassionate and understanding than most elders, responded, "This isn't the boys against the girls." But I'm not so sure he was right.

Sister Burton taught by example, not by lecture. And she was determined to live up to President Busche's expectations and to prove to elders that sisters were good missionaries. She was dedicated and diligent. Often we got to bed at 11:00 P.M. or later rather than the prescribed 10 P.M. because we had been out teaching or (more likely) tracting until the very last minute. Our apartment was near the mission office, and once, on our way home, we ran into the A.P.s around 10:00 P.M..

It was probably cold that night. (I get cold just thinking about my mission. In fact, I often volunteered to do the dishes in Germany because it was the only time my hands got warm.) When we ran into the A.P.s, we had probably been out tracting, a humiliating exercise in futility it seemed to me. When we tracted, we took turns knocking on doors. Briefly the peephole would darken, and we would know someone was there. Then either no one would answer, or someone would answer and say either "Ich bin Katholisch" or "Ich bin beschäftigt." Never, never did they say, "Kommen Sie herein." Sister Burton said that of all her companions, I disliked tracting the most. She was probably right. I can't imagine anyone disliking it more.

Now, "offhanding" I could tolerate, perhaps because we had some control over our contacts. We would go to some busy public place such as a subway or train station, approach people, introduce ourselves, and ask if we could talk to them for a few moments. This wasn't much more effective than tracting, but somehow having someone walk away was easier than getting a door slammed in my face.

It was wonderful when we finally got a chance to visit someone and teach them about the gospel. Unfortunately that didn't happen very often. So on the night we ran into the A.P.s, Sister Burton and I were probably on our way home from tracting. I'm sure they commended us for being such fine missionaries and told us how much they appreciated us. I think they did appreciate us. We did good work, and we didn't cause trouble.

And not causing trouble was perhaps the trait elders admired most in sisters. If a sister ever did need help, she was labeled a problem. Unfortunately, as women we were in a bind. If we were sick or otherwise troubled and wanted a blessing, we had to ask a priesthood holder. And that meant admitting we were sick or troubled. After my mission, a man told me about some sisters in his mission coming to his apartment in the middle of the night asking for a blessing. He had been so irritated at being awakened that he had just sent them home.

After I received my call, men often told me that the sisters were either the best missionaries or the worst missionaries in the mission. Now I believe that there are just fewer sisters, so they are more obvi-

ous and easily remembered, not necessarily better or worse. And Sister Burton taught me something perceptive when I worried about being a worst missionary. She said we are all the best missionaries and the worst missionaries at some time.

Because Sister Burton was so diligent, we were always up at 6:00 A.M.. The only time we didn't get up then was one morning after a certain baptismal service. The woman had just been baptized and had gone to change her clothes when an escapee from a mental hospital burst in, pursued by the police. In the ensuing commotion, chairs, people, and a gun were knocked about. The man jumped into the baptismal font and baptized himself until someone finally dragged him out and hauled him away—after which we continued with the services.

That next morning we didn't get up until 8:00.

Sister Burton's rigorous schedule and high standards were what I had expected when I went into the mission field. In the M.T.C., we had been inundated with stories of faith-promoting experiences, scriptural examples, and General Authorities. And I believed everything I was told. So Sister Burton was not a surprise to me. We had a very good companionship, and I grew to love and deeply trust her. We worked well together—one picked up a discussion when the other stumbled; one remembered the scriptures the other couldn't. We prayed and had baptisms. We fasted and saw miracles. My time with her was exhausting and exhilarating. She had a tremendous impact on my life and remained my closest friend for many years.

President Busche was to be released just a few months after I arrived in the mission field. Before he left us, he arranged to have the first all-mission sisters' conference. Sisters traveled from all over the mission to attend, some of us having to stay over at other sisters' apartments because of the distance.

We came in fasting and prayer and gathered with President and Sister Busche and the A.P.s, who, whether innately or from President Busche's example, also respected the sisters. The conference was filled with reverence and love. There were about twenty-five sisters in the mission at that time. President Busche asked each of us to tell the most important thing that we had learned. Thinking that everyone would probably give the same answer, I kept track. But no one did. It seemed incredible at the time and still does. I don't know if I could think off-hand of twenty-five different aspects of the gospel. But each woman's experience had been just a little different; each of us had learned something unique.

But despite our diversity, a strong feeling of unity permeated the group. Memories of that feeling offer me hope when I despair over

being different from the seeming norm of the Church. At a time of tremendous spirituality and righteousness, the diversity was as great as the unity—a paradox I don't understand, but one that I cherish.

At the conference, President Busche noted the "abundance of womanhood" before him—more than he had seen for many years in all of Germany. Long after the conference had ended, several of us mulled over the idea of "womanhood," wondering just what it was and where it fit with priesthood, motherhood, or fatherhood. We never did figure it out. But that day, I think it had something to do with our power. I felt powerful, as though I could accomplish anything. I was acceptable; we were all acceptable before God.

My mission went downhill from there. I had been transferred to a new companion just before the conference. President and Sister Busche were released and went home shortly after. Our new mission president did not like sisters. He believed women missionaries were sickly and emotionally unstable. And so, of course, that's what many of us were—or became. He put the sisters who were sick together so they wouldn't slow anyone else down. That way only one companionship was wasted.

My first contact with my new mission president was in a personal interview at a zone conference. I went with an open mind, ready to love and follow him as I had President Busche. My first impression, however, was of being in a dentist's office. The president wore very strong aftershave. And that's really all I can remember, except that I was disappointed. I was used to being loved by my mission president. Being near President Busche was a joy. I had no sense that this mission president cared about me. One of my friends remembers that at her first interview with him, he shook her hand and then glanced at his watch. She knew the interview was being timed and felt very uncomfortable.

The new president was small and thin, though my memory probably doesn't do him justice. We don't see people (or remember them) the way they really look. We see them the way we feel about them. He wore glasses and had thinning, gray-brown hair. It seems he always wore light-colored suits—probably polyester.

His wife was kind but looked a little worn. The story circulated among the sisters in the mission that when she was trying to comfort one of the sister missionaries, she had sympathized that a mission was miserable. When her husband heard the comment, he reprimanded her, at which she snapped, "Well, it *is* miserable."

The president also praised his wife for raising their children. He said he had always been too busy to be much help with the kids. He was pleased that his "good wife" had done a wonderful job with them even though she had had to do it mostly on her own. I've heard other

Mormon men say the same thing. Praise like that is supposed to be commendable, I guess. But as I see it, it only shows how the man has abandoned what is supposed to be his most important duty. It is as if by praising the wife for doing his job, he can somehow make up for not being there for his family. I didn't think it was any more admirable then than I do now. Yet he was a mission president, a high position in the Church. He appeared to be a very successful Mormon man—which is one reason I think the oft-heard maxim, "No success can compensate for failure in the home," doesn't really apply to men.

The new president inundated us with programs and pushed us to bring up "the numbers." And I felt a definite power shift in the mission. Previously, the most spiritual and Christlike missionaries had been called as the leaders, but now those positions were given to the missionaries with the best statistics. The two were not necessarily the same.

Several other changes indicated that we were in for a whole new game plan. Before President Busche left, in our final zone conferences with us, he reviewed our strengths and weaknesses as missionaries. He said our spirituality was our greatest strength and praised us for being so diligent in keeping the commandments and loving the people and one another. At one of the new mission president's first zone conferences, he told us we weren't in the mission field to make friends with the people but to convert them to the gospel. "If this were a business," he also said, "we'd all be bankrupt."

Had President Busche remained, I might have been one of the sister district leaders. As it was, I was put where I could have little contact with sisters other than my companion. Fortunately, I was never demoted to junior companion, as some elders were. But I knew right away I was not on the president's leadership track. Even though I always worked hard and did my best to live and share the gospel, numbers and statistics weren't important to me. And I wasn't above neglecting some of my statistical or motivational duties, like reporting when I passed off a discussion so that I could get a star in my file or carrying a rock around in my pocket to remind me of something—I forget what it was.

The sister missionary whom the new president held up as an example was a terror to the rest of the missionaries. She was very pretty and talented, but she was ice cold inside. All of the sisters I knew dreaded the possibility of being her companion or of being in her district when she later became district leader. Those who worked with her reported horror stories of discipline and statistics. Even when she was a greenie, she felt certain about how her all-sister district should be run. She told her sister district leader that personal interviews were a waste of time,

but if they had to have them, the sisters should speak in German. Because she never opened her mail until P-day, she had a way of making those who read letters immediately feel unworthy and undisciplined. It seemed she always reached her goal of baptisms. In our mission, not baptizing was the norm, one baptism was a great blessing, and more than one, a miracle. I have since learned that she actually had only a few more conversions than average. But at the time, it seemed like she must have had twenty or more from the way the president praised her.

At zone conferences and in newsletters, the mission president frequently recounted stories of this sister's methods and successes. Yet she was one of the most un-Christlike people I had ever met. She was supposed to be our light on a hill. Though she could appear sweet, I think underneath she was driven to be "the best." And in a country where we could sometimes get people to open their doors just by telling them to in a loud voice, where authority was almost as important as punctuality, she knew how to be authoritative. Perhaps that is how she was able to get people into the water.

The president's constant praise of this "ice sister" seemed to show that statistics and rules were more important to him than people. In contrast to President Busche, this president sent several missionaries home for infractions of the rules or simply because they couldn't handle the pressure. This was the case with a sister missionary from England who was transferred to an English-speaking mission. This was her way of giving up. Though she had had a particularly rough time, we knew that she could have been persuaded to stay, having persuaded her ourselves several times. And yet, the president had let her go. I guess he just didn't know how to handle her. We knew that was true for sisters generally when we heard he had requested that sisters not be sent to his mission. He also forbade missionaries within the mission to correspond with one another. Perhaps he sensed a general uprising and was trying to divide and conquer, but he only isolated and further discouraged us.

Morale got so low among the sisters I knew that one day my companion and I could stand it no longer and left our zone to visit a fellow sister. We were actually working in a threesome, but the greenie we were with got nervous at the last minute and stayed with a member until we got back. When the two of us arrived at our friend's apartment at two o'clock that morning, we had a wonderful celebration. We spent the next day in general recovery—laughing and relaxing with seeming impunity. We went home recharged, ready to rededicate ourselves to doing the work of the Lord (having reminded ourselves that it *was* the Lord's work and not the president's).

At the next zone conference, I was basking in a renewed sense of the Spirit, glad once again to be a missionary in the company of other servants of the Lord. My personal interview came and went uneventfully. I was so touched by an elder's vocal solo that I didn't even notice that the last person to be interviewed was the nervous greenie who had been with us the day we left the zone. And then one of the A.P.s tapped me on the shoulder and motioned me toward the president's room. Puzzled, I walked in to find the other sister. Finally I realized why we were there. Our two zone leaders and the A.P.s were waiting with the president. Why, the president demanded, had we left the zone without permission? I was proud that the two of us didn't buckle under all that authority. Oh, we bawled, but we never apologized, even when the president said he was going to send us home. And I think he would have except that one of the A.P.s spoke up for us. He had worked under President Busche and was one of the A.P.s who had seen Sister Burton and me out working so late that night. Perhaps he remembered us. Surely he understood the difference between President Busche and the new president. Perhaps he even shared our frustration and disillusionment. In any case, he spoke up and said that we had been two of the best missionaries in the mission. Though the president obviously doubted the A.P. and saw no concrete evidence, he allowed us to stay.

Months later as I was leaving my mission, I had a chance to talk to my companion from the M.T.C. She was crying, not something I'd seen her do often, even in the roughest times at the M.T.C. But she was crying on her way home from her mission because the mission president had told her in their last interview not to tell anyone that she hadn't had any baptisms in his mission. Somehow his words didn't surprise me.

Because of my mission president and the contrast in my treatment as a sister missionary, the end of my mission was very different from the beginning. I have hope that attitudes toward women going on missions have changed in the last ten years. Many of the best and brightest young women are going on missions, and support and respect for sister missionaries seems to have increased. But, sadly, many attitudes have not improved. Only a few months ago, I had several long discussions with a young woman in my ward. She related many of the same experiences that I had myself a decade before.

This young woman had wanted to go on a mission since she could remember. She had prepared herself and was only waiting for her twenty-first birthday. But she received so much opposition from Church members that she was doubting her decision. Her bishop at BYU encouraged her to get married instead of serving a mission. Student



friends asked if she had really fasted and prayed about her decision. She hadn't because she had felt for years that it was the right decision. But her friends made her doubt her conviction. One returned missionary told her that the sisters in his mission weren't very good workers and only wanted to "mother" the elders. A returned missionary she dated asked her why she was going on a mission because she was really cute.

And she was really cute—and spiritual and strong enough in her testimony and desire to serve the Lord that she went on her mission in spite of opposition from within the Church.

I believe that what this sister experienced and what many women experience as sister missionaries relates directly to women in the Church generally. Culturally the Church is a male organization, and the assets that women could bring to the Church are usually ignored or limited to a narrow domestic field.

Although many of my mission experiences are universal for all missionaries, a great deal of what I learned and experienced occurred because I was a sister missionary. The contrast between my two mission presidents and the atmosphere in the mission shows the power of a mission president, not only on sisters, but on all missionaries serving under him. I am grateful I served a mission in spite of the hardships and challenges, and I recommend such service to all young members of the Church, especially the women. I was very fortunate to serve under President Busche in the beginning of my mission. And when I think back on my mission, it is usually the beginning that I remember. When we sisters were strong, and we were good, and we were loved.

# The Mistake of the Psycholinguists

*Karla Bennion*

They say people nominalize too much.  
We tell ourselves, "I am in pain,"  
instead of simply, "I hurt."  
"Pain is not a prison you're locked in," they say.  
"You hurt because you choose to hurt,  
and you can choose to not hurt."

They are wrong.  
Pain is a small metal capsule or container  
implanted just behind my heart—  
I feel it when I breathe or swallow.  
Painted gray green (the paint peels),  
Cold and rusty,  
It's filled with bitter liquid  
distilled from blood or gall or tears.  
It precludes singing, running, or dancing  
And stops me from saying certain words.  
I don't think it is poisoning me.  
I can still live years  
with it there in my chest.

As she lay under the knife  
and the fetal monitor slowed to silence,  
he prayed, "Bless the baby,"  
and was poured full of love and peace  
and reassurance.  
But the baby was dead.  
God demands the long view.

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# Glimmers and Glitches in Zion

*Brian J. Fogg*

AN EIGHT-YEAR-OLD MORMON can tell you a lot about Zion. At least I could. In response to Sister Jensen's questions in Targeteer class, I'd raise my hand to give my rote answer: "Zion is a people of one heart and one mind. They dwell in righteousness and have no poor among them." I probably didn't understand words like *dwell* and *among*, but my voice rang through the classroom with assurance and authority.

Answers about Zion came easily then. But now that I've mastered *dwell* and *among*, I find the other concepts—like *one heart* and *no poor*—even more difficult. Those words cling to the back of my throat and march only haltingly off my tongue. Still, I cannot deny the ideas are there, ideas about a perfect society. How could the joyful songs of Zion not resonate through my veins? Zion is in my blood.

*We will sing of Zion, Kingdom of our God.  
Zion is the pure in heart, Those who seek the Savior's part.  
Zion soon in all the world Will rise to meet her God.  
(Hymn #47)*

On every branch of my family tree, I've got what Mormons might call a "pioneer heritage." Five generations ago my ancestors left their homes and earthly belongings to follow Brigham Young and trek West with the Saints. Once they arrived, the pioneers tried to build a new society. They tamed the Salt Lake Valley. They built a temple. They practiced polygamy.

Today much of that seems fuzzy to me, like the bedtime stories my mother would read me from pioneer diaries. Sitting on the edge of my

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bed, Mom told of pioneer women who buried their young by the side of the trail, then moved on. She read about small boys—just my age—whose frozen toes had to be sliced off. She spoke of men who lost their oxen, but then miraculously found them again. This was my heritage.

I believe this heritage of idealism and activism has led me to places like a recent rally on campus. In front of cameras and a crowd, I spoke bravely into a microphone. As the publisher of an independent student magazine, I pledged our support to the campus recycling movement. But what had seemed a friendly crowd suddenly turned hostile. “Will you run a recycling symbol on the cover?” someone shouted.

“It’s a design complication, but I’ll check on it,” I promised.

“Will you print only on recycled paper?” “How many articles on recycling will your staff write?” “How many public service announcements?” The pressure came from the same people who’d stood alongside me two weeks before as we protested the pollution from Geneva Steel. Their attacks didn’t seem fair: I was the one who made the protest posters. I was the one who ran a cover story on pollution in Utah. I was the one who received two phone calls that threatened my life.

I no longer tell my parents about those moments in the spotlight. Too many appearances in the local press—articles that somehow found their way to California—caused them once to joke, “Couldn’t you change your last name?” They laughed uncomfortably, wondering where they had gone wrong. Perhaps it was the “hippie summer school” they sent me to when I was four. Every morning Mom dropped me off at the Fresno Arts Center for classes in drama, crafts, ecology, and music. Susan, my art teacher, wore her long brown hair in braids. In her hand, a paintbrush became a magic wand. Carl, my other teacher, played the guitar as we sat crosslegged on the floor and sang the words he’d taught us.

*Slow down; you move too fast.*

*Ya gotta make the morning last.*

*Just, kicking down the cobblestones,*

*Looking for fun and feeling groovy.*

*(Simon and Garfunkel)*

I sang enthusiastically and swayed gently to the enticing rhythm of Carl’s guitar. And I somehow felt guilty. I wasn’t supposed to feel groovy; Mormons aren’t groovy people.

One day, as part of their not-so-subtle indoctrination, Susan and Carl helped us make necklaces. On the way home I showed Mom how I’d strung the yellow yarn through the clay pendant. She looked at it closely. One side had a peace sign etched into it; the other side said

“Zero Population.” I asked what that meant but didn’t understand Mom’s answer. (She would soon be expecting the fifth of seven children.) The next day I looked everywhere for my new necklace, but it was gone.

Even though my family was never groovy, Fresno gave us some consolation. The Saints welcomed us warmly to their corner of Zion, and they taught us to harvest raisins—before raisins were cool, before they danced on TV wearing sunglasses and singing soul. In Fresno, as in many parts of the world, the Church operates a welfare farm. In other places the Saints pick apples, grow potatoes, or package Jello; in Fresno we harvest raisins.

On the first Saturday in September, our corner of Zion gathers: hundreds of San Joaquin Valley Saints get up before the sun and make a pilgrimage to the vineyards. A few families are assigned to each row, and the work begins. Facing the morning chill with dew dripping from the leaves, making your first cut into the dense grape clusters, squashing a few loose berries under your jeans every time you kneel, seeing your hands turn dirty black and sticky sweet—the work seems endless. “Remember to pick from post to post, brothers and sisters,” Brother Thorup barks down the rows. And slowly the Saints progress.

The Church welfare farm is a great leveler. Lawyers and doctors and politicians work shoulder to shoulder with school custodians and truck drivers. For the few Saints who are farm laborers, this is just another day of work; their speed and agility make the rest of us look silly. For this one day of the year, Brother Snow takes a grapeknife in his hand instead of a surgeon’s scalpel. Brother Perkins, the lawyer, judiciously pours pan after pan of grapes onto paper trays for drying in the sun. Bishop Lambert, a dentist, clears vines for Sister Higbee, pausing to ask if she got that new job she applied for. The Medina family works through their row so quickly we lose sight of them; they finish and return to give the rest of us a hand.

*The Church has need of helping hands,  
And hearts that know and feel.  
The work to do is here for you;  
Put your shoulder to the wheel.*

*(Hymn #252)*

The Mormon grape harvest happens in a blink of an eye (much to the dismay of neighboring farmers). We fulfill our ward assignment in the early afternoon and then help other wards finish theirs. Once we’ve picked acres and acres of grapes and set them out on brown paper to shrivel in the San Joaquin sun, we relax together. We sheath our knives, take off our bandanas, and shake hands to congratulate ourselves. We

eat cold watermelon and spit the seeds on the ground. We catch grapes in our mouths and balance big bunches on our heads. We laugh with our mouths open wide and our heads thrown back. And then our utopia ends: we wash our hands, nest our grapepans, and drive home to play our old roles for another year.

For me the welfare farm seems a symbolic remnant of the early Saints' dreams. My mother once directed Carol Lynn Pearson's musical about the experimental societies in frontier Utah. *The Order Is Love* tells about struggling Saints in southern Utah, sent by Brigham Young to establish the United Order, a community where everyone gives according to their abilities and everyone receives according to their needs. The Saints in Orderville tried to live selflessly, despite human foibles. I still remember the closing scene: After eleven years Brigham Young has stopped the experiment in Orderville. Many of the Saints are packing up to leave as Ezra, the noble leader, comes on stage.

Ezra (enters, downcast): It isn't easy—to see it go.

(Sings)

I saw a world where every man's a brother,  
I saw a world where every man would share.  
A world where not one soul  
Was left alone or cold,  
A world where every man  
Was loved, and clothed, and fed.

(Speaks)

It was good, wasn't it? Everyone out in the fields and in the shops—working for all of us together and not just for his own.

...  
We failed—but then again we didn't fail. Gradually, folks'll get themselves ready to live like real brothers. And we've been a step along the way. When it finally happens, it'll be wonderful.

The musical was a success, but the United Order failed, not only in Orderville, but in one hundred other small communities.

In spite of these failures, the Church continued to grow, largely because of the missionary efforts of faithful Saints. When I turned nineteen, I too accepted the prophet's call to serve a mission. Here I saw my chance to bring Zion to southern Peru. After two months studying in the MTC, I felt nervous but ready—ready not because I could teach simple gospel principles and welfare lessons in Spanish, but because of something less tangible. Perhaps it was the BYU fifteen-stake fireside I attended three days before leaving Provo. After Elder Gordon B. Hinckley spoke, we new missionaries, all two thousand of us seated together, rose in unison—a huge sea of dark suits, conservative ties, and short hair—and together we sang.

*Ye elders of Israel, come join now with me  
 And seek out the righteous, where e're they may be—  
 In desert, on mountain, on land or on sea—  
 And bring them to Zion, the pure and the free.*  
 (Hymn #319)

One burning heart, one joyful voice, one mighty force. That night I couldn't sleep, didn't want to. I sought to savor that feeling, archive it away for future reference: "*And bring them to Zion, the pure and the free!*"

I spent two years walking the dirt roads of Peru, the dust so thick that it often baptized my shoes. I lived and worked most often among the poor, people who had no electricity or running water. And I met families—large families—who survived on the same amount I used to give the Church in tithing. My indulgences—a clean white shirt every day, a silk tie—embarrassed me. I began to feel uneasy about the luxury-laden packages I got from home and the avenues of escape my Visa card offered. Each time I pulled on a pair of cashmere socks or charged dinner on the town, I tried to forget about Brother Chalco, who gathered boulders from the riverbed for two dollars a day. Sunrise to sunset. The economic disparity between my life and the Peruvians' met me around every corner, in every doorway. Because I felt helpless to ease the financial suffering of everyone, I never opened my wallet to anyone. Besides, I told myself, the mission had rules about not giving handouts.

Then one day I confronted my own immense fallibility, something I couldn't blame on mission policies. That day shook my confidence, made me wonder if I qualified for even the crumbs that fell from Zion's table. My companion and I were headed to an appointment in the center of Ilo, a small Peruvian fishing town. As we hurried to meet with a new investigator, an old man sitting against a doorway reached his weathered, brown hand out to us. I'd seen him before. This was the man without legs who moved from place to place by propping his body stump on a skateboard and pushing himself along with his knuckles. My companion and I passed quickly by him; we were in a hurry for a first discussion, maybe another name to add to our teaching pool. Although I heard the old man plead, "*Hermano, por favor . . .*," I didn't break stride; I—the precocious district leader, who had dedicated two years of his life to build Zion up—didn't even glance down.

Two intersections later, I stopped suddenly. I looked back up the hill. "What is it, Elder?" my companion said.

"Uh, nothing. I . . . just thought I lost something back there." I turned and walked on, too embarrassed and rattled to explain.

A few minutes later, we knocked at the new family's door. No answer. We knocked again. Nothing. My companion wanted to wait awhile; this family was golden, he said. While he read scriptures, I stared across the street at people going in and out of the post office, wishing I could trade places with any one of them, even wishing I could be one of the shoeshine boys who slept there in the park. After fifteen minutes, we gave up and left. For the first time, I was pleased no one had opened the door. I knew I had nothing to teach, nothing to share. I wondered if I ever could call myself a representative of Jesus Christ again. If I wasn't willing to minister to those who suffered most, what in the hell was I doing on a mission?

As we walked away from the unanswered door, I told my disappointed companion that I needed to buy some envelopes—my ploy to lead us back up the street where the old beggar sat. This time I would stop. I would squat down beside him. I would ask his name and shake his dusty hand. My fingers would feel the hardened knuckles that propelled him through the streets. I would ask God to help me do the right thing.

But the doorway was empty; the man was gone.

My mission seems long past, almost as long ago as the Targeteer class where I first announced my understanding of Zion. Since then my experiences with attempted utopias continue to be disheartening. I've worked on a Kibbutz in Israel, clearing drip-irrigation lines in the banana fields. The work was strenuous and—worst of all—boring. We started before sunrise and finished before noon. Then we were free. We could eat our fill without price, swing from a rope into the Jordan River, or skinny-dip in the Sea of Galilee. But we never were a real part of their community. The kibbutzniks paid us a dollar a day, and we wore our own shoes, not the leather sandals issued by the kibbutz.

In the People's Republic of China, I visited a carpet factory. I saw the worn wooden bench where Chinese citizens would—in theory—sit for their entire working lives, tying the same knot, over and over and over. One carpet might require an entire year's work. Western tourists would then buy the carpets for a few hundred dollars, and the citizens would start on a new loom. To enjoy their own carpet in their own home: impossible. Everything belonged to the state: the factory, the bench, the loom, the yarn, their tired fingers, their children, and even their dreams—all for the benefit of the state.

In India I sat a full day by the River Ganges and watched the pilgrims bathe, drinking in the holiness. They all seemed to have their own rituals—chants, washings, prayers—yet all were entranced. In the late afternoon, a young Indian explained to me the meaning of the burning pyre nearby and reminded me not to take photographs.



He was of the Brahmin caste and would soon inherit a silk factory on the other side of the river. It was his lot, he said; the untouchables had theirs.

I now bring these glimmers and glitches in building an ideal society to the other side of the Sunday School lesson manual. Tomorrow I'm scheduled to teach lesson #22, "Zion Will Yet Arise," and I'm afraid. Afraid that the manual as written will evoke only simplistic rote responses, like my Targeteer mantra: "Zion is a people of one heart and one mind. They dwell in righteousness and have no poor among them."

I now know what these words mean—well, at least what the dictionary says they mean. Perhaps that's why I've restructured the lesson into an open discussion, where my class can teach me what they know about Zion. I'll ask them to help me learn to perform those songs of Zion that are in my blood, to help me amplify those joyful notes that beat in my heart but so often fail to echo off my fingertips. I don't expect that we'll discover all the answers tomorrow, but I won't be surprised if an honest discussion confirms what I've found: That Zion is as enticing as a strummed guitar but as arduous as lifting boulders from a riverbed; that Zion is as sweet as plump grapes on the vine but as fleeting as a weathered hand that begs.

# When I Swam for the Utah Valley Dolphins

*William Powley*

My mom could sleep each night  
without waking except  
when my ear ached so much  
I became a nightmare  
to my brothers. She rose  
from her bed, in her robe  
she swayed to boil water.  
She made warm medicine,  
while I lay down, aching  
side up. I listened close  
with my good ear to her  
shuffle in the kitchen,  
open cupboards, she came  
in two or three minutes  
to my room. She dripped two  
drops into my eardrum.

I waited for a pop  
and the wet to dry.  
What she whispered  
was softer than eardrops,  
better than any dream.

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*WILLIAM POWLEY received his B.A. in English at Brigham Young University. His poems have appeared in BYU Studies, Sierra Nevada Review, Sunstone, Exponent II, Zarahemlah, and other journals. An earlier version of this poem appeared in the August 1991 New Era.*

## FICTION

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# Ziontales: An Excerpt

*Kevin G. Barnhurst*

### INTRODUCTION

I WROTE THIS STORY UNDER A SPELL. I was living in Salt Lake City, not in the sprawl of the new suburbs, nor even in the politically correct neighborhoods of the East Bench or the Avenues near the university, but in the Marmalade District. Gentrification has since remade the area, but at that time and for much of its history, it was a backwater of decaying pioneer dwellings and odd apartments made from broken Victorian homes, squeezed onto the foothills below Ensign Peak.

I took long walks on the steep, narrow streets, under the aging box-elders, and wondered about the gables of one house, and the provenance of a certain black walnut tree, and the oddity of a straight but narrow Wall Street with no financial futures. I also walked with my father to the place where I was born—just around the corner—to the places where he lived as a newlywed with my mother, now long dead. Even then the district was alive on the margins of upright Mormon life, just around the mountain from the proper neighborhoods where Brigham Young had lived. There the landmarks seemed grander—the temple and the Endowment House, the facade of the first ZCMI department store, the Eagle Gate where North Temple Street entered the prophet's estates, the gazebo around the only tree pioneers found in the valley. But I remember that the tree had been reduced to a stump. Its curious end led me to spin out an explanation.

The voice I found for the yarn was officious and Victorian—an odd choice, I thought at the time, inspired by a flowery edition of the English fairy tales illustrated by Arthur Rackham. But I remember sensing that the choice was right. Now, with ten years' hindsight, I understand this odd phrasing. It is a proper Mormon voice, springing from the mercantile values and bourgeois East Coast civility that overtook the Mormons of the late nineteenth century.

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*KEVIN BARNHURST lives and writes at Pond Lane in Stoddard, New Hampshire. To pay the bills, he is a visiting scholar in the School of the Arts and research fellow of the Media Studies Center, Columbia University. He was recently named associate professor and head of the graphic arts program in the School of Public Communications, Syracuse University. He wrote Ziontales for his three sons, one of whom is enrolled in the New York Middle School for Writers in Manhattan.*

*What follows is an excerpt from the introduction to Ziontales, along with one story from the collection.*

Like theirs, it is an adopted voice, imitative and self-conscious yet utterly sincere, assured of its correctness and even superiority.

The moralism of this voice, decorative and artificial, slightly arch, is only one way in which Mormonism speaks, at least to me. The acquired genteel cadence only partly obscures another tone, a harsher accent akin to the bluntness of New Englanders. The renegade Mormon, typified by the profanity of the late J. Golden Kimball and by the unregenerate Sam Taylor and my own smoking grandfather, is a powerful voice in Mormon culture. These people are the Mormons I understand and revere. They revolted against the patina of acquired culture. They are coarse and base but essentially good, the hidden metal in the Mormon social ore.

The story is about Mormon culture, but it is also about Mormon truth. One need only pass time among the faithful to sense the web of truth. Mormon miracles happen. God's will is made manifest, right is sustained, truth revealed. Mormon scholars must correlate the demands of scholarly truth with the facticity of revealed word. Politicians must acknowledge the brethren. The Mormon world is made that way. So this story is an artifact of truth, built on evidence and framed by reason. It points to the testimony of witnesses, most of them family members, and to the corroboration of urban archeology: the remains of a golden past only partly assimilated.

The result, I have been told, is not a fairy tale at all. This may be a tale, filled with absurdity and hyperbole, but unlike the tall tale, its authenticity is asserted in the manner of the Mormon testimony, tied invariably to personal experience and witness: *My mother told me so. I beheld with my very eyes*. This concern for truth pushes the story into the territory of legend, the form where truth play-acts a central role. Of course, legend is too grand a term for this trifle. What gets in the way is its obsession with language, words, rhythm, and alliteration. The word play is self-conscious and perhaps cloying. The story contains, not only in the appropriation of the rhetoric of tall tales but also in its literary form, the contradictions to its concern for truth. The explanations ring false because they are truth protested too much. Their mannered form inspires distrust, like a syrupy salesman. The verbiage arouses a suspicion of what lurks beneath their quaint exterior—but that is fodder for some other essay.

What matters here is that the story seems, ten years later, to express my feelings for Mormonism. At one time my Mormon roots were slightly embarrassing, in the way I suppose all boys from any hinterland feel a twinge when reminded of their humble beginnings. But I am no longer embarrassed, either by this precious little legend or by having grown up a Mormon. I see both as fertile with possibilities. I find that my best motives—in those moments when I have courage to stand up for principle despite personal risk, when I do the occasional altruistic service for the sake of my community—those good values spring from the culture of Mormon Utah and the church with a capital C.

It is an odd vocation that requires constant emendations. I've been tempted to use my word processor to erase the sins of this slight literary legend. But on reflection I stand by it, because it is an artifact of my younger self and because I have learned to forgive my own folly.

## *The Lone and Only Tree*

When Grandfather Cedarbloom was still a very young man, he was called Old Cedarbloom even so by the pioneers, since his face was quite wrinkled and his head quite bald at a very early age. But this bothered Old Cedarbloom not a twig, and by his pluck and good fortune he came to be among the first to arrive at the Valley of Zion on the twenty-fourth day of July.

Now, being prematurely aged, Old Cedarbloom suffered from insomnia, having got a blessing from the prophet himself and said innumerable prayers to no avail. So on that first Twenty-fourth of July, it happened that he was abroad at night, and having wandered far from camp, he came upon an ancient tree, gnarled but hearty, growing on the valley floor.

"Now this lone tree," he exclaimed to himself, "is the only thing of dignity to grace the Valley of Zion before the Saints arrived." (Old Cedarbloom had studied elocution in the East.) "And in the prime of its glory, it shall be the pioneers' friend."

When he spoke these words, the tree, as if taking its cue from his flowery speech, burst into bloom with a hundred white blossoms that glowed in the night.

Old Cedarbloom was left speechless at this, so he took out his water jug and poured his last few drops at the foot of the tree. And finding no rocks nearby, he squatted by the tree, admiring it until almost daybreak, when the blossoms slowly closed and hid among the branches, whereupon Old Cedarbloom returned to camp.

Now when he reached the prophet's wagon, for he was a faithful Saint, Old Cedarbloom discovered that he could not speak, nor could he write down what had happened, try as he may. So he knew he must keep his own counsel.

That day the pioneers passed by the lone tree, and a few stopped to rest in its shade, never suspecting what Old Cedarbloom had seen. But that night, and every night thereafter, he made his way to the tree and watered it faithfully so that it flourished, although it didn't blossom.

Now this is not the end of the tale, for the Saints had many hardships before the Valley became the safe and comfortable place it is today. In those times, the trains of pioneers coming into the Valley would stop to rest under the lone tree, and in the winter Old Cedarbloom feared that someone would chop it down to use its bark for food and its wood for fire. But when the Saints had at last begun to prosper in the Valley, Old Cedarbloom no longer feared for the tree but watered it faithfully every night. And in the day, since he was still

a young man, he took up the trade of gardener, his training in elocution being of no use since he lost his speech.

After a time it happened that Old Cedarbloom came to be appointed gardener to the prophet himself, and in the course of his daily chores he often conversed with the young ladies of the estate, the prophet's daughters. One in particular would speak her mind at great length, while Old Cedarbloom smiled or frowned and nodded in reply. After each of their meetings, the girl would exclaim: "You are the finest man I've ever met, the only one who ever listens."

And so despite Old Cedarbloom's ancient appearance, in a short time the two fell in love, and it fell to Old Cedarbloom to escort the young lady to the Twenty-fourth of July dance. This lasted well into the night, and as soon as he had got the young lady safely home, he headed for the lone tree, carrying his water-can. Now the girl, who (being a mischievous prophet's-daughter sort) had observed Old Cedarbloom's nightly excursions, did not announce her arrival but waited until Old Cedarbloom was well away and then followed him secretly to discover what made him carry his water-can out in the night.

When Old Cedarbloom reached the tree, the girl hid out of sight but close enough to see and watched as he poured out the water at the tree's foot. But when the tree burst into blossom, she squealed, and Old Cedarbloom, who though dumb was neither deaf nor blind, heard the noise and spotted her at once behind the greasewood. In his befuddlement at being found out, he tried to speak and was greatly bewildered to hear his own voice.

"What's this!" he cried, but the girl only cowered until, realizing he spoke, she ran and threw her arms around him.

Then Old Cedarbloom told her all that had befallen him and swore her to secrecy, fearing she would be struck dumb if she told. And when he was convinced of her good will and allegiance, he asked for her hand.

For this she needed her father the prophet's consent, so Old Cedarbloom agreed to come the next day and ask for her hand in marriage. But when he came to the prophet, he was again unable to speak, the effect of his startlement having worn off. Nevertheless, he asked for her hand by signs, and the prophet, impressed that this son-in-law would never talk back, gave his assent and married them in the Endowment House.

Now the newlyweds took up residence in the gardener's cottage, and Old Cedarbloom continued his daily work while his wife became a secretary to the prophet. And in her correspondence, she discovered by chance one day that the plat of the city, as it was expanding eastward, would leave the lone tree in the middle of a street. The possi-

bility of losing the tree to a street alarmed her so, that she could hardly sleep at night, and while this was convenient, since she could accompany Old Cedarbloom to the tree, she dared not tell him what she knew.

Instead she hit upon a plan to save the tree. She went to her father the prophet and to the city council, arguing that plants and trees and grass should be allowed to flourish down the center of each street. The council thought it a costly venture, however desirable it may be, and they refused. But the prophet's daughter enlisted the aid of all of her many sisters, and soon all of the prominent and fashionable ladies of the city joined in the petition for trees in the streets. And so at last the council proclaimed the Beautification Plan its own idea and retained Old Cedarbloom to plant and care for the project.

The gardener left his post with the prophet and, taking in pay an acre of land facing the lone tree, built a house where he could grow as old in years as he was in appearance, along with his wife and his newborn son.

The years passed quickly, and about the time Old Cedarbloom retired from his post as tree warden for the city, he became a grandfather to his grandson, Orson.

Orson was a simpleton who was said to be slightly deaf at an early age and, like his grandfather, suffered from incurable insomnia. Now Grandfather Cedarbloom thought this a great blessing, and on the Twenty-fourth of July, he took young Orson, who was prematurely gray, and showed him the tree and how to water it, and on the following day, Old Cedarbloom passed away.

Well, Grandfather Cedarbloom had kept the secret perforce, and his wife because of her oath, but nobody had told young Orson it was a secret at all, and before he knew it, people were coming to watch him water the tree in the dead of the night, especially on the Twenty-fourth of July. Grandmother Cedarbloom was so alarmed at this, that she began ailing and never went out to the tree again, but watched from her kitchen window.

After a while the city council heard of the lone tree and how it was attracting visitors from distant cities far and wide. So they decided to build a gazebo around the tree to make the spot easy to find, and to attract more visitors to the hotels and eateries of the city thereby.

Although he looked quite old and gray, young Orson was very green and inexperienced, and he took his celebrity to heart, sporting a great style of dress and turning the nightly watering into a ceremony with an ungainly polished water-can. But as any gardener would know, a roof overhead and cement underneath, while useful for mankind, are harmful for a tree. And Orson Cedarbloom, being a simpleton,

hardly noticed as the tree became sickly and branch after branch dried up. Quite apart from being alarmed, Orson was glad, since each woody branch could be cut into a hundred small relics and sold at a handsome price. But his prosperity was short lived, for at last the lone tree was only a stump, and the visitors no longer came in any number.

Grandmother Cedarbloom was grieved at the death of the tree, and she no longer had the will to live. Now, on the next Twenty-fourth of July, when Orson watered the stump and it failed to blossom, the few who had gathered scoffed and laughed him to scorn, all but one stranger. So Grandmother Cedarbloom hailed this one and told him the whole of the story, and then and there she passed away. Orson was left to wander the streets, carrying his oversized watering can. But the stranger told the story to my father, who told it to me. And any who doubt the tale can go to Sixth East Street, three or four blocks south, in the City of the Great Salt Lake, and there they will find grass and bushes growing down the center of the street and a stump standing in an old, forgotten gazebo. And that is the proof of the story.





## REVIEWS

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### Reappraisal of a Classic

*Great Basin Kingdom Revisited: Contemporary Perspectives* edited by Thomas G. Alexander (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1991), 164 pp., index, \$17.95.

Reviewed by Gary Topping, instructor of history, Salt Lake Community College.

IN MAY 1988, the Charles Redd Center for Western Studies at Brigham Young University and the Mountain West Center for Western Studies at Utah State University jointly sponsored an interdisciplinary symposium to reappraise, on its thirtieth anniversary, Leonard J. Arrington's classic *Great Basin Kingdom: An Economic History of the Latter-day Saints, 1830-1900* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958). Though neither editor nor publisher of this collection of essays presented on that occasion offers any explanation for the frustrating three-year delay in its appearance, the collection is worth the wait.

The carefully chosen participants are major scholars in literature, history, economics, sociology, anthropology, and geography. Since Arrington's book studies Mormon history and institutions, we should expect most of its appraisers to be Mormon as well. But not the least of this collection's assets is the presence of two card-carrying Gentiles—Donald Worster and Richard Etulain—whose fresh perspectives are sorely needed in the insular world of Mormon scholarship.

Like most collaborative projects, the essays vary considerably. Many contain personal reminiscences of Arrington and his book; however, geographer Ben Bennion and sociologist Stan Albrecht bolster their appraisals of limited themes in the book with original research presented here for the first time in tables, maps, and

narrative. Donald Worster's essay in intellectual history focuses on what he calls "the irrigation myth" (p. 30)—the notion that irrigation of arid lands creates not only a new agriculture, but a new people as well—a Mormon idea which he believes exists as an uncritically accepted assumption in *Great Basin Kingdom*.

Bennion, Albrecht, and anthropologist Mark Leone all explore the influence of *Great Basin Kingdom* on their disciplines and, even more important, reasons why the book has had a limited effect. Their conclusions, of course, vary, but Bennion's invitation for increased communication and even collaboration among disciplines is implicit in most of these essays. If accepted, that invitation could well be the most significant achievement of the conference.

Are Mormon studies, as I alleged earlier, insular, incestuous, and intellectually sterile? Certainly the quality of the minds represented in this symposium indicate the possibility, at least, of creative, critical thought within the community of Mormon scholars. But in the concluding essay, "Beyond the Problems of Exceptionalist History," Charles S. Peterson asserts that few Mormon studies since 1958 have followed Arrington's precedent in relating Mormon history and institutions to the wider world of American thought and experience. Instead, Mormon scholars have hidden behind an assumption of Mormonism's profound exceptionalism, defeating comparative studies and absolving them of the obligation to relate their research to the larger world. Thus, meetings of the Mormon History Association attract only a few regular "token Gentiles," and Mormon articles and monographs feature tightly focused studies of

Mormon institutions and biographies of increasingly minor figures.

Editor Thomas G. Alexander takes up the cudgels against Peterson in his introduction, as he does against no other contributor, but it is difficult to avoid concluding that Peterson has the best of the debate. The narrow range of publishers of the best recent Mormon monographs cited in Alexander's footnotes and the limited circle of reviewers in Mormon periodicals strongly indicate that Mormon

scholars are generally writing for each other.

If Peterson's indictment of Mormon scholarship is at all valid, then young Mormon scholars could hardly do better than to dust off their copies of *Great Basin Kingdom* and try to fathom some of the genius of that great book. Along the way, they may find ways to connect Mormon studies once again with the nourishing bloodstream of American scholarship.

## I Laugh, Therefore I Am

*Only When I Laugh* by Elouise Bell (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1990), 136 pp. \$9.95.

Reviewed by Miriam B. Murphy, associate editor, *Utah Historical Quarterly*.

A STUDENT OF ZEN BUDDHISM meditated daily on koans assigned by the Zen master. None of his insights impressed the master until one day, after years of thought about these puzzles, the student timidly began his exposition of a koan and then burst into uncontrollable laughter, at which point the Zen master clapped him on the back and shouted his congratulations.

Laughter is not necessarily the appropriate response to every koan or to all of life's mysteries and travails, but Elouise Bell, like the Zen master, leads us to suspect that laughter may be one of the great liberating forces in the universe. Indeed, I laugh, therefore I am (which Bell may well have coined) is probably a more useful precept than that originated by René Descartes. From Descartes' time to our own, the world has been awash with the weighty thoughts of competing philosophies—many of them ridiculous and some downright dangerous. Imagine, for example, how different history might have been had Elouise or an equally gifted wit cut her teeth on a turgid copy of *Das Kapital* when it first plopped off the press.

The thirty-six entries included in *Only When I Laugh* cover a range of cultural

topics from Z (for zucchini) to C (for Christmas). Many were originally published in Bell's *Network* column. Their collection in book form is a stroke of good luck for those interested in literary history, because her work represents a rare genre in Utah and Mormon letters. Utah has poets aplenty, historians, writers of song lyrics and fiction in its many forms, and even playwrights and philosophers—but where are the humorists (other than cartoonists)? Possibly the late Pulitzer Prize winner and one-time Utahn Phyllis McGinley fits in this niche, as does the late *Salt Lake Tribune* columnist Dan Valentine. Really, though, the field isn't overpopulated.

Bell's humor is disarming rather than armor-piercing; moreover, it usually directs the reader to a closer examination of life and the cultural norms we live by. "The Mug-wump" asks us to look again at the extremist positions of the clenched-fist feminist and the don't-you-dare-call-me-one-of-them camps. Bell engages the reader in a dialogue that gently restores equilibrium by dispelling the polarizing notion that true-believer zeal is superior to a more open, less vehement view. In the context of *Only When I Laugh*, we could call it the Elouisean mean.

"The Meeting" is classic satire. It describes a typical Sunday morning church service in a familiar format of announcements, music, and talks; but in this instance all the key players are women—

not in a one-time role reversal—but as the obvious norm. When these women speak, pat and patronizing phrases about the opposite sex tumble unawares from their lips:

Next weekend is a big one for the younger teens in our congregation: the Beehive class is going to kayak down the Green River, under the direction of Sister Lynn Harrison. And as I understand it, the deacons will be here at home, helping to fold and stamp the ward newsletter.

In the Young Men's meeting tonight, the boys will have something special to look forward to—a panel of Laurels from the stake will discuss "What We Look for in Boys We Date." Here's your big chance boys! (p. 13)

"Call Me Indian Summer" is a spoof of the idea that each person's coloring relates to one of the four seasons and that cosmetic and clothing colors should be chosen with that in mind. Bell suggests that four is not enough, recalling "an aunt . . . who was clearly Ground Hog's Day" and "a friend in Logan [who] is the Fourth of July" (p. 99).

Most readers will not be disciplined enough to place *Only When I Laugh* on a bedside table for thirty-six nights of bedtime reading but will keep saying, as I did—just one more chapter before I turn out the light. So, we must nurture Elouise as we would the rare sago lily (when was the last time you saw one?); her insights and humor are sorely needed.

## The Survival of New Religious Movements

*When Prophets Die: The Post Charismatic Fate of New Religious Movements* edited by Timothy Miller (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 241 pp., \$14.95.

Reviewed by Michael W. Homer, an attorney living in Salt Lake City.

THE UNIFYING THESIS of the twelve essays contained in *When Prophets Die: The Post Charismatic Fate of New Religious Movements* is that most new religious movements, though heavily dependent on a single dominant personality, usually survive the leader's death. As J. Gordon Melton points out in his introduction, "When a new religion dies, it usually has nothing to do with the demise of the founder; it is from lack of response of the public to the founder's ideas or the incompetence of the founder in organizing the followers into a strong group. Most new religions will die in the first decade, if they are going to die" (p. 9).

The book's editor, Timothy Miller, admits that this is not a comprehensive study of the fate of new religious movements after the death of their founders, but it does examine a number of examples with a range of responses. These

examples range from communal movements (Shakers, the Amana Society, and Hutterites), to nineteenth-century American religions (Latter-day Saints, Christian Science, and the Theosophical Society), to movements of the twentieth century (Krishna Consciousness, Siddha Yoga, Unification Church, Rastafari, and Spirit Fruit). Miller even includes a chapter on American Indian prophets.

All of these movements are "new religious movements," the term now employed by social scientists who study religious movements. As Eileen Barker notes in her book *New Religious Movements* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1989), "Many scholars working in the field prefer the term 'new religious movements' to 'cult' because, although 'cult' (like 'sect') is sometimes used in a purely technical sense, it has acquired negative connotations in every day parlance." In other words, the new religious movements discussed are movements which many social scientists have traditionally considered to be out of the mainstream of traditional Christianity. Indeed, many of the movements are not "new" at all. For example, the Hutterites go back 450 years, and the group from which the founders of the

Amana Society of Amana, Iowa, are descended originated in 1714. Nevertheless, the term "new religious movement" is certainly less pejorative than "cult" or "sect," the traditional sectarian terms.

The authors of the book's essays demonstrate that none of the new religious movements discussed, with the exception of the Spirit Fruit Society, self-destructed after the death of their founders. Nevertheless, the groups enjoyed varying degrees of success. For example, of the movements discussed, the Latter-day Saints have enjoyed the greatest growth in membership. Without taking into account the various splinter groups, which Melton claims are now in excess of fifty, there are now more than 7.7 million Latter-day Saints worldwide. According to a 15 September 1991 *New York Times* article, this means that there are "now more Mormons than members of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) or the Episcopal Church, two pillars of the religious establishment." In other words, a "new religious movement" now outnumbered other "mainstream Christian churches," at least in the United States. This same article points out that only one other religion challenges Mormonism for new converts: the Jehovah Witnesses, another nineteenth-century American religion.

Most new religious movements have not been so successful in attracting new members. Statistics cited in the third edition of J. Gordon Melton's *Encyclopedia of American Religion* published in 1989 demonstrate that the Hutterites have approximately 353 communities, the Shakers have only seven members, the Amana Society 1,141, the Theosophical Society approximately 34,000, the Rastafari of Jamaica between 3,000 and 5,000, the Krishna Consciousness approximately 8,000, and the Unification Church and Christian Science in the hundreds of thousands. Thus, while the essays demonstrate that the movements studied have not died with their founders, such survival is no guarantee that the religions have grown and prospered.

Of particular interest to readers of DIALOGUE is Steven L. Shields's essay, "The Latter-day Saint Movement: A Study in Survival." Shields has written several books about religions in the Mormon family, the most comprehensive being *Divergent Paths of the Restoration* (Los Angeles, Calif.: Restoration Research, 1990). Though this essay does not break any new ground in historic research, it does survey the early history of Joseph Smith, the succession in the presidency, and the various religious groups which arose following his death, including the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, the Strangites, the Cutlerites, the Bickertonites, and the Hedrickites.

At times, Shields' terminology seems more appropriate for a lawyer's brief. For example, when discussing the succession claims of Brigham Young and the Quorum of the Twelve, he refers to their "alleged designation" by Joseph Smith (p. 61), the "alleged" conferring of the keys of the kingdom to the Quorum of the Twelve (p. 61); when discussing the practice of polygamy, he refers to the "alleged participants" in that practice (p. 64). He uses no such terminology when he discusses Joseph Smith III's designation as successor: "Joseph Smith, III had been designated as his father's successor on at least four different occasions" (p. 61).

In addition, he does not discuss the current condition of the various church organizations which originated after Smith's death. Recent membership statistics indicate that there are fewer than two hundred Strangites, forty Cutlerites, and three thousand Bickertonites and Hedrickites. Thus, while it is certainly true that many churches claim their authority through Joseph Smith, no more than two have any significant following.

Although this book provides limited examples of what happens after "prophets die" and makes little effort to distinguish between survival and growth, it is

a valuable survey of those religious movements studied. Certainly, for readers of *DIALOGUE*, it is helpful to remember the parallels between Mormon history and the

histories of other religious movements organized by charismatic leaders in the last four hundred years.

## Celebrations

*Things Happen: Poems of Survival* by Emma Lou Thayne (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1991), 80 pp., \$18.95.

Reviewed by Susan Elizabeth Howe, assistant professor of English and creative writing at Brigham Young University.

THE PUBLICATION OF A NEW BOOK of poetry is an occasion for celebration, particularly when the poetry is by such a generous and great-hearted soul as Emma Lou Thayne. But the title of this volume, *Things Happen: Poems of Survival*, suggests that these poems deal with tragic and painful human experiences; perhaps celebrating may seem inappropriate. Nevertheless, the poems themselves are celebrations, affirming life even as they explore some of its difficulties. In fact, almost all the poems are about belief, focusing on the imaginative re-creation of what is rich and rewarding in human experience as a stay against "what happens."

The volume's first poem, "Planting Wildflowers in September at the Cabin," is a metaphor for the entire book. As in most of these poems, the speaker here is Thayne herself. Planting requires her faith that "the moist seeds, webbed in the floss / of each other's company," will grow, and such faith provides an imaginative vision to sustain her through winter's bleakness. She says, "In winter dreams / I will return again and again" to the scene of planting, and affirms that "flowers / wild as Gentian and Indian Paint Brush, / will grow from my fingertips." The promise of generation, of blossoming, becomes a promise to her as well: "And I will rise with them / no matter where I am" (p. 13). As the wildflower seeds are a stay against winter, these poems, which also grow from Thayne's fingertips, are an imaginative stay against aging, pain, and loss.

The book has three sections. The first, "Come to Pass," includes poems that evoke several bitter and/or sweet incidents Thayne has experienced. She writes of the separation she feels as her children leave home. In "Last Child Going to Bed," her daughter's gleaming but empty bathroom becomes a metaphor for the loss of her constant, cherished association: "Without your running, / those tubs and sinks may toss up their porcelain / and disappear, faces unlined by tears or laughter" (p. 16). In "For My Child in Pain" (p. 25), Thayne creates a mother's anguish at her child's suffering and her desire to protect that child in any way possible. In "Margaret at 94 Refuses a Retirement Center," Margaret's own voice acknowledges what it is like to grow so old, "With my knees bone on bone, my legs parentheses, / My back the curve of meeting itself" (p. 18).

And yet, as these poems acknowledge difficulty, they affirm the value of living fully. Even as Thayne accepts her daughter's separation, she savors all their relationship has been, including the physical sensations of having her at home: "Long after I find where to sleep / the hushed taps will spill the taste of you / rushing like rain to the tang and glisten / of what is there" (p. 16). And despite her infirmities, Margaret refuses "to be serviced into non-being" and asserts, "I would still be a body lighted by love" (p. 18). She describes her approaching death as an awakening: "I would wake swaying, I swear, like a sapling / enough to please the sky, my skin, and me" (p. 20). About half the poems in this section ("Sailing at 54 with a Big Brother" and "Morning is my Time," for example) focus on the joyous experiences of life rather than the painful.

The second section of the book, called "The Map of the World," begins with a sequence of poems recounting Thayne's 1984 journey to Russia. The poems record the awe and wonder of travel into a totally unknown culture. Unsure of what awaits her as she journeys first to Moscow and then by train across Siberia, Thayne finds beauty in the land, goodness in the people, and openness and receptivity in herself. The poems are evocations of the variety of emotions Thayne experienced on this tour; they record less completely the specific scenes, the actual individual experiences.

The exception to that generalization is a poem about a later journey to Bucharest, "In the Cemetery of Heroes," which I think is the finest of the section. It recreates, in touching detail, Thayne's encounter with a mother who is visiting the grave of her son, a soldier killed at the age of twenty-one in the December 1989 revolt. As the poem opens, it addresses the young soldier, whose picture is embedded in the white marble cross of his headstone. Thayne says to him, "Your Adam's apple—a man's— / Belies the surprised eyes of a boy / Bare-headed and trying to smile—", perfectly evoking the youth and inexperience of this young man. His mother's actions are a powerful image of her grief: "She takes a wet cloth to the white edges / Of what is left, sponges away the new dirt / From this end to that of your marble grave" (p. 46). Thayne touches this woman's shoulder, speaks to her, and together they share the sorrow and immense loss mothers feel at the death of their children in war.

The arrangement of poems in this section is particularly effective. The first poems create the exhilaration of connecting with people of another culture, the genuine goodwill and enrichment that can be shared. Then the poem "Woman of Another World, I Am with You" is Thayne's affirmation of the efforts of women throughout the world to promote peace. The poem "In the Cemetery of Heroes" graphically portrays the devasta-

tion war brings to both women and their children; then the poems move to Thayne's personal reaction—as a mother, a grandmother, and a caring human being—to the beginning of the Gulf War one and a half years ago. The dramatic irony of this arrangement makes the reader ask why imaginary borders "invite the yours and the mine / of the quarrels, separate, kill" (p. 51) and whether war can ever be a satisfactory solution.

The book's third section, "Things Happen," begins with a poem of the same title describing the serious injury Thayne experienced a few years ago when a shaft of steel broke from a semi-trailer, flew through the windshield of her car, and shattered one side of her face. Thayne considered this a death experience (as the poem "When I Died" suggests), and one could wish for a longer sequence of poems exploring it because both the injury and the process leading to recovery must have been immensely significant to her.

That healing process, I think, is alluded to in "Meditations on the Heavens," a series of three pantoums that, when read in sequence, compare Thayne's vision of a comet in the night sky with Joseph Smith's vision of the Father and the Son. In the third pantoum, "The Comet Is Remembering," that vision becomes to Thayne a "small comet" in her mind, more real than Palmyra or the Sacred Grove where the vision occurred. The placement of these poems right after the poem "You Heal" suggests that Thayne's strong faith in God and in the healing powers of Christ must have played a considerable part in her recovery.

The rest of the poems again affirm the richness of experience—waterskiing at Lake Powell, writing poetry, rolling in a bathtub full of water and then shivering under a cold shower, waking up slowly and peacefully, and "Galloping Through Your Own Backyard." In the poem "I Am Delighted," Thayne says outright what all the other poems imply: "I am delighted. My life goes well. / I must say it as clearly as I can / before I'm gone." The poem

then goes on to catalogue some of the things she enjoys: "A new collapsible pair of glasses," the "Clean up window" on her new computer, "a young mare / and gelding frolicking like kittens," the sound of "the brook getting in with / the white swans at the black pond" (p. 66). The account of what pleases seems random and list-like—and those are qualities of many of the poems—but that very randomness can be attributed to Thayne's great powers of observation and her appreciation for every aspect of life it is humanly possible to enjoy.

The hopefulness of the poems is bal-

anced by an awareness of mortality. Aging or death is the background of many of the poems and the foreground of a few. But the eventuality of death serves, in fact, to make our human experiences all the more precious. As a whole, the poems of this volume are an affirmation of life. They celebrate sensory pleasure, the small touching gesture, physical and emotional contact with others, moments of variety and beauty in the natural world, and allege again and again how much of experience can be relished. In final analysis, one can learn from these poems not merely how to survive but how to flourish.

## Unnatural History

*Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place* by Terry Tempest Williams (New York: Pantheon Books, 1991), 304 pp., \$21.

Reviewed by Helen B. Cannon, a member of the English department at Utah State University, a freelance writer, and an editorial associate for *DIALOGUE*.

SOMETIMES WHEN I GO to readings given by *Nature* writers, that new and popular set exploring their private, half-mystical genre, I think for a moment that I'm listening to LDS general conference talks—the histrionic intoning of truth on automatic pilot—the sincere, paternalistic, sing-song of lesson.

In the first paragraph of Chapter 1 of Terry Tempest Williams' *Refuge*, at first I thought I heard that familiar tone of sanctimony and awe, even when the words gave only geographic, not spiritual, directions:

When I reach Foothill Drive, I turn right, pass the University of Utah, and make another right, heading east [sic] until I meet South Temple, which requires a left-hand turn. I arrive a few miles later at Eagle Gate, a bronze arch that spans State Street. I turn right once more. One block later, I turn left on North Temple and pass the Mormon Tabernacle on Temple Square.

From here, I simply follow the gulls west, past the Salt Lake City International Airport.

These direction-giving words (the bane of geographic dyslexics, of whom I am one) came to me as a reverential reading about spiritual *landscape*, where "red-rocks . . . bleed" (Williams 1989, 16) when you cut them. Come on, Terry, I thought. This is too much "sense of place," as *Nature* writers call their orienting-on-earth penchant. This is too literal a cartography.

But I was wrong. *Refuge* is unquestionably not a formulaic book. It is, rather, a book where the author, in spite of herself, transcends the camp genre of nature writing and, for the most part, moves beyond the distraction of language calling attention to itself. Oh, nature is there all right, once we get past Temple Square and the freeway—not nature tooth and claw, nor nature as fey or awesome, but nature closely observed, drawn with a fine artistic, scientific, and personal precision. No tricks. No sentimentalizing. No histrionics.

Nature here is "bedrock," to use Williams' own choice of metaphor. "I could not separate the Bird Refuge from my family. . . . The landscape of my childhood and the landscape of my fam-

ily, the two things I had always regarded as bedrock, were now subject to change. Quicksand" (p. 40). But this is not *Nature* writing, nor even nature as center. It is nature as counterpoint to another primary subject. Go back to the book's subtitle, "An Unnatural History of Family and Place." That direct taxonomic clue should have given me accurate expectation. As it was, once past that first incongruous paragraph, I realized that my initial prejudice was not justified—that this was, in fact, a book so honest and without pretense or artifice that I would not be able to put it down. (Friends to whom I've given *Refuge* swear it's an "all-nighter," impossible to leave. Impossible to leave, even after the last page is finished and the book shut.)

But if it is not mainly about nature, what then? The answer to that question is no more simple than the book is simple. For one thing, *Refuge* is about death, and dying that is not in the natural course of things; it is about the landscape (to borrow a metaphor) of critical, untimely illness—a lonely landscape where only a few intrepid companions can follow the dying and still return to bear witness. And the witness Williams bears is in league with famous sorties into that dark kingdom—James Agee's *A Death in the Family*, Susan Kenney's *In Another Country*, Barbara Myerhoff's *Number Our Days*, Susan Sontag's *Illness as Metaphor*, and Simone de Beauvoir's *A Very Easy Death*. I put *Refuge* with the best company I know. It is that strong. Like the others, it is a book written toward consolation, healing. "Volunteers are beginning to reconstruct the marshes, just as I am trying to reconstruct my life. . . . Perhaps I am telling this story in an attempt to heal myself. . . . I have been in retreat. This story is my return" (pp. 3–4).

And Terry Tempest Williams is an unflinching witness. "When most people had given up on the refuge, saying the birds were gone, I was drawn further into its essence. In the same way that when someone is dying many retreat, I chose

to stay" (p. 4). This statement is touchstone and thematic, the image recurrent. Terry does not retreat from her mother's death journey. She does not flinch in the face of death, and she no more sentimentalizes that process than she sentimentalizes what is happening to the shores of the Great Salt Lake and her threatened, beloved Bear River Bird Refuge. T. S. Eliot's lines from *Prufrock* come to mind: "I am Lazarus, come from the dead / come back to tell you all. I shall tell you all."

What Terry Tempest Williams, the messenger, tells is of her mother's long, untimely sufferance. We see how cancer transfigures Diane Dixon Tempest, how she suffers radiation, but also herself becomes a radiance. We see how dying concentrates the mind and the life, not only of the one dying, but also of those who love her best. I think Diane, with her attentiveness to life, must have wanted to be sure she was alive when she died. That is a strange comment, I know, but in our culture most of us would rather hide our deaths from ourselves and hide ourselves from others' deaths. We view illness and death as shame. We refuse to set limits, having become brainwashed by our own anything-is-possible medical hubris. Death sets a limit for each of us, but we would deny that, and in our denial, banish the dying. We don't want to believe in death. It's not even a matter of our raging "against the dying of the light"—it's our denial that each life's light will be extinguished. Only a few refuse to turn away; only a few return to testify of death and critical illness as capable of endowing life with its deepest meaning. Terry learns from her mother to put by denial—and willingly accompanies her mother on the necessary path. Terry returns from the journey with her mother to tell us.

Importantly, she writes as a daughter. That fact, too, is more central to the book than nature. This is a book about mothers and daughters. What Simone de Beauvoir writes as daughter, Terry Tempest Williams also testifies. De Beauvoir's



words could be Terry's as well: "You do not die from being born, nor from having lived, nor from old age. You die from *something*. The knowledge that because of her age my mother's life must soon come to an end did not lessen the horrible surprise. She had carcinoma. Cancer. My mother encouraged us to be optimistic. . . . She asserted the infinite value of each instant. . . . There is no such thing as a natural death" (1973, 123). And from Terry's mother, "Terry, to keep hoping for life in the midst of letting go is to rob me of the moment I am in" (p. 161). The emotional urgency in dying, the hard work it involves, is the subject of *Refuge* too.

Terry is the one who cannot turn away, even from the horrors of unnatural death. She is the one who cannot lie. Ever. That, too, is more central than nature. Her words do not lie. She writes—not as a "watch me writing" writer, but as one who bears testimony of power in the accurate word, the telling metaphor, the informed story. This is her articulation of grief and sometimes of palpable written rage (though never rant). This book presents words and storyline as a way of communing with death—of doing something that most of us refuse to do—facing and rehearsing our own inevitable deaths. In his poem "Spring and Fall," Gerard Manley Hopkins suggests that even as we cry for what is dying, it is our own eventual deaths we mourn. The child Margaret cries, ostensibly over falling leaves—the death of a season, not knowing that she mourns her own relentless progression towards death. "Margaret are you grieving / over Golden grove unleaving? . . . / Now, no matter, child, the name: / Sorrow springs are the same, . . . / It is the blight man was born for / It is Margaret you mourn for (1979, 86). Like Hopkins, Williams uses nature as image for human blight, plight, and sorrow—as reflective of self sorrow. "But this time I was not crying for Mother. I was crying for me. I wanted my life back. I wanted my marriage back. I wanted my own time. But most of all I wanted the suffering for

Mother to end" (p. 164).

And there's her singularly honest use of metaphor. Not only are her own metaphors good and true and revelatory, she also rejects metaphors that cloud or dis-color our ways of seeing.

This is cancer, my mother's process, not mine. . . . Cancer becomes a disease of shame, one that encourages secrets and lies, to protect as well as to conceal.

And then suddenly, within the rooms of secrecy, patient, doctor, and family find themselves engaged in war. Once again medical language is loaded, this time with military metaphors: the fight, the battle, enemy infiltration, and defense strategies. I wonder if this kind of aggression waged against our own bodies is counterproductive to healing. Can we be at war with ourselves and still find peace? (p. 43)

How can this book not be about nature when its very anatomy turns on bird names and precise lake levels? The chapter titles read as a taxonomy of water birds, with subheads giving measurements of the levels of the Great Salt Lake, levels crucial for the existence of these birds' refuge and habitat. Bird imagery here turns on human plight. Birds are the perfect metaphor—they "who mediate between heaven and earth" (p. 95). "There are those birds you gauge your life by" (p. 8). The birds' almost weightless bodies present poignant image of "the unbearable lightness of being" that Diane Tempest moves painfully toward. Starving and emaciated at the end, she becomes as Isak Dinesen envisioned her frail self: "And by the time I had nothing left, I myself was the lightest thing of all, for fate to get rid of" (in Thurman 1982, 443).

I must cite the strong image of the dead swan, taking it as just one example of how skillfully woven is this tapestry of birds and life and death; of water, sand, and sky. Here is the writer planting symbol, a prefiguration of how she will dress and care for her own mother's body:

Small waves hissed each time they broke on shore. Up ahead, I noticed a large, white mound a few feet from where the lake was breaking.

It was a dead swan. Its body lay contorted on the beach like an abandoned lover. I looked at the bird for a long time. . . .

I knelt beside the bird, took off my deer-skin gloves, and began smoothing feathers. Its body was still limp—the swan had not been dead long. I lifted both wings out from under its belly and spread them on the sand. Untangling the long neck which was wrapped around itself was more difficult, but finally I was able to straighten it, resting the swan's chin flat against the shore.

The small dark eyes had sunk behind the yellow lores. It was a whistling swan. I looked for two black stones, found them, and placed them over the eyes like coins. They held. And, using my own saliva as my mother and grandmother had done to wash my face, I washed the swan's black bill and feet until they shone like patent leather.

I have no idea of the amount of time that passed in the preparation of the swan. What I remember most is lying next to its body and imagining the great white bird in flight. (p. 121)

*"Es druckten deine lieben Hände / Mir die getreuen Augen zu."* Maureen Ursenbach Beecher quotes these words to Mary Bradford upon reading Bradford's touching essay, "The Veil," on the tender obligations of ritual dressing of her mother's body. The German lines express the idea that "one might go in peace if it were the loved one's loving hands which pressed the eyelids shut" (Bradford, 1987, 81).

In the mortuary, Terry does not shrink from serving her mother's body, with a tenderness similar to that prefigured in her service to the dead swan. Only here she rages against violation of the face she loves: "Mother's body, now a carapace, naked, cold, and stiff, on a stainless steel table. Her face had been painted orange. I asked him to remove the makeup" (p. 235). He doesn't. She does.

But of all the themes contained in this rich book—themes of solitude, rage, the Church providing both solace and dismay, both comforting and disturbing rituals, the land and its unnatural desecration, death and its process, the power of words—the

theme that for me is strongest is that of the mother/daughter relationship. This is the one natural fact amidst all that is unnatural and wrong with the world. It is the constant. The book is, after all, dedicated to Terry's mother. This family revolves about that mother/daughter center, and with the generational and genetic circle come all the natural and simple rituals. Racked with nausea and diminished by weakness, Diane performs a heroic gesture in preparing the family's traditional Christmas brunch. Her refinement and exquisite good taste are unmarred. That is ritual. That is Diane saying, we are family, no matter what, and we will sit down together, and we will celebrate in the midst of sorrow, and we will love each other in the fragility of a traditional meal.

The family, and especially the mother/daughter rituals, are what bring my good and rightful tears of recognition. The words are in place, and the simple acts they describe are true. Why would I cry over a shopping trip to Nordstrom's—over Diane's slim form sheathed in a red holiday dress—Terry with her in the dressing room to approve and to observe her beauty. These are mother/daughter rhythms. I wept my way through these passages—these verbal embraces of mother and child, these death lullabies:

What is it about the relationship of a mother that can heal or hurt us? Her womb is the first landscape we inhabit. . . . Our maternal environment is perfectly safe—dark, warm, and wet. It is a residency inside the Feminine. (p. 50)

Mother and I are in Wyoming. . . . She gave me my birth story . . . : "I don't ever remember being so happy, Terry. Having a child completed something for me. I can't explain it. It's something you feel as a woman connected to other women." (p. 51)

Suffering shows us what we are attached to—perhaps the umbilical cord between Mother and me has never been cut. . . . (p. 53)

"Terry, I need you to help me through my death." (p. 156)

Dawn to dusk. I have spent the entire day with Mother. Lying next to her. Rubbing her back. Holding her fevered hand

close to my face. Stroking her hair. Keeping ice on the back of her neck. She is so uncomfortable. We are trying to work with the pain. (p. 157)

"You still don't understand, do you?" Mother said to me. "It doesn't matter how much time I have left. All we have is now. I wish you could all accept that and let go of your projections. Just let me live so I can die. . . . To keep hoping for life in the midst of letting go is to rob me of the moment I am in. . . ." Her words cut through me like broken glass. (p. 161)

She starts to sob. I hold her as we rock back and forth on the stairwell. (p. 205)

She rubbed my back. "I love you so. We don't need words, do we? Do you know how wonderful it is to be perfectly honest with your daughter? Do you know how rich you have made my life?" (p. 221)

I walk back into her room, kneel at her bedside, and with bowed head and folded arms, I sob. I tell her I can no longer be strong in her presence. I tell her how agonizing this has been, how helpless I have felt, how much I hurt for her, for all that she has had to endure. I tell her how much I love her and how desperately I will miss her, that she has not only given me a reverence for life, but a reverence for death. / I cry out from my soul, burying my head in the quilt that covers her. / I feel my mother's hand gently stroking the top of my head. (p. 226)

Our eyes met. Death eyes. I looked into them, eyes wide with knowledge, unblinking, objective eyes. Eyes detached from the soul. Eyes turned inward. . . . I took her right hand in mine and whispered, "Okay, Mother, let's do it. . . ." / I began breathing with her. It began simply as a mirroring of her breath. . . . Mother and I became one. One breathing organism. Everything we had ever shared in our lives manifested itself in this moment, in each breath. Here and now. (p. 230)

Where is the Motherbody? . . . My physical mother is gone. My spiritual mother remains. I am a woman rewriting my genealogy. (pp. 240-41)

All this.

Diane had planted marigolds, just as she did each springtime, when her journey toward unnatural death began. After her mother's death, Terry and her husband, Brooke, are in Mexico for the Day

of the Dead, *el Día de los Muertos*. Terry buys marigolds from an old woman "whose arms were wide with [them]. . . . 'Gracias,' I say to her. 'This is the flower my mother planted each spring'" (pp. 278-79).

Full circle. Back in Utah, canoeing toward Antelope Island, Terry strews marigold petals into the Great Salt Lake, her "basin of tears," her "refuge."

This book is simply beautiful and complexly beautiful as well. Only a few things mar the book's near perfection, and I feel crotchety and school-marmish and out of linguistic fashion to mention them. I do so because I think Williams deserves more careful editing. To list a few of the most egregious errors, the necessary distinction between "lie" and "lay" (pp. 29 and 113), between "counsel" and "council" (p. 239), questions of agreement (p. 134), use of the passive voice when the subject requires the strength of the active voice (p. 173), or accuracy in quoting sources (p. 90). For me these are like pimples on a beautiful face. And if you think errors don't matter, consider the glitch in the author's blurb in the journal wherein her now famous Epilogue to *Refuge*, "Clan of the One-Breasted Women," appeared: "[Terry Tempest Williams] is currently working on a book entitled *Refuse* [sic], to be published by Viking next year." Little things do matter. "*Refuse*." Hmpf.

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## BRIEF NOTICE

*Looking for the Blue Rose* by Veneta Leatham Nielsen (Logan: University of Utah Press, 1990), 147 pp. \$14.95.

AN EMERITUS PROFESSOR of English from Utah State University, Veneta Leatham Nielsen has been a presence in Utah/Mormon poetry for many years, "weav[ing] her poems, somewhere between myth and morning," in the words of this volume's dust jacket. This perception of her work aptly describes this collection which embodies a personal quest for excellence and understanding in a world of mythic dimensions, symbolized by

the blue rose.

Nielsen calls it a "collection of poems and ponderings," and most of the poems do explore the spiritual/philosophical unease of the late-twentieth century. Her own answer is that "seeking, not finding, is the ultimate purpose and meaning of life" (p. xiii).

These poems require time to reread and ponder with the poet why

. . . the perfect flower, Mallarme  
The haunting indispensable,  
As you have said, is "absent  
From all bouquets". . . (p. 70)



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*Compiled by Susan B. Taber*

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## ABOUT THE ARTIST

Brian T. Kershisnik holds a bachelor of fine arts degree from BYU and an MFA from the University of Texas at Austin. He, his wife, Suzanne, and his son, Noah, live in Kanosh, Utah, where Brian paints full time.

Kershisnik says about his work, "In a metaphorical way, I would like my art to be initially beautiful and inviting but to have its full effect through digestion. Artwork should be beautiful, and I seek beauty in my work. Beauty affects me very much like truth. In my mind the search for beauty is a search for wholeness. It is a search for God. I want my artistic efforts to be part of my objectives as a Christian: to search for and serve my God. Each aspect of my work is part of my search for this ultimate, beautiful thing. The hints I find that persuade me to continue in the search are at times unexpected. Sometimes these hints are frightening; sometimes they are funny. I continue searching because I desire to build something lasting—a home, a story—to make things that teach me and make me laugh, and someday to find the unexpected God."

### ART CREDITS

*Front cover:* "Two People," 19" X 15", oil on paper, 1989

*Back cover:* "Swimmers," 19" X 15", oil on paper, 1990

p. 12: "Tall Dog," 13" X 10", drawing, 1990

p. 39: "Abram in the House of His Fathers," 19" X 15", oil on paper, 1989

p. 72: "A Fire," 19" X 15", oil on paper, 1990

p. 105: "A Man Unaware of an Angel Visiting," 14" X 11", lithograph, 1989

p. 106: "Just Before the Annunciation," 14" X 11", lithograph, 1989

p. 127: "Just Before the Annunciation," 19" X 15", oil on paper, 1989

p. 136: "Two Men Walking, Walking" 14" X 11", lithograph, 1989

p. 164: "Dog," 9" X 6", transfer print, 1990

p. 176: "Still Life with a Confused Servant," 19" X 15", lithograph, 1989

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