DIALOGUE

A Journal of Mormon Thought

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

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DIALOGUE: A JOURNAL OF MORMON THOUGHT, VOL. 39, NO. 1, SPRING 2006

Contents

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Praise for the Summer Issue

Thank you for the great summer issue of *Dialogue*. I enjoyed the variety of articles and the fiction. David C. Knowlton's article "How Many Members Are There Really? Two Censuses and the Meaning of LDS Membership in Chile and Mexico," (38, no. 2 [Summer 2005]: 53–78), on census records and Church membership numbers for LDS members in Chile and Mexico answered many questions for me. Since I have many friends and family members who haven't considered themselves church members for many years, I have wondered how many of the reported 12 million members really are affiliated with the church. I've also questioned the honesty of including people who have joined other churches on the membership rolls. Knowlton presented valid reasons for the large differences in numbers and was fair to the Church position for not wanting to drop baptized members from the rolls.

Kristen Carson's story, "'Atta Boy" (36, no. 2 [Summer 2005]: 122–50) delighted me. Most active Mormons have probably coveted a leadership position to showcase our talents and prove to surprised friends and relatives that we really are approved by God—one of the elect, to use a Calvinist term. Probably more than a few of us have secretly wondered if the less-active members we're assigned to home teach or visit teach aren't really enjoying life more than we are. Latham Runyon is a character I identify with in my imperfect attempts to gain God's approval.

Ann M. Johnson
Cedar City, Utah

Tribute to Wayne C. Booth
1921–2005

Wayne C. Booth, George M. Pullman Distinguished Service Professor emeritus at the University of Chicago, died on October 10, 2005. From humble beginnings in American Fork, Utah, he went on to become one of the foremost literary critics of our time.

Wayne's first book, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, won the Christian Gauss Award from Phi Beta Kappa in 1961. He followed it with *A Rhetoric of Irony*, *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent*, and *Critical Understanding*. Filling the need for a journal devoted to literary theory he co-founded *Critical Inquiry*. His most important critical contribution, however, may be *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction*. With its publication, he reopened a critical conversation about literature and character that had long lain dormant under the regime of the New Criticism.

After *The Company We Keep*, Wayne focused on applying his brand of ethical pluralism to teaching English. With Marshall Gregory, he wrote *The Harper and Row Rhetoric* and *The Harper and Row Reader*. With Joseph Williams and Gregory Colomb, he wrote *The Craft of Research*.

Wayne was a thoroughly engaging teacher, employing the Socratic method in its ironic power to confront students with their ignorance while encouraging lively and intelligent conversation. He was a supportive mentor, always positive, free with praise, and willing to support his students in their careers. My friends at the University of Chicago considered Wayne the moral conscience of our discipline. When they discovered that he and I belonged to the same church, they assumed he must be one of the most admired and appreciated members of our congregation. In a touch of Boothian irony, I had to admit that to many he was just another less active member. Nevertheless, to me and others who had the privilege to know him, Wayne Booth embodied the truly moral intellectual search for reconciliation and inclusion. We would do well to carry on that Mormon tradition.

NEAL W. KRAMER studied with Wayne Booth at the University of Chicago in the late seventies and early eighties. He has published a number of reviews and articles stimulated by and about Booth's ideas. He currently teaches English at BYU and lives with his wife and some of their children and grandchildren in Provo, Utah.

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Celebrating Forty Years of *Dialogue*

Levi S. Peterson

Unquestionably, *Dialogue* has a tradition. It has been on the Mormon scene for forty years now, and those who manage, edit, and read it are determined to see it make another forty.

From its beginning in 1966, the journal's intent has been to foster dialogue between faithful Latter-day Saints and the world at large. Its founders, a group of students and friends at Stanford University, saw their generation of Mormons as challenged by exposure to non-Mormon thought and culture in a way previous generations had not been. In the first issue, one of the founding editors, Wesley Johnson, wrote that the members of this new generation "share the faith of their elders but also possess a restrained skepticism born of the university, the office, and the laboratory. They display an inquiring attitude which favors open discussion with members inside the Mormon community and pleads for greater communication with those outside of it."[1] In the same issue, another of the founding editors, Eugene England, continued the theme: "I think and act within a specific context of Mormon faith that defines my life and shapes my soul . . . . But my very grasp on this specific direction, this 'iron rod,' turns me out to all people and their experience in desire for dialogue with them."[2]

Faithful to this tradition, the present board of directors and editorial staff will commemorate the journal's fortieth year in the following ways:

- Publish personal reflections on *Dialogue* by former editors, board members, and contributors.
- Publish an article which will review key developments in the

status and experience of LDS women during the past forty years, with particular reference to articles from *Dialogue*.

- Publish a retrospective of poems from earlier issues.
- Hold a commemorative dinner in Salt Lake City on Friday, September 22, 2006, featuring a documentary video of the journal's career.

It is something to have survived forty years as an independent journal with virtually no institutional support. But we have much more than that to celebrate. Treasures have accumulated in the pages of our back issues. *Dialogue* published cutting-edge articles on Mormon history long before other journals oriented to that subject came on the scene. Those cutting-edge articles dealt with topics such as the nature and meaning of the First Vision; the significance of folk magic in early Mormon experience; the formative importance of both the Kirtland and the Nauvoo years; the role of polygamy, especially following the Manifesto; Mormonism and Masonry; changes in the RLDS Church; and international aspects of Mormonism. Debates over LDS scripture, especially the Book of Abraham and the Book of Mormon, were aired in the pages of *Dialogue* well before the important work of the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS) emerged to public view.

No other publication has such a distinguished record for candid treatment of the uncomfortable social and political controversies faced by the LDS Church and people, controversies such as the race issue; the status of women; the ERA controversy; the homosexual quandary; and war and peace in both the Vietnam and Iraq eras. *Dialogue* has published landmark articles on science and religion and on profound philosophical and theological issues such as theodicy, agency, and determinism. Finally, *Dialogue* has nurtured Mormon art and literature, featuring paintings and photographs and publishing memorable personal essays, stories, and poems.

The next forty years will be equally momentous. We have reached out to the young by our New Voices program whereby, thanks to donors, we are able to grant to student authors (1) a year's subscription for submissions accepted for review, and (2) up to $300 for submissions accepted for publication. We have also responded to the challenges and opportunities of electronic media. To complement the printed version of *Dialogue*, we offer an electronic version via the web and DVD. With some sense of ad-

venture, we have entered the world of blogs by posting interviews and statements devolving from articles and essays published in the journal. We have started with the Mormon blog site, *By Common Consent,* and plan to continue participating in the "Bloggernacle" on this and other blog sites. We are also experimenting with oral interviews via podcasts.

In these ventures, we believe we act in the spirit of *Dialogue's* founders, making the journal relevant to young and old alike. In its pages, thoughtful Latter-day Saints will continue to turn themselves out, in the words of Eugene England, "to all people and their experience in desire for dialogue with them."

Notes

1. G. Wesley Johnson, "Editorial Preface," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1966): 5–6.

2. Eugene England, "The Possibility of Dialogue: A Personal View," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1966): 9.

Clyde Forsberg's *Equal Rites* and the Exoticizing of Mormonism

John-Charles Duffy

Supposedly, now is an auspicious time to be doing scholarship on Mormonism. According to a 2002 *Chronicle of Higher Education* article, Mormon studies has received a "surge of scholarly interest" from specialists in various disciplines.[1] Just since the opening of the new century, several significant works on Mormonism have rolled off university presses, including heavyweights Oxford and Cambridge.[2] In March 2003, Yale Divinity School hosted a conference on Mormon history and philosophy, the first such event to be held at an Ivy League school, advertised by organizers as "the most significant event in Mormon scholarship ever."[3] Efforts are underway to create Mormon studies courses or professorships at three institutions of higher education: Utah Valley State College, Utah State University, and Claremont Graduate University. Within Mormon intellectual circles, there is a feeling that if Mormon studies has not actually "arrived" as a recognized and valued subfield of academic inquiry, it is at least close to docking.

A new publication should give enthusiasts pause. In 2004, Columbia University Press released the latest title in its Religion and American Culture series: *Equal Rites: The Book of Mormon, Masonry, Gender, and American Culture*, by Clyde Forsberg.[4] Reviews of Forsberg's book are just beginning to appear, but so far reviewers have dismissed it as "fundamentally flawed" and have questioned whether it can even be considered "legitimate scholarly work."[5] More such assessments are bound to come, especially from Mormon reviewers. Forsberg's thesis is wildly revisionist. He professes to have discovered in the Book of Mormon a secret message which somehow managed to go unnoticed from 1830 to the present. Beneath a façade of Christian primitivism, Forsberg avers, Joseph Smith ac-

tually sought to found a new kind of androgynous Christian Masonry patterned after the Knights Templar. The Book of Mormon, as Forsberg reads it, is a coded blueprint for this Masonic order. Forsberg also discovers in the Book of Mormon an ambitious plan, never initiated, to achieve racial harmony through interracial polygamy. Though he positions himself in existing scholarly debates about Masonic or hermetic influence in Mormonism, Forsberg's reading of the Book of Mormon is eccentric, a sedulous but undisciplined amassing of parallels and speculations. Forsberg does to the Book of Mormon something akin to what popular esoteric authors Michael Drosnin and Margaret Starbird have done to the Bible[6]—except that Forsberg's work bears the imprint of a reputable university press.

Columbia University Press's decision to publish this sensationalistic revision of Mormon origins is a particularly dramatic symptom of a larger problem that hampers the mainstreaming of Mormon studies. Forsberg's book was published on the recommendation of John L. Brooke, who in 1994 won a Bancroft Prize for his own hermetic account of Mormon origins, *The Refiner's Fire,* which traced Mormonism to a culture of alchemy brought to America by the Radical Reformation.[7] Reviews of *Refiner's Fire* reflected a divide between orthodox Mormons (those who accept Mormon faith claims as literal, historical reality)[8] and everyone else doing work in this field (a broad spectrum ranging from heterodox Mormons to evangelical Protestants to confirmed atheists). While other reviewers hailed Brooke's work as groundbreaking, orthodox Mormons complained that Brooke had misrepresented their faith. As I will argue below, the Mormon critics were right, but orthodox Mormons have a credibility problem that hindered them from making their case convincingly.

A close reading of non-Mormon scholars' reviews of *Refiner's Fire* in the context of contemporary journalistic accounts of Mormonism reveals that Mormons are widely regarded, in and out of the academy, as exotic; they are also commonly perceived as being in denial about facts that debunk their faith claims. Expectations of Mormon Otherness and suspicion of Mormons' own accounts of their faith made non-Mormon reviewers receptive to Brooke's hermetic interpretation despite Mormon reviewers' just criticisms. Ten years later, that same state of affairs made possible the publication of *Equal Rites.* A climate in which scholars expect to discover exotic secrets in the Mormon past lends plausibility to a thesis even as fantastic as Forsberg's. His book's publication is a result of the disparate

horizons of plausibility that orthodox Mormons and others bring to the study of Mormonism, a disparity that impedes constructive scholarly conversation about this religious movement.

As I analyze Forsberg's and others' exoticizing representations of Mormonism, I am guided by accounts of interpretation expounded by Stanley Fish and Jane Tompkins. Fish maintains that, though interpretation is "usually thought to be a matter of discerning what is there," it is in fact "a matter of knowing how to *produce* what can thereafter be said to be there."[9] Interpretive communities teach us what to see and thus how to read. Tompkins approaches this same idea in the context of historical interpretation when she explains that any interpretation, any seeing, "is evidence of values we already hold, of judgments already made, of facts already perceived as facts."[10] In this study I attempt to identify the prior knowledge or dispositions that shape how different historians interpret Mormonism. Since I assume that work in Mormon history is, inevitably, a declaration of one's relationship to Mormon faith claims, it is only fair to indicate my own relation to Mormonism. I am Mormon by upbringing but have settled into an unorthodox Mormon identity such that Mormonism's significance for me as a biblically rooted spiritual tradition is unconnected to the historicity of its faith claims. This sets me apart from orthodox Mormon historians, for whom historical veracity is indispensable. By contrast, I am predisposed to naturalistic or environmentalist interpretations of Mormon origins; yet I find the particular interpretations offered by Brooke and Forsberg unpersuasive.

I

A connection between Mormonism and Masonry during the last years of Joseph Smith's life is undisputed. Between 1841 and 1845, four Masonic lodges were established in Nauvoo and surrounding Mormon communities, a Masonic temple was built (in addition to the Mormons' own temple), and some 1,300 Mormons were raised to the degree of Master Mason, Joseph Smith being one of the very first. Masonic parallels have been observed in Mormon temple rituals inaugurated in Nauvoo and in rhetoric surrounding the foundation of the women's Relief Society, both of which occurred within two months of Smith's Masonic initiation.[11] What is disputed is whether the Masonic-Mormon connection in Nauvoo is a reversal of earlier anti-Masonic attitudes on Smith's part. Researchers who see a reversal point to early revelations of Smith, including

the Book of Mormon, that warn against "secret combinations." Orthodox Mormon historians have resisted reading the Book of Mormon's condemnation of secret combinations as reflecting nineteenth-century anti-Masonic rhetoric. This is not surprising, given the religious issues at stake. Anti-Masonic readings tend to assume that Smith is the author of the Book of Mormon (rather than the translator of an ancient record by the power of God); and since contemporary Mormons are not inclined to regard Masonry as a satanic conspiracy, they are naturally loathe to believe that their scripture presents it as such.[12]

Like orthodox Mormon scholars, Forsberg argues against anti-Masonic readings of the Book of Mormon but for a very different reason. He believes that the Book of Mormon is a secret communiqué to Freemasons gone underground after the devastating Morgan affair of 1826.[13] In Forsberg's view, Smith sought to restore not primitive Christianity but "a beleaguered Masonic political order" threatened by the rise of feminized evangelical Protestantism. Smith, Forsberg asserts, wanted to open a middle way "between (Evangelical) feminism and (Masonic) patriarchy."[14] Not just at Nauvoo, but from the beginning, Smith envisioned Mormonism as a Christian androgynous Masonry, where women would be brought into the lodge to worship with their husbands "at the altar of true manhood."[15] Thus Smith aimed to heal the rifts between men and women, between Masons and evangelicals, and between York Rite and Scottish Rite Masons. Smith also aspired to promote greater racial harmony by instituting a system of interracial polygamy, under which white men would take white wives and Native American or African concubines to gradually produce a whiter race.

No aspect of this far-ranging agenda is explicit in Smith's writings. Forsberg's thesis is that we have to look beyond the seemingly evangelical meanings at the surface to discern the "hidden Masonic agenda" underneath.[16] Reading the Book of Mormon with an eye for scattered, often obscure, Masonic allusions, Forsberg is confident that he has uncovered Smith's true, unrealized intentions for Mormonism. The Book of Mormon is a Masonic romance, a coded call for America's divided, demoralized Masons to join a new order of Christian Knights Templar. Indeed, the act of reading the book is a kind of literary initiation into the order, anticipating actual initiation into the Mormon lodge/temple built at Nauvoo.[17]

In fairness to Forsberg, the question of Masonic influence on Mor-

mon origins, predating Nauvoo, deserves serious consideration. As Forsberg underscores, several early Mormon converts, including Smith's brother Hyrum, were Royal Arch Masons.[18] Researchers before Forsberg have noted that Royal Arch Masonry has a legend about finding lost writing on a gold plate hidden in an underground vault, recalling Smith's claim to have translated the Book of Mormon from golden plates he unearthed under the direction of an angel.[19] For those interested in identifying environmental influences on the imaginative matrix from which Mormonism sprang, the Royal Arch legend would be a plausible origin for the notion of golden plates,[20] and there may be something to be said for Smith's golden plates story having special resonance for converts who were Royal Arch Masons. Forsberg's question, "Why did so many Masons—Royal Arch devotees in particular—convert to Mormonism in the early years?" opens up a fruitful line of inquiry, with the caveat that Forsberg's phrase "so many" exaggerates the Masonic presence in pre-Nauvoo Mormonism.[21] But Forsberg provides a model of how *not* to pursue that inquiry.

Forsberg's claim that Mormonism has a "hidden Masonic agenda" is as incredible as John Allegro's theory that the Jesus stories are parables covering up a mushroom cult, and it is only somewhat less incredible than the notion of a Merovingian bloodline descended from Christ and the Madeleine, as popularized by Dan Brown.[22] No Mormons in Smith's day have left statements indicating that they understood Mormonism the way Forsberg understands it; no Masons in Smith's day have left statements indicating that they understood Mormonism the way Forsberg says they would have. This total absence of contemporary evidence does not trouble Forsberg, however, since he contends that Mormonism's Masonic agenda was a secret. By this logic, the absence of corroboration for his thesis *is* corroboration for his thesis. The secret is hinted at but never openly expounded. Readers have to assemble the scattered clues. Forsberg may or may not believe himself the first to have solved the puzzle, but he is the first to put the purported solution on display for all to see.

Forsberg employs a hermetic hermeneutic akin to that satirized in *Foucault's Pendulum*, a novel by acclaimed semioticist Umberto Eco. Eco's characters, employees of a publishing firm, are fascinated by a class of authors they dub "Diabolicals" who deluge them with manuscripts on esoteric subjects such as the Knights Templar, the Grail, Rosicrucians, cabala, alchemy, telluric currents, Atlantis, or ancient transoceanic contacts

between, for example, Roman legionnaires and the Maya. Despite their bewilderingly diverse conclusions, the Diabolicals are united in the assumption that "every word written or spoken has more than its literal meaning, that it tells us of a Secret. The rule is simple: Suspect, only suspect. You can read subtexts even in a traffic sign."[23] The essence of this hermeneutic is analogy: searching for meaning by searching for similarity. With enough creativity, however, anything can be analogized to anything else (as one character in the novel exemplifies with an elaborate comparison between the sephirot of cabala and the workings of an automobile). How, then, to decide which analogies are good—that is, which analogies are meaningful? For the Diabolicals, good analogies are simply analogies that work. The fact that any analogy could be made to work is not a problem the Diabolicals recognize; their propensity to look for esoteric analogies, specifically, is a result of their exposure to, and credence in, other esoteric analogies. The result of their reading is a "logical, irrefutable web of analogy, semblance, suspicion."[24]

In one of the epigraphs for *Foucault's Pendulum*, Eco quotes from a French work on Jules Verne by Michel Lamy, who argues for a hidden hermetic agenda behind Verne's oeuvre, not unlike the argument Forsberg makes for Smith. Eco's epigraph provides a sample of Lamy's hermeneutic: "Phileas Fogg. A name that is also a signature: *Eas* in Greek, has the sense of the global (it is therefore the equivalent of *pan*, of *poly*,) and Phileas is the same as Polyphile. As for Fogg, it is the English for brouillard . . . and no doubt Verne belonged to [the purported secret society] 'Le Brouillard.' . . . And further, doesn't [Fogg] belong to the Reform Club, whose initials, R.C., designate the reforming Rose + Cross?"[25]

Forsberg adopts a similarly unsystematic approach to linguistic parallels when he attempts to interpret a magical parchment owned by the Smith family as a Royal Arch tracing board. By reorienting some apparently nonsensical characters so that they resemble Greek letters (some capital, some lowercase), by plugging in missing letters, by proposing that one letter stands for an entire word, and by reading a magical symbol resembling the characters *2H* as shorthand for a double *eta*, he manages to come up with a Greek phrase that a Masonic encyclopedia informs him once appeared on a Royal Arch tracing board. The encyclopedia translates the Greek as "In the beginning was the Word." For the same phrase, Forsberg offers the alternative translations: "in God('s) Word," "God in the Word," "in God is the Word," or "the Word is in God." The last translation in

that list he calls "the quintessential lesson of the Master, of Third Degree of the Scottish Rite." When he is at a loss to explain some features of the parchment in Masonic terms, Forsberg decides that these are "creative departures . . . that possibly derive from something in the cabala." What that something might be, he does not say.[26]

The nature of Forsberg's project is such that evidence for his thesis can never be more than suggestive. Qualifiers such as "may," "might," "could," and so on punctuate his pages, as do rhetorical questions and parenthetical glosses. No analogy is too tenuous to be put forward as a subtle hint of Smith's veiled intentions. The fact that Smith said the Book of Mormon was written in "Reformed Egyptian" is, Forsberg proposes, a covert allusion to a degree in Masonry called the "Reformed Rite."[27] The Book of Mormon names Gazelam, Nephite, and Liahona are said to resemble Gibalim, Noachite, and Elion, names used in Masonry.[28] Forsberg finds it revealing that another Book of Mormon name, Abinadi, begins with the same three letters as Abiff, the name of a central character in Masonic lore; and he sees an "uncanny" resemblance between Hiram Abiff and the Book of Mormon's Nephi because the latter is said to have built a temple.[29] A vision described in the Book of Mormon that includes, among other things, the tree of life and a great and spacious building resembles an illustration Forsberg has seen in a Masonic encyclopedia that depicts, among other things, an acacia tree and a castle.[30] That Smith says he awoke from his first vision lying on his back Forsberg compares to the raising of a Master Mason; while a passing reference to Smith's being able to see into the bosom of the angel Moroni "may allude" to the bare breast of a Master Mason.[31] When the Jaredite barges are tossed on the sea, Forsberg see an allegory of "the hurt the Antimasonic Party caused men of Masonic sensibility."[32]

Forsberg's parallelomania is unbridled. He reads as if Smith scattered the text willy-nilly with clues that would let Masons know he was one of them, yet Forsberg also wants to believe that these scattered clues add up to a decipherable program for Masonic reform. Ironically, Forsberg speaks of a Masonic penchant "to make more out of [resemblances] than perhaps is merited."[33] Yet Forsberg does not recognize the same fault in himself. Despite the frequent qualifiers—all those mays and mights and coulds—the sheer volume of his suggestive analogies leaves Forsberg baffled that no one could see this. "It is hard to believe," he marvels, "that not a single person knew (of) Smith's (Masonic) history." After all, "to any-

one who knew their Royal Arch Masonry," the connections couldn't have been clearer.[34] Forsberg is emboldened by his mound of analogies to speculate that Smith actually became a Mason not, as history has it, in 1842 but, secretly, in 1830. There is not a shred of corroborating evidence for this speculation apart from Forsberg's Masonic reinterpretation of the Book of Mormon—but how else to explain all those parallels?

The aspect of Forsberg's argument that Mormon readers may find most bizarre—and offensive—is his claim that Mormon polygamy was originally envisioned as an instrument of racial harmony through miscegenation. "According to the Book of Mormon," Forsberg informs readers, "a multiplicity of Indian and African women were to pass through the temple, joined in holy matrimony to a monogamous white male with a white spouse."[35] By thus "marry[ing] promiscuously outside their race," white Mormons would ensure that "women of color might conceive a whiter and whiter Indian/African bloodline."[36] This is sheer fantasy on Forsberg's part. The Book of Mormon has nothing at all to say about temple marriage, those passages in the book that might be construed as speaking to miscegenation prohibit it, and polygamy is mentioned only when a prophet condemns his people for the practice (Jacob 3:5). In a convoluted attempt to make Jacob's condemnation work in favor of his own thesis, Forsberg adds interpretative glosses in square brackets to the Book of Mormon text, so that, in his quotation, the commandment against polygamy reads: "they should have, save it were one wife [of their race?]; and concubines [of other races?] should they have none." On the basis of his own speculative glosses, Forsberg concludes that the Book of Mormon equates monogamy with racial endogamy, then goes on to argue for the inverse: equating polygamy with miscegenation.[37] This is an egregious but not atypical example of how Forsberg wrests from his sources the interpretation he desires.

Forsberg has a history of zealous and, by his own admission, obnoxious efforts to show Mormons that they have not properly understood their own religion. In an autobiography that he self-published four years before *Equal Rites,* Forsberg describes how during his mission, the period when he transitioned from orthodoxy into skepticism, he alienated his fellow missionaries by doing his best "to expose them for the frauds I believed most of them to be."[38] Teaching Sunday School following his mission, he "took particular delight in exposing the ignorance of certain high-ranking officials in the church who visited my class on occasion."[39]

As he detached from Mormon activity and started doing what he calls "sensational" work in Mormon history, he was shocked by "the realization that Mormonism seemed not to want to hear the truth, or my version, anyway."[40] In his autobiography, Forsberg casts himself as a martyr, "silenced" and "ostracised" by family and church authorities "for merely attempting to speak the truth."[41] Against this background, *Equal Rites* can be read as another step in Forsberg's ongoing crusade to unveil the truth about Mormonism—"or my version, anyway."

II

How were Columbia University Press and Randall Balmer, editor of the series of which *Equal Rites* is a part, persuaded to take Forsberg's work seriously? Because Forsberg thanks them in his acknowledgements, we know the names of two of the reviewers who recommended publication; the third remains anonymous. One is John Brooke, author of *Refiner's Fire*, who, like Forsberg, believes that Mormonism must be understood in relation to hermetic rather than conventionally Christian tradition. The second reviewer Forsberg thanks is Alfred Bush. An emeritus curator at Princeton University Library, where he spearheaded the development of Princeton's Mormon collection, Bush has not published in the area of Mormon history.[42] However, in 1957 he coauthored an unpublished historical paper with Klaus J. Hansen, now an emeritus professor at Queen's University, who is Forsberg's "Ph.D. supervisor, mentor, colleague, and friend."[43] Bush also has the distinction of being one of the few Mormon reviewers who liked *Refiner's Fire*.[44]

The fact that Columbia selected Brooke as a reviewer, together with Bush's enthusiasm for both Brooke's and Forsberg's hermetic interpretations of Mormonism, suggests to me that the perceived plausibility of Forsberg's account of Mormon origins is connected to the positive reception of Brooke's account, which received the Bancroft and SHEAR Prizes. That positive reception was generally confined to non-Mormons and heterodox Mormons; most Mormon reviewers panned *Refiner's Fire*. Mormon reviewers' complaints about Brooke's book are similar to those I have lodged against Forsberg's. An examination of attitudes toward Mormonism expressed in non-Mormons' reviews of *Refiner's Fire* leads me to theorize that Brooke's account (and, by extension, Forsberg's) seems plausible to non-Mormon readers because it coincides with their preexisting sense of Mormon exoticism.

Brooke links Mormonism to the Radical Reformation, a category that includes the Münsterites, Spiritualists, the Family of Love, Seekers, Ranters, Muggletonians, Quakers, Anne Hutchinson, and Roger Williams. Flowing into the Radical Reformation is a broadly defined hermetic tradition that includes folk magic, alchemy, cabala, Rosicrucianism, Masonry, and figures such as Paracelsus, John Dee, and Jacob Boehme. These, Brooke believes, not New England Puritanism, are the precursors to Mormonism. Brooke sets Mormonism at a distance from the "biblical primitivism [that] is a broad theme in American religious history" on the grounds that "the Mormon claim of a revealed restoration ideal has few parallels, and the combination of temple ritual, polygamous marriage, three-tiered heavens, the coequality of spirit and matter, and promise of godhood is essentially unique."[45] The trajectory of Smith's life, as Brooke traces it, runs from village conjurer to prophet to Christian-hermetic magus.[46]

Orthodox Mormon scholars were displeased with *Refiner's Fire*, especially after it received the Bancroft Prize.[47] In published reviews, LDS professors Richard Lyman Bushman, Philip L. Barlow, and Grant Underwood made similar critiques of Brooke's work.[48] The three agreed that Brooke had "exaggerate[d] similarities" or "overstate[d] parallels" between Mormonism and hermeticism, which Bushman suggested were alike only to the extent that apples are like oranges.[49] They agreed also that Brooke had overlooked parallels to the Bible or Christian tradition that offered more instructive analogues to Mormon belief and practice. Barlow, for example, was bemused that Brooke would call healing a "magical" rather than a biblical practice.[50] Echoing assertions by LDS apologists, Barlow maintained that deification, which Brooke had cited as one of Mormonism's "hermetic" doctrines, has echoes in orthodox Christian tradition from the church fathers to C. S. Lewis.[51] Barlow and Bushman both cited the journals of early Mormon convert William McLellin, published around the same time as *Refiner's Fire*, to demonstrate that Mormonism was understood by its first adherents in primitivist or millenarian terms that had ample precedent in other American Christian movements. Brooke, the LDS reviewers felt, had distorted Mormonism by treating peripheral notions like the mutuality of spirit and matter as if they were central to Mormon doctrine or by recasting Mormon beliefs—e.g., about eternal marriage—into alchemical terms alien to Smith's teaching. Bushman observed that Brooke's efforts to link early Saints to Radical Reformation

groups had little corroborating documentation, making the book "itself occult in requiring secret transmission of key ideas."[52] Other LDS reviewers—William Hamblin, Daniel Peterson, and George Mitton—made these same criticisms in a more impassioned tone and at much greater length.[53]

Writing for non-LDS audiences, Barlow, Bushman, and Underwood were diplomatic in their critiques. But reviewers were blunter when writing for Mormon publications such as *BYU Studies* or the *FARMS Review of Books.* Reviews in these publications indicate that Mormons saw Brooke's book as a piece with accusations of occultism long hurled at Mormonism by evangelical countercultists. Bushman had hinted at this perspective when he started his review for the *Journal of the Early Republic* by situating *Refiner's Fire* in a history of polemics dating back to the very beginnings of Mormonism. Davis Bitton, writing for *BYU Studies,* was openly aggrieved.[54] Bitton read Brooke's book as alleging that Mormonism was "rotten at the core," something only "dunces" or a "dimwit" could believe. He predicted that *Refiner's Fire* would be "greeted enthusiastically by anti-Mormons," while he attributed the academy's praise to Brooke's having gotten "advance recommendations from scholars who should know their subject" and then reviews "by people whose mastery of the whole range of subject matter is lacking." "Are intelligent readers and reviewers really going to let Brooke get away with such slovenliness?" he fumed.[55] Hamblin, Peterson, and Mitton, having compiled an exhaustive catalogue of Brooke's factual and methodological offenses, implied that Cambridge University Press's decision to publish *Refiner's Fire* betokened a blind spot of religious prejudice: Could any Christian or Muslim, the reviewers asked, have gotten away with writing about Judaism the way Brooke wrote about Mormonism?[56] Professors at BYU, likely associated with FARMS, sent a letter chastising Cambridge University Press for publishing the book.[57] Louis Midgley, a BYU political science professor and an aggressive foe of historical work challenging Mormon orthodoxy, dubbed *Refiner's Fire* "the execrable Brooke book," and he publicly took to task non-Mormon historian Jan Shipps for having provided a complimentary blurb for the dust jacket.[58]

Orthodox Mormons were bound to object to *Refiner's Fire* if for no other reason than that Brooke's is a naturalistic explanation of Mormon origins, one that attributes Smith's teachings to environmental influences as opposed to tutelage by heavenly beings. Bitton lodged this anti-naturalist objection explicitly. In a standard apologetic move, he assured LDS

readers that any parallels between Smith's teachings and ideas afloat in his environment could be explained as signs either that fragments of truth had been preserved in the environment from previous gospel dispensations or that God had granted an independent, partial revelation of truth to individuals outside Mormonism.[59]

Controversies over naturalism are a subtext to all Mormon history, especially work on Mormon origins. In 1981, when the LDS Church Historian's office under the direction of Leonard J. Arrington was producing, for the first time, Mormon histories consistent with professional canons, Apostle Boyd K. Packer gave a now-famous speech condemning histories of the faith that placed too much emphasis on natural rather than divine forces. For Packer, a history that neglected to show "the hand of the Lord in every hour and every moment of the Church from its beginning till now" could not, by definition, be historically accurate.[60] Packer's concerns, shared by other LDS leaders, led to the squelching of projected publications from the Church Historian's Office, increasingly tight control over Church archives, and Arrington's release as Church historian.[61]

Among Mormon historians, there has been much discussion about "faithful history," history that acknowledges, or at the very least does not contradict, a supernaturalist understanding of Mormon origins and faith in the divine powers at work in the movement.[62] Richard Bushman has reflected on the obvious dilemmas faced by a professional trying to do this kind of history in *Believing History*, a collection of essays recently published by Columbia University Press.[63] As a naturalist account of Mormon origins, *Refiner's Fire* could never have hoped to receive more than qualified praise from Mormon reviewers. It was predictable that "faithful historians" would conclude that Brooke's radical revision of Mormon origins misunderstands or misrepresents their religion.

While I must emphasize that Brooke's account is nowhere near as fantastic as Forsberg's, orthodox Mormon reviewers are correct that Brooke exaggerates similarities to hermeticism and overlooks Mormonism's grounding in literal readings of the Bible. Brooke indeed seems "biblically illiterate" or "tone-deaf" when it comes to recognizing biblical parallels.[64] For example, Brooke reads an allusion to the signs that Mark 16 says will follow believers as white magic, and he wants to link a reference to Emma Smith as an "elect lady" to French Masonry, apparently unaware that the title is prominent in 2 John.[65] To use a term from Underwood's review, it is "parallelomania" for Brooke to conclude that Joseph Smith

was "fascinated" with metallurgy—and thus, we are to further believe, with alchemy—on the basis of a handful of references to mining in the Book of Mormon.[66] Brooke *may* be right to point to icons of the marriage of the alchemical king and queen as inspiration for Smith's concepts of celestial marriage and the Heavenly Father and Mother.[67] But those concepts, as Smith developed them, hardly bear much resemblance to the alchemical drama of marriage, baptism/death, and resurrection.

Hermetic influences may have contributed to the imaginative matrix from which Mormonism springs; but hermetic connections before the Nauvoo period are weak or poorly documented, and Brooke overstates the case to say that Mormon doctrines are "opaque" unless understood as hermetic.[68] Mormonism emerged from an imaginative matrix primarily informed by a primitivist, millenarian reading of the Bible, supplemented by influences that can be broadly dubbed hermetic—folk magic, Masonry, interest in Egyptian mysteries—which gave Mormonism an increasingly distinctive cast as it developed during Smith's life.

My reading of Mormon origins moves in the same general direction as those of Jan Shipps, Philip Barlow, and Grant Underwood, each of whom emphasizes Latter-day Saints' engagement with the Bible. Also, my assessment of *Refiner's Fire* and of why Mormon reviewers reacted so negatively to that book coincides in part with Shipps's. Having been challenged by Louis Midgley to explain her praise for Brooke's book, Shipps obliged in an essay that appeared in her 2000 collection, *Sojourner in the Promised Land.* Shipps broaches the problem of naturalism when she observes that "a general negative critique by Latter-day Saints is not surprising in view of Brooke's explanation in strictly human terms of virtually everything the Saints hold sacred." She observes also that "many LDS scholars seem to think the positive responses to Brooke's work are latter-day expressions of prejudice against Mormonism, the academic equivalent of the accusation that Mormonism is a cult."[69] She grants that this accusation may have some validity. But she goes on to suggest that non-Mormon historians hailed *Refiner's Fire* because its emphasis on the Radical Reformation helped check the tendency to place mainline Protestants at the center of the American religious story. It was for that reason, Shipps claims, that she complimented Brooke's book. As far as Brooke's account of Mormonism is concerned, Shipps concedes that the book is unilluminating. She regrets that Brooke and Cambridge University Press did not seek a prepublication reading by an LDS scholar and agrees with reviewers

like Barlow that the first Mormons didn't need hermeticism to make them open to Smith's message, only "a literal reading of the Bible."[70] As Mormon reviewers did, Shipps cites the McLellin journals, which she coedited, as evidence against Brooke's thesis, although she also reminds LDS readers that Church leadership had not made the journals publicly available at the time Brooke was doing his research (a subtle reproach?).[71]

Shipps is too irenic in attributing non-Mormon historians' enthusiasm to what *Refiner's Fire* says about American religion in general and thus absolving them of buying into the book's flawed claims about Mormon origins. In fact, non-Mormon reviewers did not praise the book only for its work on the Radical Reformation in America, though certainly that was a prominent theme. Occasionally reviewers conceded that the book had "rare lapses" and "a few unsupported assertions" or that "at times, speculation fills gaps in the evidence."[72] Still, non-LDS reviewers hailed *Refiner's Fire* for its revolutionary revision of Mormon origins. The book "forever changes our comprehension of Mormonism's development"; "radically alters our understanding of Mormon origins"; is "an insightful contribution to the controversy surrounding the origins of Mormonism."[73] Myron Marty and Paul Johnson described Brooke's work as a challenge to "cherished beliefs" that Mormon apologists would find difficult to refute.[74] But reviewers also praised Brooke for trying to move beyond the prophet/charlatan polemic that splits Mormon studies, implying that reviewers saw Brooke as balanced or sensitive.[75]

Like Brooke, non-Mormon reviewers[76] characterize Mormon belief in ways that would ring false, or at least distorted, to Mormon ears. Rachelle Friedman follows Brooke in interpreting a Mormon temple ritual as bestowing salvation without grace and in viewing Mormon theology as having moved from a notion of "Adamic perfection" to traditional Christian beliefs about atonement.[77] It is true that Mormons have a history of emphasizing obedience and merit to a degree that has led evangelicals to accuse them of works righteousness, and it is true that Mormons have recently adopted an evangelical-style discourse about grace that they formerly dismissed as "sectarian."[78] Still, it is far from clear that any Mormon ritual is intended to confer salvation without grace; and "Adamic perfection," which Friedman places "at the center of Smith's thinking,"[79] does not figure in Mormon parlance. Paul Johnson claims that Smith promised followers "they could become gods who knew what Adam knew before the Fall." Whether Smith in fact equated deification with knowing

"what Adam knew before the Fall" is debatable; but Johnson paraphrases Smith thus in order to imply a parallel to Royal Arch Masons, who, he says, "spoke of Adam as a god who retained memories of divine knowledge after the Fall."[80] Johnson's paraphrase of Mormon belief conveys an impression of strong similarity to Masonry where primary texts would not readily yield such an impression.

Something similar occurs when Myron Marty says Smith taught that "by his own choice Adam left heaven to mate with nature."[81] Marty has in mind the Mormon belief that Adam willingly fell to experience mortality, but "to mate with nature" is a hermetic phrase alien to Mormon teaching. Simply erroneous summaries of Mormon beliefs are Kenneth Anderson's claim that Mormons are pantheists (Anderson perhaps confuses pantheism with polytheism) or Curtis Johnson's statement that Smith believed "all matter came from God's substance."[82] Johnson misunderstands: He reads Smith's teaching that all spirit is matter as if Smith also equated spirit with God, which Smith conspicuously did not do. The point of Smith's statement is the opposite of what Johnson understands. Smith is not saying that matter is spiritual in origin; he is saying that spirit is material in substance.

Inaccurate or off-key characterizations of Mormon belief might be excused as an outsider's understandable insensibility to nuance. But non-Mormon reviewers may find it easy to believe that Mormons subscribe to notions that sound odd when they approach the movement *expecting* to find something odd. Cohen opens his review by noting that Mormons have often been regarded as the "peculiar spawn of the nineteenth century."[83] In his opening sentence, Paul Johnson calls the appearance of the Book of Mormon "one of the strangest stories in the strange history of American religion."[84] Martin Marty compliments Brooke for his restraint—i.e., for not being a "Mormon-basher"—yet "often one wishes he would utter a 'Hey! this Smith is really nutty!' or a 'Move over, Elijah!' kind of signal." Anyone who "is an eighth of an inch beyond Mormondom," Marty continues, may be forgiven for thinking this "a story of self-delusion, other-delusion, folly, and even chicanery."[85] Friedman sets her review of *Refiner's Fire* in the context of periodic news stories focusing on sensational or outrageous aspects of Mormonism: the Mark Hofmann forgeries and murders, for instance, or the controversy over Mormons performing vicarious baptisms for Holocaust victims.[86]

Mormon exoticism is linked to a perception that Mormonism dif-

fers fundamentally from traditional Christianity yet tries to pass itself off as something like evangelical Protestantism. Martin Marty is amazed that "Latter-day Saints see everything religious and cosmological in distinctive ways, unshared by their neighbors—and then plop themselves down inside the moderate and conservative forces of American society."[87] For Anderson, *Refiner's Fire* confirms that "beneath [Mormonism's] late twentieth-century Protestantism and Christianity, lies something very, very different, which is neither fundamentalist, nor conservative, nor Protestant nor, arguably, very Christian."[88] In the same vein, Cohen concludes that Mormonism owes "less to conventional Christianity than to occidental occultism"; it is "emphatically not a Protestant offshoot."[89] "Occultism" is a term certain to raise the hackles of Bitton and other orthodox Mormons worried about how *Refiner's Fire* might play into ongoing polemics about whether Mormonism is a Christian church or a cult.

Though reviewers compliment Brooke for having sidestepped the prophet/charlatan divide, some clearly see Mormonism as rooted in deception. Douglas Davies, often regarded by Mormon scholars as a sympathetic observer, writes that scholarship like Brooke's, connecting Mormonism to the magic culture, raises a problem for Mormons: how to assert the restoration of truth "amidst the matrix of trickery"? A "distinctive feature of general Mormon culture," Davies alleges, is that "the diviner is only a hair's breadth away from the false prophet, the sincere person from the charlatan."[90] Paul Johnson is convinced that early converts to Mormonism only gradually discovered what their religion really taught, that the organization of the church was "eerily secretive," and that this "aura of deception deepened over the remaining years of Smith's life." Mormonism, Johnson declares, is unique among American religions in that ultimately no one can sidestep the question of Smith's authenticity or fraud. Johnson does not hesitate to pronounce Smith's revelations "highly dubious," even debunked, citing the papyri purchased from Michael Chandler from which Smith claimed to have translated a lost book of Abraham but fragments of which, when they resurfaced in the twentieth century, turned out to be standard funerary texts.[91] Myron Marty invokes the specter of a contemporary Mormon cover-up of the movement's dubious past when he sets *Refiner's Fire* against the backdrop of D. Michael Quinn's resignation from BYU after coming under fire for publishing about aspects of Mormon history that some Church leaders preferred remain unpublicized.[92]

Expectations of Mormon exoticism by reviewers of *Refiner's Fire* correspond to similar expectations in the broader society, as reflected in journalistic accounts of Mormonism during and leading up to the 2002 Winter Games in Salt Lake City. Writers for *Newsweek*, the *New Yorker*, and the *Economist* commented with an air of surprise on how normal Mormons seemed—unusually conservative, but not unlike adherents of any Christian church.[93] Yet looks prove deceiving. As the kicker heading for Kenneth Woodward's *Newsweek* article declares: Mormonism "is looking more Christian. But it's still a different world."[94] The invisible difference consists of certain Mormon beliefs—what the *Economist* calls "startling departures from Christian orthodoxy."[95] Richard and Joan Ostling had made the same point in their 1999 primer, *Mormon America*. Politically and socially, Mormons have assimilated into the mainstream, but their beliefs still set them apart.[96] Among Mormonism's departures from Christian orthodoxy, all the journalists cited thus far mention deification, plurality of gods, the Heavenly Mother, and eternal progression. The *Economist* compares Mormon belief in eternal progression to Eastern religion, apparently thinking of reincarnation.[97] To readers of the *New Yorker*, Lawrence Wright passes on an additional bit of Mormon esoterica that Church President Gordon B. Hinckley volunteered during an interview: Brigham Young's eccentric teaching (shelved following his death) that Adam is God the Father.[98] These journalists' summations of Mormon belief suggest that, despite a conventional Christian appearance, Mormons are still essentially Other.

A corollary to the theme of continuing Mormon Otherness beneath a less alien façade is secretiveness, the intimation that Mormons are hiding something. The *Economist* describes the LDS Church as run by "small groups of men who meet in secret."[99] Mormons as a people are said to be "mysterious and clannish."[100] The "young, well-scrubbed, and ingratiating religion" ready to greet visitors for the 2002 Games has skeletons in its closet: the 1857 Mountain Meadows Massacre, for instance, or contemporary polygamists such as Tom Green, who cite early Mormon prophets to justify the practice.[101] Wright describes how during his interview with Hinckley, three Church bureaucrats placed tape recorders alongside his own. Whether Wright means it to sound menacing or amusing, the anecdote suggests a Church preoccupied with controlling information.[102] Efforts by the LDS Church to control its history and its intellectuals were covered in two chapters of the Ostlings' *Mormon America* and were

brought to the attention of academic audiences by a 2002 *Chronicle of Higher Education* article, which quoted Leonard Arrington on Church leaders' desire for a history written by public relations writers.[103] Richard John Neuhaus, writing in *First Things* in March 2000, alluded to LDS efforts to "sanitize" their history—efforts he thought were doomed to fail, as "the sanitized story . . . tries to hide so much that cannot be hidden."[104] The *New Yorker*, the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, and *First Things* all named the Chandler papyri as an example of hard evidence belying LDS claims, as Paul Johnson had done in his review of *Refiner's Fire*.[105] Neuhaus, indeed, characterized Mormon credence in the Book of Abraham as "a corrosive tradition of make-believe" and the Book of Mormon as "the product of fantasy and fabrication." Despite having a number of LDS subscribers to his journal and a Mormon sitting on the editorial advisory board, Neuhaus did not scruple to wonder aloud how Mormons could not see through the nonsense: "Not to put too fine a point on it, the founding stories and doctrines of Mormonism appear to the outsider as a bizarre phantasmagoria of fevered religious imagination not untouched by perverse genius."[106]

Terryl Givens has argued that contemporary representations of Mormonism as secretive or sinister replicate "old stereotypes and anxieties" from the nineteenth century. He makes the same argument about preoccupation with Mormon growth and political influence—a motif, it turns out, in Olympic media coverage of Mormonism, as well as in Martin Marty's review of *Refiner's Fire*.[107] Accusing their critics of perpetuating nineteenth-century persecution is a typical move for orthodox LDS scholars, especially those who see themselves as defenders of the faith.[108] I am not inclined to be so militant. But it is apparent that the writers I have examined—journalists and scholars—tend to regard Mormonism as an Other trying to pass as Like. I theorize that these writers approach Mormonism with exotic expectations already in place, leading them to create representations of the movement that are sometimes inaccurate but that in any case serve to reinforce Mormon difference. For these writers, it is a given that Mormonism is an essentially non-Christian, or at least not traditionally Christian, movement trying either to cover up this fact or to remake itself in the image of evangelical Protestantism.

Mormons would deny this portrayal of their movement. Clearly Mormons are worried about their public image and therefore downplay aspects of their past, including past teachings that are likely to provoke

controversy, especially when contemporary Mormons regard those teachings as speculative or marginal to the essence of the faith. It is also clear that Mormons are interested in presenting themselves as adherents of a Christian faith who share significant common ground with Christians of other denominational stripes. But Mormons see this activity as clarifying the nature of their faith, not transforming it; they certainly do not see themselves as calculated or disingenuous. And Mormons are, as ever, eager to proclaim the distinctive, saving message of the restored gospel, though they may disagree with journalists and others about what the key distinctions of that message are. That is, Mormons would probably prefer to talk about the Book of Mormon (which they understand as central to their faith) than about how God became God (which Mormons have come to see as a speculative or marginal feature).

Whether or not one believes that Mormons are trying to remake their faith in the direction of traditional Christianity—the implication being that they started out as, or still are at core, something very different—the fact that Mormons are *perceived* thus creates a climate that lends plausibility to accounts like *Refiner's Fire*. When Brooke tells readers that Mormonism's origins lie not in the mainstream of Christian tradition but in a hermetic fringe, he tells them what they already suspected: that behind the Mormon Tabernacle Choir singing patriotic songs and Protestant hymns, behind that giant replica of Thorvaldsen's *Christus* on Temple Square, something odd is concealed, something decisively outside the Christian mainstream, something so strange that Mormons themselves don't know what to make of it. Brooke professes to throw light on the mystery. And then Forsberg steps to the microphone, at Brooke's invitation, to announce an incredible exposé of his own.

III

Unfortunately, orthodox Mormons are not well positioned to persuade others of the problems with Brooke's and Forsberg's work. It may be disappointing, but it is also not surprising that Cambridge University Press did not submit Brooke's manuscript to an LDS reviewer, nor would it be hard to believe that Columbia University Press did not send Forsberg's manuscript to any orthodox LDS reviewer.[109] The reviews of *Refiner's Fire* and the journalistic accounts of Mormonism examined above reveal a widely disseminated perception that Mormons are in denial about their history—the Chandler papyri, for instance. This perception

was no doubt reinforced by national media coverage of the Mark Hofmann forgeries in the mid-1980s or the "purge" of prominent Mormon intellectuals in the early 1990s. Brooke invokes this perception when he remarks, in the preface to *Refiner's Fire:* "Quite obviously, this is not a traditional Mormon history, for I am not a Mormon historian"; the implication appears to be that "obviously" a Mormon historian would produce a history in step with Mormon tradition.[110]

Evangelical historian Mark Noll, known for defending religious perspectives in history, nevertheless finds fault with "faithful" Mormon history as represented by Richard Bushman's *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism* (published by University of Illinois Press but originally commissioned by the LDS Church Historian's office). Even for the largely sympathetic Noll, Bushman's work smacks too much of a providentialism where "events of religious history are regarded exclusively as transcendent and, because transcendent, immune to the techniques of the social sciences."[111]

In short, "faithful" Mormon historians have a credibility problem, even those who have published well-reviewed works on Mormon history through university presses. Consequently, despite accurate critiques of *Refiner's Fire* by Mormon reviewers like Philip Barlow, Grant Underwood, and Columbia's own Richard Bushman, John Brooke remains such an authority on Mormon origins that Columbia University Press solicited and accepted his recommendation on Forsberg's manuscript. It surely does not help matters that some Mormon scholars, specifically those associated with FARMS, have a reputation for writing "extended, scathing, and downright ugly reviews" of books that challenge orthodox accounts of Mormon history.[112] The staff at Cambridge University Press may be forgiven for thinking that the BYU professors who chewed them out for publishing Brooke's book are just cranks. And yet Brooke's work was flawed, more deeply than anyone saw except sometimes cranky orthodox Mormon reviewers and, perhaps belatedly, Jan Shipps. Whether non-Mormon reviewers will see through Forsberg's work remains to be seen.

This state of affairs is frustrating. Even if a scholarly consensus emerges that is dismissive of *Equal Rites*, the book's publication on John Brooke's recommendation still indicates how great the gap is between the horizons of plausibility that different camps of scholars bring to the study of Mormonism. Hermetic readings of Mormonism appeal to non-Mormon scholars who approach the movement with exotic expectations;

these readings appeal also to heterodox Mormons whose own religious convictions run in hermetic directions.[113] Meanwhile, orthodox Mormons are predisposed to find problems in any account of Mormon origins that jostles their faith's historical truth claims. Hermetic readings are particularly offensive to the orthodox at a time when Mormons labor to persuade the public they are Christian—"not weird," as Gordon B. Hinckley has put it.[114] All together, these circumstances constrain the possibility of constructive scholarly conversations about Mormon history. Granted that in any scholarly discourse community there will be competing camps divided by theoretical, methodological, or other interpretive preferences; but scholars working in Mormon history have such discrete horizons of plausibility that it hardly makes sense to speak of a single discourse community. Mormon history is an arena where scholars in different camps speak past each other, not to each other. Credence in Brooke's misreading of Mormonism and the publication of Forsberg's are symptoms of this disconnect.

I am not pleading for everyone to get along. If anything, my autobiography would incline me to call Mormon historians to abandon "faithful history" in favor of well-informed, naturalistic interpretations. Mormon historians are unlikely to do that. And for precisely that reason, historians are justified in suspecting orthodox Mormon colleagues of apologetic inclinations: of producing histories that serve religious interests and that reflect a distinctively Mormon supernaturalist worldview.[115] On the other hand, I share the frustration of the orthodox at seeing Mormon belief misrepresented or misconstrued. I tend to raise a skeptical eyebrow at Mormon allegations of anti-Mormon prejudice in the academy, but I also have to raise a brow at Martin Marty's willingness to hoot in print at that nutty Joseph Smith.

While I am troubled by the gulf between orthodox Mormons and others in Mormon history and am irked to see absurdities about Mormonism appearing under the imprint of a university press, it is difficult to envision a solution. As long as orthodox Mormon scholars remain committed to "faithful history"—a commitment orthodox Mormons must hold by definition—they will perpetuate a climate in which their non-Mormon colleagues regard them with more or less polite suspicion. That climate facilitates the publication of a book like *Equal Rites*. It is striking that Columbia University Press produced both *Equal Rites* and *Believing History*, Richard Bushman's reflections on being a "faithful" Mormon historian, in the

same year. Mormon readers may see the publication of *Believing History* as a sign that the academy is coming to take "faithful history" seriously, and they may be right in the sense that the publication indicates sensitivity to religious pluralism. But Bushman's essays also reinforce the perception that orthodox Mormon historians have an idiosyncratic agenda. *Equal Rites,* fantastic though it is, has the advantage of looking like history as usual: a naturalistic account of Mormon origins moving in a direction signaled some years earlier by an award-winning "regular" historian. As a token of religious diversity, Bushman may have his colleagues' courteous attention; but Brooke's work on Mormonism, not Bushman's, won the Bancroft Prize.[116] And that worked out well for Forsberg.

Notes

1. Scott McLemee, "Latter-day Studies," *Chronicle of Higher Education,* March 22, 2002, A-14.

2. Eric A. Eliason, ed., *Mormons and Mormonism: An Introduction to an American World Religion* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001); Terryl L. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture that Launched a New World Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Sarah Barringer Gordon, *The Mormon Question: Polygamy and Constitutional Conflict in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Douglas Davies, *An Introduction to Mormonism* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Kathleen Flake, *The Politics of American Religious Identity: The Seating of Senator Reed Smoot, Mormon Apostle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

3. Todd Hollingshead, "Yale Hosting Mormon Conference," BYU NewsNet, March 4, 2003, retrieved on December 23, 2004, from http:// newsnet.byu.edu/story.cfm/42757.

4. At the time he wrote the book, Forsberg was an adjunct faculty member in the History Department, Queen's College, Kingston, Ontario. According to biographical information posted at Columbia University Press's website, he is now teaching in Kyrgyzstan. Retrieved on December 23, 2004, from http:// www.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/cu/cup/catalog/data/ 023112/0231126409.HTM.

5. Arturo de Hoyos, "Two Wrongs Don't Make a *Rite,*" Review of *Equal Rites,* by Clyde R. Forsberg Jr., *The Scottish Rite Journal,* n.d., retrieved on December 23, 2004, from http://www.srmason-sj.org/web/journal-files/Issues/br-new.htm; Newell G. Bringhurst, review of *Equal Rites,* by Clyde R. Forsberg Jr., *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 24 (2004): 180.

6. Michael Drosnin, *The Bible Code* (New York: Touchstone, 1997); Margaret Starbird, *The Woman with the Alabaster Jar: Mary Magdalen and the Holy Grail* (Santa Fe, N.M.: Bear & Co., 1993).

7. John L. Brooke, *The Refiner's Fire: The Making of Mormon Cosmology, 1644–1844* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

8. Throughout this paper, I use "orthodox" Mormon in preference to the more common, but loaded, terms "faithful" Mormon or "believing" Mormon. Elsewhere, I have defined Mormon orthodoxy as belief in the historicity of LDS faith claims, in the literal reality of the plan of salvation, in the exclusive authority of the LDS Church, and in the obedience owed to the LDS hierarchy. John-Charles Duffy, "Defending the Kingdom, Rethinking the Faith: How Apologetics Is Reshaping Mormon Orthodoxy," *Sunstone*, No. 132 (May 2004): 33.

9. Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980), 327.

10. Jane Tompkins, "'Indians': Textualism, Morality, and the Problem of History," *Critical Inquiry* 13 (1986–87): 116. This does not mean, Fish and Tompkins go on to argue, that all efforts at interpretation must be swallowed up in the perspectivalist truism that we can never know what a text really means or what really happened in history. Certainly Fish and Tompkins's theory renders it unpersuasive to argue against an interpretation on the grounds of its being perspectival or invested per se (since the argument would immediately turn against the one making it). But this in turn means that "arguments about 'what happened' have to proceed much as they did before post-structuralism broke in with all its talk about language-based reality and culturally produced knowledge. Reasons must be given, evidence adduced, authorities cited, analogies drawn" (118). Hence, though I recognize the investedness of my own take on Mormon history, I will nevertheless argue against Forsberg's interpretation on grounds that I hope readers will find persuasive.

11. Michael W. Homer, "'Similarity of Priesthood in Masonry': The Relationship between Freemasonry and Mormonism," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 27, no. 3 (Fall 1994): 26–42.

12. Claims that the Book of Mormon contains anti-Masonic rhetoric go back to 1831. Homer, "Similarity of Priesthood in Masonry," 90. For a modern example, see Dan Vogel, "Mormonism's 'AntiMasonick Bible,'" *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 9 (1989): 17–30. For examples of orthodox Mormons who resist such readings, see Richard Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 128–31; Daniel C. Peterson, "Notes on 'Gadianton Masonry,'" in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, edited by Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book/Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1990), 146–224.

13. The 1826 disappearance of William Morgan was widely interpreted as a Masonic execution, since Morgan had been preparing an exposé of Masonic ritual. The incident sparked an anti-Masonic furor that decimated American lodges

through the 1830s. Mark C. Carnes, *Secret Ritual and Manhood in Victorian America* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1989), 24–25; Clyde R. Forsberg Jr., *Equal Rites: The Book of Mormon, Masonry, Gender, and American Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 17–21; Homer, "Similarity of Priesthood in Masonry," 12–14.

14. Forsberg, *Equal Rites,* xxii, xvii; parentheses his.

15. Ibid., 91.

16. Ibid., 115.

17. Ibid., 86–88.

18. Forsberg offers circumstantial evidence that Smith's father may also have been a Mason. Ibid., 46–47.

19. Homer, "Similarity of Priesthood in Masonry," 17–18, 89–90; Brooke, *The Refiner's Fire,* 157–59.

20. Jan Shipps, *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 58, has compared Smith's unearthing of the golden plates to the discovery of the lost book of the law during Josiah's restoration of Solomon's temple. Given my sense of Mormonism as growing primarily out of a literalistic engagement with the Bible, I prefer to seek biblical origins for Mormon motifs before looking to extrabiblical sources. Nevertheless, compared to Josiah's temple scroll, I find the Masonic golden plate a more satisfying, because more similar, prototype for Smith's plates.

21. Forsberg, *Equal Rites,* 44.

22. John M. Allegro, *The Sacred Mushroom and the Cross: A Study of the Nature and Origins of Christianity within the Fertility Cults of the Ancient Near East* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1970); Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code* (New York: Doubleday, 2003).

23. Umberto Eco, *Foucault's Pendulum,* translated by William Weaver (New York: Ballantine Books, 1990), 314.

24. Ibid., 513.

25. Quoted (and translated into English) in Eco, *Foucault's Pendulum,* 383. For the French original, see Michel Lamy, *Jules Verne, initié et initiateur: Le clé du secret de Rennes-le-Château et le trèsor des rois de France* (Paris: Payot, 1984), 237–38.

26. Forsberg, *Equal Rites,* 34–35.

27. Ibid., 41.

28. Ibid., 50, 74, 120.

29. Ibid., 67, 94.

30. Ibid., 70.

31. Ibid., 58, 62.

32. Ibid., 76.

33. Ibid., 114.

34. Ibid., 78; parentheses his.

35. Ibid., 224.

36. Ibid., xix.

37. Ibid, 214. The only text that could be reasonably construed as support for Forsberg's interracial polygamy thesis is a statement from an unpublished revelation of Smith's instructing missionaries to take Indian wives so that their posterity could become white. This revelation was not acted upon, but Forsberg makes as much of it as he can. *Equal Rites,* 218. Forsberg's source for this obscure text is a quotation used by his mentor, Klaus Hansen, in *Mormonism and the American Experience* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981). Forsberg follows closely—to the point of flirting with plagiarism—Hansen's argument that "within the context of the 1830s—at a time when in the eyes of most Americans the only good Indian was a dead Indian—such an attempt at racial elevation was rather daring." Hansen, *Mormonism and the American Experience,* 182. Compare Forsberg, *Equal Rites,* xix: "At a time when most people believed that the only good Indian was a dead Indian," the Mormon plan to whiten the Indians through intermarriage "was daring." Hansen says nothing about a plan for interracial polygamy; that notion is Forsberg's alone.

38. Clyde R. Forsberg Jr., *All the King's Horses and All the King's Men: Love, Alienation and "Reconciliation" in a Big, BIG Mormon Family* (N.p.: Xlibris, 2000), 91–92.

39. Ibid., 108. Apropos to his use of evidence in *Equal Rites,* Forsberg confesses that as a Sunday School teacher, he used that position "to promote my own peculiar beliefs. . . . I found myself purloining arguments from orthodox Protestant sources and distorting them to suit my Mormon apologetical agenda."

40. Ibid., 126, 138.

41. Ibid., 135. Forsberg refers here not only to truth about Mormon history but also to the truth about the abuse he alleges he and his thirteen siblings suffered at home as a result of his parents having been warped by LDS Church teachings on patriarchy and the necessity of large families. Though space does not permit an extended analysis here, there is a suggestive parallel between the gender battle at the heart of *Equal Rites* (ineffectual Masonic patriarchy versus emasculating Evangelical feminism) and Forsberg's own family dynamics as described in his autobiography (ineffectual patriarchal father, tyrannical feminist mother). In addition, a musical drama based on his autobiography reveals Forsberg's conviction that the LDS Church promoted "big families as the last line of defense . . . against the 'extinction' of the Anglo-Saxon race." Forsberg's claims in *Equal Rites* about polygamy and miscegenation should probably be understood in light of this latter conviction, though how the two intersect is not immediately apparent. "JazzTheater at NAC Elgin Room," online announcement of a performance of "Not Black or White: The Lost Recordings," by Clyde R. Forsberg Jr., retrieved on December 23, 2004, from http://ottawa-blues-jazz.ncf.ca/jazthtr.html. A more

extensive evaluation of Forsberg's scholarly habits should also consider the epilogue of his published autobiography, where he acknowledges having misinterpreted his own family history yet justifies his decision to publish the faulty interpretation anyway. In a highly confessional moment, Forsberg wonders aloud if he is mentally ill and describes himself as living "on the edge of madness." *All the King's Horses,* 182–84.

42. I make this statement after consulting the monumental bibliography by James B. Allen, Ronald W. Walker, and David J. Whittaker, *Studies in Mormon History, 1830–1997: An Indexed Bibliography* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000). Bush has published an introduction to Princeton's Mormon Americana collection, but that work is not historical. Alfred Bush, "Mormon Americana at Princeton University," in *Mormon Americana: A Guide to Sources and Collections in the United States,* edited by David J. Whittaker (Provo, Utah: BYU Studies, 1995), 281–95.

43. Forsberg, *Equal Rites,* xxiii. The unpublished paper is Klaus J. Hansen and Alfred Bush, "Notes towards a Definition of the Council of Fifty," 1957, Klaus J. Hansen Papers, Manuscripts Division, Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City.

44. Jan Shipps, "Thoughts about the Academic Community's Response to John Brooke's *The Refiner's Fire,*" in her *Sojourner in the Promised Land: Forty Years among the Mormons* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 204. Forsberg's mentor, Klaus Hansen, has also recently written in defense of Brooke's book: Klaus J. Hansen, "Jan Shipps among the Mormons," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 37, no. 3 (Fall 2004): 23–24. Another positive review of *The Refiner's Fire* was written by Lance Owens, a Latter-day Saint turned Gnostic priest and author of an award-winning *Dialogue* article drawing parallels between Smith's thought and cabala. Lance S. Owens, Review of *The Refiner's Fire,* by John L. Brooke, *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 27, no. 4 (Winter 1994): 187–91. Owens is one of a subset of Mormons or former Mormons who elaborate interpretations of the faith that could be called hermetic given their focus on magic or the *hieros gamos,* the sacred marriage of the archetypal male and female. In *The Refiner's Fire,* Brooke identifies as other members of this subset Maxine Hanks, D. Michael Quinn, and Paul J. Toscano. These individuals have been excommunicated from the LDS Church; Brooke interprets the excommunications as an effort by Church leaders to suppress Mormonism's hermetic elements. *The Refiner's Fire,* 305. Because I am interested in the contrast between orthodox Mormon and non-Mormon historians, I have little to say about the Mormon hermeticists aside from noting their presence in the constellation of competing readings of Mormonism.

45. Brooke, *The Refiner's Fire,* xv–xvi.

46. Ibid., 4.

47. John W. Welch, "Two Reviews: Mormonism and the Hermetic World View," editor's preface to Reviews of *The Refiner's Fire*, by John L. Brooke, *BYU Studies* 34, no. 4 (1994-95): 165.

48. Richard Bushman, "The Mysteries of Mormonism," Review of *The Refiner's Fire*, by John L. Brooke, *Journal of the Early Republic* 15 (1995): 501-8; Philip L. Barlow, "Decoding Mormonism," Review of *The Refiner's Fire*, by John L. Brooke, *Christian Century*, January 17, 1996, 52-55; Grant Underwood, Review of *The Refiner's Fire*, by John L. Brooke, *Pacific Historical Review* 65 (1996): 323-24. Bushman was Gouverneur Morris Professor of History at Columbia University and winner of a 1968 Bancroft Prize for his work on colonial New England. Barlow was an associate professor of theological studies at Hanover College and author of *Mormons and the Bible: The Place of the Latter-day Saints in American Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991). Underwood was teaching at BYU-Hawaii and had recently published *The Millenarian World of Early Mormonism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

49. Underwood, Review, 323; Barlow, "Decoding Mormonism," 53; Bushman, "Mysteries of Mormonism," 504.

50. Barlow, "Decoding Mormonism," 53; cf. Underwood, Review, 323.

51. Barlow, "Decoding Mormonism," 54.

52. Bushman, "Mysteries of Mormonism," 504.

53. William J. Hamblin, Daniel C. Peterson, and George L. Mitton, "Mormon in the Fiery Furnace, Or Loftes Tryk Goes to Cambridge," Review of *The Refiner's Fire*, by John L. Brooke, *FARMS Review of Books* 6, no. 2 (1994): 3-58, retrieved on December 23, 2004, from http://farms.byu.edu/display.php?table=review&id=151; William J. Hamblin, Daniel C. Peterson, and George L. Mitton, Review of *The Refiner's Fire*, by John L. Brooke, *BYU Studies* 34, no. 4 (1994-95): 167-81. Hamblin and Peterson were associate professors at BYU, Hamblin in history and Peterson in Near Eastern languages. Mitton was described as "retired now from a career in education and public administration."

54. Davis Bitton, Review of *The Refiner's Fire*, by John L. Brooke, *BYU Studies* 34, no. 4 (1994-95): 182-92. Bitton was a professor of history at the University of Utah and one of two former assistant Church historians in the LDS Historical Department under Leonard Arrington, the dean of Mormon history.

55. Ibid., 182, 186, 191.

56. Hamblin, Peterson, and Mitton, "Mormon in the Fiery Furnace."

57. For references to this letter, see Barlow, "Decoding Mormonism," 53; Shipps, "Thoughts about the Academic Community's Response," 214 note 8.

58. Louis Midgley, "The Shipps Odyssey in Retrospect," Review of *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition*, by Jan Shipps, *FARMS Review of Books* 7, no. 2 (1995): 219-52; retrieved on December 23, 2004, from http://farms.byu.edu/display.php?table=review&id=194.

59. Bitton, Review, 184–85.

60. Boyd K. Packer, "The Mantle Is Far, Far Greater Than the Intellect," *BYU Studies* 21, no. 3 (Summer 1981): 262.

61. Leonard J. Arrington, *Adventures of a Church Historian* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998).

62. See, for example, the essays in *Faithful History: Essays on Writing Mormon History,* edited by George D. Smith (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992).

63. Richard L. Bushman, *Believing History: Latter-day Saint Essays,* edited by Reid L. Neilson and Jed Woodworth (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

64. The quoted phrases come, respectively, from Hamblin, Peterson, and Mitton, "Mormon in the Fiery Furnace," and Shipps, "Thoughts on the Academic Community's Response," 210.

65. Brooke, *The Refiner's Fire,* 72, 210.

66. Underwood, Review, 323; Brooke, *The Refiner's Fire,* 159–60.

67. Brooke, *The Refiner's Fire,* 9, 257–58.

68. Ibid., 278.

69. Shipps, "Thoughts on the Academic Community's Response," 205–6.

70. Ibid., 211.

71. Ibid., 212–13.

72. Charles L. Cohen, Review of *The Refiner's Fire,* by John L. Brooke, *William and Mary Quarterly* 53 (1996): 214–15; Curtis D. Johnson, Review of *The Refiner's Fire,* by John L. Brooke, *Journal of American History* 82 (1995): 685.

73. Cohen, Review, 214; Johnson, Review, 684; George M. Eberhart, Review of *The Refiner's Fire,* by John L. Brooke, *College and Research Libraries News,* January 1995, 37.

74. Myron Marty, Review of *The Refiner's Fire,* by John L. Brooke, *Journal of Religion* 76 (1996): 648; Paul Johnson, "The Alchemist," Review of *The Refiner's Fire,* by John L. Brooke, *New Republic,* June 12, 1995, 46–48.

75. Curtis Johnson, Review, 684; Paul Johnson, "The Alchemist," 47–48; Martin Marty, "Saints for These Latter Days," Review of *The Refiner's Fire,* by John L. Brooke, *Commonweal,* March 10, 1995, 26.

76. The category "non-Mormon reviewers" lumps together a great variety of scholars subscribing to diverse worldviews, religious and otherwise. What allows these scholars to be placed in the same category is their disbelief in Mormon orthodoxy, which sharply distinguishes them from the majority of Mormons doing Mormon studies. Because I am concerned about the gap between orthodox Mormons' and non-Mormons' ideas about what could have "actually happened" in history and how this gap impacts Mormon studies as a field, I will treat the non-Mormon reviewers as a bloc, without trying to identify nuances in their respective readings of Mormonism. As part of another research project, I am work-

ing on mapping non-Mormon representations of Mormonism in scholarship with greater complexity than I have done for the purposes of this essay.

77. Rachelle E. Friedman, Review of *The Refiner's Fire*, by John L. Brooke, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 27 (1996): 329–31.

78. BYU religion professor Stephen E. Robinson popularized discourse about grace among Mormons in the early 1990s, principally through his *Believing Christ: The Parable of the Bicycle and Other Good News* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992). On Mormons having formerly rejected such discourse because of its association with apostate "sectarian" Christianity, see Joseph Fielding McConkie, *Answers: Straightforward Answers to Tough Gospel Questions* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1998), 59–60. Brooke's suggestion that early Mormons rejected salvation by grace struck a raw nerve among Mormon reviewers of *The Refiner's Fire*, probably because it echoed evangelical polemics against Mormonism. Hamblin, Peterson, and Mitton dedicate a whole section of their fifty-five-page review to rebutting Brooke on this point. "Mormon in the Fiery Furnace," under "Primary Sources and the Atonement: A Test Case." See also Bitton, Review, 189, who reads Brooke as repeating accusations that Mormons are Pelagians.

79. Friedman, Review, 330.

80. Paul Johnson, "The Alchemist," 46.

81. Myron Marty, Review, 648.

82. Kenneth Anderson, "The Magi of the Great Salt Lake," Review of *The Refiner's Fire*, by John L. Brooke, *Times Literary Supplement*, March 24, 1995, 11; Curtis Johnson, Review, 684.

83. Cohen, Review, 213.

84. Paul Johnson, "The Alchemist," 46.

85. Martin Marty, "Saints for These Latter Days," 26–27.

86. Friedman, Review, 329–30.

87. Martin Marty, "Saints for These Latter Days," 27.

88. Anderson, "Magi of the Great Salt Lake," 10.

89. Cohen, Review, 215.

90. Douglas Davies, review of *The Refiner's Fire*, by John L. Brooke, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 49, no. 2 (1996): 237.

91. Paul Johnson, "The Alchemist," 46, 48.

92. Myron Marty, Review, 648.

93. Kenneth L. Woodward, "A Mormon Moment," *Newsweek*, September 10, 2001, 44–51; Lawrence Wright, "Lives of the Saints," *New Yorker*, January 21, 2002, 40–57; "Church of the West," *Economist*, February 9, 2002, 25–26.

94. Woodward, "A Mormon Moment," 44.

95. "Church of the West," 26.

96. Richard N. Ostling and Joan K. Ostling, *Mormon America: The Power and the Promise* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1999), 112.

97. "Church of the West," 26.

98. Wright, "Lives of the Saints," 44. According to Wright, Hinckley professed not to know what Brigham Young was talking about or to be worried about it. Hinckley was perhaps trying to defuse, but likely reinforced, the perception that Mormons are in retreat from past teachings.

99. "Church of the West," 26.

100. Woodward, "A Mormon Moment," 46.

101. Wright, "Lives of the Saints," 40, 43–46, 54–56.

102. Ibid., 43.

103. Ostling and Ostling, *Mormon America,* chaps. 15, 21; McLemee, "Latter-day Studies," A16.

104. Richard John Neuhaus, "Is Mormonism Christian?" *First Things,* March 2000, 100.

105. Wright, "Lives of the Saints," 52–53; McLemee, "Latter-day Studies," A15–16; Neuhaus, "Is Mormonism Christian?" 99.

106. Neuhaus, "Is Mormonism Christian?" 99. Bruce C. Hafen sat on *First Things*'s editorial advisory board through the 1990s. His name was removed from the list of board members after September 2000, four years after Hafen was called to the First Quorum of Seventy.

107. Terry L. Givens, *The Viper on the Hearth: Mormons, Myths, and the Construction of Heresy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 155–56. In the journalistic coverage of Mormonism around the Olympics, an emphasis on Mormon growth or political dominance served as a handy hook. The *Economist* ("Church of the West," 25) cited sociologist Rodney Stark's prediction that Mormons would grow to 50 million by 2040, while the *New Yorker* (Wright, "Lives of the Saints," 42) quoted Harold Bloom's speculation that Mormon numbers and wealth could someday make "governing our democracy . . . impossible without Mormon cooperation." Mormon political influence was also a focus in *Newsweek* (Woodward, "A Mormon Moment," 46) and the *Economist,* though the latter concluded that fears over Mormon growth and theocracy are "exaggerated" ("Church of the West," 26). Martin Marty employed this same frame for his review of *The Refiner's Fire,* citing Mormonism's growth in contrast to the decline of mainline churches and Mormon expansion outside the Great Basin as facts that make it "increasingly urgent for the people they call Gentiles to understand them" ("Saints for These Latter Days," 26).

108. Duffy, "Defending the Kingdom," 25, 44 note 33.

109. Alfred Bush's enthusiasm for *The Refiner's Fire* strongly suggests that he has left Mormon orthodoxy for naturalism; he appears, in any case, thoroughly disengaged from the Mormon intellectual world (as representated by *Dialogue, Sunstone,* the Mormon History Association, etc.). It is unlikely that the anonymous third reviewer was orthodox, since I cannot imagine that an ortho-

dox Mormon would endorse Forsberg's speculative, sensationalistic revision of his or her faith.

110. Brooke, *The Refiner's Fire*, xvi.

111. Mark A. Noll, "'And the Lion Shall Lie Down with the Lamb': The Social Sciences and Religious History," *Fides et Historia* 20, no. 3 (October 1988): 20.

112. Shipps, "Thoughts on the Academic Community's Response," 205.

113. On Mormon hermeticists, see note 44.

114. Quoted in Woodward, "A Mormon Moment," 48.

115. The situation is complex, though. Interpretations of Mormonism that emphasize its biblical roots—such as Barlow's and Underwood's—may serve apologetic ends to the degree they present Mormons as recognizably Christian. Nevertheless, I remain convinced that these scholars' interpretations are more plausible than Brooke's and Forsberg's hermetic ones.

116. As mentioned earlier (note 48), Bushman won a Bancroft Prize in 1968 for work outside Mormon history.

Premortal Spirits: Implications for Cloning, Abortion, Evolution, and Extinction

Kent C. Condie

Any organism (animal or plant) living on Earth today or any organism that lived on Earth in the geologic past is largely the product of its genes, which in turn are inherited from two parents—or, in the case of asexual reproduction, one parent. No other parents can produce this organism. Hence, if each organism is patterned precisely after a spiritual precursor, as we are commonly led to believe by some interpretations of Moses 3:5, only one set of parents can produce this organism in the temporal world. Carried further, this scenario means that all of our spouses and children are predestined from the spirit world and that we really have not exercised free agency in selecting a mate or in having children in this life. It also means that each plant and animal that has ever lived on Earth was predestined to come from one or two specific parents. This would also seem to require that events in Earth history are predestined, because specific events are necessary to bring predestined individuals into contact with each other in the right time frame.

But how can a predestined or deterministic temporal world be consistent with traditional LDS belief in free agency? From the very onset of the restoration of the LDS Church, Joseph Smith taught that God "did not elect or predestinate."[1] As Bruce R. McConkie states, "Predestination is the false doctrine that from all eternity God has ordered whatever comes to pass."[2] Determinism advocates that all earthly events are controlled by prior events (usually in the premortal existence), but not necessarily by God. Although L. Rex Sears makes a case for compatibility of free agency and determinism, Blake Ostler shows that his arguments are easily refuted.[3] Also,

many basic LDS doctrines are at odds with both predestination and determinism.

Although free agency and predestination/determinism are generally considered mutually exclusive, LDS teachings and scriptures often do not clarify inconsistencies in these concepts as applied to the preexistence and to God's foreknowledge. In this paper, I examine and explore ways to reconcile inconsistencies by proposing a model for premortal spirits. The viability of the model can be tested against scriptures and scientific observations. If we find factual information that the model cannot explain, then it must be modified or abandoned. The model I propose is that premortal spirits are not predestined for specific mortal bodies, an idea earlier suggested by Frank Salisbury.[4] At present, I know of no evidence, scriptural or scientific, that would require rejecting the model outright. As with scientific models, however, future information may require modification or rejection.

I also discuss questions about cloning, abortion, evolution, and extinction related to the predestination question. This contribution, however, is not intended to be a discussion of predestination, free agency, or God's foreknowledge, all of which have been discussed from an LDS point of view in recent articles and books, many of which are cited herein.

The Spiritual Creation: Spirit-Body Relationships

Many LDS writers have speculated on how spiritual and temporal bodies are related. Most conclude that the earthly body is identical or nearly identical to the spiritual body.[5] Parley P. Pratt was one of the earliest LDS theologians to comment on this subject: "The spirit of man consists of an organization or embodiment of the elements of spiritual matter, in the likeness and after the pattern of the fleshly tabernacle. It possesses, in fact, all the organs and parts exactly corresponding to the outward tabernacle."[6] The most definitive statement is by the First Presidency in 1909: "The spirit of man is in the form of man, and the spirits of all creatures are in the likeness of their bodies."[7] Also, almost all Mormons agree that spirits have gender, a concept most recently stated by President Gordon B. Hinckley in general conference: "All human beings—male and female—are created in the image of God. Each is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents, and as such, each has a divine nature and destiny. Gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose."[8]

However, as discussed by Duane Jeffery and Jeffrey Keller, the gender of an earthly body is not always clearly defined.[9] For instance, what is the gender of spirits who reside in the bodies of hermaphrodites (individuals with male and female sex organs) or in individuals who were males in the preexistence, but in this life have a female body and are raised as females? What about individuals who undergo a sex change? Could it be that some individuals may have a spirit gender different from their temporal gender?

Premortal Spirits: A Testable Hypothesis

There may be a way around the predestination problem if the spirits God creates are not predestined for specific organisms. In this case, a premortal spirit is really a *nonspecific* spirit in that it is not intended for any specific organism but can be placed in any one of many different organisms in a similar taxonomic group at approximately the same degree of complexity within this group. For instance, very simple spirits would be placed in unicellular organisms (like bacteria), while very complex spirits would be placed in mammals. However, because all gradations exist between taxonomic groups, there also must be all gradations between spirits. An important implication of the premortal model is that no premortal spirit, simple, intermediate, or complex, is predestined to be placed in any specific organism. When nonpredestined spirits are placed in embryos of humans they would develop along with the embryo and fetus. These spirits inherit individual mental and spiritual attributes from the intelligences they contain. As a human grows and develops during his or her lifetime, his or her spirit also "grows," at least in terms of mental and spiritual capacities, if not in terms of size and shape. It is now the specific spirit of its host, and only one such organism will ever live on this planet or any place else. For instance, the spirit that was placed in the embryo or fetus that became Joseph Smith was not predestined for Joseph; but once placed in that embryo or fetus, it became the specific and eternal spirit of Joseph Smith.

We are told in Abraham 5 and in Moses 2 and 3 that God created everything spiritually *before* it was created temporally. Just what this means, however, is not entirely clear, since the time interval between the two creations is not specified. It could be billions of years or it could be microseconds. In referring to Abraham 3:22–28, Joseph Fielding Smith favored a long time between the two creations: "We were all created untold ages be-

fore we were placed on this Earth."[10] However, perhaps not all human spirits were present when the plan of salvation was presented in the preexistence. There are no scriptures to my knowledge that eliminate the possibility that spirits are still being created. We are told that God creates spirits from "intelligences," which have always existed (Abr. 3:22–23; D&C 93:29–30). A minority viewpoint in the LDS Church, as championed by Bruce R. McConkie, who followed Joseph Fielding Smith on this point, is that "the intelligence or spirit element became intelligences *after* the spirits were born as individual entities."[11] As Joseph Smith taught, however, "Intelligence is eternal and exists upon a self-existent principle."[12] According to B. H. Roberts:

> Intelligences are uncreated entities; some inhabiting spiritual bodies; others are intelligences unembodied in either spirit bodies or other kinds of bodies. They are uncreated, self-existent entities, necessarily self-conscious. . . . They possess powers of comparison and discrimination—they discern between evil and good; between good and better; they possess will or freedom. . . . The individual intelligence can think his own thoughts, act wisely or foolishly; do right or wrong.[13]

Thus, in Roberts's view, intelligences must possess self-consciousness, the power to compare, and the power to chose one thing instead of another. Whether intelligences possess gender, however, is not known. As summarized by Rex Sears: "The God of Mormonism lives in a universe and among intelligences *not of his own making.* God acquires the ability to predict our behavior only by getting to know us; when meeting an intelligence for the first time, as it were, God does not know if things will work out with that intelligence."[14]

We know very little about how or when spirits were created or whether they are still being created, a fact that has a bearing on the question of predestination. It is a common belief among Mormons that God placed each intelligence in a spirit intended for a specific temporal organism as suggested by Doctrine and Covenants 77:2: " . . . that which is spiritual being in the likeness of that which is temporal; and that which is temporal in the likeness of that which is spiritual; the spirit of man in the likeness of his person, as also the spirit of the beast, and every other creature which God has created." This sounds a lot like predestination.

However, this interpretation is critically dependent upon when the spirits were created. If they were created at or near the time of the temporal creation, it is not surprising that they would have the "likeness" of the

organism in which they were to be housed. In this case, predestination is not an issue. But if spirits are created long before their temporal hosts, we are faced again with the predestination question. If we have a large "spirit pool" containing spirits of all forms of life, this would seem to predestine that all these forms of life must appear on Earth. Yet if mortal organisms are the products of evolution, which is a random process (see below), there is no reason that hosts for premortal spirits should have appeared on Earth. This observation strongly implies to me one or both of the following scenarios: (1) most or all spirits were not created eons before the temporal creation but were created at or near the time that their temporal hosts were created; or (2) God creates spirits as generic groups with no one spirit intended for a specific temporal organism.

Still another question is just how God decides which spirits to place in which mortal bodies. Some human spirits are placed in fetuses with inherited diseases or missing body parts. Some go into children born into rich families. Others go into children born into poor families. Some go into black children, others into white children or other races. Some go into females, others into males, bisexuals, and homosexuals. Some spirits enter bodies that are members of primitive societies, whereas others enter bodies in highly technical societies of the twenty-first century. Clearly not all humans have equal chances of survival or comparably enjoyable lives. Does God discriminate against some spirits and favor others, based perhaps on their performances in the preexistence?

Although many LDS members believe that our status and the nature of the body we have in this life depend on our performance in the preexistence, I do not share this point of view. The God I believe in is fair and does not purposefully discriminate among spirits. Just how he decides which spirit to place in which body is unknown. One possibility is that he randomly selects spirits or intelligences, thus giving each one an equal chance at where it ends up in this life. A common LDS belief, although not well-supported by scripture, is that the "choicest" spirits are reserved for the latter days. However, this belief again brings up the predestination question—i.e., some spirits are predestined for the latter days.

Can the idea of nonpredestined premortal spirits be accommodated within LDS doctrine? I think it can; and in the following sections, I test the concept against various LDS scriptures and teachings and explore more fully the ramifications of such an idea.

The Preexistence

The relationship between the spiritual creation and the temporal creation has a close bearing on the nonpredestined spirit model. There are several interpretations about which scriptures refer to the spiritual creation and which to the temporal creation.[15] Milton R. Hunter, Bruce R. McConkie, and Joseph Fielding Smith interpret Abraham 4–5 as referring to the spiritual creation and Moses 2–3 and Genesis 2 as recording the temporal creation.[16] In contrast, J. Reuben Clark and W. Cleon Skousen read the Moses and Genesis accounts as referring to the spiritual creation, saying little about the temporal creation.[17] Others seem to think that both the spiritual and temporal creations are recorded in Moses and Genesis.[18] Despite these differences, most LDS scripturalists agree on two aspects of the creation accounts: (1) the temporal creation was patterned at least in some degree after the spiritual creation, and (2) all living things were created spiritually before they were created temporally.

A critical question for the nonpredestined spirit model is just how closely the spiritual creation served as a "blueprint" for the temporal creation. If the correspondence was exact, as some believe,[19] we are again faced with the predestination problem. On the other hand, if the spiritual creation was simply a general outline for the temporal creation or if spirits are created at or immediately before the creation of their temporal hosts, we may be able to sidestep the predestination issue. In either case, I suggest that the spiritual creation was and is the creation of spirits not predestined for a specific temporal home.

We are told of a great war in the preexistence (D&C 29:36–38; Rev. 12:7), suggesting that at least some part of the spiritual creation preceded the temporal creation. If the great war story is taken at face value, it would appear that approximately one third of the hosts of heaven followed Satan, and thus their spirits will never enter earthly bodies. The other two thirds of the spirits, however, have been or will be placed in earthly bodies. Joseph Smith and other Church presidents made statements suggesting that some human spirits "excelled" in the preexistence and that their placement in a specific terrestrial body reflects, at least in part, their progress in the preexistence.[20]

How does a great war and the progression of spirits in the preexistence constrain the nonpredestined spirit model? If interpreted literally, it implies enough time between the spiritual and temporal creations for at least some humans to have progressed while they were in the

spirit world. James E. Talmage also implies this concept.[21] Single spirits, much like single soldiers in an army, have individual differences because they house intelligences with individual differences. Given the opportunity in the premortal spirit world, some spirits may have significantly advanced, while others did not.

One of the problems with the great war story, however, is that the spirits who followed Christ and elected to take on a temporal body would seem to have been predestined from that time onwards. If evolution is the process by which organisms appeared on Earth, which seems likely (see below), then evolution had to give rise to a very specific group of mortal humans to house these spirits. Given the random nature of evolution, such a scenario is highly improbable.

One way to get around the predestination problem is if the word "spirit" in the scriptures that refers to premortal existence is misinterpreted. Could these scriptures really be referring to "intelligences," the precursors of spirits? If so, the great war in the preexistence would have occurred before God created spirits. In the same light, it is possible that the progression in the "spirit world" referred to above is really progression in the "intelligence world." There is no obvious reason why progression could not occur in intelligences; in fact, such development would be consistent with the principle of eternal progression, a commonly cited LDS doctrine.

Foreordination and Foreknowledge

The nonpredestined spirit model also helps solve problems related to foreordination and foreknowledge. Foreordination, which is a rather unusual LDS teaching, is the concept that certain spirits were called or assigned in the preexistence to carry out certain functions in this lifetime. Doctrine and Covenants 138:55–56 states that many of the "noble and great ones . . . were chosen even before they were born." We can get around the predestination problem with the caveat that, if spirits are foreordained to fulfill some duty in this life, they can elect not to do so by exercising their free agency.[22] Another factor to be considered is the possibility that some individuals may not be worthy to carry out their foreordained callings. In either case, the spirit is not predestined for a calling in the mortal world.

If intelligences and spirits can progress in the premortal world, there is no reason that God cannot assign or ask specific intelligences or spirits

to perform specific tasks when they arrive in this life.[23] God might pick individual intelligences or spirits that have excelled in certain ways in the preexistence and foreordain them for similar earthly endeavors.[24] However, foreordained intelligences or spirits are not predestined for specific mortal bodies. McConkie argues that God foreordains certain people for certain earthly missions because of the knowledge he has acquired through ages of observation that the person so ordained has the talents and capacities to perform the required task.[25] Perhaps God placed a foreordained spirit in the embryo that would become Joseph Smith simply because Joseph would be born at the right time and the right place to accomplish the foreordained duties of reestablishing the Church.[26] If Joseph had not met the challenge, however, some other individual of this time period and in this geographic location would have been given that opportunity.

As with predestination, an absolute foreknowledge of God seems inconsistent with free agency. As nicely summarized by Blake Ostler: "A major problem arises if God foresees precisely what must happen. For if I am morally responsible for an action, I must also be free to refrain from doing that action. But if God knows what my action is before I do it, then it is not genuinely possible for me to do otherwise. If the premises are accepted as sound, then foreknowledge and free agency in the stronger sense of freedom of alternative choices are not logically compatible."[27]

Is the idea that a premortal spirit can be placed in any earthly body (and not predestined for a certain one) inconsistent with the concept that God has a foreknowledge of the future? It would seem to be if God's foreknowledge is absolute. In an LDS context, the question of the degree of God's foreknowledge has been extensively discussed.[28] One interpretation of God's omniscience is that he knows everything that can be known and knows how he will respond to various possibilities in the future but does not have an absolute foreknowledge of the future.[29] His omniscience, however, is not limited by what cannot be known at a given time. Talmage suggests that God's foreknowledge is not absolute and does not necessitate predestination but that "God's foreknowledge is based on intelligence and reason. God foresees the future as a state which naturally and surely will be; but not as one that *must be* because He has arbitrarily willed that it shall be."[30] B. H. Roberts also suggests that God knows all that is known, which includes all that is or has been, but that he does not know the future in an absolute sense until it arrives.[31] Ostler supports the

concept of "existentially contingent omniscience," meaning that God now knows all possibilities but does not know precisely which possibilities will be chosen in the future.[32] For free agency to exist, alternatives in the future must exist. They must be real alternatives and not just "apparent" alternatives as would be the case if God had an absolute foreknowledge. If these interpretations of God's foreknowledge are correct, then premortal spirits are not predestined for a given mortal body nor for a given mortal event.

Before leaving this topic, it is necessary to mention the philosophy of "timelessness" in respect to God. The idea that God is timeless (in the sense that for God there is no past, present, or future) has been discussed by both Robson and Ostler.[33] Although a few, Elder Neal A. Maxwell among them, seem to accept a timeless God,[34] many scriptures clearly indicate that God cannot be timeless, a fact superbly summarized by Robson and Ostler.[35] I accept these arguments and, for the purposes of this discussion, do not consider a timeless God as a viable alternative.

Premortal Appearances of Christ

One of the most difficult challenges to the nonpredestined spirit model of the preexistence is abundant scriptural references to Christ's manifestations before his mortal birth. Although Christ (Jehovah) spoke to one or more people prior to his birth (e.g., Moses 1:2; Abr. 2:6–11; 3:11), he appeared in person relatively infrequently. One well-documented incident is his appearance to Mahonri Moriancumer, the brother of Jared: "Behold, this body, which ye now behold, is the body of my spirit; and man have I created after the body of my spirit; and even as I appear unto thee to be in the spirit will I appear unto my people in the flesh" (Eth. 3:16).

How do these premortal appearances of Christ avoid the problem of predestination? If the voice of Jehovah in the Old Testament was indeed that of Christ and if his appearances were in his "mortal form," then the spirit of Christ must have been predestined to enter Christ's mortal body. Romans 8:29–30 suggests that God created Christ's spirit to enter a very specific human being:

> For whom he did foreknow, he also did *predestinate* to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.
>
> Moreover whom he did *predestinate*, them he also called: and whom he

> called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. (Emphasis mine; see also D&C 93:21; 2 Tim. 1:9.)

If these scriptures are interpreted literally, they imply that the spirit of Christ had the same voice and appearance as the mortal Christ long before there was a mortal Christ.

I can see two ways around this problem that preserve the nonpredestined spirit model for most humans: (1) Christ was different from everyone else—he really was predestined for a certain mortal body; or (2) it was not Christ (Jehovah) who appeared in the Old Testament. The easiest way around the predestination problem is that it applies to everyone except Christ. Certainly Christ is a unique individual in many other ways: having God as a father yet an earthly (perhaps surrogate) mother; showing great leadership capacity in the preexistence (John 17:5); being the only person free from sin; and finally, being the Savior of all humankind. Why not add another exception to the list? In fact, the scripture quoted from Romans specifically states that Christ's spirit was predestined. Perhaps God created a spirit for Christ that could appear and speak to earthly inhabitants with a spirit body identical to the mortal body, which would appear in the future. This also implies that Christ's spirit body, which appeared as an adult to the brother of Jared, could return to some nascent state with a very small size before entering the mortal embryo Christ at a later time.

One problem with this idea emerges if Christ is really half mortal—if half his genes came from Mary. This would seem to predestine Mary to be his mother, which in turn would predestine many events that resulted in Mary being born at the right period of time and in the right place—in short, also predestinating her ancestors. It would seem that the only way around this problem is to have all of Christ's genes come from God and an eternal mother, and none from Mary. This scenario, however, relegates Mary to the role of a surrogate mother, not Christ's biological mother.

Alternatively, the images and voices of Jehovah described in the Old Testament may not have been those of Christ. Rather, God may have imprinted in the brains of Old Testament people the image (or/and voice) of a man similar to the way Christ would look or sound as a mortal. It makes no difference in terms of the lessons taught to Old Testament people whether it was really Jehovah's spirit talking to them or some other male voice. This alternative, however, requires that God deceived the individu-

als in the Old Testament who believed they were hearing or seeing Jehovah.

Cloning

The nonpredestined spirit model may solve doctrinal problems raised by cloning. Cloning is the production of a group of identical cells or organisms that come from a single organism. The genetic "parent" of Dolly, the cloned sheep in Scotland, was the nucleus from a single adult mammary gland cell.[36] Cloning is not new but has been used since the 1970s to produce cattle for breeding.[37] One potential use of cloning is to make human "replacements" for old people or dying relatives, or to make many copies of one's children. Cloning can also be a valuable tool in studying human development, genetically modifying embryos, and developing new organ transplant methods.[38]

Humans can be cloned in at least two ways: (1) split an embryo into several segments, and new individuals develop from each segment—this is the natural method that produces identical twins—and (2) clone cells from a human, thus producing individuals identical to that human. Every cell contains the genetic information to make an entire human being. On December 14, 1998, South Korean scientists of the Seoul Fertility Clinic announced that they had cloned a human embryo.[39] They claim to have inserted a new nucleus in a human egg cell and activated the cell, which reportedly divided twice in vitro before the researchers terminated the experiment. This claim immediately set off a wave of scientific doubt and controversy. Regardless of the outcome of this claim, we are close to the time when a human embryo will be cloned.

Most Christian religions believe in a human soul (spirit + body = soul; D&C 88:15), which brings up the question of whether it is possible to clone the soul. If a person's physical body can be cloned, but not his or her soul, what does this mean for the clone's eternal future? The only official statement of the LDS Church on cloning is ambiguous and not widely available to the general public.[40]

It is interesting to explore some of the ramifications of cloning in light of nonpredestined spirits. I can see no reason why God would refuse to place spirits in human clones and, as with any other human, each clone plus its spirit (i.e., a soul) becomes a specific human being. Although the clone would be anatomically identical or at least very similar to its single "parent," its mental and spiritual qualities could become quite different

depending on various environmental factors affecting the clone during its lifetime. Also contributing to divergence from the original organism are different cytoplasm and mitochondria in the clone. We can consider God as the creator of spirits while scientists, by using genetics, could play an important role in controlling and designing the mortal bodies into which some of these spirits are placed. I do not have a problem with this idea. In fact, God may be waiting for us to develop bodies by genetic engineering or cloning to house more advanced or complex spirits that he will create.

Can scientists clone spirits? Of course, we do not have an answer to this question since science cannot detect, identify, or even validate the existence of spirits. However, in the context of LDS doctrine, it seems that God reserves all manipulations of spirits for himself. There are probably enough intelligences or/and premortal spirits that each human-made clone can have its own God-made spirit.

What about unicellular organisms that propagate by cell division? When a cell divides, perhaps its spirit divides also, or alternatively, God may place a new spirit in one or both of the derivative cells.

Abortion

Perhaps no other moral issue divides the American public more than abortion. In part, the controversy hinges on the question of when the spirit enters the body. If a spirit were predestined for a given mortal body and that body is aborted before birth, the spirit would, technically, never be able to have a mortal existence. However, in the nonpredestined scenario, abortion prior to the time the spirit enters the fetus simply means that the spirit would be assigned to another fetus. Thus, the abortion would not prevent this spirit from acquiring a body but would simply transfer it to another fetus prior to birth. Brigham Young carried this idea even further when he stated: "When some people have little children born at 6 & 7 months pregnancy and they live but a few hours then die, they bless them etc. but I don't do it for I think . . . that such a spirit will have a chance of occupying another tabernacle and developing itself."[41] Although this idea does not require that the spirits are not predestined for their first body, it is certainly consistent with this possibility, thus giving them another chance at life.

Just when the spirit enters the body is the subject of considerable interest and discussion as reviewed by Lester Bush and Jeffrey Keller.[42] Consider three scenarios: (1) the spirit enters at conception, (2) the spirit en-

ters at birth, or (3) the spirit enters sometime between conception and birth. In the nonpredestined spirit model, if a spirit enters the embryo at conception, then clearly abortion at any time will prevent it from having a second chance to acquire a body. However, if a spirit enters at birth, abortion could result in reassignment of the spirit to another body, provided that the spirit was not predestined for the aborted fetus. The same argument can be used for any abortion, provided it occurs before the spirit enters the body. If Brigham Young is right, some spirits may have a second chance at life if they are born prematurely the first time around. This idea, however, is not consistent with the nonpredestined spirit model, if spirits are placed in the fetuses before the premature births.

There appear to be no unambiguous scriptures or statements by LDS prophets about when the spirit enters the body.[43] However, the official stand of the LDS Church on abortion allows us to infer an answer. Except for rape, incest, endangering the mother's life, or fatal defects in the fetus, the LDS Church has taken a very strong stand against abortion at any stage during fetal development.[44] Does this imply that the spirit enters the embryo at the time of conception? If so, it would suggest that, at the time spirits enter the embryo, they are very small (assuming they have a size) and that perhaps they grow along with the mortal body through its lifetime. However, if spirits enter the embryo at conception, what happens to this embryo if it is later cloned, if it fuses with another embryo, or if its genes are modified? Is the spirit also cloned or fused; and if so, are there some organisms with half spirits or multiple spirits (in the case of embryo fission or fusion)?

This scenario sounds improbable and seems to imply that spirits do not enter embryos until the embryos have developed beyond the stage that geneticists can modify them, or several weeks after conception. Also supporting this idea is the fact that 30–40 percent of human embryos are spontaneously aborted, chiefly in the first few weeks after conception. If spirits were already in these embryos, this would terminate their "life" before birth, thus discriminating against or perhaps favoring these individuals, depending on what happens to these spirits after death. In any case, unless they are recycled into another body, they are deprived of an earthly life.

Organic Evolution

The nonpredestined spirit model also resolves doctrinal problems

related to organic evolution. Although not everyone accepts it, the evidence that life on this planet has developed by organic evolution is overwhelming.[45] No longer must we rely on a few poorly preserved fossils, for we now have a vast fossil record with many of the so-called missing links identified, and more being identified every day.[46] To complement and support the fossil record, we have evidence from genetics, DNA biochemistry, and anthropology, all of which strongly support evolution as the mechanism by which life (including human life) has developed on Earth.[47] Fortunately, it is not necessary to consider evolution and Christian doctrine for the origin of humans as incompatible. Kenneth Miller summarizes nicely: "Evolution was much more than an indirect pathway to get you and me. By choosing evolution as His way to fashion the living world, [God] emphasized our material nature and our unity with other forms of life. He made the world today contingent upon the events of the past. He made our choices matter, our actions genuine, our lives important. In the final analysis, He used evolution as the tool to set us free."[48]

Furthermore, LDS doctrine has the concept of eternal progression, and evolution can be considered as one example of eternal progression. Although officially the LDS Church takes no stand on organic evolution,[49] there are different viewpoints on whether evolution and LDS doctrine are compatible.[50] It is not my purpose here to summarize the vast evidence for organic evolution. As a scientist, I accept evolution as the process by which humans eventually appeared on Earth. My purpose here is to explore the significance of evolution in terms of the nonpredestined spirit model.

In studying the fossil record over the last four billion years we see an overall progression of organisms from simple unicellular types to a great variety of complex animals and plants. Actually, the origin of humans should be considered as a process, not an event. Humans as such (the genus *Homo*) appeared about two million years ago in East Africa and spread to Asia and Europe soon after this time. The combined results of studies of fossil humans, genetics, and DNA indicate that *Homo sapiens* appeared about 195,000 years ago, when African and non-African linguistic and genetic lines separated somewhere in eastern Africa.[51] By at least 100,000 years ago, humans had moved into Asia and Australia, and sometime between 20,000 and 35,000 years ago, they had moved into Europe and the Americas. Prior to the appearance of *Homo sapiens*, human ancestral

forms such as *Australopithecus* were widespread in Africa. Just how do all these hominids fit into the creation of human beings?

One of the problems in making humans by evolution is the randomness that characterizes evolution, as Carl Sagan emphasizes: "Even if life on another planet has the same molecular chemistry as life here, there is no reason to expect it to resemble familiar organisms. . . . In general the random character of the evolutionary process should create extraterrestrial creatures very different from any that we know."[52] Hence, humans are not a *necessary* product of evolution.

What does this mean for the LDS belief that humans are created in God's image? Some Christian religions avoid the problem by assuming that "image" does not mean physical image but only that our "hearts and minds are fashioned in the likeness of God."[53] Some scientists point out that genetics and selection are only two of the forces directing evolution; furthermore, the final organisms are constrained by mechanical factors controlled by laws of physics. In this case, God may have "plenty of room to operate with predictability within evolution's bounded variation."[54] Still another possibility that cannot be disproved by science is that mutations are not always random. Perhaps on occasion, God directs mutations to ensure that one evolutionary line eventually leads to humans. This occasional tweaking of the genes by God may not be recognizable in the fossil record. If this is the case, life forms that evolve on another planet may be quite different from those on Earth, as Sagan hypothesizes, but humans could still appear through an evolutionary line closely monitored and directed by God.

As life has evolved on Earth during the past four billion years, God may have created increasingly complex spirits to enter the evolving mortal hosts without, according to my argument, any specific spirit being predestined for a specific organism. In a very general way, spirits of one degree of complexity are placed in organisms of similar taxonomy and complexity. However, because evolution produces all gradations between taxonomic groups, there also must be all gradations of taxonomy and complexity among spirits. One group of complex spirits would enter individuals in the evolutionary chain of hominins (primitive hominids and humans). According to my hypothesis, God created the most complex and highly developed spirits of this group for the bodies of *Homo sapiens.*

But what if humans continue to evolve and their descendants do not look much like present-day humans? One appealing aspect of the

nonpredestined spirit model for evolution is its flexibility. As new hominins evolve, perhaps by cloning and genetic engineering, God may create appropriate spirits for these individuals. Perhaps even a different species of *Homo* will appear in the future through the efforts of genetic engineering and cloning.

Still another question related to evolution is that of how God acquired his physical body. As taught by Joseph Smith in the King Follett discourse, "[God] was once a man like one of us and God himself, the Father of us all, once dwelled on an Earth the same as Jesus Christ himself did in the flesh and like us."[55] This statement implies that God acquired his body by a process of evolution—the same way humans acquire their bodies. Does this mean that there was another God at the time "our God" was going through his planetary existence? This idea is consistent with Joseph Smith's teachings on the "multiplicity of Gods." Furthermore, if our God created the universe with a big bang some 13.7 billion years ago, there must have been other universes, perhaps one God for each universe. In fact some cosmologists today consider the possibility of multiple universes to lie well within the province of scientific reality.[56]

Extinctions

It is well known that many organisms have become extinct, some in the geologic past as recorded by the fossil record, and some very recently due directly or indirectly to the impact of humans.[57] Some extinctions involve single species, such as the dodo bird, the passenger pigeon, and the elephant bird, all of which have become extinct in the last two hundred years. Others involve many life forms and are referred to as mass extinctions, with many species from different ecological environments becoming extinct within short periods of time. An important example is at the Cretaceous/Tertiary (K/T) boundary 65 million years ago when more than two hundred animal families became extinct, probably resulting from an asteroid impact.[58] A second example occurred at the end of the Permian 250 million years ago, when more than three hundred animal families disappeared due to a combination of geologic and climatic changes at this time. Some groups, such as the dinosaurs at the K/T boundary, disappeared entirely during a mass extinction, although their relatives, the birds, survived.

Extinction brings up an important question: When an organism or a group of organisms becomes extinct, how does their disappearance con-

strain the timing of the creation of the spirits of these organisms? If these spirits were created long before the organisms appeared on Earth, what happens to them when their earthly hosts are no longer being produced? One possibility is that the spirits intended for extinct organisms "skip" a mortal existence and directly acquire an eternal body. If this is the case, however, why is a mortal existence necessary at all for any organisms?

A more plausible possibility, I argue, is that God creates spirits for many (or all) of His "worlds" and places them in one gigantic "spirit pool" to be used as needed. In this case, if a group of organisms becomes extinct on one planet, their previously created spirits can be used on another planet in some other part of the universe. Although we cannot eliminate this possibility, I know of no scriptural evidence to support it, and evolution, as a random process, would not necessarily produce terrestrial organisms on another planet. To me the most obvious answer to this problem is provided by the nonpredestined spirit model. God does not create spirits until just before their mortal creation, with the possible exception of the human spirits who participated in the war in heaven. If spirits are created by God as needed and placed in mortal organisms, there is no residual "spirit pool" for organisms that become extinct and no predestination.

Conclusions

The LDS concept of a spiritual creation may predestine spirits to specific mortal organisms, thus challenging the principle of free agency. The predestination problem, however, can be avoided if the spirits that God creates are not predestined to specific organisms. Instead, premortal spirits are not intended for any specific organism but can be placed in any one of many different organisms. However, because all gradations exist between taxonomic groups, there also must be all gradations between spirits. The common idea that the spiritual creation was a blueprint of the temporal creation must be modified to avoid predestination. This adjustment can be easily made by seeing the spiritual blueprint as a very crude outline, rather than as an exact rendering of the final product. Still another way around the predestination problem would be that spirits are created at or immediately before the creation of their temporal hosts.

Nonpredestined spirits can be foreordained, but foreordained spirits are not predestined for specific mortal bodies. The premortal appearances of Christ strongly suggest that Christ is an exception and that he really was predestined for a certain mortal body. To avoid the predestina-

tion of Mary and her ancestors, however, she must be the surrogate mother, not the biologic mother of Christ.

There is no reason that God should not create spirits for clones. Premortal spirits placed in human clones produce a human that develops into a specific individual just like a nonclone. In the future, geneticists may play an ever-increasing role in controlling and designing some human bodies, but only God can create the spirits that go into these bodies. In terms of the nonpredestined spirit model, if abortion is performed prior to the time the spirit enters the fetus, this spirit could be placed in another fetus, and there is no problem with predestination. The great unknown is when the spirit actually enters the body.

If mortal organisms are the products of evolution, which is a random process, there is no reason that appropriate hosts for previously created spirits should appear on Earth. This conclusion strongly implies that most or all spirits were not created eons before the temporal creation but were created at or near the time that their temporal hosts were created, or/and that God creates spirits as generic groups with no one spirit intended for a specific temporal organism. To ensure that humans, patterned after God's image, appear in one evolutionary line, God may direct some mutations. Occasional tweaking of the genes by God may not be recognizable in the fossil record. However, no spirit is predestined for a specific organism; rather, spirits of a given complexity are placed in organisms of similar taxonomy and degree of complexity. Extinctions in the geologic record avoid the predestination problem if God creates spirits as needed and places them in mortal organisms. This way there is no residual "spirit pool" for organisms that become extinct and no predestination.

A nonpredestined spiritual creation provides important insights into the well-established conflict between predestination and free agency, yet it preserves the individual as the distinct entity it was when it coexisted with God as an intelligence.

Notes

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2. Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2d. ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 588.

3. L. Rex Sears, "Determinist Mansions in the Mormon House?" *Dialogue*: A

Journal of Mormon Thought 31, no. 4 (Winter 1998): 115–41; Blake T. Ostler, "Mormonism and Determinism," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 32, no. 4 (Winter 1999): 51.

4. Frank B. Salisbury, "Genetics and Some Gospel Concepts," *The Instructor,* November 1965, 437.

5. Charles W. Penrose, November 16, 1884, *Journal of Discourses,* 26 vols. (London and Liverpool: LDS Booksellers Depot, 1855–86), 26:21; Mark E. Petersen and Emma Marr Petersen, *Virtue Makes Sense!* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 15; Joseph Fielding Smith, *Man: His Origin and Destiny* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1954), 352; James E. Talmage, "The Earth and Man," *The Instructor,* December 1965, 477.

6. Parley P. Pratt, *Key to the Science of Theology* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1893, fifth printing), 119.

7. LDS Church First Presidency, "The Origin of Man," *Improvement Era* 13 (November 1909): 78. The First Presidency then consisted of Joseph F. Smith, John R. Winder, and Anthon H. Lund.

8. Gordon B. Hinckley, "Stand Strong against the Wiles of the World," *Ensign,* November 1995, 102.

9. Duane E. Jeffery, "Intersexes in Humans: An Introductory Exploration," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 12, no. 3 (Autumn 1979): 107; Jeffrey E. Keller, "Question: Is Sexual Gender Eternal?" *Sunstone* 10, no. 11 (1985): 38.

10. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation,* compiled by Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954), 1:76.

11. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine,* 387; emphasis mine.

12. Joseph Fielding Smith, ed. and comp., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1979), 353–54.

13. B. H. Roberts, *The Truth, the Way, the Life: An Elementary Treatise on Theology* (San Francisco: Smith Research Associates, 1994), 287.

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The Divine-Infusion Theory: Rethinking the Atonement

Jacob Morgan

I have always wondered about the meaning of the atonement. Why was it necessary for Christ to suffer? What did his suffering accomplish? How did it work? Growing up as a Latter-day Saint, I was taught that Christ suffered the punishment for my individual sins to satisfy the demands of justice, thereby making it possible for me to be forgiven. Although I found some aspects of this explanation troublesome, I did not know that this was only one of many explanations of the meaning of the atonement. As I became aware of other theories, I began to revaluate my own understanding of the meaning of the atonement.

The theory I grew up with is often referred to as the penal-substitution theory, and it is the most prevalent theory of the atonement in modern Christianity. The central idea of this theory is that Christ suffered vicariously for our sins—that he stood in our place to suffer the punishment we deserved. This theory is accepted by the vast majority of Latter-day Saints, despite a passage in the Book of Mormon that seems to explicitly reject vicarious suffering for sin:

> Now there is not any man that can sacrifice his own blood which will atone for the sins of another. Now, if a man murdereth, behold will our law, *which is just*, take the life of his brother? I say unto you, Nay.
>
> But the law requireth the life of him who hath murdered. (Alma 34:11–12; emphasis mine)

Amulek makes it clear that it is not merely the Nephite law, but the law of justice itself that will not allow one person to pay for the sins of another. If one person cannot atone for the sins of another, as this scripture states, then why was Christ able to atone for our sins? The seeming injus-

tice of vicarious suffering is one of the primary difficulties with our theory of atonement.

In 1999, R. Dennis Potter published an excellent paper in this journal, "Did Christ Pay For Our Sins?"[1] His paper begins with Amulek's rejection of penal substitution and builds upon it to deliver a persuasive argument against the penal-substitution theory. He uses a number of arguments and examples to illustrate the injustice of vicarious suffering and concludes by suggesting we abandon the penal-substitution theory in favor of what he calls the empathy theory of the atonement. Although I find the bulk of his paper persuasive and enlightening, I remain unsatisfied by the empathy theory. Inspired by Potter's audacity in suggesting an alternate theory of atonement, I will follow his lead by advancing my own theory of atonement, which similarly rejects penal substitution, but offers a different explanation from Potter's for the purpose of the atonement. I call my proposal the divine-infusion theory.

The explanations I received growing up were borrowed directly from traditional Christian theories of atonement. This is unfortunate, because the Book of Mormon's emphasis on the meaning of the atonement puts Latter-day Saints in a unique position to shed new light on old problems of atonement theory. With this in mind, I will rely heavily on the scriptures and revelations of the restored gospel.

A Brief History of Atonement Theory

It seems appropriate to begin by stepping back from the narrow focus of the penal-substitution theory to get a broader view of atonement theory. A brief review of the most prominent theories of atonement will give a flavor of the differences that exist between the various theories of atonement, and illustrate the fundamental difficulties of devising a compelling theory.

The Ransom Theory

The ransom theory was the dominant theory of atonement for most of the first thousand years following the death of Christ; its development is often attributed to Origen (185–254). It is based on the idea that through the fall, humankind became captive to the devil, hostages of Satan. In response to this crisis, God offered Christ as a literal ransom in exchange for humankind. Satan agreed to the deal but was deceived by God, not knowing that Christ would resurrect and escape his control.

The ransom theory draws on biblical language that refers to Christ

as a ransom, but on its own, it does not offer a compelling explanation of the atonement. If the only problem was that Satan took humanity hostage, then why didn't God simply take humanity back by force? The idea that God had to bargain with Satan for humankind flirts dangerously with dualism, the doctrine that good and evil are equivalent or nearly equivalent cosmic forces.[2] This theory also invites criticism for suggesting that God was a deceiver in the arrangement. Despite its historical significance, this theory has had little influence on Mormon thought.

The Satisfaction Theory

An alternative to the ransom theory was eventually championed by Anselm, archbishop of Canterbury (1033–1109). His "satisfaction theory"[3] is based on the idea that the atonement was not needed to appease Satan, but God. Justice, he says, demands that we give God his due at all times. Whenever we fail to give God his due, this is sin. By sinning, we dishonor God. Something had to be done to restore God's honor, and this could only be done through Christ's suffering and death.[4]

The biggest problem with the satisfaction theory is that it is difficult to see why God's honor would be restored through the tortured death of his only perfectly obedient Son. How does undeserved suffering add to God's honor? Anselm never gives a satisfactory answer to this question.

The Moral-Influence Theory

Peter Abelard (1079–1142) developed a radically different theory of the atonement. His moral-influence theory rejected the idea that the atonement accomplished something objective. Instead, he suggested that the atonement works only because it influences the human heart. The atonement was Christ's perfect example to humanity. Suffering was not required to satisfy God or justice, but simply to set an example which would inspire moral behavior.[5]

The biggest problem with the moral-influence theory is that its premise undermines the absolute necessity of the atonement. Consider, for example, that, if it is true, the atonement could still work even if it never actually happened. The only important thing, according to the moral-influence theory, is that people believe in the story and are inspired by it. In principle, this could have been accomplished equally well with a fictional story, as long as people believed it to be true.

That leads to a second criticism. If it was not strictly necessary for Christ to suffer, we might reasonably ask if his suffering was a good way,

on its own, to inspire obedience. Keep in mind that according to the moral-influence theory, the *only* purpose for Christ's suffering was to provide an example. If someone were run over by a train because she was pushing her child to safety, we would see this self-sacrifice as a moving example of love. However, if she were to jump in front of an oncoming train just to set an example (without saving someone in the process), it would make no sense at all. If the act does not accomplish anything objective, then what is it setting an example of?

The Penal-Substitution Theory

The penal-substitution theory became popular during the Reformation (ca. 1500), as variations of it were taught by Martin Luther and John Calvin. This theory is really just a variation of the satisfaction theory; the major difference is that the necessity of the atonement was based on satisfying *justice* instead of satisfying *God.* The penal-substitution theory is based on the idea that justice demands suffering for sin and that Christ stood in as a substitute for us to satisfy this demand of suffering.[6]

Because Mormons usually explain the atonement in the same language as the penal-substitution theory, I will explore the problems with this theory in more detail. Potter's paper was devoted almost entirely to the discussion of this theory, and he spent much of it illustrating the injustice of penal substitution. His critique strikes to the core of the theory, since justice, by definition, cannot demand injustice.

From my experience of discussing the atonement in casual settings with other Latter-day Saints, some have been bothered by the injustice of the atonement, but most do not initially see the problem. The most common question is: If Christ volunteered, where is the injustice? We all readily see that it was unjust to punish Christ for sins he did not commit; but since he volunteered, this injustice is part of what makes his sacrifice so awe inspiring. I agree. The fact that Christ volunteered does answer the problem of the injustice to him.

The more difficult problem is explaining why his suffering should allow us to be pardoned. As Amulek asked, "If a man murdereth, behold will our law, which is just, take the life of his brother?" (Alma 34:11). Likewise, Potter asked, "Why should facts about what Jesus did convince God to pardon *us*?"[7] Justice demands that the guilty are punished and that the innocent are not punished. It is all right that Christ chose to endure suf-

fering which justice did not demand, but why would justice accept that suffering as payment for our sins?

We would never think to absolve a criminal because his mother felt vicarious guilt for his crimes, or even because she agreed to serve his jail term. Our sense of justice does not include a provision for the transfer of guilt because justice is inextricably rooted in one's merited deserts. To make vicarious suffering seem just, we must pretend that justice demands suffering without regard to whether it is deserved, but this is not how we think of justice in any other setting. In this way, penal substitution ignores our most basic understanding of what justice means.

A second problem with the penal-substitution theory is that it undermines the notion of forgiveness. Imagine for a moment that you owe me $1,000 and I tell you I will forgive the debt as long as you find someone else to pay me the $1,000. This would be ridiculous, because forgiveness of a debt *means* not requiring payment. We cannot continue to say that God forgives sins in the same sense that debts are forgiven if Christ fully paid the debt incurred by sins. If justice was fully satisfied by Christ, it seems that everyone should be forgiven of their sins automatically.[8]

A third problem with the penal-substitution theory is that it fails to explain why we cannot pay for our own sins. The price of sin is suffering, and we are capable of suffering. We sing that "there was no other good enough / to pay the price of sin," but we never explain why "goodness" qualified Christ to pay for sin.[9] We say that it was because Christ was divine, or that he was perfect, but neither of these is an intuitive qualification. On the contrary, our sense of justice suggests that it is the guilty person who is uniquely qualified to pay for his or her own sins.

The Empathy Theory

As a replacement to the penal-substitution theory, Potter offers the empathy theory of the atonement. According to the empathy theory, justice can be satisfied equally well by punishment or by forgiveness. He illustrates this notion of justice by comparing God to the priest in one of the opening scenes of *Les Miserables.* The priest chooses to forgive Jean Valjean for stealing his silver, rather than pressing charges and sending him to jail. Just as the priest could satisfy the demands of justice by forgiving Valjean, God can satisfy justice by forgiving us.[10] Thus, Christ's suffering was not required to satisfy justice because God's forgiveness fully satisfies justice.

But there's a catch. Although justice can be satisfied by punishment or forgiveness, justice allows forgiveness only under certain circumstances. God must determine "when it is best to forgive"[11] instead of punish. This determination should be based on the circumstances surrounding the sin, the remorse felt by the sinner, and the reform accompanying that remorse.[12] This is where the atonement comes in. Without the atonement, Christ would have been ignorant of all three and thus would have been unable to forgive us. The purpose of the atonement was to make Christ aware of the data upon which we could be judged:

> The suffering in Gethsemane is a miraculous event in which Jesus experiences exactly what each of us experiences in our sinning. Only then can he fully understand why we do what we do. Only then can he fully understand the circumstances of our crimes. Only then can he know our remorse, and know whether our hearts have changed. . . . It is the bringing to his understanding the hearts and minds of humanity that is the atonement. . . . Being one of the judges himself, this understanding of our hearts allows him to justly pardon us in the event that we feel remorse for our sins.[13]

The principal problem with the empathy theory is that it gives the atonement no direct influence on humankind. The only person directly affected by the atonement was Christ. How then, does the atonement *save* us? The empathy theory seems to answer by saying that Christ saves us by judging us fairly. This strikes me as inadequate. Doesn't the atonement do anything to help us overcome the fall of Adam and Eve? The scriptures speak of man becoming "a saint through the atonement" (Mosiah 3:19) and children being "sanctified through the atonement" (D&C 74:7). In addition, Lehi says the atonement brought about the resurrection (2 Ne. 2:8). The empathy theory doesn't account for the atonement's active influence on man.

To further illustrate this problem, consider what would have happened without the atonement. Because the atonement had no direct influence on human beings, we must suppose that the history of the world would have been unchanged. The difference would have come at the time of judgment. If there were no atonement, the same number of people would have *deserved* salvation (based on their same actions), but all of them would have been damned because Christ would have been unable to judge them correctly. His ignorance of their circumstances, remorse, and reform would have prevented him from judging them fairly and thereby from saving them.

The scriptures put this claim in perspective. *Without* the atonement, "all mankind must unavoidably perish" (Alma 34:9). *With* the atonement, Jesus "glorifies the Father, and saves all the works of his hands, except those sons of perdition" (D&C 76:43). Can this monumental difference in outcomes be adequately accounted for solely by a change in God's knowledge of the facts? If the primary purpose of the atonement was to effect a change in Christ, then the hopeless situation without the atonement must be explained by a deficiency in Christ. The scriptures, however, consistently teach that the hopeless situation was due to a deficiency in fallen man.

Summary of Overview

These brief sketches illustrate the difficulties inherent in atonement theory. Each theory attempts to answer the same basic questions: What was the central problem that made the atonement necessary? How did the atonement solve the problem?

The satisfaction theory says that sin dishonors God—a reasonable enough problem statement. The difficulty arises in showing how the atonement could have solved that problem. The moral-influence theory posits a more convincing problem: that our sins will prevent us from living with God unless we turn from them and follow Christ's example. Again, the difficulty arises in showing how the atonement solved that problem.

The penal-substitution theory avoids a repetition of the same mistake by framing the problem with the solution in mind. The solution consisted of suffering, so the problem must be that sin can be remitted only by suffering. This explanation of the atonement connects the solution to the problem but makes the problem less compelling. The empathy theory offers a problem that matches the solution (it seems reasonable that suffering vicariously would give Christ empathy and enable him to judge fairly), but centering the whole thing on a deficiency in Christ undercuts many other aspects of our scripture and doctrine. Hopefully, it is becoming clear why devising a compelling theory of atonement is so difficult.

The Divine-Infusion Theory

With this historical backdrop in place, I will introduce my own theory of atonement which builds on Potter's rejection of vicarious suffering but offers a different explanation of what was accomplished by the atonement. I call it the divine-infusion theory.

Before diving into a detailed exploration of the theory, a brief introduction will be beneficial. The divine-infusion theory identifies two problems. The first is the problem of sin. Our sins prevent us from living in the presence of God. The problem of sin made the plan of salvation necessary. Justice demanded that we become celestial beings to be saved in the celestial kingdom, and we needed some way to do that.

The second problem is the fall of Adam, which would have thwarted God's plan of salvation were it not for the atonement. The reason that the fall would have been devastating is that, without the atonement, it would have resulted in a condition far worse than our current "fallen" state. To avoid confusion with our current state, I give the name "super-fallen state" to the state that would have prevailed were it not for the atonement. One major task for the divine-infusion theory will be to define this super-fallen state and show why it would have thwarted God's plan. The Book of Mormon introduces the possibility of a super-fallen state and tells us what it would have been like.

The purpose of the atonement was to prevent the super-fallen state from becoming actual. Rather than undoing the fall entirely, the atonement lessened the depth to which we fell. That is, it lessened the degree to which the earth and its inhabitants were cut off from God's presence. The atonement accomplished this by infusing all of creation with a bit of divinity called the light of Christ. This light, existing in and through all things as a consequence of the atonement, lifted the whole creation out of the super-fallen state brought on by the fall and gave us the opportunity to repent and be saved. The theory takes its name from the crucial role of the light of Christ as an infusion of divinity to humankind and the universe.

While cursory, this introduction provides the basic outline for how the theory will unfold. A discussion of the meaning of justice will illustrate the need for the plan of salvation, and the nature of that plan. I will then discuss the fall, the potential for a super-fallen state, and the way in which the atonement prevented the super-fallen state from occurring.

The Nature of Justice

Understanding the nature of justice is essential to understanding the atonement. I argue that justice can be satisfied only by reform on the part of each individual and that, when justice prescribes suffering, it is always for the purpose of bringing about that reform.

The Book of Mormon says that the atonement satisfied the de-

mands of justice (2 Ne. 9:26; Mosiah 15:9), but what is it that justice demands? We get conflicting answers from the two basic concepts of justice found in the Book of Mormon. The first answer is that justice demands punishment for infractions of the law; I will refer to this notion of justice as *punitive justice.* The second answer is that everyone should get what they deserve; I will refer to this as *deserts justice.* We wrestle with these two notions of justice whenever we try to decide what to do with a seemingly reformed criminal. Should we remove or reduce the punishment for a reformed criminal?

Punitive justice dictates that a guilty person must pay the full price of the law, regardless of whether he or she changes. This is because punitive justice is based solely on the principle of punishment. However, deserts justice says that, once a guilty person has reformed, he is no longer required to suffer because he is no longer deserving of punishment. Thus, deserts justice is only concerned with the current self, while punitive justice is primarily concerned with past actions.

There is often disagreement about which of these concepts of justice is more fundamental, but most people accept both to some extent. Both ideas have some basis in our innate sense of justice. However, determining which one takes precedence over the other has far-reaching implications on the atonement. Consider, for example, the effect this can have on the meaning of repentance.

Punitive justice leads to a concept of repentance focused on suffering and remorse. If the law requires suffering for the remission of sin, it follows naturally that repentance is our experience of that cleansing pain. However, according to deserts justice, the important part of repentance is not the suffering, but the change of heart. We can stop suffering when we have become good, as the moral law requires. According to deserts justice, the purpose of suffering is to bring about reform; but for punitive justice, the suffering is an end in itself. For help in understanding the relationship between deserts justice and punitive justice, we turn to the scriptures.

Deserts Justice in the Scriptures

For Alma, the concept of justice is embodied and described in the principle of restoration:

> The plan of restoration is *requisite with the justice of God;* for it is requisite that all things should be restored to their proper order. . . .
>
> And it is *requisite with the justice of God* that men should be judged according to their works; and if their works were good in this life, and the de-

> sires of their hearts were good, that they should also, at the last day, be restored unto that which is good. (Alma 41:2–3; emphasis mine)

This is a description of deserts justice. The principle of restoration dictates that we will get what we deserve based on our works. Justice demands that we reap what we sow. This concept of justice is further developed in the Doctrine and Covenants, which provides the necessary background for a deeper understanding of deserts justice.

Every person who comes in to the world is given the light of Christ (D&C 88:6–7). "He that receiveth light, and continueth in God, receiveth more light; and that light groweth brighter and brighter until the perfect day" (D&C 50:24). The connection to justice starts to unfold when we learn that the light of Christ is "the law by which all things are governed" (D&C 88:13). This law (the light of Christ) governs not only humans but also the kingdoms filling the immensity of space:

> All kingdoms have a law given;
>
> And there are many kingdoms; for there is no space in the which there is no kingdom; and there is no kingdom in which there is no space, either a greater or a lesser kingdom.
>
> And unto every kingdom is given a law; and unto every law there are certain bounds also and conditions.
>
> *All beings who abide not in those conditions are not justified.* (D&C 88:36–39; emphasis mine)

These scriptures come together to give an interesting perspective on justice. The universe is full of kingdoms of varying degrees of glory. Likewise, it is also full of people of varying degrees of glory. In both cases, the glory corresponds to varying degrees of law. To inhabit a certain degree of glory, you must progress to a matching degree of glory as a person. That is, you must be able to abide by the law of the kingdom to reside there.

The connection between this concept and the law of restoration is made in the next passage:

> All beings who abide not in those conditions are not justified.
>
> *For* intelligence cleaveth unto intelligence; wisdom receiveth wisdom; truth embraceth truth; virtue loveth virtue; light cleaveth unto light; mercy hath compassion on mercy and claimeth her own; justice continueth its course and claimeth its own. . . (D&C 88:39–40; emphasis mine)

To be "justified" is to abide by or to be squared with the demands of justice. Everything following the connecting word *for* in the verse above is an explanation of why those who cannot live the law are not justified. It is

because intelligence cleaveth unto intelligence; truth embraceth truth; virtue loveth virtue and so forth. Thus, who you are determines the kingdom to which you belong. This modern-day scripture shares language with Alma's description of restoration:

> And now behold, is the meaning of the word restoration to take a thing of a natural state and place it in an unnatural state, or to place it in a state opposite to its nature?
>
> O, my son, this is not the case; but the meaning of the word restoration is to bring back again evil for evil, or carnal for carnal, or devilish for devilish—*good for that which is good; righteous for that which is righteous; just for that which is just; merciful for that which is merciful.* (Alma 41:12–13; emphasis mine)

Alma's doctrine of restoration is clearly based on the same concept of justice described in Doctrine and Covenants 88. Our deserts, then, are ultimately manifest in the kind of people we are and what degree of light we have obtained. In the end we will get what we deserve through the principle of restoration. If our works were good, we will be restored to that which is good; if our works were evil, we will be restored to that which is evil. We will reap what we sow because our actions shape who we will become.

Modern revelation teaches this concept in terms of the actual structure of the universe (every space with a kingdom and every kingdom with a law; D&C 88:36–37) which means deserts justice is an unavoidable and inescapable consequence of the nature of the universe.

The Role of Punitive Justice

The scriptures also describe justice in terms of punishment. The most explicit example of this approach is found in Doctrine and Covenants 82:4: "Ye call upon my name for revelations, and I give them unto you; and inasmuch as ye keep not my sayings, which I give unto you, ye become transgressors; *and justice and judgment are the penalty which is affixed unto my law*" (emphasis mine).

This scripture portrays a very intuitive concept of justice in which violators of the law face punishment as a result of their disobedience. Justice is identified as "the penalty" affixed to the law. It clearly endorses punitive justice, which demands punishment when the law is violated. However, the ultimate sanction for punitive justice is much different than that of deserts justice.

We saw that deserts justice is described as a consequence of the

structure of the universe. By contrast, punitive justice is introduced as a practical matter, created to facilitate repentance:

> Now, how could a man repent except he should sin? How could he sin if there was no law? How could there be a law save there was a punishment?
>
> Now, there was a punishment affixed, and a just law given, which brought remorse of conscience unto man. (Alma 42:17–18)

Thus, punitive justice is functional—intended to bring about repentance. Once a person has reformed through the repentance process, there is no more purpose for punishment.

The reason punitive justice exists at all is to make us aware of the eternal consequences of deserts justice. Deserts justice will not be fully realized until final judgment. In the meantime, punitive justice helps us to understand the ultimate consequence of our actions. We learn what actions will lead eventually to misery and which will lead to happiness. Once we have learned that lesson and chosen to follow a path of righteousness, the punishment has served its purpose.

Justice and Mercy

The idea that mercy cannot rob justice is frequently at the center of Mormon discussions of the atonement. According to the penal-substitution theory, God would "rob justice" if he forgave sins without inflicting the required punishment. Those who reject the penal-substitution theory commonly do so on the grounds that justice is not fundamentally punitive. Thus, God can forgive without inflicting punishment if he chooses. For example, Potter argues that "it strikes me as right that God can decide to forgive without punishment."[14] It strikes me the same way.

If justice is concerned only with reform and if punishment exists to bring about that reform, then it should be possible to remove all remaining punishments once a person has truly changed. This conclusion is taught forcefully in the Book of Mormon. Several scriptures refer to the "claims" of justice and mercy. Even God is bound by these claims, for he "cannot deny justice when it has its claim" (Mosiah 15:27). Justice has a claim on people who "do evil" and "die in their sins" (Mosiah 2:38; 15:26). Mercy's claim, on the other hand, is based on repentance (Alma 12:34).

In his masterful discourse on the atonement, Alma states four separate times that mercy's claim is based on repentance (Alma 42:22–31). We learn that mercy has no claim on the wicked, even if they feel intense guilt.

By itself, remorse is not enough to enable mercy; it must be coupled with reform to give mercy a claim (Mosiah 2:38–39). This relationship further supports the precedence of deserts justice over punitive justice.

We often quote Alma's teaching that mercy cannot rob justice (Alma 42:25), but we have largely ignored Amulek's teaching that mercy can "overpower" justice: "And thus he shall bring salvation to all those who shall believe on his name; this being the intent of this last sacrifice, to bring about the bowels of mercy, *which overpowereth justice*, and bringeth about means unto men that they may have faith unto repentance" (Alma 34:15; emphasis mine). This scripture states that mercy can overpower justice on condition of repentance, meaning that some portion of the punishment can be omitted when there has been true repentance.

However, if a person does not repent, he must endure the full punishment dictated by punitive justice: "And thus mercy can satisfy the demands of justice, and encircles them in the arms of safety, while he that exercises no faith unto repentance is exposed to the whole law of the demands of justice; therefore only unto him that has faith unto repentance is brought about the great and eternal plan of redemption" (Alma 34:16). Thus, the Book of Mormon confirms the idea that just punishment can be mercifully overruled, but only when true reform has taken place.

This conclusion undermines our usual explanation of the atonement by suggesting that there is no need for suffering (vicarious or otherwise) once we have reformed from our sinful ways. It also provides its own answer to the question of what justice demands: We must learn to live the celestial law before we can be saved in the celestial kingdom. God cannot simply decide to save us in the celestial kingdom based on his love, because mercy cannot rob justice. Justice is ultimately concerned with what we are—not merely that we obtain forgiveness from God, but that we become like God if we want to live where he does. The plan of salvation exists to make this growth possible.

The Plan of Salvation

If we reject vicarious suffering, as this theory of justice suggests, we create the problem of finding a new explanation for the purpose of Christ's suffering. Our initial review of atonement theory illustrates how difficult this can be. A key scripture will help us succeed where others have failed. In Doctrine and Covenants 88—the same section in which we found the ultimate meaning of justice—we are given a key insight into the

purpose of the atonement: "Jesus Christ . . . descended below all things, . . . *that he might be* in all and through all things, the light of truth; . . . the light of Christ" (D&C 88:5-7; emphasis mine)

This scripture answers the question of what the atonement accomplished. Jesus descended below all things so that the light of Christ might be in and through all things. Without the atonement, there would be no light of Christ as we have it now. I readily concede, however, that the theory does not explain why suffering was required to accomplish this infusion. I simply accept that it does on the authority of scripture.

The rest of the theory explains why the light of Christ is so crucial as to be considered the principal consequence of the atonement. If infusing the light of Christ was the purpose of the atonement, the theory must answer some tough questions. How did the light of Christ satisfy the demands of justice? How did it overcome the fall? Answering these questions will require us to mean more by "the light of Christ" than just a vague metaphor for God's influence or presence in the universe. Despite its enigmatic nature, the light of Christ manifests itself in its most concrete way as the source of conscience. The crucial role of conscience will become clear as we continue.

The importance of the light of Christ cannot be fully appreciated without an understanding of the plan of salvation and the role of the fall in that plan. Joseph Smith's description of the plan is as insightful as it is original:

> God himself, finding he was in the midst of spirits and glory, because he was more intelligent, saw proper to institute laws whereby the rest could have a privilege to advance like himself. The relationship we have with God places us in a situation to advance in knowledge. He has power to institute laws to instruct the weaker intelligences, that they may be exalted with himself, so that they might have one glory upon another, and all that knowledge, power, glory, and intelligence, which is requisite to save them in the world of spirits.[15]

This statement provides crucial perspective by explaining the plan in a context prior to the fall. God's purpose in instituting laws was to create an environment in which weaker intelligences could advance in knowledge, power, and glory. Justice demands that we be celestial to inhabit the celestial kingdom, and there was no magic wand to make us so. It could only come "one glory upon another" through our own experiences and choices.

In a moment, the difference between God's strength and our weakness will help to explain the fall, so it is important to understand what it means that we were weak. We were weak in the premortal world in the sense that we were dependant on God's light and influence. We were weak in that our behavior was greatly influenced by our environment. In God's presence we were good, but we could not maintain the same level of goodness without God's influence.

Christ showed us what it means to be strong. Even though he took on a mortal body and faced the challenges and temptations of a fallen world, he remained perfectly obedient. He was "in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15). He had it within himself to choose goodness in any situation, even when he was forsaken by the Father. This is the type of strength we lacked, and the purpose of God's plan was to help us overcome our weakness.

The Fall

This leads to the highly unorthodox view in Mormon theology that the fall was a necessary part of God's plan. It was important for our progression that we leave God's presence to freely exercise our agency through character-shaping choices. We often focus on the good aspects of the fall; but to understand the atonement, we must also understand what was bad about the fall—the super-fallen state which it brought about.

First, the super-fallen state is not the doctrine of original sin. In Christian theology, original sin typically means that (1) We are in some sense culpable for Adam's sin; and/or (2) Because of Adam's sin we inherit a sinful predisposition. These doctrines of original sin raise problems similar to those raised by Christ's vicarious suffering. For example: Why should I be held responsible for Adam's sin? How is it possible that Adam's sin could change who I am as a person? Neither idea seems just.

Joseph Smith explicitly rejected the first doctrine of original sin in the second Article of Faith: "We believe that men will be punished for their own sins, and not for Adam's transgression." The second doctrine (that Adam's sin predisposed his posterity to sin) is often accepted in Mormon writings, but it is just as troublesome as the first. To say that Adam's sin gave all his children an innate predisposition to evil is to say that Adam changed who they were in a fundamental way. External temptations are one thing, but internal predispositions constitute what we call character and help to define who we are. I submit that this second doctrine of origi-

nal sin is inconsistent with our commitment to agency, individuality, and autonomy.

If we embrace Joseph Smith's rejection of original sin and his description of the plan, we are left with a less problematic view of the fall. Joseph Smith provided the key when he said that the plan was created because of our weakness in the premortal world. This explanation allows us to account for fallen human nature by a change of environment, without reference to a mystical connection between Adam's action and our natures. Rather than giving us a sinful nature, the fall merely placed us in an environment in which our weakness was exposed.

After Adam and Eve taught their children in the fallen world, Satan came in among them and said "Believe it not; and they believed it not, . . . And men began *from that time forth* to be carnal, sensual, and devilish" (Moses 5:13; emphasis mine). The implication is that any devilishness we exhibit is a result of our own disobedience rather than Adam's original sin. We are accountable for our own actions and cannot blame Adam for making us sinful.

The result of Adam's transgression was that the earth and its inhabitants were cut off from God's presence and influence. Were it not for the atonement, this separation from God would have been complete—a possibility I have referred to as a super-fallen state. In the actual fall, we were not completely cut off from God because the atonement provided us with the light of Christ. We often think of our current state on earth as the only fallen state, but this view ignores the potential of the super-fallen state, causing us to overlook one of the most important accomplishments of the atonement: preventing the super-fallen state.[16]

The Atonement

The atonement counteracted the fall by giving us the light of Christ in the form of conscience, which makes us aware of what is good and makes us feel that we ought to be good. To understand the super-fallen state, we need only imagine our predicament in mortality: with bodies prompting us to indulge our physical desires (which occurs) and with Satan tempting us to choose evil (which also occurs) but without the guidance of conscience. In this situation, it seems clear that we would have chosen "eternal death, according to the will of the flesh and the evil which is therein, which giveth the spirit of the devil power to captivate" (2 Ne. 2:29).

Lehi clarifies how conscience counteracts the super-fallen state: "The Messiah cometh in the fulness of time, that he may redeem the children of men from the fall. *And because that they are redeemed from the fall they have become free forever, knowing good from evil;* to act for themselves and not to be acted upon" (2 Ne. 2:26; emphasis mine). According to Lehi, it is because of the atonement that we are free to act and that we know good from evil. Both ideas seem strange from a typical Mormon perspective. We usually teach that agency is intrinsic to intelligence, and that our knowledge of good and evil was a result of the fall rather than the atonement.

Although we sometimes think of our knowledge of good and evil as a consequence of the fall, it was actually a result of the fall and the atonement together. It was because of the fall that we became subject to the devil and began to directly experience evil (Mosiah 16:3; Moses 5:11). However, our knowledge of good was, and is, a result of the atonement.

Moroni 7:16 says that "the Spirit of Christ is given to every man, that he may know good from evil. Moroni continues by admonishing us to "search diligently in the light of Christ," knowing that "every thing which inviteth to do good . . . is sent forth by the power and gift of Christ" (Moro. 7:16, 19). Thus, our ability to recognize goodness comes from the light of Christ. This is the reason the light of Christ is so frequently equated with conscience.

It may seem unusual to think of conscience as a gift, because we think of our conscience as our own. However, if there is one thing the study of ethics has shown, it is that we all have a sense of right and wrong without knowing where it comes from or how it arrives at its conclusions. And this is just what we should expect, if conscience is a borrowed light. This expectation is a natural one in Mormon theology, where the doctrine that conscience is a manifestation of the light of Christ is well established.[17] The full significance of this gift in helping to overcome the fall is found in its connection to agency.

Agency

Lehi's claim that the atonement made us free is initially perplexing because we think of agency as individuality and autonomy. These fundamental aspects of agency existed in the premortal world and were neither created nor destroyed by the fall. However, the degree to which we are able to exercise our agency depends on our circumstances, which *were* greatly affected by the fall and the atonement. We can understand how the atone-

ment enabled our agency by considering three conditions which expand our ability to exercise our agency.

The first is genuine alternatives and the ability to choose among them. God told Enoch: "In the Garden of Eden, gave I unto man his agency" (Moses 6:32). God gave agency to Adam and Eve in the garden by giving them a choice. They were commanded not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil; nevertheless, they could choose to do so if they wished (Moses 3:17). There can be no meaningful exercise of agency without a choice between genuine alternatives.[18] Unlike the next two conditions, this one did not depend on the atonement. After the fall, Adam and Eve would have had genuine choices even without the atonement.

The second condition is that the alternatives from which we choose must be of interest to us. This is the meaning of Lehi's statement that "man could not act for himself save it should be that he was enticed by the one or the other" (2 Ne. 2:16). The importance of enticement is reiterated in modern scripture where God declares that "it must needs be that the devil should tempt the children of men, or they could not be agents unto themselves" (D&C 29:39).

Moroni makes the connection to the atonement by explaining the source of our enticement in his discussion of the light of Christ:

> That which is evil cometh of the devil; for the devil . . . inviteth and *enticeth to sin*, and to do that which is evil continually.
>
> But behold, that which is of God inviteth and *enticeth to do good* continually. (Moro. 7:12–13; emphasis mine)

Initially, it was not obvious to me why agency should rely on enticement, but the answer is clear upon reflection. Think back to the last time you were asked to choose between two alternatives for which you had absolutely no preference. For me, this was last week when my wife asked me if she should set up her doctor's appointment for Tuesday or for Wednesday. I had absolutely no preference either way. In this case, I got out of choosing by telling her that it did not matter to me one way or the other. But sometimes (maybe this was the case for you), the person asking presses you to make the decision. I find that when I am pressed to choose between alternatives that do not interest me, I prefer to flip a coin rather than choosing. That is because choice loses its meaning when you are not enticed one way or the other. It is still a choice in the sense of having two alternatives from which to choose; however, with no reason to care about

the different outcomes, there is no cause for deliberation. Choice becomes a mental coin toss.

The third condition for the meaningful exercise of agency is that there be a moral component to our choices. Moral agency requires choices between good and evil: "And it is given unto them to know good from evil; *wherefore* they are agents unto themselves" (Moses 6:56; emphasis mine). Agency can exist without the knowledge of good and evil, but *moral* agency cannot. Since moral agency was essential to God's plan, we had to have a knowledge of good and evil to be agents in the requisite sense. Thus, moral agency is enabled by the atonement because our knowledge of good is a direct result of the atonement, through the light of Christ.

This analysis of agency explains Lehi's claim that the atonement made us free to choose between good and evil. We could not be moral agents without enticement toward the good and without a knowledge of good and evil. The two most distinguishing features of conscience are that it tells us what is right and that it makes us feel that we ought to do what is right. In other words, conscience gives us a knowledge of good and entices us toward the good. Thus, our moral agency is made possible by the gift of conscience.

We can see, now, why God's plan would have been thwarted by the fall and how the atonement made salvation possible. Without conscience, we would have had no practical hope of choosing the right and overcoming temptation. We rely on borrowed light for our recognition of goodness. We could not progress through the exercise of agency if our environment was full of temptation toward sin without anything tempting us toward righteousness.

Summary of the Divine-Infusion Theory

We are now prepared to summarize the divine-infusion theory. We have covered considerable ground, touching on justice, mercy, agency, the fall, and the plan of salvation. All of this analysis comes together to create the divine-infusion theory of the atonement.

Unlike the traditional theory in which justice demands punishment, the scriptures suggest that the ultimate demand of justice is that we inherit a place in the universe based upon what we have become. This concept of justice fits well with our understanding of the plan of salvation, which was designed by God to help lesser intelligences advance in their ability to live higher laws.

To grow and progress, we had to leave God's presence to go to a place where we could freely exercise our agency.[19] Thus, some sort of fall (i.e., separation from God) was required. The problem with the fall was that its unmitigated effect would have left us in a state in which we could not progress. In this super-fallen state, being totally cut off from God, we would have had nothing to make us aware of what was good and to entice us toward the good. In such a state, we would not have been moral agents in the sense required by God's plan. Without conscience teaching us what is good and enticing us to be good, we would have been endlessly lost, as the Book of Mormon suggests (Mosiah 16:4).

The atonement saved us from the fall by giving us the light of Christ, manifest as conscience. If we respond to the prodding of conscience by rejecting temptation and choosing the right, we receive more light. Our potential is realized through this process of *becoming*, which finds its fullest expression in eternal progression. With the addition of the light of Christ, mortal probation became an essential testing ground where we could progress through choice and accountability.

King Benjamin referred to this process as putting off the natural man, yielding to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and becoming saints through the atonement of Christ (Mosiah 3:19). This is the essence of repentance (i.e., change toward the good), and the only means of satisfying the demands of justice (i.e., that we learn to live celestial law before going to the celestial kingdom). The atonement makes us free so that our choices can determine the extent of our justification. Samuel the Lamanite portrayed our situation in exactly this way (Hel. 14:30–31).

The atonement was not a matter of satisfying justice's relentless thirst for suffering. Instead, it was a matter of pulling the universe far enough out of the darkness to make repentance and growth possible. The atonement "bringeth about means unto men that they may have faith unto repentance" (Alma 34:15). Thus, the atonement satisfies the demands of justice by making it possible for us to become celestial. A dual emphasis on grace and works follows naturally. Our works make us who we are and determine our final destiny, but every good work we do is enabled and influenced by the light of Christ in us.

The divine-infusion theory provides a clear and compelling necessity for the atonement that is based on our most fundamental understanding of God's plan. It does not answer the question of why suffering was necessary to infuse the light of Christ in and through all things, but such

is the testimony of modern revelation. It solves many of the philosophical problems posed by the fall and the atonement, and it is also woven tightly into the unique metaphysics underlying LDS theology. Further strengths of the divine-infusion theory emerge by examining its answers to a few common questions.

1. What about the resurrection? The Book of Mormon consistently emphasizes the atonement's role in bringing about the resurrection (2 Ne. 2:8; 9:6, 22; Mosiah 16:7; Alma 21:9, 42:23; Hel. 14:15; Morm. 9:13). It is striking, then, how out of place the resurrection is in the traditional theories of atonement. For example, there is no obvious connection between the resurrection and justice's demand for suffering. Sins might incur a debt to justice, but certainly death does not. In the empathy theory, Christ suffered so that he could understand our circumstances, remorse, and reform. I see no plausible link between his improved empathy and the "power of the resurrection" (Jac. 4:11) spoken of in the Book of Mormon. In the moral-influence theory, where the atonement merely sets an example, there seems to be no hope of accounting for the resurrection.

In the divine-infusion theory, the resurrection is not so out of place. Christ performed the atonement to bring about the light of Christ—the "light which is in all things, which *giveth life to all things*" (D&C 88:13; emphasis mine). Abinadi draws on this concept when he speaks of the resurrection:

> But *there is a resurrection*, therefore the grave hath no victory, and the sting of death is swallowed up in Christ.
>
> *He is the light and the life of the world*; yea, a light that is endless, that can never be darkened; yea, and also a life which is endless, that there can be no more death. (Mosiah 16:8–9; emphasis mine)

This passage clearly connects the resurrection and the light of Christ. Paul said, "As in Adam all die, even so in Christ, shall all be made alive" (1 Cor. 15:22). In a similarly universal way, the light of Christ "proceedeth forth from the presence of God to fill the immensity of space" (D&C 88:12). The atonement brought life to all things by infusing the light of Christ through all things. Surely this fact makes the resurrection more at home in the divine-infusion theory than in any of the other theories.

2. Why was it necessary for Christ to be perfect? We teach that Christ had to be perfect to perform the atonement, but we have a difficult time explaining why. In contrast, the reason is quite obvious in the divine-infu-

sion theory. The purpose of the atonement was to pull all of creation out of darkness, to breathe life and light and goodness back into all things. It seems natural that to infuse all things with goodness, you must be good yourself. The penal-substitution theory has very little to offer as an explanation for why Christ had to be perfect to perform the atonement. The divine-infusion theory offers an intuitive and more satisfying answer.

3. *Why can't I pay for my own sins?* I criticized the penal-substitution theory for its failure to explain why I cannot atone for my own sins. The price of sin appears to be suffering, and I am certainly capable of suffering. The scriptures even say that the unrepentant will eventually suffer "even as" Christ (D&C 19:17). What, then, prevents me from rejecting Christ's suffering and saving myself? Why is Christ the only way to salvation? (Mosiah 3:17).

The answer is that the atonement is not about "paying" for sins as we usually think of it. Suffering alone cannot remit sins. Ultimately, the plan of mercy is made possible through repentance, which the atonement made possible through the gift of conscience. The real purpose of suffering (even in Doctrine and Covenants 19) is to bring us to repentance and to spur progress.

Alma set up his experience as the model of what happens in hell. He said he was "racked with eternal torment" and "tormented with the pains of hell," even with "the pains of a damned soul" (Alma 36:12–16). That suffering brought about a change of heart, so that when he finally turned to Christ, his torment ended abruptly. Alma's experience describes the painful path the wicked will tread on their way to the telestial kingdom (D&C 76:103–106). The pains of hell will motivate change in those who were wicked on earth. They were wicked on earth, but they will have to repent and reform before they can be saved in the telestial kingdom. Justice demands it.

4. *Why must we repent if Christ paid the price of our sins?* Acceptance of the debt analogy from the penal-substitution theory often leads to an incorrect understanding of forgiveness. The penal-substitution theory says forgiveness can be granted only on condition of payment to justice.[20] In my critique, I asked why we are not automatically forgiven if Christ paid the full price of sin. If forgiveness is conditioned on the payment of a debt, and the debt was paid, then forgiveness should be automatic. The penal-substitution theory is vulnerable to this criticism because it incorrectly conflates justification with forgiveness. In reality, the two are quite differ-

ent. Justification is a process of coming into conformity with law, but forgiveness is simply a matter of relationship.

When my wife forgives me for being insensitive, this does not mean that I do not need to change, nor does it mean that I have already changed. It simply means that she is willing to forget the incident and that she will not allow it to come between us in the future. Her forgiveness restores our damaged relationship. In the same way, God can forgive us long before we are justified. His forgiveness does not remove our need to become celestial; it simply restores our relationship so that we can continue to approach God with confidence. Thus, the empathy theory is correct when it says God can forgive without punishment, but it is incorrect when it concludes that this forgiveness satisfies the demands of justice.

5. Don't the scriptures say that Christ "paid" for our sins? I have cited many scriptures to support specific points of the divine-infusion theory, but of course, other scriptures could be cited in seeming opposition to the theory. Although space does not permit a thorough discussion of such scriptures, I have found one objection to be the most common. The objection is that we cannot abandon penal substitution because it is taught explicitly in the scriptures. Consider, for example, Isaiah 53:5: "But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed."

We are so accustomed to interpreting this passage as a statement of penal substitution that it may be hard to see how the divine-infusion theory would explain it. However, it is very easy to understand this scripture (and many others like it) in terms of the divine-infusion theory if we keep one point in mind: The scriptures are almost always ambiguous about the mechanism of atonement.

The scriptures speak frequently about what happened (suffering), and what resulted (salvation), without making it clear how the one leads to the other. It helps to recognize that this is not uncommon in everyday speech. For example, when I am told a person is "running a marathon to cure cancer," I do not mistakenly assume that the marathon itself is what cures other people's cancer. It would be equally natural to say that the person was running *for* cancer. The actual mechanism is more complicated than what the sentence describes: by running the marathon, the runner encourages people to donate money, which in turn funds research, which eventually leads to new treatments for cancer.

The complicated nature of the mechanism does not clash with the statement, "he is running a marathon to cure cancer." However, if I had spent my whole life thinking that one person's running magically cured another person's cancer, I might think it utterly ridiculous to believe that "he is running to cure cancer" meant something about money and research. You may experience something like this when you first try to consider the scriptures about the atonement in a new light.

In the divine-infusion theory, it is still the case that Christ suffered under the weight of our sins to free us from the bondage of those sins. The difference is only in the purpose of this suffering. I have suggested a new reason for how and why it works, but it does not conflict with the basic statements about what the suffering ultimately brought about.

Notes

1. R. Dennis Potter, "Did Christ Pay for Our Sins?" *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 32, no. 4 (Winter 1999): 73–86.

2. Sterling M. McMurrin, *The Theological Foundations of the Mormon Religion* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1965), 86.

3. As set forth in *Cur Deus Homo*, retrieved on May 21, 2005, from http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/anselm-curdeus.html.

4. B. H. Roberts followed in the footsteps of Anselm when he argued: "It is the breach in the law that must be mended. . . . The Atonement is . . . a matter of satisfying the insulted honor and majesty of God adequately." B. H. Roberts, *Seventy's Course in Theology*, 5 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1907–12), 4:94.

5. Cleon Skousen developed an imaginative variation of the moral-influence theory in which the purpose of the atonement was to persuade all of the undeveloped intelligences in the universe to permit God to ignore the demands of justice. W. Cleon Skousen, *The First 2000 Years* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1953), appendix. This one-sentence summary is not the most favorable one possible, but I believe it to be an accurate restatement of his central premise.

6. Many Latter-day Saints are familiar with the penal substitution theory through Boyd K. Packer's parable that describes the atonement in terms of a debtor who cannot pay his debt, a creditor who demands payment, and a mediator who allows both justice and mercy to be satisfied by paying the debt for the debtor. Boyd K. Packer, "The Mediator," *Ensign*, May 1977, 54. Potter discusses the problems with this parable in some detail.

7. Potter, "Did Christ Pay for Our Sins?" 83; emphasis his.

8. For this reason, the penal substitution theory leads naturally to either a doc-

trine of universal salvation or to a doctrine of limited atonement in which, for example, Christ paid only for the sins of the elect.

9. Cecil Frances Alexander, "There Is a Green Hill Far Away," *Hymns* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), No. 194.

10. Potter, "Did Christ Pay for Our Sins?" 82.

11. Ibid., 82.

12. Ibid., 83. At this point, the example from *Les Miserables* appears to be a bad one, since Valjean exhibited neither remorse nor reform and the circumstances were less than exculpatory.

13. Ibid., 83–84.

14. Potter, "Did Christ Pay for Our Sins?" 82.

15. Joseph Fielding Smith, ed. and comp., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1976), 354.

16. Blake T. Ostler, "The Development of the Mormon Concept of Grace" *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 24, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 58–64, describes a similar role for the atonement as the means of preventing what he calls *theoretical original sin.*

17. A few examples are Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary,* 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965–73), 2:274–75; Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation,* edited by Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954–56), 1:51; Harold B. Lee, *The Teachings of Harold B. Lee,* edited by Clyde J. Williams (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1996), 101. For contemporary discussions on the light of Christ, see Boyd K. Packer, "The Light of Christ," *Ensign,* April 2005, 8–14. He gave this talk originally on June 22, 2004, at the Missionary Training Center in Provo, Utah, at a seminar for new mission presidents; and [no author/editor], *True to the Faith: A Gospel Reference* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, July 2004), 96.

18. See Blake T. Ostler, "The Development of the Mormon Concept of Grace," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 24, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 58–60, for a more fully developed form of this idea.

19. "Our first parents were cut off both temporally and spiritually from the presence of the Lord; and thus we see they became subjects to follow after their own will" (Alma 42:7).

20. B. H. Roberts, *Seventy's Course in Theology,* 4:102–3, adopts this reasoning: "The *ground work of their forgiveness* and restoration to union with God must be that the penalty due to their sin has been paid. This or Justice goes unsatisfied." Emphasis mine.

Editor's note: The following essay is another in Dialogue's *special series which, under guest editor Ethan Yorgason, explores the Mormon experience and identity outside the usual Anglo-American cultural realm.*

Yesterday's People

Gary Huxford

It would take a detailed map of Ethiopia to help you locate the village of Lalibela more than four hundred miles north of Addis Ababa. Save for a lyrically beautiful name, there is little to distinguish this place except that it contains some of the world's most amazing monuments to religious devotion—the "mysterious subterranean, monolithic rock hewn churches," as one travel guide describes them.[1] Some eight centuries ago at a time when Ethiopia exercised a power felt throughout much of northern Africa, a Zagwe ruler dreamed of a series of churches carved from a seam of solid rock. They stand today, eleven of them, still being used for Eastern Orthodox religious ceremonies dating back to the beginning of Christianity and protected as an international historical treasure by the United Nations.

Catherine and I visited the village near the end of our missionary stint in Ethiopia, and there I experienced an epiphany. I attempted to capture something of the feeling in a letter home to our children:

> Our second Christmas in East Africa—last year in Kenya, this year in Ethiopia. I write this sitting beside Lake Tana, the source of the Blue Nile. It is evening and the water birds return to their nesting sanctuaries. This is the final day of a week of travel along the historical route in Northern Ethiopia, travel that included the churches of Lalibela, truly one of the world's great architectural wonders. A journey such as this redeems this desperate part of the Earth that time and circumstance have abused beyond measure. It is easy to become cynical about human nature when surrounded by people victimized by every form of degradation. But when you experience (the

most descriptive word I can think of) these churches—eight hundred years old, chiseled out of a solid mass of living rock—you watch the slow, measured cadence of the life of the monks and priests; you smell the incense and listen to the sound of drum, chant, sistrum; and then you realize you are witness to a drama older than Christianity, older than recorded time, and perhaps as basic as breathing.

I do not want to romanticize all this. I shall leave that sort of thing to the novelists, many of whom spend their evenings soused in some shabby third world hotel, then retreat to their lakeside villa in Switzerland to write about how grand it all was, never once living among the people they describe. Life for the victims may be "real and earnest" but it is also narrow—and often short.[2]

A few years of reflection plus an additional tour of duty in Haiti have deepened my broodings begun on that day. I'm not sure I am prepared to make a commentary worthy of universal application on the implications of widely divergent cultures for a world-wide Church. My limited time and exposure may mean that what follows must be taken as no more than solitary ramblings. I am convinced, however, that these are not isolated experiences, nor limited to our time alone. Rather this interface between old and new is so time-honored as to be almost a cliché. But like all clichés, they become such because we forget the substance that made them believable at the outset.

What I felt in that dusty village in Ethiopia was the initial—"doubt" is too strong a word—reevaluation of my errand. I experienced my share, and then some, of the faith-promoting missionary stories: lives deeply impacted by the gospel message and individuals with whom an eternal bond exists. What began to weigh on my mind, however, was the burden of the totality of it all, both in terms of numbers and, more importantly, in terms of the deep cultural setting. What right had I to intrude? Yes, yes, I am mindful of the divine commission. But other than the externals of Church membership, how far was I to go into the heart of the matter? What elements of that culture, far older than our own either as Latter-day Saints or Americans, trailed along like DNA traces covering generations?

Here I was, dark-suited, badged, and armed with my *Handbook of Instructions,* ready to initiate these people of not only another place but, even more significantly, another time into a movement that, in spite of its claims to antiquity, was the very epitome of modernity in its operations. A word of explanation may help.

Much as we would like to think we are exceptional and therefore im-

mune from general tendencies in the world of religion, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints follows pretty closely the statistical trends of the broader Christian community. We vary above and below the average depending on the factors being measured, but we don't depart far from the norm. Recent developments in western Christendom should, therefore, give us pause or, if nothing else, excite our curiosity.

One such development widely commented upon is the substantial decline of Christianity in its traditional heartland, which to us in the West means Europe and its outreach communities, together with a corresponding surge in adherents coming from non-Christian backgrounds in southern climes. Africa is a case in point although not the exclusive example. There is much to excite the imagination in this shift which is bound to leave both parties—Church and host cultures—altered in the process. To provide a setting, let me offer a quick and dirty romp through the early centuries of the Christian movement. Experts will wince, but bear with me.

The early appeal of the message of Jesus was based, among other things, on the individual's personal experience with God. The kingdom truly was within us. Personal revelation and spiritual manifestations provided constant encouragement. The great challenge was to harness these free-flowing gifts of the Spirit and channel them into a more enduring institutional setting. After all, nothing is more destructive of collective continuity than the individual acting on what is felt to be a personal mandate from God.

The answer was a church.[3] In spite of LDS arguments to the contrary, the New Testament efforts at organization were tentative, incomplete, and, from later evidence, ineffectual. And so the new movement was left with a dynamic faith based on the revelatory experience in search of an institutional framework that provided both a clarification of doctrine, at least to the defining of orthodoxy, and an organizational hierarchy. In casting about, it found the two supports it needed in Greek philosophy and the legal and political framework of the Roman Empire.

In the great compromise that spanned those early centuries, Christianity made its peace, troubled though that peace may have been, with the requirements of historical survival. But at a cost. For the sake of survival, it adopted doctrinal orthodoxy together with enforcement procedures; an ecclesiastical hierarchy, often self-perpetuating, with the power

to mediate between the believer and God; and an earthly institution, the church, that replicated in Augustine's mind the divine kingdom of God.

The cost was the free flowing of the Spirit, which Spirit may, indeed, flow "where it listeth" (John 3:8); but as far as the religious establishment was concerned, it had darn well better "list" in well-defined paths.

Latter-day Saints will recognize much of this pattern repeated in the early history of the Restoration. One of the major issues faced by Joseph Smith, as seen in several early revelations in the subsequent Doctrine and Covenants, was the effort to silence all competing revelations and confirm his role as the sole source of guidance for the Church. Those of us today with our understandable tendency to read the present into the past are inclined to see order in these formative years where, in truth, chaos often threatened to break through.

What I witnessed in my aforementioned limited stay in the Third World convinced me that we are seeing much the same pattern. What follows are some areas where this dialogue between traditional intimate religious expectations and contemporary institutional requirements was most apparent to me.

One of my first impressions when I arrived in Africa, an impression deepened immeasurably by my subsequent experience in Haiti, was a closeness bordering on an intimate familiarity on the part of most people I met with what I would call the workings of the Spirit. This observation needs clarification.

We in the western world, heirs as we are of the Enlightenment and the subsequent scientific and industrial revolutions, persist in separating the physical from the spiritual worlds. In the Church we make a great deal of being in, but not of, the world (John 17:6–26), our very protestations suggesting that, much as we try, we still muck about in this material world.

I found less of this dichotomy in the people we met in Africa and Haiti—partly due, of course, to the absence of money to spend, but even more because of a deep cultural conditioning that prepares them to accept—indeed, expect—incidents that we would classify as spiritual manifestations. I found, for instance, that they readily accepted the Joseph Smith story complete with its recounting of visions, angels, hidden documents, and divine interventions. Prophets? No problem. They knew a prophet who lived right around the corner. In fact, an uncle of theirs just the other day. . . . Miracles? Commonplace.

I recall a conversation one day with a Haitian man, very well edu-

cated and a Church leader. We were on our way back from a visit to the south of the island, heading to Port-au-Prince. We passed several drovers herding their cattle to market in the capital city. I wondered aloud where they spent the nights since the trip would take several days. My traveling companion replied, "They turn into animals at night and graze with the cattle." I chided him a bit to the effect that he certainly didn't believe such a thing. He allowed that "it doesn't happen as often now as it used to," but that it could and did happen was not at all in question.

And maybe it does!

Remember, the scriptures are replete with episodes of talking donkeys, spirit-possessed swine, burning bushes issuing messages, and the earth itself weeping for its inhabitants. All this is far beyond, or outside, our ken. But shift our dichotomous thinking to "I and Thou" and mix in a healthy dose of Vodou and you have a potent mix conducive to a belief in what we insist in labeling the supernatural. Maybe there is indeed more "than is dreamt of in [our] philosophy," as Hamlet remarked to Horatio, or our day-to-day religious experience.

The temple provides a good beginning for recapturing this union of the two worlds. During my stay in East Africa, the only temple on the entire continent was in Johannesburg, thousands of miles away and prohibitive in cost for all but a handful of Kenyans and Ethiopians. I had little contact with those who attended. Haiti, however, presented a different story. Haiti shares the same island with the Dominican Republic which has a temple in Santo Domingo. Though the trip is brief in terms of miles, it is still very difficult for the Haitians. Visa clearance, a generally hostile attitude toward Haitians on the part of Dominicans (not temple personnel, I hasten to add), and expense all mitigate against what we would assume to be an easy junket.

Catherine and I were moved, deeply so, as we witnessed the efforts, both financial and logistical, on the part of the Haitian Saints to attend. Catherine spent many hours assisting members by arranging their information in a TempleReady format, no small task given the convoluted nature of most Haitian family genealogies.

Their reasons for making this monumental effort included those common to most temple-going Mormons. We became aware, however, of yet another set of motives, strange and in a way thrilling to us. Be aware that these are people who come out of a religious culture that includes Vodou, much misunderstood by Anglo-American Latter-day Saints. At

the risk of over-simplifying, Vodou involves an attempt to bridge the world of the living and the spirits of the dead. It invokes divine help. It celebrates elaborate rituals. Highly structured, it is designed to evoke a deep spiritual communion. If this sounds familiar, it should. And so in the temple, many of those with whom we spoke found themselves attracted to the ritual, the oaths of secrecy, the feeling of being initiated into the mysteries. Think of blending Hugh Nibley and *The Da Vinci Code.* However you want to interpret it, the temple to them meant something more and something deeper than it had previously meant to me.

When President Hinckley is asked, as he often is by reporters, "What is the foremost problem faced by the contemporary Church as it expands abroad?" he usually responds, "Growth," with the added explanation, "Training new leadership." And so it is. But the training aims at developing several abilities, and the easiest to achieve are those most readily measured and reported—easiest but probably least important. Far more difficult to deal with are inclinations to use the leadership role to foster values deeply embedded in the dominant cultures that shape us all. When those cultures posit values at odds with a Church culture, much is required of those who assume positions of responsibility.

The Church is new to both East Africa and Haiti, with predictable results when it comes to setting up a functioning organization. If you introduce a church noted for measures of institutional efficiency that have been borrowed equally from scriptural injunctions and Business Administration 101 into the free-wheeling setting of, say, Haiti, you have a challenge of the first order. Catherine and I served among many leaders who met the challenge in truly heroic fashion. That they did so was a tribute more to who they were rather than what they could be taught. And maybe, when all is said, meeting such challenges defines quality in leaders in any society. Good ones are a rare commodity.

But back to the issue of the cultural challenges. May I suggest a few based on personal observations.

I am struggling at this point but can come up with no better phrase than the challenge of what I would describe as leadership based on charisma, which I define as including ascribed as well as manifest abilities. As mentioned, the three countries under consideration have had a brief moment with the Mormon experience. Therefore, Church leaders at the regional and General Authority levels are new, exotic, and—dare I say it—worshipped. Visiting authorities from Church headquarters and area

presidencies receive a respectful, almost adoring, reception and hearing. Comments from visiting authorities, even those casually made, can redirect entire lives.

This respect for ascribed charisma has both good and not-so-good implications. The good is obvious as indicated above. The not-so-good is the tendency for visiting authorities to come away from short-term visits with a sort of Potemkin-village, distorted picture of life in the trenches. I was heartened by the assignments of Elders Dallin H. Oaks, Jeffrey R. Holland, and L. Tom Perry of the Quorum of the Twelve to overseas posts. Much good can come from their good sense, observational skills, and candor.

The worshipfulness described above diminishes in direct ratio with close proximity. This phenomenon is not universal, of course, but my experience indicates that local leaders succeed or fail based much more on their personal qualities than their titles. The office does not make the man or woman. Quite the opposite. I see three cultural traits that place this burden on local leaders.

One is the already mentioned theme of the Spirit. After all, if every person is his or her own prophet, then what exclusive right does one have to dictate to others? Even Martin Luther came to regret the chaos loosed upon the Christian community by the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers.[4] I was jolted into this awareness shortly after arriving in Haiti. The mission president and I (I was serving as his counselor) reorganized a district, in the process creating two new branch presidencies. Following established procedures, we called in several of the leading local members to ask their opinions concerning potential branch presidents. Of the eight men we interviewed, when asked whom they recommended, seven replied, "Me. I'm your man!" Now, this may have been a language problem in which the good brethren thought we were extending a call to which they dutifully responded. But subsequent episodes convinced me otherwise.

This leads to a second trait, more characteristic of Africa than Haiti. For want of a better phrase, I will call it the "chief" syndrome. Once in power, one does not voluntarily relinquish power. Nor does one consult others. To do so is seen as demeaning. Thus, there is a tendency to close ranks, surround oneself with friends, and regard advice, however wise or well-intentioned, as a challenge. In our eighteen months in Africa, I did not know of one active former branch president. I am confident that this

situation is correcting itself over time. But the deeper passions that provide the undergirding will always be present.

A third tendency, again more evident in Africa, is tribalism. In societies where Church culture has not yet taken root and where national loyalty is nonexistent, family and tribal ties remain preeminent.

Combine these tendencies and you have a tugging and hauling within the congregation resembling street politics more than the sedate procedures characteristic of Utah wards. As an aside, I recall holding my breath whenever we sustained local leadership. My standard report to the mission president was, "Well, we got a working majority." An exaggeration, to be sure, but not by much.

A final observation on leadership. The growth of the Church, especially during the past half century, creates a bureaucracy, the size and influence of which is a concern. This is especially apparent in newly developing areas. The Church employs a lot of people. In many economically lean countries, the Church is, in fact, the employer of first, last, and only resort. This phenomenon creates several strains, but one stands out: the inordinate number of people who work for the Church and occupy prominent ecclesiastical positions. This mixture of the secular with the religious gives us an early whiff of a professional clergy. If that is overstating the case, then let me simply state that it sets up some awkward personal and procedural problems.

Again, over time the situation will be modified, if for no other reason than the fact that growth will dilute the now top-heavy number of Church employees serving in local ecclesiastical positions. To those who argue that, after all, these leaders are the best-qualified people, my response is to point to a thousand years of medieval history, during which the Catholic Church made the same argument to defend the same practice of overlapping secular and ecclesiastical spheres, despite some consequences that were disastrous for spiritual purity: the deep involvement of ecclesiastical leaders in secular affairs and vice versa, the perpetuation of leadership within certain families, and the increasing influence on doctrine of outside influences.

The LDS Church encourages and, where necessary, enforces a moral order that is scripturally based but also deeply influenced by our western culture. We frequently found this order standing on its head. Relations among individuals, between the individual and the secular powers

that be, rules concerning personal conduct—these all required reexamination. Although examples are numerous, I offer just one.

One highly regarded virtue of Anglo-American Mormonism is service, King Benjamin's admonition being an eloquent statement to that effect. In Haiti, the tendency is to link service with servitude. Therefore, it often becomes an indication of social inferiority. This is especially true if the service rendered involves physical effort, whether or not there is the exchange of money. The pecking order is not so much tribal, as in Kenya and Ethiopia, but, rather, socio-economic with the degree of servitude as one of the chief indicators.

The reasons are embedded deeply in Haiti's history. This failed nation's one claim to greatness is that it was created from the first successful slave revolt against European imperial control. Two centuries have not removed the inherited memory of what constitutes such personal subjugation. To "exercise . . . dominion" (D&C 121:39; the word indicated by the ellipsis is, significantly, "unrighteous") over someone else, regardless of the degree of volition, is to establish a social order. This understanding looms larger than we may be inclined to believe when it takes place in a society lacking many of the customs and mores of more highly developed societies.

I do not intend this essay to be a litany of complaints. Rather, it is a personal statement based on limited observations summarizing what seemed to me to be some deeply seated matters the Church must be aware of as it deals with people distanced by time and inclination from the world most of us have known. How do we proceed? How much correction is justified, trainable, possible, or even desirable?

As I hope the introductory vignette suggests, I am not nearly as sure of the answers as I once was. The frustrations are there, to be sure; but if you want your worship straight, passionate, moving, and spontaneous, have a go at Mormonism in the newer reaches of Church influence. But catch the delicate bloom quickly before it ripens into the rather bland fruit with which we are all familiar. And what are some of the features you will find? A few illustrations.

The Church has moved quickly and generously to provide meeting facilities for new congregations wherever we went. These buildings, more often than not, are the finest in their respective communities. The meetinghouse then becomes the religious, social, and often economic, hub of the life of the new members. In many cases, the LDS Church is the only

game in town. (I don't use the term derisively.) For many members, their former gods have failed them. The Church is their last, best hope.

Within the walls of the buildings is a coming together of souls to create a sanctuary from what is, in the view of many of us as observers, an unimaginably harsh, external world. Here they are free to create and perform, often within the expected structures of their newly adopted religion.

Let me spend a moment with that most characteristic of all Mormon artistic forms—the spoken word. We are great talkers—or at one time were. It has been my lot in my missionary experiences, including as a young elder in Ireland, to have labored among peoples for whom the crafting of the spoken word is still an art form. Never in my years in Africa and Haiti did I hear a bad sermon—doctrinally off-center, on occasion, but nothing that couldn't be corrected. And, after all, which would you rather have, a passion that excites, even though occasionally tripping over itself, or a bland competence that is proscribed, prescribed, comfortable—and boring? Two illustrations from many:

A young girl—I'd judge her to be about fifteen—gave a sacrament meeting talk on the care of pets (no table scraps; how many brush strokes, etc.). It sounds silly to mention her effort as being memorable. But her talk was, quite simply, the most coherent, well-thought-out, and earnestly delivered presentation I have ever heard from a young person (or from most older persons, for that matter). She *worked* at it, and the results showed. She paid her audience the highest of compliments; she took us, and her responsibility toward us, seriously.

The second example took place in Nairobi but involved a non-African speaker. I mention the episode because of the reaction on the part of the listeners. We had the privilege of serving with Gunn and Donna McKay. What can one say about Gunn McKay, a larger-than-life presence, several-term Congressman from Utah, and Scot through and through? The entire mission came together for the visit of President Hinckley in 1998. The mission president, David Boucher, asked Elder McKay to address the assembled missionaries prior to the general membership meeting. McKay pulled out all the stops, including slipping into his Scots brogue. As we left, I overheard a group of young North American elders reflecting on the meeting. One of them allowed that he had "never heard a sermon like that" in his life. What he had heard, of course, was good old-fashioned pulpit oratory, the likes of which has largely disappeared in

this age of scripted, tele-prompted, timed, doctrinally screened performances.

The Africans and Haitians we associated with craved an audience. They wrote and performed plays; and when it came to celebrating, any excuse sufficed. They measured time itself by a different standard, easier to do since most of the adults were unemployed. My most vivid example of this matter of time came in Ethiopia. As we in the West approached the year 2000, the Church financial people became quite exercised that they were not getting any response from our local Bank of Ethiopia about whether the bank was Y2K compliant. I had several conversations with the bank personnel but finally wrote Church headquarters to the effect that, hey, this is Africa, after all, and besides, in Ethiopia, operating with a different calendar, it was only 1993!

The good Saints create to fill needs, even within Church programs. In Haiti where entire branches consisted of young single adults, they invented a week-night program closely resembling the old MIA. In Addis Ababa, at the members' urging, we set up a spiritual Olympics complete with gold, silver, and bronze medals. (Many of the awardees subsequently wore their medals as part of their Sunday attire.) In Nairobi, and again in Addis, under the mission president's direction, I taught a Book of Mormon study class outside the usual CES auspices—probably not a wise thing to do but which was redeemed by the observation that, in my humble opinion, they resulted in a remarkable level of gospel learning on the part of the students.

The interface of the Church and the Third World will leave none of the parties untouched. Right now, as indicated by this essay, there are some rough edges, more than are indicated in our usual Church literature. We are replicating a history already well established. In the end, the institutionalized Church will win in the sense that its policies and procedures, as well as how it defines the life of a Saint, will determine membership. In the domestication process, however, something will be lost as it always is in such exchanges.

And it is this loss that holds my attention much more than our parading of statistics. As stated at the outset, I have no truck with those who would romanticize both the people and the process involved in this change. We can only hope for the best.

A story in closing says a lot—maybe all that needs saying.

In Nairobi, Catherine and I were invited to an outlying village where

a well-known shaman would perform a healing ritual. It was a compliment to be invited. I found the ceremony moving, complete as it was with incantations, bones, fire, feathers, and the shaman's ritual attire. The ceremony, I was told, went back to time out of mind. Then once finished, the shaman went out to his pick-up and used his cell phone to dial up his secretary to find out his next gig.

These are memories worth hugging.

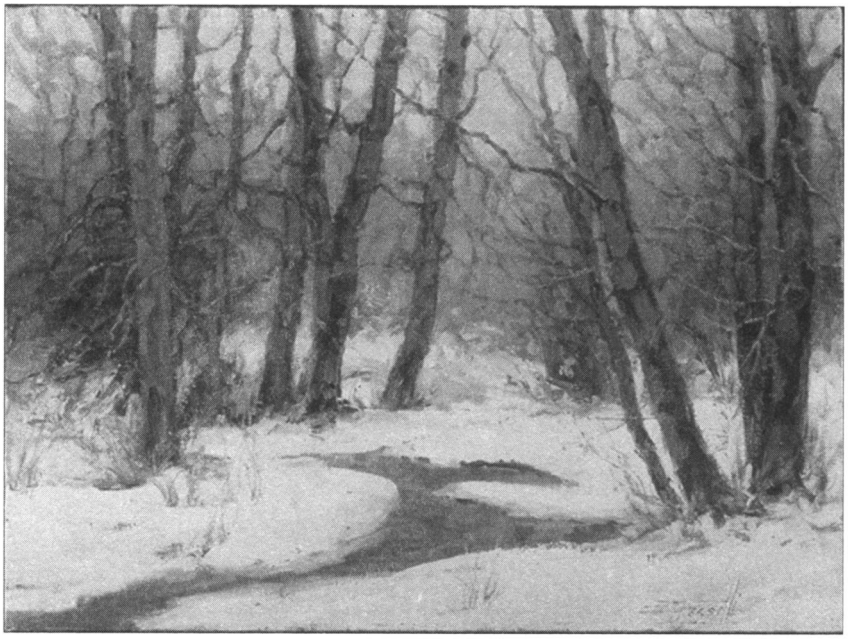
Notes

1. Patricia Schultz, *1,000 Places to See before You Die* (New York: Workman Publishing, 2003), 365.

2. Christmas letter to family and friends, written from Bahar Dar, Ethiopia, November 22, 1998.

3. I am using the term in its more restrictive and historically demonstrative sense as opposed to the broader and, save for debates among scripturalists, largely useless definition in the Bible Dictionary section of the LDS edition of the Bible (p. 645). The best scriptural example I can cite is Mosiah 18, which is, in my decidedly nonprofessional judgment, the first appearance of a "church," in the sense of a volitional, religious community, in recorded scripture. As such, the nature of both the constituents and the circumstances present at this significant event are worthy of close attention. I acknowledge the appearance of "church" (1 Ne. 13) in the "great and abominable church," but it refers to a future time and describes political, not religious, activities. Nephi also states that Zoram thinks he is talking about "the brethren of the church" (1 Ne. 4:26), but neither the Book of Mormon nor cultural information about Jerusalem in 600 B.C. enable us to see whether this group functions as a community of religious believers.

4. "Christians should be subject to the governing authorities . . . that in the liberty of the spirit they shall by so doing serve others and the authorities themselves. . . . Each one should do the works of his profession and station . . . that through them he may keep his body under control . . . and that by such works he may submit his will to that of others." Martin Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian," 1520, in *Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings,* edited by John Dillenberger (New York: Anchor Books, 1951), 78; see also Heiko A. Oberman, *Luther: Man between God and the Devil* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University press, 1989), 225–57.



Bonnie Posselli, *Brocade,* oil, 18" x 24"

PERSONAL VOICES

Studying Mormons: One Franciscan's Encounter with the World of the Latter-day Saints

Daniel P. Dwyer, OFM

Since my teenage years, I have been interested in all things Mormon. I have given countless hours to studying the history, corporate structures, leadership, scriptures and theology of the Latter-day Saints. It has led me to places I would not otherwise have visited: places like Friendship and Palmyra in New York; Kirtland, Ohio; the banks of Pennsylvania's Susquehanna River; Independence, Missouri; Salt Lake City, Utah; and Sharon, Vermont. I have made numerous trips to the Hill Cumorah Pageant, have joined the Mormon History Association, and have read hundreds of books, pamphlets, and journal articles that were in any way related to Mormonism. Indeed, it was my interest in Mormons that caused me to read Zane Grey's *Riders of the Purple Sage* and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet.* I taught a seminar on Mormons and Shakers in the nineteenth century and I found, probably with help from an LDS Family History Center, that I am, in all likelihood, a distant cousin of Emma Hale Smith, the (first) wife of Mormonism's founding prophet. I even have some idea of the difference between a Hendrickite and a Strangite.

How did this obsession begin? What attracted me to this study? And why, as a Franciscan and a Roman Catholic priest, do I continue to be absorbed in Mormonism to this day?[1]

Before I ever heard of Joseph Smith or Mormonism, I was very much taken with America's indigenous peoples. As a child I knew all about longhouses, birch bark canoes, and wampum. My favorite Indians were the Mohawks, perhaps because I was born in the Mohawk Valley. I apparently

came to believe, thanks to tall tales of my grandfather, that I myself was an Indian. When we children played cowboys and Indians, I would have nothing to do with the former. I kept hoping that I might even find a lost tribe of Native Americans living somewhere in my suburban neighborhood. As luck and genealogy (a very Mormon pastime) would have it, in my forties I found that I did have a Canadian Algonquin in my family tree. All of this is by way of stating that Mormonism's claims about ancient Americans had a real fascination for me. I already loved the "Lamanites" before I had ever read that exotic name for our native peoples.

Nevertheless, despite my yearnings for pre-Columbian America, I was also quite aware that I was really an Irish Catholic. And I think that perhaps my Irish heritage has given me a mystical sense of place and a love for old graveyards. As a historian, I love to commune with the past; indeed, I feel, and believe, that those who went before us are still present. Few Christian doctrines excite me more than belief in the Communion of Saints.[2] Though I do not believe that God the Father and Jesus Christ actually appeared to Joseph Smith in the Sacred Grove near Palmyra, my own visits to Assisi, Guadalupe, Rome, and even Auriesville, New York, help me to understand the tears of a young Mormon sister as she expressed her thrill at being at that otherwise ordinary grove of trees.

As a believing Catholic Christian, I have become increasingly "incarnational." I believe that God is found in the most surprising places and in the most unusual people. So I was prepared to find God among the Mormons. I was also taken by the sensual nature of Catholicism: candles in a darkened chapel; holy images of Jesus, Mary, and the saints; the sound of Gregorian chant; the feel of a rosary or Bible in my hands; and the sound of scripture being proclaimed.

Put this all together and you will see why an afternoon visit to the Wingate branch of the Schenectady County Public Library changed my life. There, while browsing among the offerings in religion, I chanced upon a curious purple book with a golden angel embossed on the cover. I liked the size and feel of it in my hands, and I was intrigued by the strange cover page informing me that it was "an account written by the hand of Mormon upon plates taken from the plates of Nephi." I was fascinated; and though I found the actual reading of the book a trifle tedious, I have been fascinated by the Mormon story ever since. My love of Indian lore, my Irish mystical bent, my attachment to Christ and to the Church, and

my fascination with the past had all prepared me for that visit to the library.

But I am not a Latter-day Saint, nor do I expect that I ever will be one. Sometimes Mormons will hear that I have read the Book of Mormon, the Pearl of Great Price, and Doctrine and Covenants, learn of my visits to Palmyra and Salt Lake City, or find that I've traced my family tree. They will often assume that "Heavenly Father" is trying to tell me something! Yet my dealings with Mormonism have actually made me a more convinced Catholic. Still, I think that our Heavenly Father does have a purpose for me in all of this. My study has given me new insights and delightful gifts. Why do I continue to be absorbed in this study? What can a study of Mormonism offer to a Catholic "gentile?" And how does my Franciscan vocation come into play?

The most important gift of Mormonism to me has been an increased ability to empathize with those who are different. I can see myself in the eager young Mormon elders who are filled with both zeal and triumphalism. I can appreciate their enthusiasm, smile at their youthful conviction that they have all the answers, and remain comfortable with my own tradition. All of us are human beings before we are anything else, and my experiences are not that different from a Mormon's. Like a Latter-day Saint, I come from a church that is hierarchical, that considers itself "true," that has both glories and scandals in its history. Like Mormons, we Catholics know what it is like to not quite fit in American society. Like many Mormons, I see the beauty in angels, church buildings, and all the physical, musical, and poetic aspects of faith.

Like Mormonism, Catholicism is a living religion. The Holy Spirit speaks in God's Word, the Bible; but the Spirit also speaks in the here and now—through the Church and our own experiences. While faith is essential, both traditions would agree with James that "faith without works is dead" (James 2:26).

But while increased empathy is probably the greatest gift of Mormonism to me, it has also helped me to hone my critical skills. These have helped me to evaluate the truth claims of our two faiths and have reaffirmed my commitment to Roman Catholic Christianity. Others have skillfully presented the arguments for and against the two faiths; so I will simply, and I hope respectfully, note that I do not believe that the Book of Mormon is ancient scripture; and I am especially critical of the Pearl of Great Price. I believe in one God who is Triune; I believe that God created

all that is—not that God rearranged eternally existing matter; I do not believe that God, from all eternity, had body, parts, and passions, or that he is an exalted man. I believe that Jesus Christ is 100 percent human and 100 percent divine. And I believe that the "one, holy, catholic and apostolic church"[3] founded by Jesus Christ never experienced a "great apostasy" causing all authority to be lost from the earth. I believe that that same church still subsists today in the Roman Catholic Church. For me it is the fullest and most complete expression of the Church.

While I believe "all that the Holy Catholic Church teaches,"[4] I also believe that God is everywhere at work. God's Spirit can speak to Mormons through their church, and God can even speak to me through their church—as God can speak to me through Buddhism, Judaism, or Islam. We can pray for and with each other. Joseph Smith and I would agree with the apostle James as he expressed himself in the passage that sent Joseph into the woods to pray: "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him" (KJV James 1:5).

Finally, I am a Franciscan. Franciscan, in my case, means that I am a member of the Order of Friars Minor, a worldwide Roman Catholic community of brothers founded by St. Francis of Assisi (1182–1226). We are generally recognized by our brown robes with a cord around the waist. We live in homes called *friaries* with men who share our particular way of being Catholic Christians. Some of us are ordained priests while others are not. In our ranks we have professional clergy but also teachers, laborers, medical doctors, accountants, and men of almost every other occupation imaginable. We are part of a larger family that includes religious women (nuns or sisters) as well as married and single men and women of every walk of life, ethnicity, and nationality. In the Order of Friars Minor, we follow a *Rule* written by St. Francis in the year 1223. It is our particular way of living out the gospel of Jesus Christ.

During the Crusades, St. Francis, at the risk of his life, crossed through the lines to engage in a dialogue with the Muslim sultan. It was an encounter that was unusually respectful on both sides. I sometimes feel that, as Francis was called to a reappraisal of Islam and a new approach to Muslims, I have been called to a relationship with the Latter-day Saints. In his rule of 1221, Francis wrote of those who would go among the "Saracens" as follows:

> Friars who go can conduct themselves spiritually in two manners

> among them. One manner is that they cause no quarrels nor disputes, but be subject to every human creature for God's sake and let them confess that they are Christians. The other manner is, that, when they have seen that it would please God, they announce the word of God, that they should believe in God the Almighty, Father and Son and Holy Spirit, the Creator of all things, the Redeemer and Savior, the Son, and that they should be baptized and become Christians (Rule of 1221).[5]

It is to the former method that I feel called—to be a sympathetic presence while remaining true to my own beliefs. I am not sure I am called to move to Utah, but the tremendous growth in membership of the LDS Church means that the Latter-day Saints have already come to me. Let me be among them as a person who knows their tradition and appreciates my own. Let me be respectful of their testimonies and ready to share my own. If we believers broaden the scope of our inquiry and concern, we can all easily make our own the challenge of Moroni:

> And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost.
>
> And by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things. (Moro. 10:4–5)

Notes

1. Two Franciscans who may be familiar to Latter-day Saints in Utah are the early explorers, Fray Francisco Atanasio Dominguez and Fray Silvestre Velez de Escalante. Hubert Howe Bancroft, *History of Utah, 1540–1886* (1889; reprinted, Las Vegas: Nevada Publications, 1982), 7–17. For more on the life and times of St. Francis, a handy introduction is Mark Galli's *Francis of Assisi and His World* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2002).

2. One definition says in part: "'Saints' are primarily the members of God's people, who are one in the Holy Ghost (today we would normally say "Holy Spirit") in the grace of justification, in love, and in the sacraments, and accordingly they intercede for one another in prayer and deed. Hence . . . the communion of saints also signifies union with the dead who have gone before us and with the angels." Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimler, *Concise Theological Dictionary,* 2d ed. (London: Burns & Oates, 1983), 84.

3. This well-known phrase from the Nicene Creed is found in numerous places, but see, for example, *The Catholic Prayerbook from Downside Abbey,* edited by David Foster (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999), 17.

4. This phrase from a traditional prayer known as the "Act of Faith" can be found in *Catholic Prayer Book*, compiled by Ruth M. Hannon (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1991).

5. Regis J. Armstrong et al., *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, 3 vols. (New York: New City Press, 1999), 1:74.

Swimming in the Sea of Azov

Barry Gaines

For the first and only time, my wife sent my father a letter. I have since retrieved the letter and have it still. It is two deckle sheets neatly typed on the electric portable I received for graduate school. It was June 1976, and I was planning a trip to visit my mother and father in Houston on Father's Day. Janet wrote instead of phoning because, although I did not know it at the time, she sometimes had trouble understanding my father's thick Russian accent.

He had been born Grigori Ginzburg in the tiny town of Genichesk in what is now Ukraine, still part, in 1976, of the vast and forbidding Soviet Union. The purpose of Janet's letter was to ask my father to tell me the stories of his life in the Old Country, his family, and his travels to America in 1923. She chose her words carefully: Barry "hopes to spend the evenings talking with you about your early years in Russia and recording your recollections on a tape recorder. Although this would by no means be the primary motivation for the trip, I am writing to urge you to allow these 'interviews' to take place. . . . I know that you have opposed our previous suggestions on this topic. It is nonetheless my most fervent hope that you will reconsider."

My father called to say that he welcomed the chance to share his past—my past—with me, and I prepared my tape recorder and my questions. Five days before my scheduled visit, however, my father, at age sixty-eight, died, and I sadly exchanged my ticket for an earlier flight to his funeral. There, many people told me how much he was looking forward to my visit.

I do not believe that my father purposely tried to hide the stories of his early life from me; like many immigrants, he saw the past as full of sorrow and pain, and he wished instead to look to the future. Still, he told me certain stories again and again. How his beloved father had magically pulled live fish out of the sea and how my grandfather had drowned when

my father was but eight years old. Of his beautiful mother—whose bright eyes and aristocratic profile are captured in a photograph he kept all of his life—who died nursing victims of the typhus epidemic when he was twelve. How his cousins tormented him because he was an orphan and did not have a parent to protect him. How at sixteen he was sent to America with a distant relative because he was a handful.

I, however, wanted more. At my father's funeral, we recited the Kaddish, the ancient Jewish mourners' prayer, a glorification of God that, strangely, says nothing about death. It begins, *Yitgadal veyitkadash shemei reba* ("Let the glory of God be extolled"). As the familiar words rose from our mouths, I found myself remembering another story from my father. When his father, Joseph, drowned, his grandfather, Lazar, recited Kaddish with nine other Jewish men of the town. My father listened to the prayer; and with anguished tears, he demanded to know what the men were saying. When someone translated the words for him, the eight-year-old boy got angry. "Where is the mention of my father? Where is the explanation of death?" he questioned. My great-grandfather, suffering from the grief of burying his son, struck my father with his walking stick. That blow ended my father's faith in organized religion, although he always considered himself a Jew.

After my own father's death, in an effort to satisfy my yearning to learn more about him, I searched for what documentary evidence I could about his past. At the National Archives, and later at the Family History Library in Salt Lake City, I found the ship's records of his arrival and his application for and certificate of naturalization. And so things remained for many years.

Then in 1983, my daughter celebrated her *Bat Mitzvah*, the Jewish coming of age celebration at a young woman's thirteenth birthday. We dispatched invitations to the ceremony to relatives I had not seen for years. Much to our surprise, many of them came to Albuquerque to share in our joy and pride. After living at least a thousand miles away from any family, I found it surprisingly pleasant to have family share in our *simcha* (celebration). The event awakened within me a desire to get closer to more family.

Janet and I had traveled to the Soviet Union as part of a group in the summer of 1976, just before she wrote her letter to my father. This was the era of the "refuseniks," Soviet Jews who'd requested emigration to Israel or the United States and thereby lost their job and their status, and we'd

enjoyed the many honorable and courageous people whom we met: a former general stripped of his rank and medals, an accomplished opera singer with time to serenade us, a world-renowned scholar of ancient China. That trip was wonderful; but after the Soviet Union disintegrated and Ukraine became a separate nation in search of hard currency, I thought about actually visiting my father's village. It was theoretically possible to go to Genichesk where my father was born.

Then, in the summer of 1994, things came together. I had a sabbatical semester that I planned to spend in England doing research in Stratford-upon-Avon; I was invited to attend the International Shakespeare Institute and join a seminar on Shakespeare in the former Soviet Union; and extending my trip from London to Kiev was not overly expensive. So I began to make plans, although not until after I completed my trip did I understand that I'd been able to manage the pilgrimage only by the most incredible luck.

Several months earlier, on a trip to the Galapagos Islands, I met a fascinating and generous man who was vice president for quality control for Coca Cola worldwide. Alex became interested in my Ukraine plans and followed my adventures. When I arrived in Kiev, I found that Coca Cola of Kiev was supplying a driver and van for me. Every time I arrived by airplane or train, I was met by the smiling Coke man and his Ford Ranger 4 x 4. Air conditioned! Never was a vehicle more welcome. And there was always a can of Coke (albeit warm) waiting for me in the back seat.

Alex also provided the name of the woman in Ukraine who made my trip possible. Dr. Bronislava Vlasneva was a Deputy Minister of Health responsible for sanitary inspections and the prevention and treatment of communicable diseases in Ukraine. She used the power of her office to convert my dreams into reality. She arranged for a woman in the Ministry of Health, Zhanna Tsenilova, to be my interpreter. Zhanna was a graduate of Kiev University in English philology and literature who was taking her vacation in August and wanted to make some extra money. She worked out well as my translator.

On my arrival in Kiev, I was greeted by Zhanna and the Coca Cola driver and taken to my hotel. The next afternoon I had lunch with Dr. Vlasneva (she wanted me to call her Slava) in the deserted dining room of a major hotel. The only other party was a trio of couples at the next table. The men all sported silk suits and massive gold jewelry, and the ladies wore tight dresses and too much make-up. They drank boisterously, and I

realized that the stereotypes of the Mafia were applicable even in Kiev. Fortunately, that was as close as I came to crime during my stay in Ukraine.

I ate chicken Kiev in Kiev and accompanied it with Ukrainian champagne, an auspicious start to my journey. Later that evening Zhanna and I boarded a train to Kherson, the principal city of the *oblast* (region) where Genichesk was located. The train trip lasted about fifteen hours, and we slept in our compartment. Tea was available, but people brought their own food for the trip.

When our train was met in Kherson by four health officials of the region, Zhanna explained to me that Dr. Vlasneva had told everyone I was a high-ranking official of the World Health Organization (WHO) who must be treated with the highest regard. Our driver took us to breakfast with the local health officials, whose broad smiles revealed the stainless steel crowns typical of the Soviet era. We had the entire dining room of the best hotel in Kherson to ourselves for a massive meal (which I hesitate to call breakfast since it included *shashlik*, or lamb on a skewer).

When I was asked the first question about WHO and its economic impact on Ukraine, Zhanna assured me that she would make up appropriate answers. It was like a Woody Allen movie; I would say anything I wanted to Zhanna, and she would provide meaningful dialogue. We tried to change the subject as quickly as possible; still, Zhanna was a nervous wreck by the end of the meal. Although it was not yet 11 A.M., a bottle of vodka appeared and toasts were made. When one is responding to a toast, it is protocol to finish the small glass in a single gulp. When I hesitated, one of my hosts said, "You don't drink like your ancestors!" It took a while to grow accustomed to the practice, but I did. When a bottle of vodka appeared, it was always finished. We toasted everything imaginable, and I can see why people employ drivers.

Our driver set off for the town of Genichesk, where my father lived his first sixteen years. It was a three-hour trip toward the coast of the Black Sea. I felt a wonderful calm as we approached the first of my goals. (Of course, it might have been the vodka.) In Genichesk we were taken to the chief sanitary doctor of the Genichesk subregion, Valerie Ivanovich. While Valerie Ivanovich was anxious to please the Deputy Minister of Health, he (Valerie is a man's name in Russian) was also, I believe, genuinely touched by my story. He personally arranged much of my stay in Genichesk. Rather than have us stay in the town where he felt the hotel to be unworthy, he arranged for us to stay in a "rest home" (a better term

than "resort") on the *Arabatskaya Strelka* (Fortress Arrow), the narrow strip of land that connects Genichesk with the Crimea.

The area was considered beautiful and attracted vacationers from Ukraine and Belarus, but it meant a thirty-minute, twelve-mile drive over a sand road each time we traveled to and from the town. Our "rest home" was a series of two-story buildings housing families of workers on vacation. No American had ever visited (although I was told that there had once been a Pole and a Rumanian). We were fed all of our meals in a special dining room, often with the directors of the "resort" (and the inevitable vodka toasts), for the trifling price of about two dollars a day. Once we were settled into our rooms, I told Zhanna that I would see her for dinner. I then put on my bathing suit and sandals and headed for the water. At last I could swim in the Sea of Azov, the small arm of the Black Sea where my father had frolicked as a child and where my grandfather had drowned seventy years before.

Genichesk is a town of about fifteen thousand. It had been, at the turn of the century, a prominent port, but it now has no real importance. It is very poor but representative of similar size towns throughout the country. Although it had been occupied by the Nazis, much of the town remains as it was when my father lived there. (The joke in Kherson was that when the party official who had been in charge of Genichesk for forty years retired, he was congratulated for returning the town *exactly* as he had received it.) The first guide we were given provided the usual history, but she was not a native, nor did she know much about the Jews of the town.

Then we found Vitali Mikailovich, a young physician who had become the informal town historian with special interest in the Jews of Genichesk since his sister had married one. Vitali provided photographs of Genichesk at the turn of the century, including a fascinating picture of the class of students at the gymnasium around 1915, just at the time my father might have been in such a class. I wish I could say I definitely recognized him in the picture, but I didn't. He probably attended a Talmud Torah school instead.

Vitali took us on a tour of old Genichesk. When I explained that my grandmother, Klara Yompolska, had died while nursing others during the typhus epidemic of 1920–21, he took me to the building where typhus sufferers had been quarantined and thus where my grandmother probably died. I took photos and silently recited the Kaddish. On a happier note, I also saw the movie theater where my father described seeing silent films

projected on a sheet and the old lighthouse that has remained unchanged from the turn of the century. Last, we visited where the synagogue and Jewish school, destroyed by the Nazis along with the Jewish cemetery, had stood. Vitali showed us the only remaining building that had relief decorations of Stars of David. I later learned that the house belonged to a local poet who was half Jewish. She told me that, when the authorities offered to remove the stars, she told them, "No, this is part of our history."

We then returned to Vitali's home, shared with his parents, wife, and three children. Considering themselves honored to have a visitor like me, his parents brought out their best samovar and wine. The mother told me how important her Jewish friends had been to her as she was growing up, and the father played a mandolin-like instrument (*domra*) and sang old folk songs. It was a memorable day.

Vitali has yet another talent—he is a fine artist. He showed me watercolors he had made of local sights and scenes, and I bought a watercolor that I cherish of the Genichesk lighthouse. He was reluctant to sell me the painting. "It is like a father losing a child," he said. I replied, "For me it is a child gaining a father."

My father had dropped the "burg" from Ginzburg and somehow come up with "Gaines" during the Depression when he was living in Salt Lake City, trying to find work as an upholsterer. I was naturally interested in looking at local records to find references to the Ginzburg and Yompolski families. At the vital records office, the clerk told us that the director was away for the day and that we'd need permission from Kherson to look at records, as well as written assurances that there was no classified material in the records. This was the old Soviet bureaucracy that I had feared. One call to Valerie Ivanovich at the health office, however, and we had an appointment with the head of the Town Council. Within half an hour we were sitting in front of three town officials telling our story. The head of the group granted our request to see the records and wished me success. He gave me a set of Genichesk postcards and a book of poetry on the town. I took a photograph of the group, and one of them said in smiling English, "New York Times." By the time we returned to the record office, however, it was closed, and we postponed our visit there to the following day.

Our next stop was the local museum, which appeared to be abandoned; but when we walked around to the back, found a door, and entered, we were greeted by Duana Aleksandrovna, the museum's deputy di-

rector, who offered her help. She showed me more photographs of early Genichesk, then she brought out and examined a document of several pages.

"I may have some news for you, but it is sad news," she said. She showed me the list of 244 Jews executed north of town by the Nazis in 1941. There was a Ginzburg couple on the list, a husband, age fifty-six, and his wife, age fifty-four. No first names were listed, but the ages would have been right for one of my father's uncles. Another occasion for the Kaddish. I asked the librarian if anyone else had copied the death records, and she said no. I then explained the project at Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem, to bring together all the death records of the holocaust, and I asked permission to photograph the records. You must remember that there is no such thing as a copying machine in the whole town. Bravely, she agreed and provided me with the full description of the document from which the list came, so that it could be properly catalogued and acknowledged. The photographs came out, and I sent them to Yad Vashem and to the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C. This I did for the dead Ginzburgs and the others who died in Genichesk.

The next day I dressed in coat and tie to meet the Director of Vital Records, Svetlana Ivanova. Someone had obviously spoken to her about us because I did not even need to present my letter from the Town Council. She was more than happy to help! She explained that Jewish records had been kept separately from Christian records, and most had been destroyed. She did, however, have the book of births from 1908 to 1920, and she looked at every entry in that book, each written in a florid Yiddish hand as well as in Russian, searching for Ginzburgs and Yompolskis. My dad had been born in 1907 and his sisters were older, so I did not expect to find his birth. We did, however, find the birth records of two of his cousins, Aaron and Aleksandr Ginzburg, born to Boris Lazarovich Ginsburg and Haya Sara Aronovna Golshtein. I had been told that my great-grandfather had been named Lazar; these records confirmed the name and showed Boris Lazarovich to have come from Mistislavl in the Mogilyev region of what is now Belarus. It seems logical that this is the area from which the Ginzburg family came to Genichesk. We also found some other Ginzburg births, probably part of an extended family.

Svetlana Ivanova was not satisfied, however, simply to look in records. Knowing, as she did, everyone in town, she was determined to find someone who had known my family. She simply left the office and the

line of people waiting to see her to take me to meet the elderly of Genichesk. First we walked fifteen minutes to the home of a wonderfully elegant lady, short, with her silver hair in a neat bun, who told me that her home had been sold to her mother by a Ginzburg, perhaps the son of the Ginzburgs who were executed—he had fled to Moscow. The lady took me inside the old house that she kept just as her mother left it, and the two rooms were cool and soothing.

Next we walked to the home of an elderly Jewish lady in the same neighborhood. We called first to see that she was willing to talk with me, then entered the modern house, and were led into a light and airy room. A wrinkled old lady with piercing black eyes and virtually no teeth was supporting herself on a cane. When I came in, she exclaimed, "Oy, Ginzburg," and started to weep. "I knew your grandfather!" She sank down on the sofa behind her. No documentary film could have provided a finer scene, but I believe that she may have been milking the moment for its emotional effect. When we explained that my grandfather had drowned around 1916, she admitted that she had known the Ginzburgs whose house I had just visited, but she maintained that I bore a family resemblance to them. They may well have been my father's aunt and uncle or cousins. Perhaps I do look like them. It's nice to think so. We talked about the Jews of Genichesk and the hardships of the war. She had been sent away to a concentration camp for three years and still receives reparations from the Germans. When she returned, she became a schoolteacher and had been Svetlana's teacher. Now, one of her own grown sons was planning to emigrate to Israel with his family as soon as the paperwork came through. She marveled that I was living in the United States and that I had come to Genichesk: "We Jews are everywhere."

We visited yet another elderly woman, but we had no more success. We left a Russian translation of the information I have on my father's family with Svetlana Ivanova, who promised to continue to look in the records.

Virtually everyone I met in Genichesk was moved by my story and anxious to help me in any way. The editor of the local newspaper asked to interview me for an article, and I agreed since someone reading about me might have some information. I asked the editor how many Americans had visited Genichesk. "You are the first since the first World War," he said. I left an extra passport picture for an illustration. Vitali also promised to tell my story in a television interview, and I wrote my reactions to

Genichesk for publication in the local literary magazine. I have since spoken to Vitali via telephone and translator, but I heard no more about those publications. I did, however, receive a copy of his book about Genichesk with a lovely inscription.

People in Genichesk also told me their stories. Sofia Vladimirovna, the poet laureate of Genichesk whose house has the Stars of David, had a Jewish mother and a Ukrainian father. She and her brother had been passed through the window to neighbors before the Nazis came. Her father had been out of town when the order to round up the Jews was issued. He returned and joined his wife when the Germans led her away. The Germans told him he was free to go, but he said he would stay. They shot him with his wife. Sofia Vladimirovna begged me to find a publisher for her story, but, unfortunately, her story is not at all unique and has been told by others.

I did not find any living Ginzburgs or Yompolskis, but I did find traces of them and saw a glimpse of their world. I was able to confirm the few stories that I remember my father telling me. The strangest was that his father could dive into the sea and come to the surface holding a fish. You can imagine the sense of wonder and pride in a youngster with such a magical father. "It is an old trick," said Mikail Averyanovich, Vitali's elderly father. Apparently a variety of fish called "bychok" could be picked up out of crevices or off the ocean floor at low tide. These details made my father's youth come alive to me.

When my father used to doodle by the telephone, he always wrote some Russian characters that he explained were the beginning of a letter that he never wrote to his family in Russia. I tried to deliver that letter.

My pilgrimage, however, was not yet complete. My mother's mother had also emigrated from Russia, so, after my week in Genichesk, I traveled by train—on an especially filthy, decrepit specimen—the nineteen hours back to Kiev. There I arranged for the next part of my journey, a visit to Vinnitsa, the *oblast'*s principal city, population 400,000, from which Hasa-Bina Ochokoffska, my maternal grandmother, was born in May 1889. She departed for the United States with her two brothers in 1907. The drive took more than four hours, and once there we were housed at the sanitary medicine guesthouse. Again I was the WHO official, but by now I would simply say that my interpreter had answered questions for me so often that I would just let her respond.

People were once again most helpful. The sanitary doctors made in-

quiries, and I was taken to the city's only synagogue, a small house with no outside markings to identify its function. Sabbath services had just concluded, but two officials were still there. They marveled at my presence and told me of their financial woes. The town's Talmud Torah school was led by an American rabbi (the Chief Rabbi of Kiev was also an American—from Skokie, Illinois), and they wanted me to tell America that there were still Jews in Vinnitsa.

From the synagogue, we went to the Regional Natural History Museum where the deputy director (everyone is a deputy something) gave us a personal tour of the museum. The museum was exceptionally well designed with an impressive amount of information conveyed in Russian and Ukrainian. The director was a very expressive man who clearly loved the opportunity of showing off his museum to an American visitor who had ancestors from the town. Of special interest was the display of photographs and other material from the turn of the century, including several pictures of Alexander Street where my grandmother had lived. Also moving was the section on the Nazi occupation and the Stalinist purges. Hundreds of individual cases were on display to particularize the atrocities. At the end of our visit, the director went to his office and brought back a book on Vinnitsa and a pile of photographs of the old postcards that I had been admiring earlier. He wanted me to have them.

That afternoon we had a strange excursion. After Vinnitsa was occupied, Hitler ordered thousands of slave laborers to build an elaborate system of bunkers outside of the city. After the bunker was finished, he executed the workers to ensure the secret of the location and layout. We drove to that bunker. Most of it is underground and has not been excavated; but over a wide area, outcrops of concrete reinforced with iron bars had been pushed to the surface by explosions below. I found it amazing that the rebar made by Krupp Works was still so strong. I had not been aware of such a Nazi headquarters in Ukraine, but I was told that the direct phone lines to Berlin are still in use. Most bizarre was the swimming pool that was built for the Führer and his mistress Eva Braun. It stands deserted with plants growing in it. I did not know exactly how I felt at this place, but I picked up a piece of brick from the site. It sits next to my piece of the Berlin Wall.

The next day we went to the vital records office. Unlike in Genichesk, one could not go to the shelf and take down the appropriate volume in this office. At the synagogue I had been advised to see the Di-

rector of Genealogical Research, Faina Abramovna. Of Jewish origin herself, she had given a talk at the synagogue about Jewish records. She explained the difficulty of finding records, but she and her assistant assured us that Ochokoffski was an unusual name and that any encounters were likely to be my family. We left all of the information translated into Ukrainian (which is generally spoken in preference to Russian in this part of the country) and paid a search fee. Months later I received a group of documents relating to the Ochokoffski family—birth records, land transfers, and voter lists.

There was one more place to visit, Belilovka, the home of the Chernitskii family, my mother's father's family. We had thought that Belilovka was in the Vinnitsa region, but it was just across the border in the Zhytomir *oblast.* We had, therefore, to drive two hours to Kazatin to pick up the health official from the Zhytomir region to make our way to Belilovka. The Zhytomir health officials also wanted to demonstrate their regard for the Minister of Health.

It was not at all easy to find the turnoff to Belilovka, and there were no signs. However, the officials had done their homework well. Soon we found the turn and came to a bent and rusted metal sign proclaiming the village of Belilovka. Few residents remain. On what passes for the town square stands a two-story wooden Russian Orthodox church painted blue, the only structure of any consequence in sight.

Oldtimers told us there were no more Jews in Belilovka; they had either died or gone to Israel or America. They pointed out where the Jews had lived, where their market and synagogue and school had been. But everything had been destroyed long ago. We were led to the remains of the Jewish cemetery. The stones were overrun with bushes and trees, but the Hebrew lettering was still clear on many. A boy of about eight saw us poking about and volunteered to lead us through the underbrush to more headstones, including ones with the Star of David and one stone with an unusual crocodile-like creature spread out over it. Again it was time for a silent Kaddish.

There was one more melancholy monument to see. We were told that outside of the village was a memorial to the more than eight hundred Jews from Belilovka whom the Nazis had executed. We went looking for the memorial, but the directions we had received were poor, and there were no signs. I must say that my hosts were diligent and wanted me to see this memorial. When it seemed impossible to find, a young man suddenly

appeared in the wood and took us to the place. His mysterious appearance in the middle of nowhere gave the moment a fairy-tale feel. Finally, we found a black obelisk overgrown with plants. On it was an inscription in Yiddish and Russian. The English translation is: "We must never forget these people whom the German fascists murdered September 10, 1941, in the village of Belilovka. Erected by relatives and friends." We were told that in the past on the anniversary of that date, a group of Jews from nearby Berdichev would come to remember the village and tend the monument. It was a sad and somber conclusion to my visit to my grandfather's birthplace.

Genealogical study has many appeals and uses; but when such studies are combined with travels to ancestral villages and homes, the results can be both edifying and moving. My visit to the world of my ancestors was powerfully meaningful for me. Not only did I confirm the early settings of my grandparents' and my father's lives, but in some way I confirmed my own. I walked the streets that my ancestors had walked and smelled the smells my ancestors had smelled. I did not essentially change, and yet I did. For a few days I joined my father and his father and his father's father and swam with them in the Sea of Azov.

An Interview with Darrell Spencer

Douglas Thayer

In addition to many stories in quarterlies, Darrell Spencer has published four collections of stories, Bring Your Legs with You, Caution: Men in Trees, Our Secret's Out, A Woman Packing a Pistol, *and a novel,* One Mile Past Dangerous Curve. *Darrell's honors include the Drue Heinz Literature Prize and the Flannery O'Connor Award for Short Fiction, easily two of the most distinguished prizes for the short story offered in America. For Darrell, his "life is about writing and what it means"–inventing a world, rather than mirroring one–and he hopes "to write stories that will break your heart."*

Douglas: What got you started writing, the original impulse? Did you always think of yourself as a writer or was it adult-onset?

Darrell: Reading. That's the answer. Reading. Which I came to late. I didn't really start until I went to college. You don't count *Fielder from Nowhere, Hard Court Press*–the kind of books I read growing up. You hear about writers reading *Moby-Dick* when they were five years old, part of their journey through the local library, book by book, end to end, top to bottom. They discovered Kafka at age seven. Wrote novels before they were ten. Makes me feel stupid. I was collecting baseball cards and trying to figure out how to avoid getting spiked when some kid slid into third.

No, I did not think of myself as a writer. Me, a writer?–the thought never occurred to me. What I wanted was to be trickier than Bob Cousy and play for the Boston Celtics, but I learned early and profoundly and without question that I didn't have the talent.

So I got to college, was thinking about law school, and then I read Faulkner. *As I Lay Dying,* first. That was a class assignment. Next, *Light in August* on my own. I bought all his books. *Absalom, Absalom!* He reset me, turned my world sideways. I read Fielding–what a swarm of words–and tried to imitate him. Used *sagacity* and *negotiant* and *victuals* in the open-

ing paragraph of a seven-hundred-page novel I was going to write, but of course never did. I was twenty-one at the time. Even then it didn't occur to me that I could be a writer. For people like me, that wasn't in the cards. What I needed was a job and a paycheck. Bread on the table. *Tom Jones* led me to what was then a contemporary novel, John Barth's *The Sot-Weed Factor.* Great fun is that book. I discovered the writers who were alive and writing and began reading them.

The impulse to tell stories must have been in me because I can recall only one assignment from high school. Mr. Butterfield asked us to write a short story. I was never a good student, not in high school, not in college, not until graduate school. But I worked hard on my short story. In the end, it was terrible. Shameful. Particularly when you think about what someone like Truman Capote was producing when he was a teenager. Lee Smith talks about one of her early college-day attempts to write fiction; in the final scene, a house has burned to the ground, and a family has died—I think it's Christmas Eve—and the only sound is a music box playing "Silent Night." She cites the story as an example of her early failures, as a story driven by its own melodrama, but I imagine it as better than mine. The short story I wrote for Mr. Butterfield was about a sixteen-year-old who has saved up and bought his first car. He's going on his first solo date. We follow him on his drive during which he passes images of his younger self. I chose three images. Had to be three. There's significance in three, right? Three wishes. Three visitations. Three strikes and you're out. There's heft and every possibility of truth in three. At one point, he has to brake to avoid hitting a kid dribbling a basketball. He reaches his girl's house, rings the bell, and then glances down at his shoes. There is one spot of mud on the toe. Symbolism. Profundity. What I knew back then about writing stories I had learned from literature classes, classes that teach us how to read texts and the world in sophisticated ways, but that are not the best training ground for a writer. As I said, the story was terrible. I got a C- on it. But my point is that it mattered to me; it's the one thing in high school I cared about. I wanted to write a story that knocked Mr. Butterfield's socks off.

I have to mention John Berryman. There are incidents that take us on a 360 turnabout. You go in a door and out the same door, but you're different. My wife, Kate, and I were living in Las Vegas. I had given up on school. I was painting signs for a living, fourteen-by-forty-eight-foot billboards, doing show changes for Elvis, Wayne Newton, Buddy Hackett,

putting highlights on the nose of the clown for the Circus Circus, doing pictorials of the Coppertone dog. Kate and I went to the mall one night. She was checking on a book she had ordered, and I wandered over to the poetry section. No reason for it, but I picked up Berryman's 77 *Dream Songs.* I had never heard of him, and I had never read anything like his poems, which were colloquial and rude and ill-bred, yet tight and rigorous in structure. Voices jigsawed together. Celebratory and mean-spirited. Retaliatory, yet full of love and joy. I am still, thirty years later, memorizing his poetry. Right now I'm working on his *Eleven Addresses to the Lord.* Berryman—eventually I would learn what a highly respected scholar he was—had no truck with decorum. The book was a carnival. Was like a mob. His poems are part of me.

The first serious thing I wrote—I was in graduate school by now, University of Nevada, Las Vegas—was an imitation of Berryman's *Homage to Mistress Bradstreet.* I was homaging Virginia Woolf. Not her fiction. I was reading her letters.

So the one-word answer to your question is *reading.*

I fell hard for words. Even how they sit on the page, which has to do with sign painting, I suppose. You eyeball lettering. It's an art. Fit and fix together. You have to know that "O's" dip below the bottom line and "A's" intrude upon and adjust in odd ways to the surrounding letters.

Do your remember diagramming sentences in grade school? I couldn't admit it to my basketball-playing pals, but I thoroughly enjoyed diagramming sentences. Miss Leach, sixth grade, John S. Park Elementary in Las Vegas. One sentence on the blackboard laid out like an overhead photograph of the city of itself. That, too, has something to do with my desire to write fiction.

Douglas: How would you characterize your style? Some have called you a minimalist, or said that, in some ways, you're like one. Are you? If so, why? What are the advantages?

Darrell: A minimalist? No. Maybe the stories in my first book, *A Woman Packing a Pistol,* are somewhat minimalist. I'll confess to that, though I don't think of them in that way. I was reading Ivy Goodman, Mary Robison, and what people call early Raymond Carver.

Cheryll Glotelty, who teaches at the University of Nevada at Reno, contacted me because she wanted to include a story of mine in a Nevada literature anthology. I think it's titled *Home Means Nevada: Literature of the Silver State.* She sent me the headnote for my story. It began, "By writing

experimental fiction, Darrell Spencer . . ." I phoned. Said, "Experimental?" All this in a friendly way. We talked and then she wrote back. I need to mention that what she was including in the anthology was a short-short titled "My Home State of Nevada." She suggested "avant-garde," "postmodern." No. No. She sent me her brainstorming, talked about fiction that skirts the edges of realism, fiction that displaces reality and refuses to be taken literally.

I kept thinking, They're stories; that's all. There is nothing avant-garde or experimental or postmodern about them. They're told in a straightforward and direct way. They're stories about folk walking about on the planet and trying to figure out how to live in particular ways.

I can't remember what we decided on. It'll be interesting to see what the headnote says when the book comes out.

I designed and taught a course in minimalism here at Ohio University. We read Amy Hempel, Ann Beattie, some Marc Richard, and Janet Kaufman. We read Carver and Mary Robison's *Why Did I Ever*, a novel that gathers on you like a breakdown.

Kim Herzinger edited an issue of the *Mississippi Review* that is devoted to minimalist fiction, a give and take, a few writers lamenting minimalist fiction's presence in the world and other writers celebrating its being here.

What you end up talking about in a class is contracted language that is blunt, clean, spare, sparse, exacting. Sometimes my language is contracted. I hope it's exacting. You talk about elliptical structure and form. Sometimes my work is elliptical. You talk about dislocation. You talk about silent surfaces. One class period I brought in an Ann Beattie story, a recent one, a nonminimalist piece. I had cut all the exposition from it—paragraph by paragraph, line by line. I asked the students to account for the action—to see if their exposition (why is the husband being rude to his wife?) matched the exposition in the original story. We also did a line-by-line comparison of Raymond Carver's "The Bath" and "A Small, Good Thing." What you learn is that what is not there on the page is present in the white space.

I admire minimalist fiction, but, no, my work is not minimalist. If we were to run through a list of styles, I would say to each one, Yes, and no. I don't mean to sound wishy-washy, but I don't know how to describe my style. Maximalist? Nah.

Douglas: What do you strive for in your fiction? How do you want it

to affect your readers? What should delight and please them, entertain them, in your work? Do you have a special audience in mind?

Darrell: Barry Hannah says the brain got to sing. I can't sing. Not a lick. Or dance. Wouldn't you love to ballroom dance like the pros? Get dressed to the nines. All that footwork, the choreography of passion. Or hoof it. Tap dance. Foxtrot in shining shoes.

I can't sing and I can't dance, so I write. And what I strive for is that my work will sing and dance. I think of my fiction, each piece, whether it is a short story or a novel, as a repository of language. When I talk to friends about this, I find myself making a kind of bracketing shape with my hands, fingers curved as if I'm holding a small pot as an offering, or as if I'm stretching open a gunny sack. I hold my hands out in front me, like I'm struggling to contain something that doesn't want to be contained, and I say, I want to drop you in this bag, pocket, bucket, this pot—this repository. Jump in. Enjoy.

I like slang. Argot. Jargon. The colloquial. Vernacular. The demotic. I try to entice readers into an experience with a particular brand of language, such as, in a specific sense, the jargon of sign painting or roofing, or, in a broader sense, the language of loss or grief or joy. Each piece contains, I hope, at least ten cats in a bag.

Almost every story I have written has begun with a line or phrase that I overheard or one that popped into my head. I'm writing one right now called "Can I Help Who's Next?" Nothing startling about that question, and, having eaten a lot of Subway sandwiches, I'm sure I've heard it dozens of times. Then one day I finally really heard the sandwich-maker say it. So I started a story. It seems to me that that question is a repository of language, that it contains all I need to know. It is as if once I write the words down, they gather to themselves all the other words I'll need to tell a story.

I'm also interested in story telling. I want to tell stories that break your heart. But my fiction is character driven. I don't see much plot in it. Plot doesn't interest me.

My work is, I hope, baggy. Off-shot. Disjointed. Unwieldy. I hope my stories, like John Berryman's poetry, won't hold still. Years ago I read an article about an architect named Gehry. The author said that Gehry did not accept the biblical idea that a house divided against itself cannot stand. Instead, Gehry believed that a house divided against itself

would—I'm pretty sure this is the word the author used—*flourish*. Such a house will astonish us. I want my work to be divided against itself.

I hope each sentence I write sticks to the page and delights a reader, not so you stop and take note or underline anything. There is a certain kind of delight we experience on the move. Are we back to dancing? Probably. But also I'm talking about the delight you feel when you strike a nail exactly as a nail ought to be struck. I hope my stories have some humor in them. I hope they don't come across as clever. That would make me very sad. I hope the characters entertain readers. And count. I hope the events and characters matter. Flannery O'Connor tells us that she loaned a few of her stories to a country woman who lived nearby. When the woman returned them, she said, "Well, them stories just gone and shown you how some folks *would* do." O'Connor adds that that is where you have to start, with "showing how some specific folks *will* do, *will* do in spite of everything." That knowledge drives my own work.

Douglas: What are your themes, the things you are trying to say in your work? Or are you trying to say anything? Are there values you keep punching?

Darrell: I'm a member of Chekhov's tribe as far as theme is concerned. I'm trying to take what Chekhov calls an intelligent attitude toward what I write about, but I'm not trying to convey a theme. I have no points to make or argue. No scores to settle. No axes to grind. Okay, one or two axes. Chekhov tells us that a fiction writer is not under obligation to solve a problem; an artist's only obligation is to state the problem correctly. Obligation is Chekhov's word.

We need something in this world that isn't trying to teach us lessons or get us to buy a product, that isn't self-helping us to death. All writing, fiction included, is, of course, loaded with bias and it certainly signifies—it distorts and deforms and jerry-builds—but fiction can draw us into a simulacrum of experience itself. We need that. We need work that isn't trying to tell us how to act.

William Gass says of his fiction that he wants to plant an object in the world. I think I'm close in quoting him: "I want to add something to the world which the world can ponder the same way it ponders the world." He makes it clear that he wants the object to be a beautiful object and that beauty is not to be subservient to truth.

There you have it. Beauty and truth: two cans of worms you don't want to open. Try talking intelligently about that pair, and you'll end up

tripping over your own tongue. You'll end up deconstructing yourself word by word, talking and walking backwards, erasing yourself as you speak. Rewinding.

What I say to my students about beauty, about measuring one piece of writing against some standard, is that I'm going to ask Mikhail Baryshnikov to dance across the front of the classroom. Then I'll dance. And they'll notice a difference. Sure that comparison fails—culture is at the root of all judgment—but isn't that the pleasure of analogical thought: that it fails: that it celebrates, in the end, difference.

Gass and Chekhov both agree that part of the issue has to do with the way fiction works. Combine art and sermon? Chekhov asks. Would be pleasant, he says, but not possible because of what I believe he calls matters of technique. Fiction speaks the voice of what—character, event, circumstance, situation—it depicts. Gass wants us to turn the moral issues and problems over to the rigors of philosophical and scientific thinking. He doesn't trust fiction. Fiction, for him, must not assert. I hear people say that fiction lies to tell the truth. I don't buy that. Fiction lies, and it distorts in order to depict and wonder. It wonders. The fictive experience can be—is?—as real as any other experience—as if there is any other kind.

I'm in these two camps, and Gass and Chekhov have said eloquently what I feel, so I thought I'd pass their words along. Nothing originates with me. Their views inform my sensibilities as a writer.

I want to add one more thought. I'm trying to explain what it is I'm after in my work. We know that all the stories we tell are texts that refer to other texts—story (small "s") refers to Story (big "S"). Call Story with the big "S" myth or collective unconscious or master narrative or arche or form. Call it whatever you want. What I'm saying relates (maybe only in my head) to what Vladimir Propp discovered when he analyzed folktales: that they're made up of functions. The second function of a folktale is what Propp calls the interdiction. Someone is warned not to do something. Don't go into the woods. You can hear some zealots: Don't go into the words. Don't go downstairs. Don't go to the far kingdom. When I was a kid, it was, Don't cross Oakey Boulevard. But, of course, the interdiction is violated so that the tale begins. Interdiction and violation, two members of Story, the one with the big S. Or we can talk about Story with the big S in other terms: Greenhorn comes to town. Hero goes on quest. Someone is expelled from somewhere.

What I'm trying to say here is that I'm aware of all this as a writer,

and there's one thought that drives me when I write: *Traduttore, tradittore.* To translate is to be a traitor. To translate is to traduce. Recently I taught a class in form and theory here at Ohio University. It was guided by a phrase from Derrida's *The Retrait of Metaphor:* "(a 'good' translation must always abuse)." When I say that the small-s story refers to the big-S story, I mean that it translates the master narrative, the myth, but does so, when it is well done, in an idiosyncratic way. I want my work to be a traitor to that big-S Story; I want it to traduce that big-S Story. Abuse it in some exacting and idiosyncratic way. John Caputo says to do so is to commit scandal, is to tell the story in a treacherous way.

If I have a theme, that's it.

I'm not saying I think about any of this when I write. I don't. You can't will any of this into being.

Douglas: You've won both the Flannery O'Connor Award for Short Fiction and the Drue Heinz Literature Prize. How has winning those prestigious short-story competitions affected you? Any other prizes or awards you plan to go for?

Darrell: I feel lucky to have won the awards, and I'm grateful to the people who chose the books. The awards have affected me because they mean that two more of my books are now in print, are out there for people to read.

Douglas: Virtually all of your success has been in the short story, but you recently published a novel with the University of Michigan Press. Why the switch and what's the difference for you between writing stories and a novel? Do you see yourself leaving the short story to write novels? What advantage does the novel hold for you over the short story, if any?

Darrell: The novel is titled *One Mile Past Dangerous Curve.* I haven't actually switched from short stories to novels, although the publication history makes it look as if there has been a changeover. All the time that I was writing stories I was writing novels. Failed novels. Bad novels. I wrote two that I threw away. I have been revising a novel titled *Welcome to Wisdom, Utah* for almost ten years. Right now, I'm finishing up a book titled *So You Got Next to the Hammer.* It contains two novellas and five stories. The novellas are novels I cut and cut and cut. A few weeks ago I started a novel I'm calling *The Department of Big Thoughts.* It's about—is told by—one of the characters in my book *Bring Your Legs with You.* He's a roofer and a thinker. What he is is one more big-time talker on the planet. So I'm writing that novel, but at the same time I am writing short stories.

I write novels and stories in the same fashion. *One Mile Past Dangerous Curve* began with a sentence I overheard, a sentence that disappeared from the book a long time ago, a sentence that is no longer in play. The working title was *The Devil, You Say.* I plumbed those words for all I could get out of them. Stories require weeks of revision; the novel took years. But I think that's an obvious thing to say. I wish I could say something smart about the difference between the two forms. This is true for me: Language and character can carry a story. I tried to let character drive the novel, but I found that for each major revision I wrote I was restructuring in order to satisfy my desire and itch for plot. Maybe a better word is *event.* I was into a third or fourth draft when I realized that I was spending the first fifty or sixty pages caught up in a riff triggered by the opening paragraph. It hit me that I could move one of the key events up and that in doing so I would be upsetting the ground situation.

I don't think one form has an advantage over the other form. I acknowledge the major differences, but it's all writing and trying to create the immediacy that is essential to fiction. In practical terms, I like the short story because I can pretty much keep the whole piece in mind as I write. I can tweak the story at one point, knowing exactly what changes that will require three, six, nine pages later. I can make a change near the end and I know where I have to go earlier in the story to make adjustments. It's difficult to keep an entire novel in mind. When I'm finished with a story, I hold an image of it in my mind. One story was held together by a picture of a woman sitting in a chair in her front yard. I wasn't able to do that with the novel. It's driven by an image, I think: bafflement. If that's an image. It can be. The sound of the word. But, again in practical terms, it was difficult to keep all of the characters and conflicts and situations in mind. For example, late in the publication process—I think we were in galleys—I was rereading a section where I had done some revision, and I discovered that a character was both in the house and still sitting outside the house on a redwood table. An egregious error, but there it was.

A novel, a story—each is written one sentence at a time. You write a sentence, and you listen, and the next sentence responds to it. They bump against each other. You like how they join each other, so you write the next one.

Douglas: What are the major literary influences in your life as a writer and why? Which writers do you value most?

Darrell: I'm going to start by side-stepping your questions somewhat.

The major influence on my work is actually my wife's painting. I want to write fiction that is like her art. One of her paintings is the cover on *One Mile Past Dangerous Curve.* The people at Michigan were kicking around ideas for the cover, and I told them about the painting. I wish I could write the way she paints. Her work is referential, is representational, but the color, the texture, the shapes, the brush strokes—all of the elements of her art resist lending themselves to picture. There is a remarkable give-and-take going on. I will badly recount this story, but Ernest Gombrich, in one of his books on art, tells us about a famous art critic describing an experience he had with a painting by Velázquez. The man kept walking up to the painting and then back away. Up and back. Up and back. He wanted to experience the moment when the paint and brush strokes transformed into a boat. The story goes something like that. Kate's work exploits that kind of tension, and I want to write stories that do so with language. Our friend, Wayne Dodd, bought one of Kate's paintings. I was talking to him about it one day, and he said, "Her work talks back to you." Yes. He was dead-on right. I want my fiction to talk back to you.

Now the literary influences. I've already mentioned Faulkner, who wasn't an influence as much as he was an impetus. I studied the canon in school, and I hope I learned from writers like Flannery O'Connor, Melville, Hawthorne, Gertrude Stein, Kate Chopin, James Baldwin, Ralph Ellison—the tradition, the masters. You know all the names. What I was doing was catching up and learning what art is. No one, at that time, was teaching Saul Bellow, but I found my way to him. *The Adventures of Augie March*—difficult to describe my response to that novel, what it meant to a young man trying to find his way into writing. No one was teaching Thomas Pynchon either, but I read him. Eudora Welty, Capote's *In Cold Blood,* F. Scott Fitzgerald. Well, the list seems endless, so I'll stop.

The writers whose work made me feel as if it was okay for me to write are contemporary writers. I'll name some names, but first have to say that François Camoin was the writer whose presence and work influenced my own writing more than anyone else did. I once tried to figure out a way to describe François's fiction. When I think about his work I always think *the sentences, the sentences, the sentences.* They are precise. Exact. Hard-cut. I told him I imagine him as Kurtz in *The Heart of Darkness,* only François is truly smart, and not mad, although his work can be scary. He has sounded the human heart. I see him making sentences in an unlit place, one small circle of light on the words he fiddles with. He shuffles them about. He

rolls them like dice. Tosses them into the air. You see his hands—busy, busy, busy. Berryman begins the first of his *Eleven Addresses to the Lord* thus: "Master of beauty, craftsman of the snowflake." In that spirit, I think of François's sentences, his stories, his books. Isn't there a tale or myth about an artisan who forged a sword so brilliant and sharp it could cut air? It had to be put away by the gods, kept from the hand of humankind. The universe was at risk. François's sentences—there you go.

And you, Doug—your fiction, which was important for me to read, also taught me to pay attention to sentences. Not one word wasted. Another good friend at BYU, Bruce Jorgensen, once wrote out a quote from Chekhov for me. It still sits on my desk. Chekhov was writing to a friend of his; the two of them were discussing fiction writing, and Chekhov wrote back: "Your laziness stands out between the lines of every story. You don't work on your sentences. You must, you know. That's what makes it art." My wife says Bruce's own writing is full of heart. It is. Truly. And there is not one lazy sentence in it.

It's inevitable that I will forget some influences if I try to name names, but I would rather be accused of forgetting than risk not paying tribute. These are the writers whose work makes me want to write; I can't read anything they've written but that I want get up, go to my desk, and write. Stanley Elkin, Grace Paley, Harold Brodkey, Barry Hannah, Amy Hempel, Mary Robison, Frederick Bathelme, Lee K. Abbott, Kate Haake, Debra Monroe. There are dozens whose work taught me (William Gass, John Barth, Alice Munro) and whose work I greatly admire, whose work is the good news, if only people would read it.

Douglas: Earning a doctorate seems to damage some fiction writers, distracts them from what they want most to do. But that didn't happen to you. What was your University of Utah doctorate like? Do you think of it as making you a better writer, or not? Was it a good experience?

Darrell: Good things happened to me at the University of Utah. It was a terrific program then, and it still is. I met working writers. Leonard Michaels came in for a residency. I drove William Gass around in a snow storm, which led to a story I wrote called "I Could of Killed Bill Gass." I tossed that one away a long time ago. It was important for me to meet writers. Not because of what they said to me about my work, but because their being what they were made writing fiction seem a possibility. Legitimatized it for me.

The scholarly work at the University of Utah was as important to me

as the fiction-writing workshops. In fact, in certain ways it was what I really needed. I became interested in narrative theory, and I read what I could get my hands on—Gérard Genette, Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, Seymour Chatman. The list is long. Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida. I wasn't reading theory in order to learn how to write. I was intrigued. Think how it might affect a writer to have running through his veins Heidegger's idea that truth is untruth, that the work of the work of art is to enact the eternal strife between concealing and unconcealing, that when the artist lights up a space, that lighting itself darkens the edges. Here's one that I will never forget: "The truth of things lies in the event of their *thinging.*" Ha. Don't you hope your own writing *things?*

All this has to do with writing fiction, but I am not in any way suggesting that I think about any of it when I am writing a story. You can't impose strife on your work; you can't will *thinging* into a piece about a kid growing up in Pahrump, Nevada.

But the concepts bounce about in your mind and they can't help but influence your work. You asked about style earlier. I don't know what my style is, but I do know that it is what it is—not directly, but because the idea sits on my heart—partly because of my understanding that the life of a metaphor lies in the fact that it practices (Derrida's notion) difference not in similarity.

The University of Utah also placed me within a community of writers. There may have been competition there, but I didn't feel it. Or it worked in beneficial ways. I made friends, writers who have gone on to great success, who have kept in touch, whose work I turn to when I need to be reminded that what we do can matter.

Certainly a degree in writing, whether it's a Ph.D. or an MFA, is not what everyone needs. I can see how a degree might slow a writer down. But you're learning. How can learning hurt a writer? I hear people say that writing programs produce a sameness in the fiction. That's hooey. I would bet that you could list a bunch of fine, fine writers, and ask those critics—assuming they don't know beforehand—who had MFAs, Ph.D.'s and who didn't, and the critics wouldn't be able to guess based only on the work. The only danger might be that a young writer isn't ready to accept workshop criticism that is helpful and ignore workshop criticism that isn't.

Douglas: What were your BYU years like? You were known as a brilliant writer and teacher, yet you left. Can you say something about that?

Darrell: Here's what I'll remember most about BYU: pals and a horde of young writers whose work was impressive and who have gone on to have great successes. There was a period of about five years when every graduate workshop I taught had two or three writers whose work was the kind that makes you sit back and say, "Here's the real thing." You simply try to get out of their way. These remarkable young writers kept coming year after year. Several of them went on to the University of Utah. Here I really don't want to mention names because I'll forget someone, and I don't want to do that. But they're writing and publishing novels; they're writing movies.

At BYU, Bruce Jorgensen and I found one excuse or another to walk to the bookstore three or four times a week. I miss those days, our talks. Bruce is wise and kind and generous and funny—and he is one smart man. He introduced me to writers I needed to read. He was good company, and we all need that. He, as they say on the playground, schooled me. I'm grateful to him for his friendship.

So many brilliant teachers at BYU. That was nice of you to say I was known as one of them, but I wasn't a brilliant teacher. I cared about what I was doing, but "cared" is one of those words like "sincere." Sincere folk can be frightening and destructive in five or six different ways.

I chose to leave BYU. I needed to leave because I was uncomfortable teaching there. Felt that I was living a lie. By leaving I was trying to act with some integrity.

Douglas: What kind of writing schedule do you have? Do you work at writing every day? Are you a morning person? What kind of distractions can't you tolerate? What does it take to get you started?

Darrell: What I'll describe here is only an ideal, is what happens when all is going well, when the corn is as high as an elephant's eye. I'm not a morning person, but that's when I write. Teaching—the reading, the preparation, the responding to manuscripts, the classroom discussions, and workshops—fills up a day, usually seven days a week. When I was younger I often worked at teaching until one in the morning.

So, the ideal: During the afternoon and evening, I complete all the preparation for teaching so that, when the morning comes, I'm ready to write. I try to leave my desk clean. I often put my manuscript in the center of it. I get up, write for a couple of hours, go for a run (thinking about what I'm writing), return and do some more writing. At night, after I've finished preparing for classes, I read over what I wrote in the morning,

scribbling on the manuscript. That means that when I wake up I've already begun the writing process: I need to type in the revisions I've made, so I'm already at work. The writing has already begun. There is momentum.

When the world is right, I work on short stories during the week and the novels on the weekend. Of course, that means I'll be thinking about the novel all week long, making notes, writing down possible changes, asking questions.

The one lesson I have learned again and again and again: Get yourself to the place where you write. Put some words down. Don't let anyone sit on your shoulder and say, "That's bad. That's not working. That's dumb." Write. Write poorly. Write well. Write. Something will come of your putting the words together. Italo Calvino calls it combinatorial play.

The only distraction I could not deal with was our dog Willie. No dog has ever barked like Willie. It was a matter of his timing. I would be working, and he would ask to go out, so I would open the door to the backyard. About the time I started to think it was going to be okay, about the time I was writing well, he'd bark. Once. Twice. At nothing. He might be staring at the fence. He might be studying the sky. He had his own rhythm, which was really no rhythm. Three barks. Sometimes, one. And I waited. Surely the one will be followed by more. No? Start to work. Then a seven-bark riff.

Douglas: What does the future hold for you in terms of writing? What are you working on now, and what future projects do you have in mind?

Darrell: I mentioned earlier that I'm polishing up a story collection titled *So You Got Next to the Hammer* and a novel titled *Welcome to Wisdom, Utah.* The collection opens with a novella, the title work, and closes with a novella I'm calling *They Had Their Man for Breakfast.* Sort of bookend novellas. The second one is a cut-down version of a novel I wrote about Las Vegas. It has to do with growing up there in the 1960s. The book will contain four or five short stories and three short shorts. There's a certain kind of symmetry to it, but not to any purpose I can think of.

I'm excited about the novel I recently started, *The Department of Big Thoughts.* I mentioned that it is told by one of the characters in *Bring Your Legs with You.* The narrator of the novel is also the narrator of a story, "How Are You Going to Play This?" His name is Mac, but the other roofers have nicknamed him Spinoza. He talks big talk now and then. The

book begins the day his girlfriend leaves him. He's in his late forties, and she's younger, probably in her thirties. The novel is set in Las Vegas.

Should take three or four years to finish. I probably ought to focus only on it, but I can't stop writing stories.

Douglas: Las Vegas appears repeatedly in your writing. Why? What meaning does Las Vegas have for you, and the American West in general? Do you view yourself as a Western writer, and if so why? How important is it to live, write, and teach in the West?

Darrell: I wasn't born in Las Vegas, but I grew up there. I was a baby when my family moved there. So it's my context. Las Vegas frames the world for me. I'm not talking about Las Vegas as it now exists. Growing up I didn't think Las Vegas was unusual. It defined reality for me. A Salt Lake City magazine asked me to write a piece about night, so I wrote about the showgirls coming to the grocery store where I worked when I was a kid. They came in full costume, complete with boas. I thought that was normal. Once I was talking to François Camoin about eating breakfast at Circus, Circus, while the aerialists above were swinging from trapeze to trapeze, doing their stunts. He said, "No wonder you write the way you do."

A Western writer? No. Not really. I'm not trying to say something about living in the West. That assumes a sense for the big picture, which I don't have.

I've been in Ohio for seven years now. I don't live here the way I lived in the West. That's a fact. After I was hired, I came to Athens to look for a house. I was on the porch of the one I eventually bought, and I said to the realtor, "I guess we'll need to put in a sprinkling system." She led me over to a spot out front and said, "You have drains in the lawn here." I asked her where our property ended and the neighbor's began. She said, "Your yard is where you mow to." Winter came, and the sun retired. Next to the walkway to our place, there was a lamp that was light sensitive; it turned on at night and off when sunlight hit it. It stayed on for three weeks straight, day and night. The local newspaper advised us, after our first winter here, to walk slowly around the house and inspect for damage.

It's a different world. We experienced our first ice storm. It knocked out the power. There was a fireplace in the dining room, so we put our bed in there. No heat, no light for three days. I learned how to build a fire. You need kindling, Kate told me. I thought, Kindling? I'd heard the word, but didn't know what kindling was. A colleague loaned us firewood. In Ohio, I saw fireflies for the first time.

When we lived out West, we didn't let the bed coverings touch the floor. Scorpions might climb up. As if you could stop them. You saw them high up on the ceilings.

Athens, Ohio, is built on clay. It shifts. The walls of your house crack. You adjust. You live in a certain way.

I don't know if all of this comes through in stories. Where I live in Ohio is truly beautiful. Trees. Rivers. Those colorful small towns you see in black-white movies starring Spencer Tracy. I found a narrative point of view for *One Mile Past Dangerous Curve* that allowed the novel to both appreciate and wonder at the world here. The minute I found that voice the book took off.

But I'm not answering the question. Las Vegas—the wide hot streets I grew up on (we did actually fry eggs on them. We counted the number of steps it took to scoot across them in our bare feet), the desert I wandered in, the unreal round moons that sat on the city, Fremont Street (to this day I'm cursing the man who covered Fremont Street and turned it into The Fremont Experience or whatever it is they call it; he should be tarred, feathered, and ridden out of town).

I rode my bicycle all over the city. No fear. It was a safe place. Wide open. I think there were about 200,000 residents when I was in high school. There were The Strip people and townies. My friends' dads ran casinos. They comped us tickets. I got to see the Rat Pack. My sister's friend dragged her out to a motel on The Strip, knocked on the door, and Elvis answered. This was his first try at Las Vegas. They sat and talked.

There's a frankness about Las Vegas. It's tacky, and it knows it's tacky. I recently wrote a review of a book written by Marc Cooper. Its title is *The Last Honest Place in America: Paradise and Perdition in the New Las Vegas.* What Cooper argues is that the city is honest about the fact that it wants your money. It's upfront about what it is all about. I'll go back to that word *frankness.* I want to capture that in my fiction.

You don't want to get me started on how important it is for me to live, write, and teach in the West. I'll end up begging for someone out there to hire me. I enjoy my job here at Ohio University. My colleagues are smart and funny and cultured. I've worked with students whose work dazzles me. Made pals.

But I do need the West. I miss the sky. I miss the way the day whitens in Nevada. I desperately miss driving through the desert.

Douglas: Any advice for the young fiction writer on how to get

started, what to avoid and what to seek? How helpful is an MFA for the beginning writer? Does it serve an essential purpose if one doesn't want to teach?

Darrell: My advice is clichéd: read and write.

Don't write in a void. Find the fiction that cares about itself and read it. There are writers who will make you want to write. Find them.

MFA programs, Ph.D. programs—essential purpose? Essential. What if, instead of sitting in your house writing, you're sitting in a workshop and some writer says exactly what you need to hear? Sure, a program can help. But *essential?* I can't answer that question.

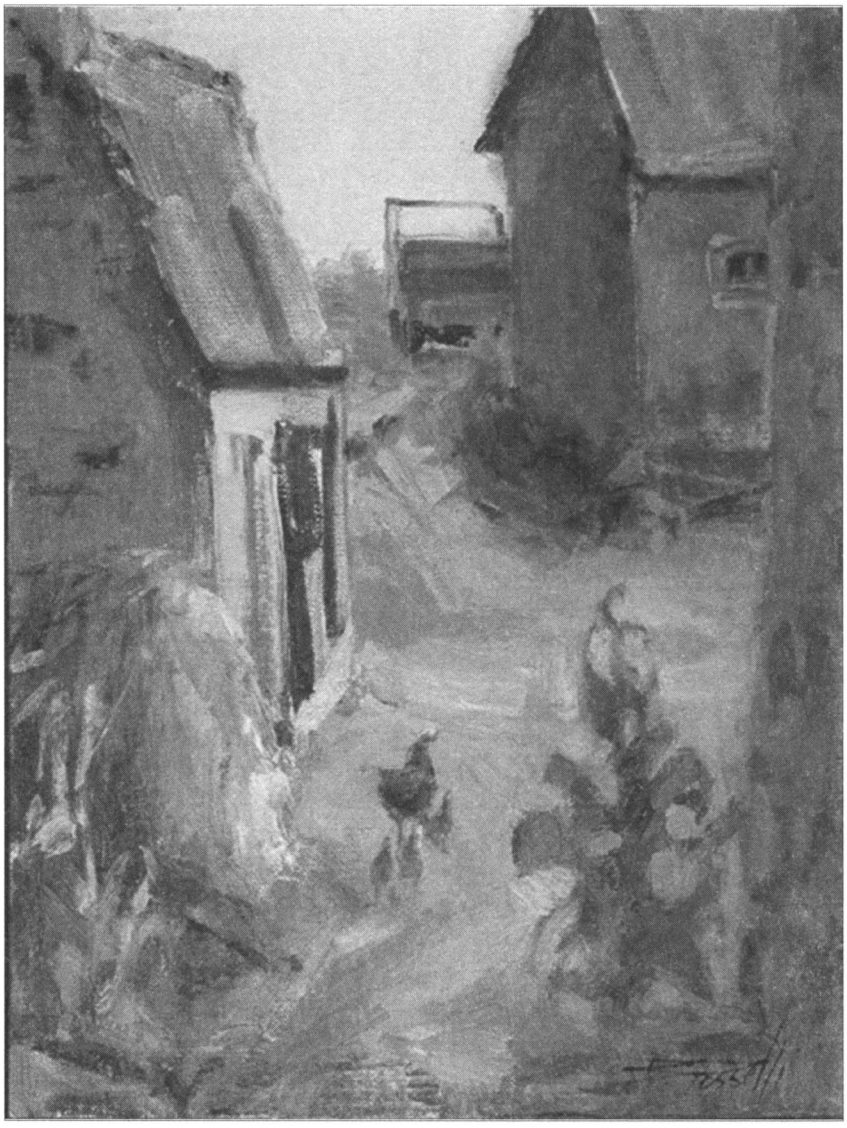
For me, yes. I needed the University of Utah's program. I was otherwise too ignorant. If nothing else, the program saved me ten years.

Douglas: You've never viewed yourself as a Mormon writer, but does your Mormonism signify in your writing in some ways?

Darrell: I was born into a Mormon family. There was a time when my father entered wholeheartedly into the religion. So I grew up as a Mormon. It has to inform my writing, but I don't think about it when I'm writing. Our growing up is present in whatever we write.

I don't really write about Mormons, though there are Mormons in some of my stories. I don't think about Mormon themes. I'm not interested in the religion as a subject.

John Bennion wrote an article about a few writers whose work in some way deals with Mormonism, the reference to which I unfortunately no longer remember. He spent some time talking about one of my stories—"The Glue That Binds Us"—from *Our Secret's Out,* my second collection. The story is about a man who has married a Mormon woman. They've returned to Salt Lake City for a short visit. John compares the story to what he calls conventional Mormon texts, and he points out that what the story resists is any kind of easy connection between signified and signifier. John argues well—I'm a reader here, not the writer—and soundly that the story doesn't so much undermine Mormon thought and culture as it simply won't settle into the kind of thinking or worldview that Mormons and most Mormon fiction easily accept. It doesn't attack Mormonism, but it won't let Mormonism capture the narrative. John is kind to point out that my work does not make judgments or pronouncements. I like to think that Mormons are present in the story the way they are present in the world.



Bonnie Posselli, ***Maison de Renée (Normandy)***, oil, 12" x 9"

FICTION

You Can Count on the Fingers of Your One Hand the Reasons

Darrell Spencer

Whether you were driving in from the east or the west you got to our mother's from Canal Street here in southern Ohio. There at the big McDonald's in Nelsonville you took the crossroad at Stoltz's Drugs and bumped over railroad tracks this side of Cristy's Pizza. No time to blink, you pulled a hard right at the intersection onto Tooth and dealt with the tracks a second time where they split into a Y. You followed Tooth, and there was our mother's place, Alice's, fifth house on your right, cedar-sided, three stories and basement, Victorian, complete with gingerbread and a slate roof, so close to the house next door that if you were on the porch and lost your balance, the wall you used to catch yourself would be the neighbor's. Early photographs of the town prove the street wasn't always so crowded.

Wooden stairs at the back took you to the second floor. They about-faced halfway up. Our dad built them to give us kids a way in when we got older. The garage, whose wide doors swung open like a barn, stood to the side and off by itself. Two rows of brick laid in pea gravel led to it. The backyard was narrow and lengthy and ran through the block to within ten feet of Canal, which was part of I-33 and was the main drag through Nelsonville. The yard was chain-linked, a four-footer that kept Alice's poodles in check. You sent the dogs out, though, and they barked like crazy, not at the traffic or people passing by on the sidewalk, but over a shoulder at the house. You had insulted them—poodles would have you think they know how to use a toilet—and you had put them at risk to the pit bull next door.

Tonight, Alice's living room was jam packed with what we called the

Knapp family can of worms, our mother's brothers and some of their wives and children, plus me and my sisters, too many near likenesses in the same room, which was why I had settled in the kitchen. Alice was hospitalized over in Athens. Close enough to dying for all of us to gather.

My sister Karen wandered in where I was, collected two Rolling Rocks from the refrigerator, and sat across from me at the breakfast counter.

"Mine?" I said. I twisted the cap off one of the beers.

She said, "If you want."

She finished hers in three takes and held up her pointer finger. She said, "Number one reason is she's so skinny." Karen faked poking that same finger down her throat and gagging. She said, "The woman's got to be a barfer," then drank from the beer I had opened for myself.

The woman who was so skinny was our sister Jennifer. I wasn't buying barfer and said so.

"Check out her hands," Karen said. "Nicks and cuts. You don't bite yourself writing poetry." Karen made like she was shoving her whole hand into her mouth, down her throat, and then choking on it. Biting the whole time.

She was on a roll big time. What Karen was arguing was why our sister should be shot on television at high noon. Her logic was death by firing squad. She held up two fingers and said, "Number two reason is the woman's clothes. You see her shoes? They cost more than a trip to Europe. The dress she's wearing could feed a nation and lower the national debt as an afterthought."

Karen mouthing off.

Hen talk, dad used to say. Karen, he often said right to her, was all jaw and sit.

Our father was a piece of work.

Ally, my daughter, appeared at the door to the kitchen, wearing a face like she was hunting safe harbor, a place where she could sit and not have to listen or talk. Too much family in this shoebox, and no one she was comfortable with. She spotted Karen, spun on her heel, and retreated. My hunch was she would head upstairs. I might find her in a closet. Maybe she would locate my other sister, Molly. The two of them had the wherewithal to sit together for three days in a rowboat and not say a word. Ally was fifteen. She loved and feared her Aunt Karen, was, whenever they were around each other, always studying on her like she was a pocketknife.

Karen said to me, "The third reason—" She went back to the Rolling Rock, said, "Wait."

After the hospital booted us out, most of the family ended up at the house tonight, not that anyone but me, Ally, Karen, and Molly was staying here, not unless they wanted to sleep in sacks on the hardwood floors or on the screened-in back porch, which wasn't likely to happen, it being December. Our cars and trucks took up most of the block. Everybody but immediate family was sleeping at friends' places or had gotten a room down the road at the Ramada off 691 or ten minutes from here at the Days Inn this side of Athens. There were teenagers moping around, acting like they would die if one more minute had to be spent this lame way—no TV on, no music. Torpor on them like sweat. Cell phones at their ears. Children ran in and out, which was worrying me because I didn't want the poodles disappearing. I had stashed the dogs in Alice's bedroom and taped a note to the door. DON'T OPEN FOR ANY REASON. Not that such adult foolishness could stop a kid from busting in. When is it we learn to read for real? When we turn twenty-five? Or is it forty?

Some Christmas was up, but not much. A Santa who played the saxophone, some garlands, a snowman. No tree. On the mantel, there was a row of cards Alice had received.

Stan was here—next oldest to Alice, her brother, our Vietnam vet who carried that war around like it was a spike in his chest. He had kept his muttonchops through three marriages. Stan's oldest, Douglas, brought along five of his six kids. They all seemed to be about the same age. Seven or so. A bunch of tadpoles. No one was asking where the sixth one was. Doug had broken his good foot and was on crutches. Then there was Art, the youngest of Alice's family, widowed, a St. Christopher's medal and a cross around his neck, each on a separate silver chain and hanging outside his T-shirt for the world to see. He was our mother's little brother by more than ten years.

Ally had asked to come with me. We lived up in Toledo. She was our only child, was a kid who was squared up to the world, who was actually good company in ten or twelve different ways. I was thinking she chose to tag along because our dog was struggling, congestive heart failure, unable to tolerate Lasix, her heart, as the vet put it, unhappy on the drug, her kidneys unhappy off it. Ally didn't want to face the fact of the dog's death.

But I was only guessing at Ally's motivation. She loved her grandmother, and we were all here because the word we got over the phone was

that there was a good chance Alice was not going to make it. She had been taken to Doctors Hospital up on the hill and then transferred to O'Bleness over in Athens. There had been some talk of Life Flight to Columbus.

Karen tapped my forearm to make sure I was listening, and she said, "We're all here because we're afraid we won't be in the poem if we're not present and accounted for."

More of her picking at our sister. Jennifer was a poet. She wrote books, and her poems were in magazines. She traveled to foreign countries to talk about her work

I said, "No one's thinking about poetry."

"Ask them," Karen said. "Go in there and ask them."

Karen tilted the Rolling Rock so she could eyeball how much was left, then spread wide the fingers on her hand, putting all of them and the thumb on display, like she was stopping traffic. She said, "That's reasons three, four, and five. The woman's a control freak." She polished off the beer and said, "You've seen that husband of hers, the man on his tiptoes twenty-four-seven and living the old joke: *how high? how high?* on the way up."

What they said around the university where Jennifer taught was she had a national reputation. She was famous in the way a poet can be. Not like Robert Frost so she would be reading for some president, but known in certain circles. Talked about. Growing up, we called her Jen. Not now. You didn't. No longer. There was a good chance you might lose your tongue. *Jen* is a gum-chewer's name. *Jen* is the name of one of those halfwits she teaches, the ones who pierce their lips and eyelids and noses, who take their parents' money and come to college to sit on their hands or spend class text-messaging each other. Karen called her F-hud, in honor of the Ph.D.

Her greeting when they met every time was "Hey, F-hud."

Like that.

She put the hardest of *d*'s on the word.

Jennifer, when she talked to you, kept bundling her hair up and flinging it back like it was annoying her, like it was whispering in her ear, distracting, like Jennifer was saying to it, *Later. We'll talk about this later. Not here. Not now.*

Jennifer left me out of the poem about our father's dying. Karen's in

it, arriving, cooking. Molly. Dad's two sisters, his one brother. All the husbands, uncles, even children. Not me.

I delayed when I got the call that Dad was in a coma. It came in the way that kind of news is supposed to arrive. The phone rang at 3 A.M. He had been ill about a year. His heart sputtering. Lesions on his lungs. He refused to quit smoking until even he recognized he had become a fire hazard. Last time I saw him on his feet, he was standing by my car, cradling an oxygen tank. His hair was long and tangled, unwashed, pasted in swirls above his ears. White.

He decided to die, and Jennifer assigned her husband, Barry, to telephone me. Jennifer told him to tell me I was to hurry home. I looked around my own house, at my sleeping wife, Julie, at our dog who was doing fine then. I thought about Ally asleep in her room. This was a few months ago. The dog's own turn toward death came one afternoon about a week before I got the call about Alice. I sent Buffy the dog out to do her duty, and she sat down in the backyard and looked around like she'd be damned if she could figure out what it meant to be alive. She blinked once hard and went to her knees. It was already cold, the hard air piercing, and I was standing at the slider waiting to let her in. I hurried out and gathered her up. Packed her to the house. I didn't really know it at the time but I was witness to the shit life can come to in one split second. She had had a stroke. That morning when my dad was dying, Barry, on the phone, 3 A.M., said, "They're thinking he won't last through the night. You'll need to hustle home." In the den off our bedroom, through an archway, dots of light on our two computers shone, fading in and out. I remember thinking, *Hustle? Hustle home? I am home.*

Hurry, or you'll miss your father's death.

My delay was cowardly. I was four, five hours away. Molly flew across the country and made it before he died. She traveled 1700 miles—first took a shuttle from her hometown, then hopped on a plane, then rented a car, and was sitting by our father's bed when he stopped breathing.

I took hours to pack. I ran errands once daylight came. I brewed coffee and sat and drank it. I delayed because I did not want to hear one more thing my father had to say in this world.

Not one more word from him.

Silence, please.

Which, at the time, didn't seem like too much to ask for.

Back then, when I told Karen I came late on purpose—we were sit-

ting on Alice's front porch after the funeral, sharing a cigarette even though both of us had quit, and Alice was inside, healthy then and feeding mourners—so when I told Karen, she said, "Yeah, well, you made an intelligent choice. If anything could have gotten him out of that bed, it would have been him sensing you in the room." She acted like she was sniffing the air, like she was our dad picking up on my scent. Karen put on the face our father would have put on. She was the spitting image of him. It was a look that let everyone within a mile of him know there was a wrong that needed to be righted. She said, "Had he gotten the smallest whiff of you, he would have rallied, and we'd still be dealing with the old jackass." She took a pull on our cigarette and said, "He got wind of your being around, and he would have crawled hand over hand out of that coma so he could get in the last word, and then where would we all be?"

Tonight, sitting across from me, Karen shook the empty Rolling Rock, folded her fingers so she left a fist in the air between us, and she said, "The law says you only need five good reasons and I've provided them." She unleashed one finger at a time, saying, "One, barfer. Two, money like it grows on trees. Three, control. Four, control. Five, control. You loading the pistol or am I?"

* * *

Early afternoon, a Sunday, Ally and I drove over to the hospital. The staff was dressed in Christmas duds. Too soon in the day for costumes. Like putting ice cream on breakfast cereal. Dress-up ought to come at night, if at all. In the entrance, near the information station, there was a Christmas tree, its cloth skirt trying hard to be snow. There were gifts underneath those lights that bubble. Funny how you could tell by looking at them that the boxes were empty. The lady at the front desk was wearing an elf hat. There was a Santa Claus pushing an old man in a wheelchair. We stopped at a table and, for a ten-dollar donation each, had Alice's and our dog's names printed on a ribbon and attached to lights on a Christmas tree in a waiting area. Love Lights—they were shaped like candles, a bulb for the flame.

Flora, a neighbor, was the one who found Alice walking down the middle of Tooth at six in the morning, thirty degrees out, and Alice was wearing a bathrobe. Frost on the lawns, a blue crust. Alice was barefoot. Had left her slippers on the porch. She was floating through a waltz that only she was hearing in her head, kept touching her hair, vamping, like

she was a movie star on the red carpet and the press was taking photographs. Like flashbulbs were popping. All this was the description Jennifer got from Flora. What Jennifer pieced together was that Alice had not eaten for at least three days. Even more of a problem was that she hadn't had anything to drink for long enough that she had a kidney infection. When the paramedics brought her in, her blood pressure was eighty over forty. Her temperature, one hundred and four.

Ally and I ran into Alice's doctor on his way out of her room. He was tall, six-three. Curly gray hair. A mouth like the knot on a necktie. He wore a goatee and half-glasses, the kind you buy off the rack at K-Mart, dime-sized lenses, like he used the glasses only to check his punctuation.

"We got lucky," he said. He crossed two fingers and tapped the air near his face, saying, "Thank God she left the house."

We met the night my mother was brought in. He told me then that she was in real danger. The blood pressure scary. The infection deadly. Now, when he said *We got lucky*, I was wondering if something else had come up? The infection was under control. Right? Her pressure was normal. Right? Had something else gone wrong?

He said, "Ten or fifteen minutes the other way, and I'm not sure we could have brought her out of it."

"But not new troubles?" I said.

"No, no," he said. "She's a fighter."

Ally slipped by the doctor—she wanted to get in to see her grandmother—and I shook his hand and said, "She's out of the woods for sure? Clear sailing?"

"We'll watch her a couple more days," he said.

A nurse was standing next to my mother, saying, "Smell the roses. Blow out the candles."

Alice looked right past her at Ally. There was a plastic machine in Alice's lap. It had an orange ball in one of its tubes, a short hose, and mouthpiece. Had to have something to do with breathing.

"Smell the roses," the nurse said to Alice.

My mother waved her off.

The nurse turned, saw Ally, then me, and was not pleased.

"Later," my mother said to the nurse. But then she breathed in deeply—*smell the roses*—and made a show of letting the air go—*blow out the candles*. Alice was being a good girl.

"Once more," the nurse said. She adjusted the plastic machine in

Alice's hands and said, "Smell the roses." Alice breathed in at its mouthpiece. The nurse said, "Blow out the candles," and Alice let her breath go. The orange ball rose and fell.

The nurse, on her way out, said to me, "She hasn't touched her food."

One of those tattletales on planet Earth. Where would we be without them? You got to have your record keepers. Otherwise life would go around and around and nobody would know when to get off.

My mother said directly to me, "Whatever I eat bounces."

Ally took hold of her hand. "Hey, Gram," she said.

"You're a sight for sore eyes," Alice said.

I said, "Doctor tells us you're going to stick around."

Alice said, "All I want is to be in my own house for Christmas."

I said, "I meant you're not getting your wings yet."

"So he says."

Her TV, mounted high up on the wall and in a corner, was showing a Cavalier game. Pro basketball, a replay of last night's loss. The sound off. One of the players stepped to the line for a foul shot. He had spider webs tattooed on his shoulders and biceps and a Chinese-looking letter on his neck. Alice kept one eye on the game. Her hair was combed. It had the swoop I was used to seeing in it. She had recovered enough to put on her make-up.

"You've seen the kid play for real?" Alice said to me.

I told her I had. I had driven over to Cleveland for a couple of games, and on a business trip out West I caught a free night and saw the Cavs in Salt Lake City. They whipped the Jazz. The kid, LeBron James, went for thirty.

She said, "I can't keep his name in my head."

I told her what it was.

"You're right," she said. "So handsome a young man. A smile like that—the ladies. He'll need bodyguards. What can he really know about being grown up?"

I gave her the best hug I could under the circumstances. She couldn't take her eyes off the game. "The tall one," she said, "he looks like one of those foreign players. All his weight in the lower half."

"He's got a wide butt," Ally said.

"For rebounding," Alice said. "And the legs. Beef to the heels, we used to say. Rhino thighs."

"Illgauskus," I said. "He's Russian or Romanian, I think."

She said, "That sounds right." She squirmed in her bed, and I helped slide her toward the headboard and sit up taller. Ally adjusted the pillows. Alice put on her eyeglasses. They had a blue tint to them. She said, "Ill-whatever his name is looks like he should be raising chickens for a living."

"He's good," I said.

She said, "Maybe, but he's not pretty to watch."

I said, "Pretty to watch counts."

"More than dollars and cents," Alice said.

"There's a saying," I said. "They say, 'He plays ugly.'"

"Amen," Alice said.

I said, "It's a compliment."

I positioned a chair so I could sit and see the game, and Ally moved so she didn't have to twist around to watch. She kept Alice's hand in hers. The Cavs were giving away a fifteen-point lead. Taking bad shots. Not rebounding. Not running the floor. Nothing the three of us sitting here in the hospital could do to help.

Alice broke our spell, glanced at me and said, "You could play."

Ally looked from her to me.

"Your father could shoot like it was target practice," Alice said to Ally.

I said, "I played like a fish can deal cards."

"He got offers," my mother said. "People were going to give him money to come to their college."

My daughter had heard all this. It was family history. Ally said, "And he gave it all up to work in a factory fourteen hours a day breaking up steel, seven days a week, giving his wages to Grandpa so there'd be firewood come winter and crops come summer."

Alice's face came alive. My mother appreciated Ally's spunk. She could see Ally had what it took to manufacture a spot for herself in this world. The kid had a sense of humor and trusted the adults to get it. Such a gift you can't teach. Alice said, "The real truth is he gave all that up because he found out he was too slow and he couldn't get his shot off."

"Could he jump?"

"This high." Alice showed about an inch between her thumb and forefinger.

"You two having fun?" I said.

They were.

"Your grandfather," Alice said to Ally, "he hated sports."

This was news to Ally. Not to me. I had had this conversation before. I had lived it.

"I couldn't even watch them on TV," Alice said. "He'd come into the room, stand and gawk at the television, then walk out like I'd offered him slop for dinner. But just leaving wasn't enough. He'd storm out of the house. He'd crash around in the yard, making so much noise I had to turn the TV completely off, not because I couldn't hear but because having it on wasn't worth it."

Ally, I could see, didn't want to say anything against her grandfather.

Alice said, "My father, he was the coach. He was a different man from your grandfather. You walked around town, and people'd call my dad Coach. Not by his name. Never his name. They'd say, Coach." Alice was focused on the game. The Cavs' lead had been cut to two. She said, "He hauled me along to games when I was a girl. When I was no more than a kid you toted around." The Cavs turned the ball over and lost their lead on a fast break. Alice said, "Your great-granddad took the high school team to Chicago to play for the national title."

We watched the game until I thought Alice was asleep. I gave Ally a look that said maybe we should go. Somehow Alice sensed our plan. Her eyes still closed, she said, "William, pitch that, would you?"

Nothing to pitch. No tissues. No plastic cups. No straws. I thought maybe she was in a dream.

"The food," she said. "I can smell it. It's turning my stomach."

The cart her hospital meal sat on had been pushed away from the bed but was still close to her face. She hadn't touched what I could see of the food. Toast, jello, and milk. The main course was still covered.

"Please, dear," she said.

I took the tray and stepped outside her room. Three women at the nurses' station, two in scrubs, one in an outfit Little Bo-Peep would have worn, saw me and ducked themselves back into their tasks. It wasn't their job to haul food around. I came over and put the tray on the counter. Not one of them looked at me.

I said, "Merry Christmas."

I got back to the room and Ally was leaned in close so that my mother was whispering to her. Then Alice kissed Ally high on the forehead. Ally came around the end of the bed, saying, "We can go now."

Alice said to me, "I fought like tigers." She made a fist in her lap exactly like the one Karen had made back at the house our first night here.

I said, "Your doctor says you did."

Alice said, "Tell Jennifer to put the poem on the back burner. Tell her to wait until I'm in the ground for sure."

I gave Alice a hug and said, "The poem's on hold."

I was wondering what this was all about—her not eating, her not drinking to the point of self-destruction. Her courting death. Was this somehow about my father in a psychological way? His dying? Her missing him?

Ally said to her, "We'll come back later."

In the hallway, we passed three of Santa's helpers and one guy who was wearing cloth antlers, the kind people put on dogs. The elevator we caught started to close its doors and then reopened, and there were two men standing beside a gurney. Everything about them said mortician. They were escorting a body covered with a patchwork quilt. One man was bald and the other one looked like his bird had barbered his hair. He wore a sweater vest under his suit coat. It had reindeer on it. He said, "Do you mind if we ride down with you?"

I said, "No problem."

He said, "The one we're supposed to take is broken and it'll be tomorrow before it's fixed."

Ally said, "Sad." She was studying the quilt like she was trying to figure the stitching out. You could see she wanted to touch it.

The bald guy said, "It is."

* * *

Ally and I were crossing the parking lot, and she said, "I'm beginning to think that HBO and its bizarre TV shows might have its finger on the pulse that is American life. One absurdity follows another only to be followed by another one."

My little girl was smart as a whip and had just floored me. Unlike so many kids she saw through the strange to the other side, which was: The beat goes on. Somebody dies, the elevator breaks down, there's a detour. You think you've left death behind. Next minute—don't hold your breath, you run into death around the corner.

I started the car and said, "What were you and Alice whispering about?"

And Ally said, "If I told you, it would spoil it."

Sounded fair to me.

We got about half way back to Nelsonville, Ally quiet the whole way, and then she said, "I can tell you part of what she told me."

I said, "If you want."

Ally said, "Gram said that Grandpa was a blowhard and that if I was ever to see you putting on your blowhard shoes and socks I was to say the magic word."

I gave her a look, and she said, "Cross my heart."

I said, "What's the magic word?" and she said, "That's the part I can't tell you."

"But I'll know it when I hear it."

"Let's hope so."

A few minutes before midnight, and I was sitting in Alice's front living room when my cell phone rang. Only the television was on, no lights, and I hadn't pulled the curtains. In front of me, stuck to the big window that looked out on Tooth, was a zig-zag of wide clear tape Alice had used to fix a crack that ran from top to bottom. Dad would not have tolerated such a slipshod way of doing things. Frost whitened the tape's edges. Karen was out, hunting coyote for all I could imagine. Molly and Ally were asleep upstairs.

I checked the caller I.D. "Hey," I said to Julie.

She said, "Somehow I imagined you'd be up, a TV on, no sound, sort of and sort of not watching Sports Center."

I said, "The Cavs managed to lose again."

"How'd the twelve-year-old kid do?"

"Good. He did good. He's playing like a pro."

Mostly, I told her, I was listening to the noise the radiators made. The long one under the window sounded like a music box. Each time the boiler kicked in, it chimed.

My wife said, "I'm watching the Weather Channel and I'm on e-Bay."

I said, "Storm Stories?"

She said, "Right now it's Your Local on the Eights. But they're doing a tornado next. They're teasing us with a story about a dog that survived a monster twister and found its way home one hundred years later."

"Was it limping?"

"Of course. One paw up. And it was emotionally damaged."

I said, "You winning anything on e-Bay?"

"I'm bidding on a box and waiting on the snipers to hit at the last minute. It's at seven dollars right now."

"How bad do you want it?"

"Enough to be sitting here," she said. "Some hotshot named Boxed-In is after it, too."

I said, "Boxed-In sounds like serious competition."

I asked her how Toledo was, and she said, "It's snowing. There's that light outside that happens when it snows. You know what I mean, how it brightens the curtains?"

I said, "Like the earth has turned on its footlights."

"That's it," she said.

"One of the good things about life," I said.

I asked how the dog was doing, and my wife said, "She's here by me on a pad. I try not to but I keep counting her respiration, and it's too fast. Her chest is rising and falling a mile a minute."

Julie already knew my mother was going to make it. We had talked about the fact that nobody could figure out what happened. Had she been trying to kill herself? Your body won't let you not eat, will it? Not eating—you could make some kind of explanation for, but not drinking, no water or coffee or a Coke, you had to plan that. You had to do battle to accomplish it. Thirst didn't go away.

You couldn't simply forget.

I told Julie I thought Ally was doing fine, and then I described the erotic dream I had fallen into while I was sitting here half asleep. We—Julie and me—were driving through a town I didn't recognize. It was late, the sun had set. It was a small Ohio place, tunnels of trees, skinny brick streets, and I was driving real slow. Cautious. There was a roundabout, filled with flowers, a statue of a soldier in the middle of it. She climbed over and got between me and the steering wheel so she was facing me and we were making love like that while I drove. I said, "Probably isn't enough room, would you think?"

She said, "Are you calling me fat?"

Had me there. I said, "There's probably only a few inches to fit in."

She said, "It's surprising what people can do when they put their collective minds to it."

I granted her that. I said, "But still."

She said, "Sounds like you might be missing me."

That I was.

I said, "Can I, at times, be a blowhard?"

Nothing from her end. I did hear her tapping at the computer. Then she said, "You can be." She put some kindness in her voice.

I said, "Ally tells me there's a magic word that will stop me when I get headed down that road. Do you know what that word would be?"

Some more silence. Her thinking. Then: "Probably."

I said, "Something you women keep to yourselves?"

Julie said, "That and a lot of other stuff."

I said, "But you know the word?"

She said, "If I don't, I'll make it up."

* * *

I was checking the doors before I hit the sack and noticed, on the dining room table, a pile of Christmas cards Alice must have been writing on before she got sick. There were a couple of sheets of holly stamps. The cards didn't seem like the kind she would buy. These looked like they came from Dollar General. One had a cartoon reindeer on it, standing up on its hind legs and pointing at Santa and saying, "Hold it, Muffin Man! One more of those and your sleigh ain't going nowhere." Santa was eyeing a muffin on a plate that was balanced on his belly. Inside, my mother had written a note in red ink: "A joyous Advent season and a healthy, happy New Year 2004—and peace for our world, please grant, O Lord." There was an asterisk next to the A of Advent. At the bottom was the matching asterisk and she had handwritten an explanation: "Advent begins the Christian Church calendar as the secular one ends its year—then comes Epiphany Jan 6 (Magi visit) till 40 days of Lent to Easter, Pentecost, then Ordinary time." And under her signature, she added, "Kinda zany Christmas cards but our Jennifer bought them for us to use. Ol' dad loves his muffins, alas . . . "

Us didn't surprise me. Seemed a natural mistake. Normal. *Ol' dad loves his muffins, alas . . .* did.

Ol'? *Ol' dad loves muffins, alas . . .*

Alas?

Whose language was this? Not Alice's. Her handwriting but not how she expressed herself.

I thought, *Ordinary time?*

I knew if I asked what to do with the cards Karen's vote would be *toss*

them, every single one. Out with the whole lot. Trash each and every one. Christmas was as good as over. Move on was how she would put it. Molly would vote to store them until Alice could think about it.

* * *

Ally and I took Karen to lunch at the Dairy Queen.

We ordered at a counter inside, got our drinks and a number, then found a booth. Karen looked around and said, "I invited Jennifer, but her halo was in the dryer and she couldn't leave it unattended." Karen had pulled her hair into a ponytail. Her face looked like it was about to bloom.

Across from us in a section where large groups could sit and party was Doug and his truckload of children. It was a double-wide booth. Uncle Art was at one end. Doug, at the other, his broken foot in the aisle. Kids were crawling up and around and over the seats and the table, the floor. Made you think of bees at a hive.

Karen said, "You know why the wife's not with him?"

I said, "She's probably looking after number six. You have that many children, at least one of them has to be sick every day of the week."

"Sick doesn't stop her. She'd haul a sick kid along," Karen said. "She's pregnant out to here." She showed us where here was. "The goal seems to be one a year."

Our order came up, and I sent Ally for the food.

"For God's sake," Karen said. "He ought to tie it off, and she ought to put a cork in it." She studied me hard, then said, "Don't say it."

"What?"

"You were going to say 'In all fairness.'"

"I don't say things like that."

"Yup. You do."

Not even an hour ago, out on the back porch of Alice's, Karen had climbed into Jennifer's face and was saying, "Fuck you. Fuck you." I came late to the argument and still didn't know what it was about. Jennifer opened her mouth to speak, and Karen occupied it and all the space between them, saying, "Fuck you." She wouldn't let Jennifer get one word out. It was like Karen had wadded up a wool blanket and was hell bent on smothering Jennifer with it.

Ally returned, handing me and Karen fries. She had a burger for herself.

Karen said, "Your dad says things like 'in all fairness,' doesn't he?"

Ally said, "You do, Dad. You say 'in all fairness' and 'on the other hand.' It's like what you're saying has been written out before you put words to it. You say—"

"And this is bad?" I said. "'In all fairness.' This is a bad thing to say?"

"Fuck, yes," Karen said. She held a fry in the air and said, "The man—Doug, not you—doesn't even have a job. Six kids, no job—you do the math. Fairness is not an issue."

"You're working too hard to be the outlaw," Ally said to Karen. We looked at Ally—where was this coming from?—and she said, "Jennifer's poetry is powerful." What had Ally brought down on herself? She was deliberately stepping out from under a rock to take on the enemy when she could have remained hidden. "We need poetry," Ally said. "The arts cancel the facts that wear us down."

Karen said, "Stubborn facts, they say."

"Beauty doesn't need fact," Ally said.

"Beauty? Jesus," Karen said. "Give me a break."

My daughter—*Hold your own* was my quick and tidy prayer for her.

Karen said, "Please don't start chanting at me. I have a headache." She sipped her Coke and said, "You're not going to talk in haiku and you're not going to twist yourself into yoga right here, are you?"

Ally didn't need me or my prayer. She said, "Haiku, mantra, poem. Rhythm and sound. Hymns, the Psalms. Lyric and form. It's how we stand up and be counted. It's making something in the world as much as building a house is. It's what little we have left of grace."

"Beauty, now grace?"

"Grace."

"How old are you?"

"Fifteen."

"Jennifer and grace, this is what you're saying? You lumping the two of them together?"

"Jennifer and grace."

"Whose party line are you feeding us?" Karen said. "Let me guess. AP English. Am I right? All the goody two-shoes sitting in a circle and *sharing* their big ideas." She made one of her hands talk. Managed to make it angry above the table, hanging in the air. She said, "Some school teacher preaching about the real world like she's part of it. Yak. Yak. Yak. A bill of goods. Claptrap."

"All else is stupor," Ally said.

"Stupor?"

"Stupor."

Karen said, "She Fed-Exs her books to me. Fed-Ex? Give me a break. Like I'm standing at the front window, ants in my pants, waiting on the delivery of her poems."

Ally quoted what sounded like poetry.

"Jennifer's?" I said.

"It is," Ally said.

"What are you?" Karen said. "You're made up to look fifteen, to look like a teenager, but you're so smart and full of deep-water b.s. you can't keep it to yourself?" She folded her arms in front of her. She said, "If the next word I hear is anything like transcendence, I'm gone."

I was about to say "In all fairness"—as a joke, to lighten things up, but bit off the words.

Karen said, "Fed-Exing poetry. What is that? Poems she writes like columns in a newspaper." Karen acted like she was squeezing space together in front of her, and she said, "Squished together words, and they go on and on. Four pages. Five pages. What can you say in a column of words that you can't say in a normal way? What can you say that would matter or count because you've changed the way it's printed?"

Jennifer had also sent her books to me. Fed-Exed them. And I had not read even one all the way through. I tried. I would start at the front. Read a few lines. I'd skip pages. Dip in. Read lines. And give up. My wife read all of them cover to cover. I would be eating, and Julie would come in and read a poem to me. She told me the poetry was funny in ways Jennifer wasn't in real life.

Karen said, "And nature, like it's our pal. Scares the bejesus out of me that someone is writing like trees give a hoot who we are. Elms, and maples, and hyacinths. What you just quoted, for example. Fucking apple blossoms. Buttercups. Sagebrush. Give me a fucking break. She spends her entire life in Ohio and then one week out in Nevada and comes back like she's an expert on the desert. The desert is a fucking killer, if you want usable information. If you want a word to the wise." Karen tapped her nose. She said, "The desert is not our consort. It has no feelings. Or if it does, it hates us. It is not transcendent. It isn't there to teach us a lesson unless you think death is worth your time."

Art and Doug were looking over. The kids had stopped crawling in

and out of the booth. One of Doug's boys came limping around a corner, using Doug's crutches as best he could.

Karen said to them, "It's all in the family. Go back to feeding your faces." She lowered her voice for us, said, "She talks about the desert like it's a breast. A breast? What is that? How do you come up with crap like that?"

"She's the family's real outlaw," Ally said.

"Because she can't write a complete sentence? Because she thinks four words side by side account for this world?" Karen got to her feet. Ready to leave. I started collecting our trash. She said, "What proofed you,/your debut? The button,/the stock you married./Welt? Peach? Ash?"

I recognized the words. They opened the poem Jennifer wrote about our father's dying. I didn't, when I first read it, pretend to understand the words in the way you're supposed to go deeper into poems. Not now either. But what Jennifer had written was clearly and in a precise and exact way about my father. It was him in a nutshell.

Karen said, "She got that right. Score one for Jennifer."

Karen understood. Ally understood. I didn't. I thought about what Alice had written: "Ol' dad loves his muffins, alas . . ."

There was some poetry in that.

Jennifer put everyone in the poem but me. I remember these lines: "Molly flew coach/and arrived/like ice."

Jennifer left me out.

It was her job to punish me. It was her job to make sure I paid for my—

My what? My negligence. My stubbornness. My absence.

My anger.

My disrespect.

Carelessness.

Karen, Ally, and I walked out of the DQ single file, Ally two steps ahead of us, Karen talking to my back, saying, "Your daughter sounding like this, her talking about grace and beauty, that's reason enough to shoot F-hud."

We reached the parking lot, and Karen said, "Here's some poetry for you." She was talking loudly. She said, "Line one, *Fuck you.* Line two, *Fuck you.* Line three, *Fuck you.*" She opened the back door to the car and said, "Repeat for five pages."

We were pulling onto 33, and she said, "Title it Jennifer."

* * *

Alice said, "Your sister can be a real pill." She had been home for a couple of days, and we were walking up Tooth toward the Y in the railroad tracks, Alice dressed like she was going to lunch with pals. We bundled her up in a coat. It came to her ankles, was cranberry, and her scarf was purple. Her dress, blue. She spent an hour dressing. Her friend Bobbie had come by and done her hair. Alice wore gym shoes for the footing they gave her.

"Which one?" I said.

"True," she said. "You're right."

"Not Molly," I said.

"No, not Molly. Heavens no," she said. "Is she talking yet?"

It was the family joke. Molly said so little we kept at her about it, kept testing to see if she could speak. Her nickname at one time was Littlesaid.

Alice said, "But those other two. Oil and water."

"Dynamite and a match," I said.

"Who's dynamite?" she said. "Who's the match?"

I didn't know.

I had the poodles on leashes. Alice left the hospital with a walker but put it in the closet by the front door and hadn't touched it since. Yesterday we made it halfway to the old depot. Our goal today was the corner where Cristy's stood.

Alice said, "I guess it depends on which pill you want to take."

Art cruised by in his truck and tooted his so-long. He was headed home to Circleville. Earlier I walked in on him and Alice in the room she used for an office. She was handing Art a check.

Now, here on the street, I said, "It's none of my business, but what's up with Art?"

"Like you said," Alice said, "it's none of your business."

She was, of course, right.

Alice said, "Let the devil dance in his pocket was what your father used to say. He wouldn't give his own mother a dollar on her death bed."

I said, "Who's next, Doug?" Couldn't help myself.

She touched her nose, which—our entire family understood this—meant that I was to keep mine out of her business. It meant, Not one more word on the subject.

Karen and Jennifer were back at the house, Karen packing to leave, Jennifer cleaning the kitchen. Ally was with them. Molly had driven over to Parkersburg, but she was going to stay with Alice for a couple of weeks.

We u-turned slowly at the corner, and Alice came to a halt before we started back. Part of Cristy's parking lot had been used to sell Christmas trees. There was ragged lettering on a piece of plywood. Red letters and a white background. TREES CUT & DUG. The old loading dock was to our left. You could imagine what the town had been like early on. Think about an old 1930s movie. Travelers coming and going, everybody dressed in their finest duds, the women in hats, men in three-piece suits and fedoras no matter how hot it was. People from all over arriving for a night at Stuart's Opera House. Coming to see a minstrel show or hear a lecture. A play. Roosevelt once spoke on the steps of Dew Hotel.

Alice and I were walking and talking about the Cavaliers when we saw Jennifer's husband coming up Tooth from the other direction. It was clear he was in a hurry. The man drove an El Camino he had paid a stranger to restore. It was mint and none of his doing. You've got to wonder where pride figures in that kind of an equation. He parked against the traffic and was up Alice's stoop in two strides.

Alice took my arm so we would stop, and she said, "Let's watch the fireworks from here."

Out of the house came Jennifer. She was wearing what looked like a cloak the way it flew out behind her. She was tossing around that hair of hers. Barry was next but got stuck holding the screen door open because Karen was standing so he couldn't shut it. The sunlight on Jennifer, the pillars that held the roof up, the way Jennifer was stomping across the length of the porch—it was all a kind of flickering. She took the stairs in choppy steps. Karen was yelling. Jennifer was yelling. From where we stood, they sounded like an old gramophone. We couldn't make out what they were shouting about. Ally came from around the side of the house where the garage was and stopped in the yard.

In the street, Jennifer fumbled in her purse and came up with a cell phone.

It was like we were watching a skit called anger.

I said, "I better—" and Alice shushed me. She held my arm tighter. We were to stay right where we were. The neighbors across from Alice's wandered out onto their porch. People were drifting into their yards. A dog did start to bark, probably that pit bull. Barry hadn't moved. He was

holding the screen open, and Jennifer was punching numbers into her phone. Then Karen was down the steps, rushing at Jennifer, and Barry was doing a two-step and the tango and skipping rope trying to get between them.

They all stopped, and they looked over at Ally. She raised her arms high as if she might bring the heavens down on them, as if she might shake the sky like a rug and drop it over the scene. Jennifer, Karen, Barry—they stared at her.

Karen retreated to the house, and Jennifer shoved past her husband and climbed into the El Camino. He seemed baffled, glued to the ground. He was wearing white tennis shoes. In the car, Jennifer had the cell phone to her ear. Barry glanced at Ally, and then he got in and drove toward us. They didn't even hesitate. They sailed past, Jennifer on the phone, Barry staring straight ahead.

Ally came walking up the street. Behind her, Karen hustled down the front steps, threw her suitcase into the back seat of her Camry, and backed out of the driveway. She came in our direction. Did stop. She lowered the passenger's side window and said to Alice, "I'll call you later." She rolled her eyes at me, letting me know how pissed she was.

Later, when she phoned, she told me that, at one point, she and Jennifer passed through the pantry, and Jennifer bumped her shoulder. Junior high stuff. In the end, Karen heard one word more than she could take, and she trapped Jennifer in a corner in the kitchen. Not more than a foot away, she flipped Jennifer off, put the big finger in her mug, and said, "Write a poem about that."

Alice and me and Ally, we watched Karen turn toward Canal Street, and then we got ourselves in gear. We were about to the house, and Alice again took my arm. The three of us stopped. My count was at least ten neighbors still rubbernecking from their windows. Alice was looking between houses and toward Knoter's Hill and its ridge east of town. There, winter having stripped the trees, was Betty's cross. You could see it rising out of the woods. Sixty, seventy feet high and thirty or so across, it was made of steel and aluminum and painted white. Everyone in Nelsonville knew its history. At night, the cross was lit from underneath. You couldn't miss it. Mr. Walter Schwartz erected it as a memorial to his wife, Elizabeth Smith.

We could see the top third of it from where we stood on Tooth. Alice said, "You know what your dad said about the cross?"

I'd heard him on it. He threatened to blow it up.

Alice mimicked my dad. Dead-on perfect. She said, "'You got to show off like that means you got something up your sleeves you don't want the people to be asking about.'"

I said, "At least he didn't blow it up."

"Not that he didn't try," Alice said.

I studied her. I said, "I know he talked about it. Did he try?"

"He got drunk one night, him and Martin Daws."

"You're kidding."

"Cross my fingers and—"

I said, "Don't say it."

She said, "His friend Jack Staff talked the two of them out of it."

Ally said, "There's a part of me wishes he'd done it."

Delight lit Alice up. She looked better than she had since coming out of the hospital. She said, "Me, too."

We had reached the driveway. The pit bull had quit barking, and the neighbors had retreated. Alice said, "I'm thinking I'm going to sell the house."

I said, "You're serious?"

"I think so. Yes. I am."

"You'd sell your house?"

"And never look back."

"You're welcome to come live with us," I said.

Ally said, "You could, Gram. We'd love it."

Alice said, "In Toledo, Ohio? Isn't that like trading a lump of coal for a lump of coal?"

I told her there were worse places, but the three of us knew better.

She said, "You remember Nadine from number 16?"

I did. If Nadine wasn't pregnant, one of her six daughters was, and it was hard to tell them apart. Seemed like there were always at least three women sitting on the glider on their front porch, each one holding a baby, each one wearing the same dress as the other ones.

Alice said, "She's got a condo on Johnson Road, and she tells me there is one available. You pay a fee, and they take care of the yard and anything else that goes wrong. I think I'm going to jump at the chance."

We were standing right in front of the house appraising it when Alice said, "I hear the fire department buys homes and burns them to the ground for the practice."

Later, I asked Ally what she had said to break up the fight, and she told me she couldn't remember exactly. Mostly it amounted to her being louder than they were and saying, "Look at yourselves."

I asked her what started it.

And Ally said, "It was a given, wasn't it? You leave those two alone and you're lucky one isn't at the mortuary right now."

Like I said, my daughter, for her, puzzles fell into place easier than for most.

* * *

Next morning, Alice and I were sitting at her dining room table. She was shuffling through the Christmas cards she hadn't mailed and the ones she hadn't finished writing in. She said, "I ought to send them anyway. Belated holiday wishes."

I showed her the card I had read, fat Santa, the reindeer, the muffin. I said, "This isn't like you."

She said, "What isn't?"

"The cheap card," I said. "What you wrote."

She reread the note. She said, "It was a question on *Jeopardy!* The category had to do with religion, and I got interested, so I did some reading." She handed me another card she had written, the same reindeer and Santa, this one to the Comptons who lived in Chauncey. Her note was about Hanukkah. She wrote *Chanukah* in parentheses. Her message was about the miracle of the flask of olive oil and the lighting of the Great Menorah in the Temple. "Once the Jews defeated the Greeks," she wrote, "they had to purify the Temple. But they found only one flask of oil with the seal of the High Priest; it was enough to light the Menorah for only one day, but the light burned for the eight days needed to cleanse the Temple." Alice had placed an asterisk next to the word Menorah, and in a corner of the card she explained what one was, the eight branches, the eight candles, the lighting of one each night of Hanukkah. A double asterisk next to the word "lighting" noted that you start at the far right and move to the left, but you light left to right as the days go along.

I said, "Is there a reason you sent this to the Comptons?"

"I didn't plan it," she said. "I wrote the cards and then later added who they went to."

One, this to a family I didn't know, explained Kawanzaa, its roots in African harvest festivals, its use of candles, and the seven principles, the

Nguzo Saba—listed under another asterisk—celebrated during the seven days of Kawanzaa. Other cards explained Ramadan, St. Patrick's Day, All Souls Day. She showed me her list of other religious holidays. Each had a personal note written underneath it. She said, "I learned all this curious information and I wanted to pass it along."

I said, "Why?"

She said, "Because I didn't know it before and maybe they didn't know it. Understanding never hurt anybody."

That made sense to me. None of it sounded like what a woman who wanted to die would be doing. I said, "Does this have anything to do with what happened to you?"

"With 'the incident'?" Alice said. She put imaginary sarcastic quotes in the air around the words.

I said, "Jennifer's name for it, the incident?"

Alice said, "Be sure to add 'What happened to Mother.'" She hung more quotes up like those stick-on hooks you put on a wall.

I told her she hadn't answered my question.

She said, "I can't answer your question. I don't know why there was 'the incident.'" More quotes. These tired ones. She got up and walked into the kitchen.

I was reading about Ramadan, and Alice returned and said, "All's well with you?"

"You can see Ally's flying right," I said.

She said, "And you and Julie?"

I told her about me and my wife. We were doing fine. I brought up the dog. Alice's poodles were on their pads here in the room. "The dog could be dead for all I know," I said. "She might have died during the night." I hadn't phoned Julie yet today.

My mother looked at her poodles. She said, "The condo takes dogs. That's no problem."

"You're really selling?"

Alice picked up one of the Christmas cards. Looked at it. She collected all of them into a stack and placed the cards inside a box, fit the lid to it. A sadness settled on her.

I opened the box, removed the cards, and said, "Let's send these."

Delight again.

She was addressing envelopes, and I was stamping them, when she looked around the house and said, "Your father will kill me."

"If you sell the place?"

"If I do."

I waited for her to say "alas." From where we sat, we could see into the living room. My father's chair, the one he spent his life riding, was facing the TV. We hadn't pulled the curtains, and a Christmas tree from across the street was reflected in Alice's front window. Its lights were blinking.

She said, "He will barehanded dig himself out of his grave and kill me."

I didn't reach Julie until about one in the morning. She was on e-Bay. The dog had died early in the afternoon, and she had taken her out to be cremated. It was the weekend, and we would have to wait until Monday to pick up her ashes. Julie bought a ceramic pot for the remains. She wondered if I would be back by then, and I told her that I thought Ally and I would leave in the morning. "Which is today," I said. "In a few hours."

"Your mother's doing all right?"

"She's giving money to anyone who needs it, and she's talking rationally."

"So she's her feisty self again?"

"I think so."

"But can she make do alone?"

"Molly is staying a couple of weeks."

"Good. Molly's a rock."

There was the first line for Jennifer's poem. I thought I'd write it out. Leave it behind. *Molly's a rock.*

I said to Julie, "Karen might kill Jennifer or Jennifer might kill Karen. It depends on who gets the draw on the other one."

Julie said, "Same old story, then. Since the beginning of time."

"You mean Cain and Abel?"

"Men. Women. It's all the same."

I said, "Alice is talking about selling the house. There's a condo available."

"It's about time."

"She's afraid Dad will kill her if she does."

"He'll try. He'll try real hard."

I listened to the radiators play their tunes. If anyone could rise from

the dead, it would be my father. If anybody could resurrect himself, it would be Dad.

I said to Julie, "Is there a magic word I could give Alice?"

She stopped typing on the computer keys. An hour, or a day, or a year passed, and she said, "I can't think of one."

I said, "Our daughter's going to need one too. For the dog."

"She'll eventually need one for more than that, but you're right."

I said, "We all will, I guess. That's what I hear."

She said, "True enough."

I said, "I got it wrong about my father."

"You got what wrong?"

"About coming here," I said. "Whatever it took to get here before he died, I owed him that. Instead, I fiddled around. Who knows what could have happened?"

"You think you two might have found your own magic words to say to each other?"

"If I had been here," I said. "If I'd gotten my act together."

She said, "Time for one of those reality checks. He was in a coma."

I said, "They say people in comas understand what you say."

Julie said, "Here's what I want you to do right now." I could tell she had gotten up and was walking with the cordless. She said, "Stand on your feet like I am. Go on. Wipe that look from your face and get off your duff."

I did.

She said, "Are you up?"

I told her I was standing tall, and she said, "Go outside to where the car is."

I said, "It's freezing out there," and she told me not to be hard-headed. She teased me about being a wimp. So I stepped outside.

She said, "Let me hear that screen squeak." So I held the phone next to it and opened and closed the screen. She said, "You're going to get in the car." I told her I was walking down the porch steps, that I was seeing my breath every step of the way, and she said, "Poor baby."

I said, "What if the car's frozen shut?"

She said, "It won't be."

I got the door open, and I climbed in. I told her I was in, was sitting behind the steering wheel, and she said, "Turn the engine on and don't talk until the inside is toasty."

I obeyed.

Complete silence. Up the street was the Christmas Tree sign and its ugly lettering. Too far away to see, but I knew what it said. TREES CUT & DUG.

"Don't talk," Julie said.

I waited until the car was warm. The windows began to fog up. I said, "Okay. It's like an oven in here."

She said, "You know me. Is it warm enough for me?"

It was.

She said, "Now, what you've got to figure out is if there is enough room for that fantasy of yours to come true."

Made me laugh out loud.

"There's the key," Julie said. "There's your answer."

Jonah in the Belly

Lon Young

So this is how you'll preserve
me, Lord? in a slosh of brine?
Go ahead, though I've borne no fruit, torn
loose from my roots and gone my own way.
I should be plunging through the vast black
deep like a spoiled melon dropped overboard.
But your bowels were moved;
You rinsed and wombed me.

How long till I sour in this reeling
vat of guts? My cries rendered blubber-deaf
against the rushing of great waters.
A pulse in my brain, a breach of trust.
Once I grasped the tongue of your thunder.
This is no cellar, but the belly of hell.

What have I fled?

Take me back. I taste it now; I taste the salt
even of Ninevah and her people, and tears for them
in gales, in flood. It is enough
that you regard them.
Save me, Lord.
I've swallowed my pride and softened the bones
of my skull until it's as supple as a gourd
sprung new in the night.

On Reading a Blank Page

David Clark Knowlton

I once sat on a plateau's edge
It began on my back, with updrafts.
They rose along the white escarpment.

No relief, my eyes
Could not grasp its on and on.

I felt the filling of a sandwich:
No mustard, no lettuce, just me.

So I sat. Wind rustled up my shirt,
Brushed my face, and snarled my hair.
At least there was difference.

"Young man. Yes. Please come in.
This room with books and papers
Overfilling chairs and couch
Is my study. You can see I have
A great light from the north
Burning through that window.
It makes words stand out from the page
Like trees against a cliff.

"So, yes. Please tell me about yourself?
Why have you come from Utah
To this town in Bolivia
Where it seems the miners
Are either on strike
Or dancing in bejeweled
Masks of the Devil and St. Michael?
Please, please sit down. No, just move
Those books off to the side.
The maid will bring tea presently.

"Now, young man. Tell me, tell me
All about yourself. It is not often
Blond boys come to my door,

"Especially not dressed in suits.
Although I must confess you
Could use a better tailor.

"Tell me what brings you here
So far from home like a
Migrating butterfly. With that tie
You could be a monarch.
What brings you here
So removed from the paths of your kind
Like a blue and purple insect
Blown by a hurricane
From its flight path?

"No, wait. Before you open those pamphlets,
I know something that will break the ice.
It is the best way to know someone
Deeply and profoundly in a short time
Yes. Young man. It will work
Please, please tell me what vices you practice.

"It is always best to know the dark things
Of a man's heart and mind
In contradiction is light and truth."

How do I know a plane,
When I sit and sit
Where it breaks into space?

I want to know it, but there are no stains,
No tears, no rips in its reflecting surface.
How do I make a map to return?

"I don't get this reading.
It makes my head hurt.
Why can't they write
In simple English
So everyone can understand!

"I am a simple person.
I do not plan to think
Complex sentences.
I am straightforward,
Literal, and pragmatic.

"What does he mean
'there is nothing but difference'?
I mean you should just
Say what you mean directly.

"Life is a straight line from birth to death.
If you just hold to that stainless steel
You get to where there is no
Contradiction and only peace.

"I am tired of this prose.
It goes nowhere.
What does he want?"

Like a winter fog, this gleaming plateau:
If I drive into it, how do I know
Another car in my lane won't be going slow,

And we'll crash? Maybe one comes up fast
Hits me in the rear and
Throws me into another plane.

I need perspective,
I need to break the plane apart,
To know its sleeves from its collar.

"No vice! Harrumph! Even one as young as you
Has had time to cultivate a vice or two.
Maybe you think impure thoughts. Maybe
You relieve tension in a burst
Of shaking in the night. Maybe you like sports
Too much or maybe you hide in books.
I think you must not
Tell yourself the truth. Surely it is a pretense,
This vicelessness of yours. You are like a poem
That speaks of love and passion but means
Enmity and death. I must read
Between your words to know who you are.
You obviously do not know yourself.

"You are a strange being, Mr. Blond Utahn.
Your words make no sense. Life is to be filled
With vice and pleasures before the long,
Trackless plane of death."

Sheep Ranch Near Hillspring

Helen Walker Jones

She never speaks to him anymore. Her tongue
is as bone-dry as an irrigation ditch in winter,
her ankles grimy as a crooked ewe's. Dribbled
wine and spots of sour milk stain her blouse,
and now his lead sheep has given up the bell.

His wife's pantlegs dip ragged against the floor
as Hunter, her old Aussie dog, howls night for night
beside their window, duetting with the baby till its
mother bundles the infant close to her nipple. Such
polar Aprils—the rancher sees mirages of mermaids

riding pond-water billows, his lambs losing the snow
battle. By June, his wife has stooped to wearing his own
clothing: tattered army fatigues and denim overalls.
Dressed as a refugee, she spurns his affection. This
woman gave birth at home, clips and shears, mixes feed

and dungs out the pens, her breasts leaking milk onto her
camouflage tee shirt, the baby unsatisfied until her coming.
He—her husband—coasts through daylight hours,
doting on his trembling, newly shorn, pink-skinned
flock, hoping to outlast the slow-witted beasts.

Guest Room

Our children were conceived
in a carved maple bed sent
from Milwaukee on the train
by my husband's grandmother in 1937.

Last night, celebrating thirty-five years,
we turned back its eyelet sheets,
the floor seeming to lower beneath us,
the bodies of all the women

my husband *could* have married
crowding around the foot
of our bed, handing us their weary
hearts, struggling to remember

him. I offered them my hands, fingernails
with sunken moons. Our shadows blended
on the wall. Through the open window
I saw glaciers, snow folded

in their laps, and wondered if they were
breathing. This was the same
carved maple bed where, so many years ago,
the stork left our children in the dark of night.

The Holding Room

In a plowed field at the rim
of the southern Utah desert
one of those Schnebbley brothers

found connected bones,
the skull of a young girl,
and a set of terrible blue toenails.

Hearing about it, I have nightmares
in which I stumble across a rib-cage
still wearing a backless hospital gown.

The Schnebbley boy's find
was a partial skeleton like the one
hanging in my father's office closet,

by which he learned anatomy.
A kidney floats in a bottle on my dad's desk.
A jar of liquid cocaine lies in his little black bag,

for setting nose fractures. My father leaves
the lights on, the door ajar, so his patients
cannot trap him in their comedies.

Bliss

I trace my past life through hairdos: ringlets,
pigtails, finger waves, straightened-on-juice-cans,
bouffant, French braids, and—worst—sausage rolls
flying back from my face like ditsy, exuberant wings.

At fifty-eight, I lie gingerly on a satin pillowcase—
must not muss my baked-under-the-dryer curls—
dreading the day I start swaddling my head in a lacy
Mother Hubbard cap, like my mother always wore to bed.

Across asparagus and Metamucil, my husband pores
over my crow's feet and droopy lids, pondering, "Who *is*
that old woman?" He blurts, "Should I wear a hat?
An orange feather stuck in the band of a brown fedora?"

One partner's memory slips away like quicksilver. For
another month or so, we're still one flesh, our bedsheets
worn smooth through a long, tempestuous marriage. After
that, one of us lies awake, trying to memorize the stages of grief.

Everlasting

Every bride asks herself, What if
he doesn't show up? What then?

I fully identify with poor Miss Havisham,
stranded at the altar, the groom's absence
whispered in the ash grove. I could never

move from there. White, cobwebbed plumes
would tangle my stiff net veil,
the frothy dress, Dickensian in its decay,
my metacarpals hanging fleshless.

My three desolate sisters would acquire
teeth as yellow as tusks, the flesh of hobgoblins,
purple-veined noses and crunchy bouquets.

Eternity without you. Count on me
to wait forever.

Possibilities, Problems and Pitfalls

Newell G. Bringhurst and Lavina Fielding Anderson, eds., *Excavating Mormon Pasts: The New Historiography of the Last Half Century* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2004), 408 pp., $39.95.

Reviewed by John Sillito, Professor of Libraries, Weber State University, Ogden, Utah

More than thirty years ago, I made a decision that seemed simple enough at the time but that would have a far-reaching impact on my professional career. I became an archivist at the LDS Church Historical Department. I came to that position during one of the most exciting periods of intellectual ferment in the Mormon experience. It was here I first learned the possibilities, problems, and pitfalls inherent in any study of the Latter-day Saint past.

Looking back, I am not sure I fully realized the extent of what was going on around me in those years. If I had, I might have paid more attention, kept a better diary, perhaps reflected more on what I was witnessing. Those were heady times, and my colleagues and I were simply caught up in the moment when the professionalization of the Historical Department occurred in the 1970s. And, to avoid any parochialism, it is also clear that this ferment was not confined to the Historical Department alone, as scholars elsewhere were producing significant studies.

In the years since then, I have gone on to other professional challenges, but the excitement and turmoil of Mormon historiography that I first encountered in those years has continued. Indeed an explosion of scholarship—labeled the New Mormon History—has burst upon the scene. It is problematic for some because it seems to challenge earlier assumptions about Mormonism's origins and development, while others like Charles S. Peterson have suggested that it has created an "exceptionalist" view that is not always accurate or useful. Still as co-editor Newell Bringhurst notes, it is a "historiographical fact" that a "body of scholarship has emerged in Mormon studies that differs in a significant way from its predecessors." The "sheer volume" of that scholarship has been one of its "distinctive characteristics" (ix). Beyond the amazing outpouring, Bringhurst suggests that the New Mormon History is also characterized by the professional training of its practitioners, a strong reliance on new or previously unavailable sources of data and synthesis, an openness to a variety of techniques and methodologies, and a conscious quest for objectivity.

Moreover as the other co-editor (and author of a provocative chapter titled

"Fictional Pasts: Mormon Historical Novels"), Lavina Fielding Anderson, observes, the practitioners of this New Mormon History were of two generations. The first group was "for the most part, survivors of World War II, educated by the G. I. Bill, and thus part of the greatest achievement in mass education in American history." The second group consisted of "baby-boomers born immediately after World War II who went on to college as a matter of course in a variety of academic fields." Eventually many of the college-trained historians of this second group worked under the tutelage of Leonard Arrington and others from the first group, applying their skill and training "to the task of conceptualizing and constructing Mormon history" (389).

For Bringhurst and Anderson, this volume, which has been several years in the making, was conceived as a means "to critically evaluate the general body of recent Mormon scholarship" published since the end of World War II, providing a "general overview of what has been accomplished, while at the same time noting areas in need of further exploration" (xii). Moreover, the editors set a high bar for their collection, envisioning a work intended not solely for those directly involved in the research and writing of Mormon history, but also as a "basic, readily accessible reference guide for scholars in the large fields of American studies, the history of the American West, and the history of religions" (xiv).

Admittedly ambitious in scope, the excellent essays in this volume in large measure succeed in attaining those goals. The collection brings together a fine cross-section of some of the best chroniclers of Mormonism, especially from that second group. These scholars capture the excitement of the explosion in Mormon studies I previously mentioned, while also illuminating large and important themes in Mormon studies. Two important introductory essays, both broadly conceived, offer an excellent starting point. In them, Klaus J. Hansen and David L. Paulsen provide differing assessments of the way scholars have viewed Mormon origins and its interface with the larger themes of nineteenth-century America.

Beyond that general framework, several chronological examinations provide important context as well. For example, Roger D. Launius, Stephen C. LeSueur, and Glen M. Leonard examine the historiography of the beginnings of the Mormon experience, tracing the accounts of the Saints as they moved from New York to Ohio, Missouri, and Illinois. Similarly, Craig L. Foster, M. Guy Bishop, and Jessie L. Embry update scholarship on the story of the Latter-day Saints once they established themselves in the American West generally and in the Great Basin specifically. In summing up this history, Embry offers an important observation, noting that a religion started by a "young man with a vision" is now "run by leaders who match the Victorian ideal more than the Mormons who lived in the early nineteenth century. As radical as the early Mormon Church may have appeared, by the end of the twentieth century it had swung completely to the other side.

Even though the LDS Church seems out of step with the post-modern world, it continues to grow—not in spite of—but because of its conservatism" (198).

In addition to these broad examinations, a number of scholars look at specific aspects of the Mormon story. Among these are fine essays on post-war internationalization by Kahlile B. Mehr, with Mark L. Grover, Reid L. Nelson, Donald Q. Cannon, and Grant Underwood; dissent and schisms in the early church by Danny L. Jorgensen; and, Mark A. Scherer's overview of historiographical developments in the Community of Christ faith tradition. At the same time, excellent overviews of specific aspects of the New Mormon History are provided by three of the finest scholars in the field. These include Todd Compton's examination of the sources of women's experience in the Mormon tradition; Martha Sonntag Bradley's survey of writings on polygamy; and Newell G. Bringhurst's consideration of biographical accounts.

One of the most important contributions comes from Davis Bitton, a member of that first group identified by Anderson and one of the assistant Church historians to Leonard Arrington. Bitton cautions that the term New Mormon History has been sometimes "carelessly" used to mean recent scholarship, noting that, when more carefully used, the term ought to "have reference not to the fact of being produced recently but to distinctive approaches and questions asked." In this sense, Bitton suggests, the best of the New Mormon History is grounded in the larger new social history which developed roughly during the same time period. The characteristics of this approach which should animate future examinations of Mormon history include the following: it has been analytical rather than primarily narrative; where appropriate it has been quantitative; where possible it has been interdisciplinary; it has focused on several demographic concerns; and it has shown "a heightened awareness of class, ethnicity, and gender" (351).

Beyond the essays themselves, one is struck by the sense of community represented here. In Anderson's phrase, a "network of connections" exists, bringing together the relatively small number of observers of the Mormon experience. Indeed, my own roots in the Historical Department, combined with my graduate studies, brought me into contact with many of the essayists in this volume, and most of the scholars they chronicle. It is also true that, at least for a time, the scholarly circle was broadening to include new participants, some of whom were tied to Mormonism directly, with others coming from the outside. While many have been concerned in recent years with the simultaneous tightening of attitudes toward history and the "graying" of its practitioners, I am more optimistic than I was a few years ago that a third generation of scholars—Mormon and non-Mormon alike—is continuing the tradition of those who set a course over the past three decades.

Finally, one of the most important aspects of this collection is the extensive and helpful index. Accounting for nearly fifty pages of text, the index is organized

by author, title, and subject. Because the essays themselves cover so much material and are packed with important references, the index is an essential tool.

Some may quibble with the assessments and interpretations of the scholars included, and the nature of their contributions, of who and what is included or left out. It is almost impossible in a work of this magnitude to avoid such criticisms. As I indicated in the beginning, Mormon history brings its share of possibilities, problems, and pitfalls. Still, as Roger Launius observes, the on-going challenge facing historians of the Mormon experience is to "balance the stresses and strains of Mormon historical inquiry" with the goal of honest observation that "seeks to understand the past on its own terms" (86). This is a valuable volume in that effort and one that points the way in the years ahead for other considerations of Mormonism's place in history. The publisher, editors, and contributors deserve commendation for the scope and stature of their work.

A Scholarly Tribute to Leonard Arrington

Special Collections and Archives, Utah State University Libraries, *The Collected Leonard J. Arrington Mormon History Lectures* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2005), 296 pp., $29.95.

Reviewed by Newell G. Bringhurst, Professor of History and Government, College of the Sequoias, Visalia, California

Contained in this informative volume are ten essays originally delivered as annual lectures from 1995 through 2004 honoring Leonard J. Arrington, renowned scholar of Utah-Mormon history, former LDS Church Historian, and one-time Utah State University professor of economics. The lectures also pay tribute to Utah State University's Special Collections and Archives, where Arrington chose to deposit his personal papers and related historical materials in an archive that bears his name. In establishing this lecture series, Arrington requested that the university's historical collection serve as the focus for a series of annual lectures, each dealing with some specific aspect of Mormon history.

Arrington's vision has been fulfilled in a most able manner, evident in the outstanding qualifications of the ten scholars combined with the quality of the essays each contributed. Arrington himself set this tone in his own inaugural 1995 lecture, "Faith and Intellect as Partners in Mormon History." He argued that, throughout the history of the LDS Church, "faith and intellect have [had] a mutually supportive relationship" (1). In making his case, Arrington pointed to various statements and actions by early Mormon Church leaders and spokespersons,

specifically, Joseph Smith, Eliza R. Snow, Brigham Young, George Q. Cannon, and Emmeline B. Wells.

Richard Bushman, Columbia University emeritus professor, brought his expertise concerning the life and time of Joseph Smith to his 1996 lecture essay, "Making Space for the Mormons." It is one of the volume's most innovative essays, specifically in its use of space as a method of cultural analysis. Bushman provides illuminating insights concerning the centrality of Zion as a physical space in Joseph Smith's thinking: One of Joseph Smith's "most powerful acts was to create a conception of space that governed the movement of tens of thousands of [Latter-day Saints] over many decades" (35). Bushman's essay also contrasts Nauvoo with Chicago, which during the 1840s rivaled Mormonism's gathering place in size and influence.

In a third equally evocative essay, "The Exodus as Reformation," Richard Bennett, professor of Church history and doctrine at Brigham Young University and noted expert on Mormon migration, examines from a fresh perspective the story of the LDS exodus to the Great Basin commencing in 1846. Drawing on his training and interest in American intellectual history, Bennett describes the Mormon migration as an exercise in "covenant and obedience" (57). The migrating Saints "believed that they were on a divine errand" in the wilderness, reminiscent of that undertaken by their Puritan progenitors two centuries earlier. The Latter-day Saints believed that the success of their undertaking "depended on their behavior" and were convinced that a "scourge awaited the rebellious among them," while "blessings" in abundance were "in store for the faithful" (58).

Howard R. Lamar, Sterling Professor of History at Yale University, prolific author, and primary promoter of the New Western History, examines the Latter-day Saint experience from a fascinating cultural perspective in "The Theater in Mormon Life and Culture." According to Lamar, theatrical performances played a significant role in Mormon pioneer Utah with Brigham Young a most enthusiastic backer and financial investor in this enterprise. In fact, he initially proscribed non-Mormon actors and tragedies from the old Salt Lake Theater, a venue modeled after the Drury Lane Theater in London. The theater, notes Lamar, served three functions in pioneer Utah: first, through "romantic fantasy" it "provided an "escape" from "the limitations of life in Utah"; second, "it provided release from . . . a stern religion full of 'thou shalt nots'"; and, finally it represented "an effort to do the forbidden, or even to parody the everyday life of the Saints" (87).

Claudia Lauper Bushman, former professor in the Honors Program at the University of Delaware and author of books on aspects of American social and women's history, displays her skills in "Mormon Domestic Life in the 1870s." Bushman critically evaluates the quality of home life among the Latter-day Saints, using as a point of departure the observations of non-Mormon Elizabeth Wood

Kane, wife of Thomas L. Kane, long-time friend and patron to the Latter-day Saints during her visit to Utah in 1873–74. Bushman, drawing on Elizabeth Kane's astute observations, effectively presents the "complexities and contradictions" (118) of LDS domestic life which both fascinated and appalled non-Mormon outsiders.

Kenneth L. Godfrey, former Institute of Religion director in the Church Education System, who has extensively researched the Nauvoo experience, produced "The Importance of the Temple in Understanding the Latter-day Saint Nauvoo Experience: Then and Now." In a carefully crafted and finely focused essay, Godfrey notes that both Joseph Smith and Brigham Young emphasized that "the gathering was intrinsically bound to the temple experience" (126). According to Godfrey, Joseph Smith envisioned the temple as "a place of refuge and divine protection for the Saints from the evils, dangers, and cares of the world." It would moreover serve as "the edifice where through divine oracles, God would reveal his wisdom to his people" (126–27).

Jan Shipps, professor emeritus of religious studies at Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis, author of two books and nationally recognized observer of the LDS scene, brings her expertise to "Signifying Sainthood, 1830–2001." In this largely autobiographical essay, Shipps reflects on her experiences as a non-Mormon encountering Mormon culture as an undergraduate at Utah State University during the late 1950s. "Identity markers" which served as "means of signifying Sainthood" (160) included the obvious—abstinence from coffee, tea, alcohol, and tobacco—and the less obvious but equally important family size and structure; "appropriate" clothing, and personal grooming (for men, beardlessness and short hair), and for both sexes a strict prohibition on tattooing and body piercing, or as it was termed, "mutilation." Shipps concludes with the speculation that "Sainthood [in the future] increasingly will be signified by things connected with Latter-day Saint temples" (180).

Also looking at Mormon life and culture from an outsider perspective is Donald Worster, professor of environmental history at the University of Kansas and the author of several foundational studies of western environmental history, including his award-winning biography of John Wesley Powell, *A River Running West*. Worster's Arrington essay, "Encountering Mormon Country: John Wesley Powell, John Muir, and the Nature of Utah," brings a fresh perspective to the relationship of Powell and Muir with the Mormons and the larger landscape that drew each to the Great Basin on different occasions during the nineteenth century. Powell saw much that he liked in LDS culture, specifically the Mormon spirit of cooperative enterprise, even though he "was no friend of Utah's 'ecclesiastical organization,' being an "agnostic and secularist" (191). John Muir, likewise, was ambivalent concerning the Mormon people, "liking and disliking them in about equal measure" (197). On the negative side, Muir was appalled by the

Mormon concept of "environmental conquest," not surprising given his strong advocacy of environmental preservation. At the same time, he admired the Mormons' attitude toward children. Their children, he wrote, "are petted & loved & left to grow like wildflowers (unlike the real wildflowers which were destroyed)" (199).

Completely different in tone and tenor are the final two essays in the volume. Each in its own way provides intriguing insights into the craft and challenges of writing Mormon family history. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, professor of early American history at Harvard University and Pulitzer Prize winning author, investigates the mystery surrounding the life and death of an LDS ancestor in "Rachel's Death: How Memory Challenges History." In this engaging account, Ulrich unravels the confusion and conflicting accounts surrounding the death of her great-grandmother, Rachel Hannah Thatcher, while at the same time providing frank insights into family tensions resulting from the structure of polygamy and exacerbated by the age difference between her polygamous great-grandfather, John Bethel Thatcher, and another much younger wife, Sarah Maria Davis.

Similarly, family tensions underlie F. Ross Peterson's equally frank account, "A Personal Examination of a Mormon Family." Peterson, currently president of Deep Springs College in California and former professor of history at Utah State University, is the author of three books dealing with diverse aspects of American western history. Like Ulrich, Peterson confronted differing, often conflicting accounts of less than ideal conditions in the marriage of his paternal grandparents, Parley and Johanna Peterson. Peterson forthrightly evaluates the oral accounts of family difficulties passed down through filtered family tradition, carefully comparing these oral accounts and memories with such documents as newspapers, LDS ward records, state and federal government tax records, and census data. In describing his grandparents' estrangement and ultimate divorce, Peterson candidly summarizes: "Jealousy, anger, mistrust, and frustration led to desertion and failure to provide" (240). Taken together, the two accounts by Peterson and Ulrich represent the craft of family history at its best. As such they stand as ideal models for all practitioners of family history.

In conclusion, the ten essays comprising this volume are a fitting tribute to Leonard J. Arrington, widely acknowledged as a major progenitor, if indeed, not the prime promoter, of the New Mormon History that has emerged over the past half century. Among its characteristics are an attempt to achieve objectivity combined with a willingness to confront controversy. Also a characteristic of recent Mormon scholarship has been the expanded variety of techniques and methodologies utilized both in research and writing. These characteristics are amply demonstrated in these essays, all ably written. We may hope that such scholarship will continue into the future and that, a decade hence, a sequel to *The Collected Leon-*

ard J. Arrington Mormon History Lectures will appear, providing equally illuminating insights into the state of scholarship of the New Mormon History.

Peer-Reviewed Genealogy

Val D. Rust, *Radical Origins: Early Mormon Converts and Their Colonial Ancestors* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 253 pages. $35.00.

Reviewed by Mark Decker, Department of English and Philosophy, University of Wisconsin-Stout, Menomonie, Wisconsin

I have a distant relative who is an avid genealogist. She is fond of joking that, whenever two people talk about genealogy, one of them is bored. If this quip has any truth to it, Val D. Rust has scored quite a coup. Rust, a professor of education at UCLA, has turned what began as a "quest to gain some perspective on the radical religious roots of my own family" (165) into an intellectually stimulating and highly readable argument that Mormonism "is grounded" in America's "early colonial period" and that it "springs more from the tradition of radical religious content than from mainstream Puritanism" (xi). *Radical Origins* manages this feat largely because Rust reaches beyond his own family and examines the genealogies of 583 early (pre-1835) Mormon converts in an attempt to create a genealogy of a belief rather than of an individual family. Yet despite this expansion of scope, Rust's book ultimately suffers from a selective emphasis that leaves it unable to account for all of Mormonism's radical origins.

Rust does provide much support for his claim that "those who were drawn to the message of Joseph Smith, Jr., especially in the earliest years, likely had family and community histories" of radical religious involvement "that predisposed them to resonate with that message" (5). This legacy of New England radicalism is at least plausible because, as Rust documents, "approximately 20 per cent of the 1650 population of New England were direct-line ancestors of LDS converts" (27) and because most of those ancestors did not live in Puritan Boston but in more doctrinally heterogeneous places like Rhode Island. If this radical religiosity were transmitted intergenerationally, Mormonism would have been attractive in part because the "new convert had likely grown up hearing tales . . . filled with accounts of miracles, spiritual experiences, privations, and persecutions that distinguished the family as religious radicals" (21).

Rust also does an admirable job of presenting this argument to two distinct audiences. Academic experts in colonial American history will appreciate Rust's engagement with the relevant scholarly literature. Those approaching the text from other perspectives who may not have a strong background in early American

history—such as those interested because their families are discussed—will enjoy Rust's succinct reconstruction of the religious and political realities of the New England colonies and explanation of the doctrines of now-obscure groups like the Antinomians and Gortonists.

Ultimately, however, Rust's argument is more compelling than convincing. As Rust himself admits, he is often forced to argue from propinquity or to extrapolate because most of the records he works with are little more than "birth, marriage, and death dates and places" (52). Consequently, Rust is often unsure if an ancestor of one of the LDS converts in his dataset was actually involved in the radical religious movements present in their hometowns. Readers are thus presented with assertions like Rust's claim that William Cahoon "was surely influenced by . . . Anabaptist religious radicalism" (48) because he lived in Swansea, a village on the Rhode Island border. Rust is probably right about William Cahoon since it is difficult to be completely insensitive to one's surroundings. Still, we have no way of knowing the degree of that influence or whether that influence was positive or negative. After all, William Cahoon may have disliked the Anabaptist influence in Swansea and transmitted a very different message to his descendants than Rust's thesis implies.

Another gap in Rust's argument is the distance between the supposed actors in the radical critiques of Puritanism and their descendants who converted to Mormonism. Passing down a radical religious orientation over five generations would be difficult; but if it did happen, there should be some evidence: diary entries, records of fourth-, third-, or second-generation ancestors participating in radical sects, statements of the LDS converts indicating that their decision to become a Mormon was influenced by the unconventional religious attitudes of their ancestors, etc. However, Rust presents his readers with little direct evidence of how the radical religious beliefs transcended this not-inconsiderable historical and cultural distance. To his credit, Rust openly acknowledges this difficulty and dedicates his penultimate chapter to addressing it, but he is able only to trace a persistent transgenerational influence in two of the 583 LDS converts studied.

The most problematic aspect of Rust's thesis is his attempt to make totalizing claims about Mormonism from evidence provided by a relatively small and localized sample. Rust's thesis does not make sense unless, as he argues, the "message of the early LDS Church was so radical that it demanded a certain spiritual predisposition to resonate with it" (20). By choosing to limit his sample to those "baptized between 1830 and the end of 1834" (10), Rust implies that there was a formative "early church" period that ended on or about January 1, 1835, and that, by the end of this early period, the church had become less radical and its doctrines more broadly appealing. If this were true, it would be one way to account for the increase in growth the Church experienced in the years following 1834. Indeed, Rust's own figures indicate that there were only about 1,500 mem-

bers in 1835 but that by 1844, when total Church membership was approximately 15,000, the majority of members (about 8,000) had been converted in Great Britain and therefore probably did not have family ties to religious radicals from colonial New England (7–8).

If the LDS Church's doctrines were still radical during the Nauvoo period, however, Rust's work does not explain why the 8,000 British converts—or the American converts who were not related to seventeenth-century New Englanders, for that matter—had the spiritual disposition to "resonate" with Mormonism. Rust's suggestion that 1830–35 was the early and radical phase of the LDS Church, however, does not ultimately undermine his argument. Instead, it makes his title more apt than it first appears. Perhaps, if a radical spiritual disposition remained necessary for motivating conversion beyond the mid-1830s, there were many radical origins. It would be interesting to see, for example, the source to which the British converts of the 1840s traced their spiritually open disposition. Since the religious movements Rust discusses were transatlantic, similar genealogical research could reveal a similar radical origin.

Perhaps the best way to summarize this book's strengths and weaknesses is to return to the joke that opened this review. If humor really does disguise hostility, then the resentment my distant cousin's quip turns on is the necessary exclusion of other families and other stories that a genealogical narrative creates, even when that genealogical narrative is accurate and historically enlightening. Rust's book should be read by anyone seriously interested in the formative era of the LDS Church, but it should also serve as a call for others to investigate their own radical origins. Maybe then it will be Rust's turn to be bored.

Seeing Post-Zion Salt Lake City

Alan Barnett, *Seeing Salt Lake City: The Legacy of the Shipler Photographers* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2000), 174 pages, $49.95.

Reviewed by Byron C. Smith, Director and Curator, The Stone House Foundation, Stephens City, Virginia and Adjunct Lecturer, Historic Preservation Program, Shepherd University, Shepherdstown, West Virginia

Those of us who study material culture frequently use "rootedness," which is the quality of an object or a structure when it is fixed in association with a geographical place. For example, a group of two-hundred-year-old tombstones with German inscriptions marking graves in the lower Shenandoah Valley of Virginia is valued as evidence by cultural geographers, historians, and material culture scholars alike. The tombstones' connection to a particular time, place, and society is

relatively certain. On the other hand, the provenance of two-hundred-year-old pieces of furniture, silverware, firearms, or other moveable objects is often much more difficult to tie down. Thus, "reading" these "uprooted" objects requires a lot more speculation or educated guesswork—the kind of conjecture that makes many academics very uncomfortable.

Buildings are rooted. Depending on their size and construction, they rarely get moved very far from the places they are originally built. Much like those eighteenth-century German grave markers in the lower Shenandoah Valley, a building's connection to a particular era, region, and culture is relatively certain. Thus, scholars who study historical architecture as cultural evidence are able to use buildings from a certain time and place to draw inferences about the practical and aesthetic values of the society that created them. Sometimes these scholars compare the structures that have not survived with the ones that have been preserved. This sort of comparison has been made easier since the advent of photography, which makes it possible to capture images of structures as they existed at a specific moment in time and thus preserve facsimiles of these bits of cultural evidence for future generations of scholars. These captured images also show us buildings that have survived into the present with changes made by campaigns of remodeling and repair. With all of this in mind, what might a scholar of Mormon cultural history learn from one-hundred-year-old photographs of buildings rooted in the soil of Salt Lake City?

Those who study Mormon cultural history recognize the importance of Salt Lake City as a center of the Church's urban identity. Unlike early Mormon capital cities such as Kirtland, Independence, Far West, and Nauvoo, Salt Lake City has served as a seemingly permanent headquarters for the LDS Church as well as the seat of economic and political power for the state of Utah. A religious refuge for Mormons that was soon besieged by federal troops and "Gentiles," Salt Lake City was far from being the Zion community envisioned by its founders when the railroad came to Utah in 1869. Despite the influx of non-Mormon immigrants and influences brought by the railroads, it was not until after the public end of officially sanctioned new plural marriages in 1890 and the establishment of Utah as a state in 1896 that Salt Lake City became more than an essentially Mormon urban center. It was during this "post-Zion" period that the non-Mormon population of Salt Lake City grew exponentially and a modern state capital was rebuilt on ground where adobe, frame, and brick structures once stood. This post-Zion building boom tradition has defined the cityscape ever since.

In his large format, semi-glossy, "coffee table" book, *Seeing Salt Lake City: The Legacy of the Shipler Photographers,* author Alan Barnett visually addresses this post-Zion building boom tradition. Before selecting the 174 images that appear in his book, Barnett sifted through more than 100,000 images dating from 1903 to 1979 from the Shipler Photograph Collection at the Utah State Historical Soci-

ety. The Shiplers were commercial photographers who worked in Salt Lake City for the better part of the twentieth century and often photographed "business buildings, schools, churches, apartments, and private residences for owners, architects, contractors, real estate investors, and developers" (xii). These previously unpublished black and white photographs run chronologically from 1903 to 1940, with the majority dating to the first two decades of that period. The book also features a foreword by Ted L. Wilson, Salt Lake's mayor from 1976 to 1985.

Writing for the mass audience of interested laity, neither Barnett nor Wilson attempts to draw any academic conclusions aimed at scholars in Mormon studies. Even so, Barnett clearly understands the value of these images as two-dimensional material evidence for students of Mormon cultural history. The majority of the images are of the secular side of early twentieth-century Salt Lake City. While it might be argued that even these pictures indirectly shed light on Mormon aesthetic taste of the era, they are scenes that might have been photographed in many American cities during that time.

Barnett also includes at least eighteen snapshots of scenes and structures that drew their significance from their association with the Church and its early leaders. Students of Mormon history and culture will find meaning in these particular images. For instance, I found noteworthy the 1907 photograph of the LDS Seventeenth Ward Chapel that once stood on 200 North between West Temple and Second West (21). This gothic revival meetinghouse with its castle-like parapet tower and stained-glass windows was a great example of the kind of architecture that flourished before the ubiquitous LDS corporate cookie-cutter style took over in the mid-twentieth century. Clearly this structure was designed to evoke a stylistic relationship with the Anglo-Protestant ecclesiastical building tradition. This style was almost universally recognized in that day as the fashion for American Christian congregations that traced their doctrinal heritage back to the British Protestant churches. It is hard not to imagine a predominantly British ethnic make-up for the congregation that originally built this chapel. While other LDS meetinghouses used this style, the Seventeenth Ward was distinctive in being one of the few with a stained-glass window featuring Joseph Smith's First Vision. As Barnett notes, this church was torn down in 1966, but the window is preserved today in a new meetinghouse across the street. Those who see this window today will find that it makes more sense when viewed in conjunction with this photograph.

The book does have its weaknesses. Lacking an index, *Seeing Salt Lake City* requires readers to flip through in search of a remembered image, rereading Barnett's three- to four-sentence captions in search of dates or other identifiers. Students of Mormon material culture and history may also come away feeling a bit frustrated by the relatively small number of photos that feature Mormon architectural subjects. Nevertheless, Barnett's effort is a welcome addition to the li-

brary of Mormon material culture studies. Perhaps now others will build on Barnett's work and begin to answer the question, "What might a scholar of Mormon cultural history learn from one-hundred-year-old photographs of buildings rooted in the soil of Salt Lake City?"

NOTES OF INTEREST

Jacob and the Angel: Modern Readers and the Old Testament

Karl Sandberg

> *Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord:*
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> *And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, and shall not find it. (Amos 8:11–12)*

If we simply open our eyes and look about us, it would seem that Amos got it wrong. In societies insulated by affluence, where life runs in routine and moves by diversion, it is visible that the word of God is something most people get along very well without. But in the lives of individuals and societies, tragedies befall, the comforts of routine and the anodyne of affluence cease to satisfy, and people are at length obliged to look for what supports life at its foundations.

In that case, Amos says it just right—nothing has been more persistent among people of the most various temperaments, circumstances, cultures, and generations than the disappearance and the seeking after the words of God, the voice of what we consider to be ultimate in the cosmos, speaking in judgment on the ways of the world, commanding duties, and offering redemption.

Where do people look for the word of God? Usually in superficial places—at the check-out stand in the supermarket, where the tabloids always have some story of life elsewhere in the universe (abduction by aliens), knowing the future (prophecies by Nostradamus or Jeanne

Dixon), or proof of the Bible, and so forth. They look for it in the popular press, where cover stories about religion always guarantee a larger than usual press run. But they also look for it in the books of scripture, the stories of what happened to others as they searched for the divine: books such as the Bagavahd Gita or the Tao Teh Ching in the East or the Qur'an or the Old or New Testaments in the West. They look for the word of God in stories of people like Jacob.

* * *

We meet Jacob in his mid-life. From his birth, he had been an ambitious, striving, and therefore disquiet man. Even in the womb, he was in conflict with his twin brother Esau and was born "clutching at Esau's heel." It is a figure for ruse and deception which marked the course of Jacob's life. He had recourse to a ruse to get Esau's birthright. He used gross deception, he and his mother, to get the blessing of the first-born from Isaac. But when he had succeeded, Jacob found it prudent to flee rather than confront Esau or Isaac, since Esau was threatening to kill him. (Read Genesis 27ff. for the whole story.)

He then left his home country for about twenty years, during which time, in the employ of his kinsman Laban and again by the use of shrewd tactics, he became wealthy. He was always able to work an angle and turn events to his benefit. Having accumulated two wives, two concubines, eleven sons, and a daughter, he returned to his homeland and learned that the first one he would meet would be Esau, who was accompanied by several hundred armed men. Jacob therefore sent all of his household over the river and spent the night alone . . . wrestling.

> That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two maidservants, and his twelve children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions. So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until the daybreak.
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> When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak. But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go, except you bless me." The man asked him, "What is your name?" "Jacob," he answered. Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome."
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> Jacob said, "Please tell me your name." But he replied, "Why do you ask my name?" Then he blessed him there.

> So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared." The sun arose above him as he passed Peniel, and he was limping because of his hip. (See Gen. 32:22–31)

With whom is Jacob wrestling? Jacob does not know. It is with a "man" who is more than a man. A part of his divided self? Esau? His image of Esau? An angel? God? The struggle continues through the night, neither contestant being able to best the other. Finally, his opponent dislocates Jacob's hip, but Jacob persists. His opponent then asks for release. Jacob still persists. He will not give up the struggle until he has a blessing, the blessing of knowing what God intends for him and the reunification of his divided and fragmented life. It did not suffice that twenty years previously he had had a vision, or a dream, in which he saw a great stairway reaching up to heaven and angels going up and down on it. At the head of it had stood the Lord, who told him that he, Jacob, would have an innumerable posterity and that He, the Lord, would give them the land upon which Jacob was now sleeping and, furthermore, that He would be with Jacob and protect him.

But even such a grand manifestation as this did not suffice. Jacob hedged his bets, as it were, receiving such promises conditionally: "if God protects me . . . if God provides me food and shelter . . . if God brings me back safely to my father's land . . . then the Lord shall be my God" (Gen. 28:10–22). But now he can no longer rely on deceptions or shrewd tactics. He is totally engaged in the wrestle.

The story of Jacob and the angel is a metaphor for the reading of the Old Testament which has to be entered into with seriousness of intent before it will yield its blessing. The Old Testament is the most contemporary of our scriptures. Its view of humanity is stark and unmitigated: Sin is real, evil is real, and people struggle with elemental forces for their survival. The books in it are often powerful in their statements and in their contradictions. In them we find the human questions—that is, the religious questions, which are the ones worth wrestling about. It is here also that humanity can wrestle with its own image; and many have said that, through the wrestle, they have come to see the face and experience the presence of God.

Others, it is true, report merely a dislocated hip.

* * *

A preliminary problem: What is the name of the thing that we are

studying? And whose book is it? Four religious traditions lay claim to direct revelation as their founding warrant, and all of them accept what we call the Old Testament as revelation. They are Judaism, traditional Christianity, Islam, and in a modern day, a new kind of Christianity: Mormonism.

Within Judaism, this collection of books is known simply as the Hebrew Bible, or the Tanakh (the acronym in Hebrew for the Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings). As such, it is the entirety of the revelation of God to the covenant people. It has its own integrity and its own direction.

Within Christianity, these same scriptures are called the Old Testament, implying that the first testament is not complete without a second, the New Testament. The Old Testament thereby becomes a Christian document, which it certainly was not at the beginning. It had been in existence several hundred years before there was such a thing as Christianity, but the emerging Christian church used the Hebrew Bible (in its Greek translation, the Septuagint), as its official scripture. There weren't any other scriptures for the early Christians, but they established their own interpretive position around it, and it gradually became a Christian document.

When we consult the Qur'an, which was compiled between 644 and 656 C.E., we find many references to what we call the Old Testament. The same cast of characters is spoken of as prophets or messengers whom God sent to another people. They are part of that large stream of revelations which prepare the way for the final and definitive revelation received by Mohammed. So what we call the Old Testament thereby becomes also an Islamic document.

And within Mormonism, the Old Testament has been Mormonized and has hereby become also a Mormon document, part of the Mormon canon and accepted as part of God's continuing revelation to the world over the ages.

Whose book, then, is it that we are studying? It belongs to all those who will peruse its pages and make it a part of themselves.

* * *

Now when we cast about for the word of God, we must first of all become aware of the interpretive context we are using, which consists of the initially unidentified presupposition we make about the text, for there is no text so plain that it does not require interpretation, and no revelation

is so plain that it does not require another revelation to interpret it. Therefore, each of the four religions laying claim to direct revelation—Judaism, traditional Christianity, Islam, and Mormonism—has developed an interpretive context consisting of a set of tacit suppositions or of articulated rules that in themselves carry the authority of revelation and thus can be invoked to decide between ambiguous meanings possible in the text.

In the Jewish tradition, this interpretive context takes the form of the double Torah, i.e. the written Torah and the oral Torah. When God gave Moses the written law, the Torah, he also gave another set of verbal teachings for the interpretation of the Torah, which was not to be written but passed on verbally from generation to generation. Eventually, much of this accumulated interpretation was compiled in the Talmud, a summary of oral law and practical wisdom which represents Judaism's traditional understanding of the Torah.

In the Roman Catholic way, the interpretive context of the scriptures is made up of the traditions of the Church, i.e., the teachings of the apostles and Church fathers as handed down verbally within the church. Catholics have often argued, therefore, against Protestants that ambiguous passages of scripture cannot be rightly interpreted without the tradition of the original prophets and Church fathers who said how they should be interpreted.

Protestantism held to the written text and supposed it would itself provide the keys to its interpretation. For example, early in the Protestant tradition, when Luther was translating the Old Testament into German, he would come upon a verse where two meanings were possible. In such cases he would choose the one nearest to the meaning of the Christian gospel. A presupposition about the gospel thus served automatically as a yardstick.

An example of this procedure can also be seen in the King James translation of Isaiah 7:14: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive." The word translated as *virgin* can also be translated just as well as *young woman*. *Virgin* is used, presumably, because it fits better with the preestablished doctrine of the virgin birth. The Old Testament thus becomes the prelude to the New Testament, needing the New Testament to complete it. The Old Testament thus de facto becomes a Christian document.

In the Qur'an, we also find materials of the Old Testament referred to as authentic parts of God's revelation given in preparation for the final revelation given to the final prophet, Mohammed. The Qur'an recounts

the calling and testing of Abraham as the friend of God, but relates that it was Abraham's first-born son, Ishmael, whom he saw in a dream that he was to offer up. Since Ishmael also surrendered to the will of God, both became prophets of Islam. In fact, the Qur'an even accepts the virgin birth of Jesus, which Muslims interpret according to their own presuppositions. Since God is all-powerful, it costs Him no more to create a soul without sexual intercourse than with it, which marks Jesus as a great prophet, but not as the son of God, since God has no partners. Again, the interpretive context acts as the fulcrum by which the interpretation is moved.

Mormonism likewise, from its earliest beginnings, has had its own interpretive context by which Mormons attribute meanings to the Old Testament. This context came from a double source: (1) the widespread practice in early American churches of giving a literal meaning to the text, and (2) the early revelations given to Joseph Smith, especially in the Book of Mormon, the Book of Moses, and the Book of Abraham.

There is much richness in the interpretive contexts of each of these religions, in that they all engage the mind and the spirit of the reader in seeking greater understanding and deeper meaning. They all have the one drawback, however, that they tend to be Procrustean.

Procrustean? Yes, Procrustes was the robber chief of antiquity who had an iron bedstead in his cave, upon which he would place any prisoner which he took. If the prisoner were too short, Procrustes would stretch him out. If he were too long, he would cut him off. No one could say exactly how tall a prisoner was going into the cave, but he could be sure how tall anyone was coming out.

Is it possible to give a neutral, *objective* reading of any of the Old Testament texts? No. We cannot make the merest use of language without all of the subjective elements of our past experience and culture. However, we should first read simply to see what the text says as a story or statement, without having to make it fit into some previously established doctrine. Beyond that, we should read what biblical scholars have laid out through contemporary scholarship for an inquiring modern reader.

* * *

We should steer clear of the morass of modernism and postmodernism, except to note that modernism is the project of the Enlightenment (which was, to use Descartes's phrase, to "make man the mas-

ter and possessor of nature" on the basis of a sure and unshifting knowledge). Postmodernism is the perception that the project did not work. Everything currently being said about these two notions can, I believe, be fitted under these two rubrics.

The mischief in the use of these two terms is that they suggest that one came after the other. Actually, every idea connected with postmodernism was present from the beginning and every stage of formation of the modern spirit. Every time the bright angel of reason sounded the trumpet call of progress, the slouchy devil of doubt was there to whisper over the collective shoulder, "It'll never work," speaking through the voices of David Hume, Jonathan Swift, Pierre Bayle, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, even Denis Diderot, and hosts of lesser figures.

I take another notion of "modern." Modern readers are those who do not remain satisfied in the time of their maturity with the understandings they had in their youth and who therefore feel impelled to rethink their beliefs in the light of a new time. Except in an unchanging world, each generation has its own aspect of modernity.

The modern reader who wishes to read the Bible in translation has many and varied options available. Prior to World War II, the English-speaking reader had few choices other than the King James Version. Although many English translations had been made since 1611, the KJV, the Revised Version (1881), and the American Standard Version (1901) were the most popular choices. The KJV retains value as a literary document and as an important influence on the English language, but its weakness as a translation and use of outdated terms makes it difficult to use for the average reader today. But in 1922 James Moffatt's *The Bible: A New Translation* and Smith's and Goodspeed's *The Bible: An American Translation* broke new ground by applying a coherent theory of translation that demanded strict standards of content and style. These translations were very influential for future translation efforts.

Different translations available today seek to redress different shortcomings of earlier versions. Some, such as the Revised Standard Version (1953), depend strongly on the language of the KJV and the Revised Version. The New American Standard Bible chooses to translate the text very literally, without interpreting some of the idioms of the original language. Others such as the New English Bible (1970) provide a much freer and more interpretive translation. Even more colloquial is the Good News Bible (1976), which was intended to reach beyond church readers to a wider

audience. Colloquial translations must be used with caution; sometimes the text is interpreted beyond the bounds of its context.

Other traditions have joined the dialogue. The Jewish Publication Society published a valuable translation of the Hebrew Bible in 1962 that treats that text as the Jewish Hebrew Bible rather than the Christian Old Testament.

The choice of translations and versions is now so broad that, in considering which to use, the reader should decide what he or she wishes to draw from the text. The Bible can be read for devotion, liturgy, literature, mythology, or critical study. Each translation tends to emphasize one or more of these purposes over others. Unlike most readers of the past, these issues have an impact on modern readers, whether they realize it or not.

For all their sophistication, the arts of the modern translator have not removed the ambiguity and dissonance from the biblical text. Nor should they. By highlighting or expanding these characteristics for all to see, they do us a service. The difficulty and ambiguity of the Old Testament are what give it so much of its value, a value plumbed when we measure ourselves against this encapsulation of the human experience seeking to wring a blessing from the divine. Now, more than ever before, the wrestling match continues.

The Unbidden Prayer

Frances Lee Menlove

A few years back, I was assisting the Ethics Committee of a large metropolitan hospital. The second case on our agenda one afternoon was presented by a pediatric nurse. Two weeks earlier, a baby in her care had been too quickly pronounced a male by the pediatrician attending the birth. The baby's gender was, in fact, ambiguous. Though the visible genitalia appeared to be male, the infant had a uterus and ovaries. Both surgery and hormone treatments would be needed regardless of assigned sex. The nurse was concerned because, after consultations with geneticists and other specialists, the medical team told the parents the infant would best be served by a female designation. This had been explained to the parents. Twice. The parents were adamant. They had been told they had a boy and they wanted a boy. The infant had been baptized a boy and the birth announced as a boy. The nurse was disturbed by this decision, foreseeing unnecessary medical trauma in the years ahead—hence, her decision to request an ethics review.

After about an hour of presentations by the medical specialists, the committee decided to approach the parents again. A Jesuit priest on our committee offered, along with their pediatrician, to meet with the family.

At our next meeting, they reported back on this family meeting. Initially, the doctor had gone over the medical issues one more time. The priest then explained gently to these parents that in the Catholic tradition their baby had not been baptized as a male, but as a child of God. Male or female the infant *was* baptized. "If you decide to have the child raised a girl, it would simply be a matter of changing the name on the parish records from Paul to Paula." Then he added, "Whatever you decide, know that your infant is precious in the eye of God." The parents decided to have the name on the baptismal record changed to Paula.

I remember exactly the moment of my silent unbidden prayer of gratitude. It sprang fully formed from my heart, bypassing my head, as the

pediatrician was quoting the priest's statement, "Whatever you decide, know that your infant is precious in the eye of God." My prayer was simply this. "Thank you, thank you, God. Thank you that these parents are not Mormon." I was deeply grateful that the confused, struggling parents of our tiny infant would not be living inside the Mormon story of eternal gender.

"The Family: A Proclamation to the World" states that "gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose."[1] What might this statement mean to a child whose gender was the result of a decision on the part of her earthly parents and their doctors? Does this mean that this infant's ambiguous gender was not simply biological miscues, but some giant cosmic mistake? If gender is "essential" to the premortal condition, what does it mean when it is ambiguous at birth? How would living inside a story of gender essentialism affect the parents and their child's understanding of her divine nature? How might this theological frame influence the self-perception of a growing girl whose gender was determined by a human decision? Sounds like a nightmare to me. A toxic spiritual burden. That's why I was grateful the parents were not Mormon.

Jan Stout, in an article on the complexities of human sexuality, cites a similar case, although in this situation the child was raised as a male. "A pseudohermaphrodite, known to be genetically female, received hormonal therapy and a hysterectomy and eventually proceeded, as a male, to priesthood ordination and a temple marriage."[2]

These are stories of two similar infants but with very different outcomes and religious implications. Both cases contradict the common understanding that male and female are always discrete, binary categories. In essence, a parental and/or medical decision at birth determined if the child would be eligible for priesthood ordination. How should Mormon theology and practice take intersex people into account as God's children? The Mormon notion that maleness and femaleness are core (eternally present) to personhood raises theological and moral issues not faced by other Christian groups that do not hold such specific ideas of pre- and postmortal existence.

I believe there are some parallels between what is happening now with respect to sexual minorities (including homosexual, transgender, and intersex) and what was happening in the mid-twentieth century when

Church doctrine precluded black males from ordination to the priesthood.

It became clear during the 1950s, '60s, and '70s that the doctrine of denying priesthood ordination to worthy black males was unsustainable, both scientifically and practically. Biologists said that trying to sort blacks from nonblacks was a scientific impossibility; there is no dividing line. Social scientists said it was foolish to try and racist to boot. I remember talking to returned missionaries who reported they didn't know whom to ordain and whom not to ordain. Just how far back in a member's genealogy must one go to determine if the potential priesthood holder was really white? What should be done when a priesthood member in good standing starts doing genealogy work and finds he has a black ancestor? Should he be unordained? You get the picture. Religious issues aside, it was pragmatically unfeasible to both bar black males from the priesthood and also become a truly global church.

Once again empirical evidence, reason, and conscience are pushing and shoving at a Church policy. Just as we learned about the complexity and ambiguity of racial designations in the mid-twentieth century, we have learned about the complexity and ambiguity of sexual designations in the late twentieth century. Issues of race are complex. Issues of sexual identity are complex. Apparently God's comfort with diversity is greater than ours.

In his article on the complexities of human sexuality, published in 1987, Jan Stout foresaw many of the current ethical problems Mormons are facing. He wrote that research on the development of human sexuality, including homosexuality, has "enormous implications for our perception of sin and responsibility. No one should ignore the dilemma."[3] Stout challenged the widely accepted LDS assumption that homosexuals have chosen their lifestyle and knowingly entered into sin. He called for a rethinking of our understanding of the relationship between homosexuality and moral responsibility. Homosexual, transgender, and intersex Mormons are coming out of the closet, a closet into which they won't return. Mormon families are being wrenched. Members are realizing that people they know and love have been given labels that are supposed to equate with sinfulness but that the labels don't fit.

All communities of faith struggle with the challenge of being sensitive to their social and historical context while remaining true to their core beliefs. Each generation must interpret the meaning of the gospel to

meet current challenges and morally complex issues. In each generation, issues arise in which Church authority is held in tension with the demands of an informed conscience. Faith communities experience crisis when the doctrine they teach contradicts experience in significant ways. I believe this is happening now.

During times of tension within the Church over morally complex issues like those surrounding sexual designations, it is tempting to cherish certainty over truth. Certainty alleviates the anxiety and the fear that frequently accompany ambiguity. But certainty is difficult to maintain when reason and experience don't support it. Reality has a knack for pushing truth up through the underbrush, a knack for trumping false certainties. We can't anchor Church teachings to bad science. The demands of the real world and the obligations of conscience won't be trumped.

How do I feel now, after these few years, about my sudden burst of gratitude that Paula was not born into a Mormon family? I stand by it.

Notes

1. The First Presidency and Council of the Twelve Apostles, "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," announced September 23, 1995, retrieved March 18, 2005, from http://www.lds.org/library/display/0,4945,161-1-11-1,00.html.

2. Jan Stout, "Sin and Sexuality: Psychobiology and the Development of Homosexuality," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 20, no. 2 (Summer 1987): 37.

3. Ibid., 29–30.

Mormon Laundry List

Julianna Gardner Berry

Mormons love telling each other what to do more than any group I know.

When we meet up together at that great regional conference in the sky and the Lord reviews our collective performance at keeping the commandments, I think that he, unlike most of us, will start with our strengths and congratulate us for observing, to a man [person] and to a fault, the injunction to "give your language to exhortation continually" (D&C 23:7).

I call it the Mormon Laundry List, and I can smell it coming from afar. It's lengthy. It's itemized. It leaves no spiritual stone unturned. And it worms its admonishing way into unsuspecting talks and lessons the whole Church over.

Earnest teachers and sacrament meeting speakers ask the riveting question, "What can we do to improve our ___ ?" (Fill in the blank: faith, hope, charity, skin tone, net worth, etc.) The answers could be recited in unison like the Young Women's theme: (1) Pray. (2) Read your scriptures. (3) Attend your meetings. (4) Do your home or visiting teaching. (5) Pay your tithing. (6) Attend the temple. (7) Magnify your callings. (8) Serve others. And then the catch-all, which all but renders the list meaningless—and certainly unattainable: (9) Keep the commandments.

The Laundry List is amazingly versatile. In it lies the solution to all of life's problems. Overcoming addiction. Strengthening your marriage. Eliminating debt. Becoming more Christlike. Following the prophet. Making home a haven. Finding kindred dead. Living well on lentils.

Sometimes the Laundry List is puzzlingly recursive. What can we do to improve our prayers? Pray, read scriptures, attend meetings. What can we do to improve our scripture study? Pray, read scriptures, attend meetings. And so on.

I grant that the Laundry List contains life practices that make a spiri-

tual journey possible. But I find it amusing at best, dull mostly, and often patronizing that this is all my fellow Saints have to say from the pulpit. I'm looking for more education and edification in the bread I'm fed at church. I'm looking for someone to offer me their honest thoughts, a serving of the good word of God, and a taste of the fruit of God's love.

Do we need a weekly flogging with instructions? Will those who falter be buoyed up by a roster of requirements? God evidently trusts us more than we trust each other to "work out [our] own salvation with fear and trembling" (Morm. 9:27). Is our prevailing sense of one another that we're all so wayward we can't get past the remedial course?

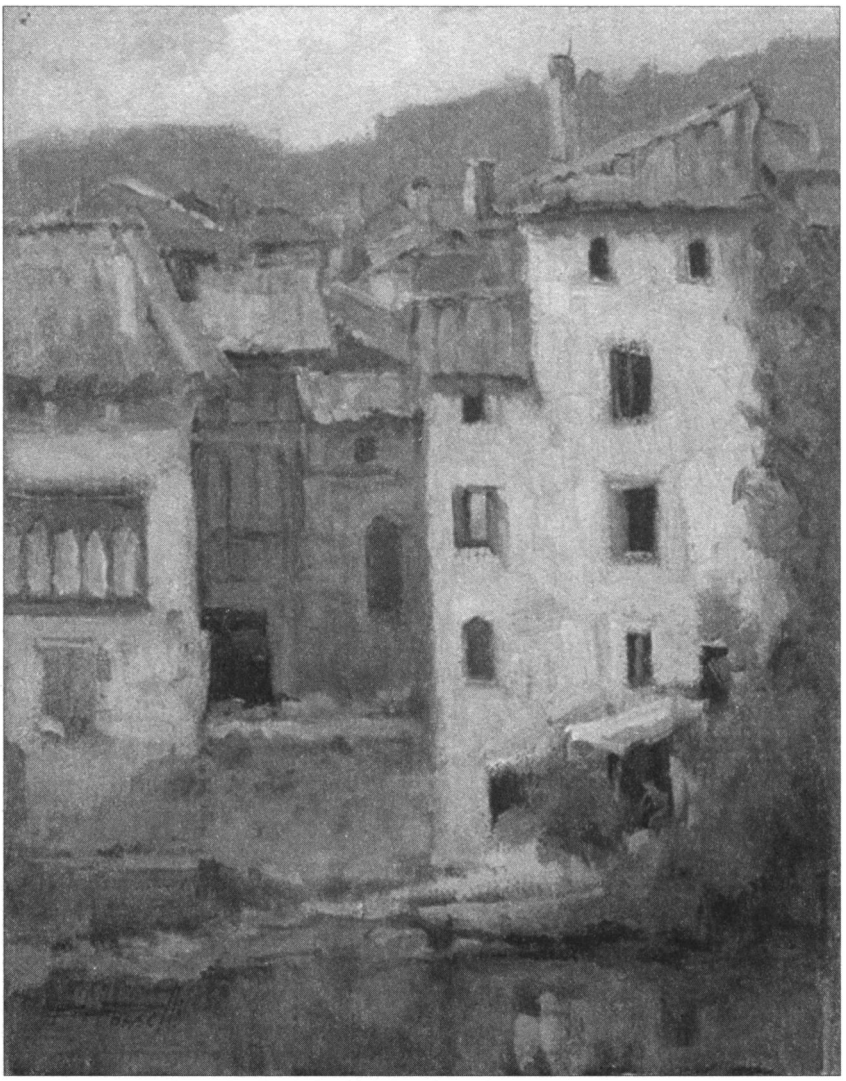
Lest I be misunderstood, I feel the tedious need to explain that I'm a card-carrying, calling-filling, sacrament-taking, choir-singing member of the Church, one who is more or less up-to-date with her laundry.

Though Mormons have always loved to admonish, I sense that the Laundry List has become more entrenched in the last decade, as talks are prepared in Microsoft Word, with the benefit of bulleted lists. Our many MBAs, trained in presentation skills, believe that all knowledge can be conveyed through PowerPoint. I cringe when sacrament meeting speakers emphasize their "takeaway message" or when missionary-themed conversations include the word "branding."

In a larger cultural context, the impact of technology on language is partly to blame. Mass communication that isn't pure tabloid has become technical writing, a slick how-to manual. Estate planning, quality parenting, weight loss, and cholesterol reduction can all be achieved in three easy steps. Why not, then, our eternal salvation? Except we need more than three steps, and no one can say they're easy.

Our scriptural canon is so broad and our theology so lofty that we should have no shortage of pure doctrine for an eternity of talks and lessons, with exhortation trimmed to a minimum. Inspire me with scriptural examples but spare me to-do lists. General Authorities can admonish all they like. It's their job. And perhaps youth and children need it in industrial-strength doses. But for me, please, air your laundry elsewhere.

But there I go, telling Mormons what to do.



Bonnie Posselli, *St. Antonin (Southern France)*, oil, 14" x 11"

Contributors

JULIANNA GARDNER BERRY, a native Northeasterner, lives in Maynard, Massachusetts, with her husband and four sons. She writes a humor column regularly for a suburban Boston newspaper and is pursuing a master's degree in children's literature.

KENT CONDIE is professor of geochemistry at the New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology, where he has taught since 1970. Condie has written three research treatises, an introductory historical geology textbook with co-author Robert Sloan, *Origin and Evolution of Earth* (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1998), and three advanced textbooks: *Plate Tectonics and Crustal Evolution* (Oxford, Eng: Butterworth Heinmann, 1997), *Mantle Plumes and Their Record in Earth History* (Cambridge, Eng: Cambridge, University Press, 2001), and *Earth as Evolving Planetary System* (Amsterdam, Netherlands: Elsevier Academic Press, 2005). His research, primarily dealing with the origin and evolution of continents and the early history of the Earth, has been sponsored chiefly by the U.S. National Science Foundation. He is also the author or co-author of more than three hundred articles published in scientific journals.

JOHN-CHARLES DUFFY is a graduate student in religious studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He taught for several years as an adjunct instructor at the University of Utah, where from 2001 to 2004 he organized a monthly Mormon studies brown-bag series. His articles have appeared in *Sunstone, Dialogue, American Transcendental Quarterly,* and Cambridge University Press's *Victorian Literature and Culture.*

DANIEL P. DWYER, Order of Friars Minor (OFM), was born in Schenectady, New York, received M.A.'s in history and theology from the College of St. Rose, Albany, New York, and the Washington Theological Union, Silver Spring, Maryland, respectively; and a Ph.D. in history from Tulane University in New Orleans. He has been a member of the Franciscan Order since 1982 and a Roman Catholic priest since 1988. He is a

member of the Mormon History Association and the John Whitmer Historical Association. He is currently an associate professor of history at Siena College in Loudonville, New York, and a member of the board of trustees of St. Bonaventure University in Olean, New York.

BARRY GAINES is a professor of English literature at the University of New Mexico where he has taught for more than twenty-five years. He specializes in the plays of William Shakespeare and served as associate editor of *Shakespeare Studies* for eighteen years. He has published a bibliography of Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur* and editions of renaissance plays. He also writes theater reviews for the *Albuquerque Journal.*

GARY HUXFORD is emeritus professor of history, Western Oregon University. He serves as the self-appointed mayor of Cooper Hollow. Gary and his wife, Catherine, served a mission in East Africa, 1997–99, dividing their time between Kenya and Ethiopia. From 2000 to 2002 they served a second mission together in Haiti.

HELEN WALKER JONES teaches English part-time at BYU and at Salt Lake Community College. Her work has appeared in *Harper's, Cimarron Review, Wisconsin Review, Wittenberg Review, Richmond Quarterly, Florida Review, Indiana Review, Gargoyle, Nebraska Review,* and many other journals. She and her husband, Walter, are the parents of two grown children and the grandparents of baby Quincy.

DAVID CLARK KNOWLTON tracks flat, empty spaces, worries about Bolivia, and sometimes grapples with difficult texts from his home in Salt Lake City. He also teaches at Utah Valley State College, where he specializes in the anthropology of religion in Latin America.

FRANCES LEE MENLOVE was a founder of *Dialogue* and its first manuscript editor. She graduated from Stanford University and holds a Ph.D. in psychology from the University of Michigan and a master of divinity degree from the Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, California. She has four children and six grandchildren and lives on the beautiful Oregon coast.

JACOB MORGAN is a microprocessor design engineer in Forest Grove, Oregon, where he lives with his wife, Stephanie, and their three children. He served a mission in Jacksonville, Florida, and thoroughly enjoys his current calling as Primary chorister.

KARL SANDBERG was an articulate writer on Mormon topics and a loyal supporter of *Dialogue*. Awarded a master's in French from BYU and a Ph.D. in philosophy and humanities from the University of Wisconsin, Madison, he taught at several universities before settling in for thirty-one years of teaching in the French and Humanities Department at Macalester College in St. Paul, Minnesota. Not long before his death in April 2000, Karl collaborated with Mark Thomas and Sheldon Greaves in preparing a collection of essays on the Old Testament, written by eminent scholars. Although the collection as a whole never found a publisher, a number of the essays have appeared in recent issues of *Dialogue*. This essay was to have served as an introduction to that collection. *Dialogue* is grateful to Dawn B. Sandberg, Karl's wife, for her assistance in preparing this essay for publication.

DARRELL SPENCER, Stocker Professor of Creative Writing, Ohio University, grew up in Las Vegas, where he painted signs, roofed, played sports from sunrise to sunset, and learned the town, then taught at Brigham Young University for twelve years. He and his wife Kate, an artist and frequenter of estate auctions, live in Athens with their dog, Eddie.

DOUGLAS THAYER teaches at BYU. His publications include two collections of short stories, *Under the Cottonwoods* (Provo, Utah: Frankson Books, 1977) and *Mr. Wahlquist in Yellowstone* (Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith Books, 1989), and two novels, *Summer Fire* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1983), and *The Conversion of Jeff Williams* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2003).

LON YOUNG teaches music in Provo, Utah, where he shares a house with five vibrant redheads: his wife Rebecca and their four daughters. He is completing his thesis, a collection of poems, at Utah State University.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

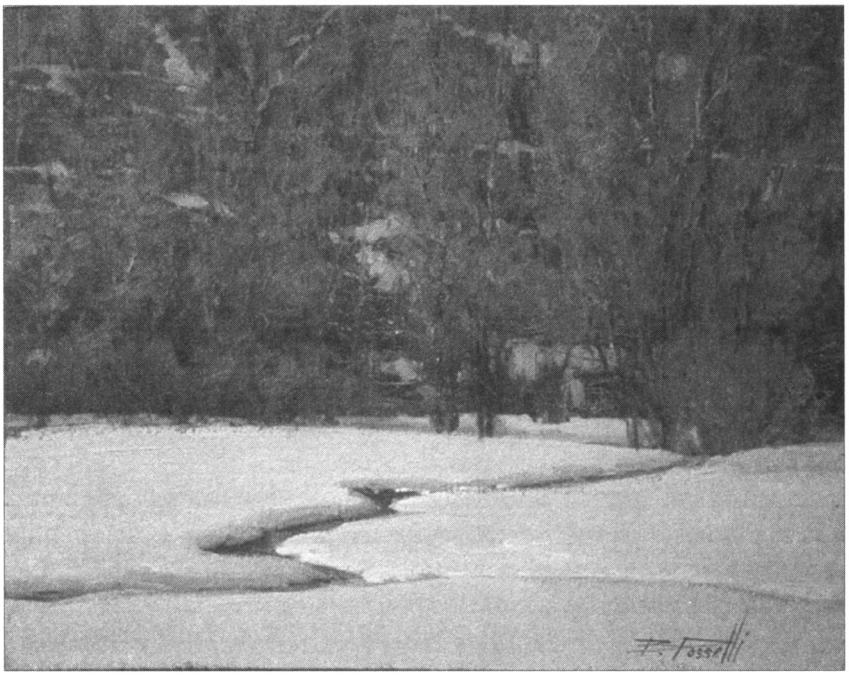
Bonnie Posselli

A native of Salt Lake City, Bonnie Posselli was introduced early by her mother to plein air painting, which she describes as her "abiding love and strongest asset." She has traveled extensively to paint in France, Brazil, Argentina, Peru, Guatemala, Chile, Easter Island, Ecuador, the Galapagos Islands, and Alaska, to say nothing of the Puget Sound and the redrock country of Utah and the Four Corners area. Her subjects, chiefly done in oils, include landscapes, both rural and wild, and outdoor scenes from villages and cities. Among the important influences upon her art were the instruction of Alvin Gittens of the University of Utah Art Department and the art of early landscape painter John F. Carlson, whose "reverence for pure, natural landscape and his abiding love of trees" continue to inspire her to this day. Bonnie has had many gallery and corporate one person shows. Her most recent awards include Best of Show, Maynard Dixon Invitational; Deseret News Purchase Award; and Utah Governor's Mansion Artist Award. Further examples of her art can be viewed at http:\\www.bonnieposselli.com. She may be contacted at (801) 232-5771.

Artist's Statement

In the beginning the canvas is washed in hues that are chosen for a ground that will give energy to the painting. . . . . When I am satisfied with the wash I will do a slight sketch, and then perhaps select a palette knife to slip some texture into areas where it would be effective. From there a loose block-in is formed with shape, value, and line, with the idea of coming back with layers of paint using palette knife and brush. Sometimes washes and glazes are used to create an effect or mood. Always there is a reverence for truth that the subject chosen has inspired.

Front Cover: Bonnie Posselli, *Winter Blues*, oil, 16" x 20".
Back Cover (above): Bonnie Posselli, *Mujeres Hermanas*, oil, 10" x 15".
Back Cover (below): Bonnie Posselli, *Among Friends*, oil, 14" x 18".



Bonnie Posselli, *Winter Peace,* oil 18" x 24"

Bonnie Posselli, *Winter Lace*, oil, 18" x 24"

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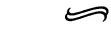

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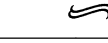

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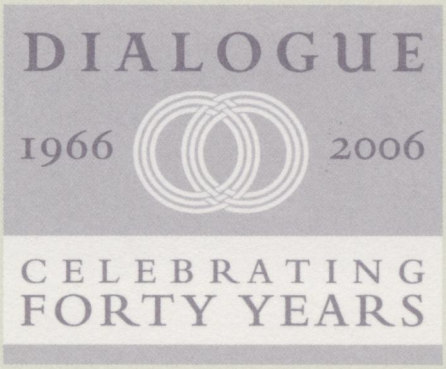

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