

# DIALOGUE

*A Journal of Mormon Thought*



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*A Journal of Mormon Thought*

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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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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### *A Neglected Chronicler*

I read Michael Quinn's "LDS Church Authority and New Plural Marriages, 1890-1904" when it appeared (*Dialogue* 18, no. 1, [Spring 1985]: 9-105). I also found interesting Julie Hemming Savage's "Hannah Grocer Hegsted and Post-Manifesto Plural Marriage" (*Dialogue* 26, no. 3 [Fall 1993]: 101-18).

In a day when the world press is expounding on the polygamous ancestry of presidential candidate Mitt Romney, I thought *Dialogue* readers might be interested in the following thoughts penned twenty years ago after reading Quinn's and Savage's only partially informed articles on the subject of post-Manifesto plural marriages.

I am constantly amazed how the current generation is rediscovering matters that never were a mystery. Frank J. Cannon, son of George Q. Cannon (first counselor to Brigham Young, John Taylor, and Wilford Woodruff), and half-brother of Apostle Abraham H. Cannon, wrote all anyone ever needed to know about the Church's continued practice of plural marriage, not only in Canada and Mexico, but here in the United States. And Samuel W. Taylor, a frequent *Dialogue* contributor also told the story of his own apostle-father's (John W. Taylor) several plural marriages well after the 1890 Manifesto.

Cannon, an attorney, attended to Church business in Washington, D.C., for many years, being instrumental in mediating between the U.S. Senate and

Church authorities to obtain statehood. Here is an interesting sidebar for political scientists and historians. Cannon had all but achieved his objective when Grover Cleveland was defeated for a second term. As some may remember, Cleveland became the only U.S. president reelected after an interval of four years out of office. He needed no further convincing that Utah should become a state when he resumed office and saw Utah's admission to the union as one of his administration's first items of business. Cleveland was a Democrat; and for many years, Utah voted Democratic in gratitude for Cleveland's understanding and in retaliation against the Republican Party which, with the exception of the two Cleveland administrations, had ruled the United States since the Civil War and had deliberately kept Utah out of the union, lumping Mormonism's polygamy with the slavery of the South as one of "the twin relics of barbarism."

Frank Cannon was thereupon named by the new state legislature as Utah's first senator to Washington. (This was before the Constitutional amendment providing for direct election of senators.)

Neither Cannon nor his book, *Under the Prophet in Utah* (1909; rpt., Boston: C. M. Clark Co., 1911), are cited in either Quinn's or Savage's articles, leaving the impression that it remained for contemporary scholars to reveal the fascinating story of polygamy's having continued (with the approval of high Church authorities) for



another thirty years following the Manifesto. For goodness sake, I remember that, when I was a child, men in good standing visited plural wives up and down the street where I was reared. And these weren't "Fundamentalist" types, either. I daresay many others can remember similar events.

In *Under the Prophet in Utah*, ex-Senator Cannon, by then publisher of a newspaper in Boulder, Colorado (he had been a newspaper publisher in Ogden until life in Utah became too uncomfortable) tells the intriguing secular side of the Woodruff Manifesto story (now canonized as Official Declaration 1 in the Doctrine and Covenants).

It has often been stated by enemies of the Church (and super-sophisticated scholar members) that the Manifesto was drafted by outside lawyers with no inspiration whatever and foisted on an elderly President Woodruff as an act of desperation to save the properties and temples of the Church. (Some have charged Cannon himself with having drafted the Manifesto as a sop to Congress). Cannon assures us in his book that this just wasn't so. He says that he talked with President Woodruff personally shortly after the Manifesto was read in October 1890 general conference. He had been close to the president since childhood and characterizes him as a sweet, if naive soul, of towering integrity. As history has it, the Lord said, in effect, "Enough, my good and faithful servant. What has been done will be counted as righteousness, and my Church will continue on a slightly different track."

According to Cannon, the entire

original redaction, which he was shown, was in President Woodruff's own handwriting, with which Cannon was familiar. This is the best ammunition I have ever seen against Fundamentalist pretensions that the Manifesto is nothing more than a political document conjured up by lawyers and foisted on a senile Church leader.

The sad part is Cannon's assertion that it was Joseph F. Smith and his Smith kin who insisted on reinterpreting the Woodruff Manifesto as not affecting continued, underground plural marriages during the next fourteen years (until the Second Manifesto of 1904) in defiance of the U.S. government and the pledged word of previous Church leaders. (Today, most interpreters curiously place the blame on John Taylor, who was dead before the Manifesto was received.) This is sad because the successors of these leaders were eventually compelled to return to the original pledge of giving up the practice absolutely, an eventuality which Cannon asserts President Woodruff originally intended.

He also tells in passing the fascinating, and eventually tragic, tale of how his brother Abraham, while an apostle, was among the first to be called to take a plural wife following the death of Presidents Woodruff and Snow, only to die of typhoid fever at age thirty-seven, in 1896.

Frank Cannon maintains, and it isn't difficult to accept, that if we had acted in good faith as originally agreed, we wouldn't be plagued by Fundamentalism today. Indeed, it has been argued that Fundamentalism came into being during the next few



decades of equivocation. Straightforward post-Woodruff acceptance of the Manifesto might also have saved the careers and reputations of Apostles Matthias F. Cowley and John W. Taylor, each of whom, he asserts, had married with the Church president's approval but were dropped from the Quorum when sacrificial lambs were required. That the Church recognized they had done nothing contrary to Church order is sustained by the fact that at least Matthias Cowley was accorded a posthumous "restoration of blessings."

It must be acknowledged that Frank Cannon has come down in LDS history as an apostate, a scalawag, and an enemy of the Church and that he was repudiated as senator because he had become venal and self-seeking. And his book, whenever it is infrequently referred to, is counted as "anti-Mormon" literature. I've reviewed the book carefully and cannot agree with either characterization. Cannon himself insists that he always felt close to the Church, its rich history, its leaders, and his heritage, though he himself never received a personal testimony of, nor practiced, plural marriage.

As a result, in a day when accepting "the Principle" was a test of faith, he never held high priesthood office (though, as noted, he served the Church well for many years, carrying out sensitive and often secret legal and political commissions for top Church officials). It was when a new generation of Church leaders insisted on repudiating the Church's (and his) pledged word to national political leaders that he felt he could no longer represent the

Church, even in a secular capacity, and absented himself to Colorado.

Of course, one always tells a story to put the best face on one's own behavior. And perhaps the truth lies somewhere in the middle. Anyway, I bring the book to the attention of *Dialogue* readers because there's nothing in it to impair anyone's testimony and because it provides a close look at the travails of the Church at a telling moment in its history. Again, it is a shame that scholars who have written on the subject appear to have missed this important original source—and have also overlooked an important cause for the residual "Fundamentalist" movement 120 years after it should have disappeared.

David Timmins  
Salt Lake City

### *Science/Religion Complement*

I would like to thank David O. Tolman for his letter "Natural vs. Supernatural," *Dialogue* 40, no. 1 (Spring 2007) commenting on my article, "Eternal Progression in a Multiverse: An Explorative Mormon Cosmology," 39, no. 2 (Summer 2006): 1–45.

Tolman is correct in saying that articles on the science-religion interface are rare in *Dialogue*, but I do not share his opinion that our study of science and religion should be disconnected. On the contrary, I submit that science and religion are connected because both are legitimate "disciplines" by which we seek truth. Our inability, at this point in our progression, to find connections is not a valid reason to abandon the attempt. We ought to

seek truth wherever and however it may be found—in a strand of DNA, the core of a star, the equations of a patent clerk, or the writings of a prophet.

A fertile dialogue between scientists and theologians is taking place. Indeed, the John Templeton Foundation makes awards to cutting-edge research in science and spirituality, encouraging progress in the marriage of the two. Tolman states, “Trying to understand one by means of the other does harm to both.” In his acceptance speech of the 2007 Templeton Prize, Charles Taylor, professor of philosophy at Northwestern University, states, “The divorce of natural science and religion has been damaging to both.” These diametrical statements reflect the end points of the science-religion spectrum. As the science-religion dialogue progresses, I believe that our understanding of both will be enriched.

Finally, I am uncomfortable with Tolman’s demarcation of science as “natural” and religion as “supernatural,” and I would not consider likening, even loosely, the magical world of Harry Potter with the workings of God. I wonder . . . to God, are the workings of God “supernatural?”

Kirk D. Hagen  
Ogden, Utah

### *Praise from Afar*

Note: The following letter was sent to Dialogue’s managing director, Lori Levinson, who oversees subscriptions and mailing.

Thanks for your email. I received the *Dialogue* Spring 2007 issue (40, no.

1) some time ago without problems, thank you very much.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you and the whole staff of *Dialogue* for the wonderful work you do. To read the journal is always a great pleasure. It gives me new insights and the feeling that there are other Mormons in this world who think and feel the way I do. It supports me in my spiritual journey and helps me to stay active in the Church. Thank you very much for all your work.

Susanne Müller-Schröter  
Bremen, Germany

### *Celestial Sex?*

I do not know where to begin with Cetti Cherniak’s exhilarating essay “The Theology of Desire, Part I” (*Dialogue* 40, no.1 [Spring 2007]: 1–42.) I have underlined and annotated passage after passage after passage. It is insightful, ambitious, courageous, expansive, and oh so necessary. I find the prose bold, poetic, and, in parts, downright seductive.

That said, there are several tenuous assumptions that hinder the central argument. I do not have space to address all of them in this brief letter; however, the most outstanding is the assumption that there are, in fact, sexual relations in heaven (or, more apropos, in the celestial kingdom).

Before going any further, I need to clarify: I am not suggesting that the erotic in the proper context (as defined by the author) is sinful, evil, perverse, dirty, etc. Nor am I saying that there are *not* sexual relations in heaven. However, this assertion (sex in

heaven) is such a radical departure from most Christian conceptions of the hereafter that it needs to be established with unambiguous evidence (from the scriptures, authoritative quotes from those who would truly know or who are truly in the know) at the outset.

I remember as a young teenager who used to routinely doze off in the back row of my early morning seminary class suddenly perking up one day when the teacher said, "And remember, in the next life you can only have sex in the celestial kingdom." I also remember at least one BYU religion professor telling the students in a Book of Mormon class the same thing. In retrospect, I suppose this was a way of enticing or motivating us to keep our hands and body parts to ourselves until we were legally married. However, I have found this to be a fairly common belief among the rank and file of the church—a given, if you will.

The reasoning goes something like this: Celestial marriage will unite husband and wife forever. Marriage is God's authorized institution for procreation on Earth (for procreating children). Celestial couples can become as the gods, creating and populating worlds. Sexual intercourse is the vehicle for procreating children. Therefore, there must needs be sexual relations in the celestial kingdom.

This is a nice, tidy argument—at least from a mortal perspective. However, as the author has argued most persuasively, God's mind and ways are not the ways of mortal men and women. If it is impossible for humans in their mortal state to fully comprehend the machinations of the Almighty, then is

it not possible that sexual relations (including the way of procreating here on Earth) is strictly a mortal construct designed for this world?

In a stake priesthood leadership training a few years ago, I heard Neal A. Maxwell state that time is a uniquely mortal phenomenon. Elder Boyd K. Packer once suggested that God created libido because He knew that humans would not mate and stay together unless there was an exceptionally powerful force motivating them to do so. In the celestial kingdom, where the inhabitants are living a much higher law, perhaps no such motivation is necessary?

As I mentioned earlier, it is not that sexual relations are dirty or sinful or bad within the proper context. However, sexual intercourse may be the way we procreate in mortality but not in other realms. If we extend human logic to the celestial kingdom, factoring in a gestation period of nine months, it would take eons for a celestial couple to populate a planet (unless, of course, the husband had millions of wives, but that is another letter for another day, and it would really throw the male-female ratio out of balance, I think).

Then there is the whole issue of "spirit" children. Celestial couples are not procreating flesh and blood children but spirit offspring. So perhaps the entire process is different. Maybe the celestial process allows a couple to procreate thousands or millions or an entire planet's worth of spirit children in the twinkling of an eye?

If this were true, then the next question would be: Does that mean

there is no sexual pleasure in heaven? Again, we do not know at this time. However, it could be that there are sensations and experiences in heaven that are far more intense, pleasurable, and satisfying than what we on Earth in our mortal state call sex, experiences that out-orgasm orgasms. Perhaps on the scale of pleasure sex as we know it here on Earth is like riding a tricycle and on the other side awaiting us are BMW experiences?

Because our thoughts and feelings are not God's, we should be cautious when applying and extending mortal logic to the hereafter. For example, the author says that God defecates and urinates. Does he eat food? Does he need to? If he doesn't eat or drink, then no need to urinate or defecate. Are those activities uniquely human as well? What does it mean to have a celestial body? Is there celestial junk food? If so, if we indulge, will we compromise our perfected celestial bodies?

The author says that only those who reach the highest level of the celestial kingdom will enjoy sexual relations. The others will be "spayed or neutered" (17). Literally or figuratively? And if the body is literally neutered or spayed, how can it be perfect? Does it mean those people would be incapable of having sexual relations?

Logical extension is one reason we may incorrectly assume there is sex in heaven. Other reasons are faulty metaphorical application and ambiguous evidence. For example, the author states that Jesus was conceived via a sexual encounter. Where in the scriptures does it unequivocally say that? I am not saying that it did not or could not have

happened that way; I am saying that we do not know. The scripture (Luke 1:35) says that "the Holy Ghost shall come upon" her.

With recent advancements in technology, the idea of a virgin birth is hardly a miracle in our day. And if we as humans can create a virgin birth, surely God, the all-knowing and all-powerful, has countless ways to bring this to pass without sexual intercourse. An impregnation sans intercourse would be more consistent with the definition of "virgin" (and, correspondingly, virgin birth). Also, the virgin Mary was not married to God the Father (so far as we know). So it would have been a suspension of the eternal law of chastity if God had had sexual relations with someone to whom he was not legally and lawfully married.

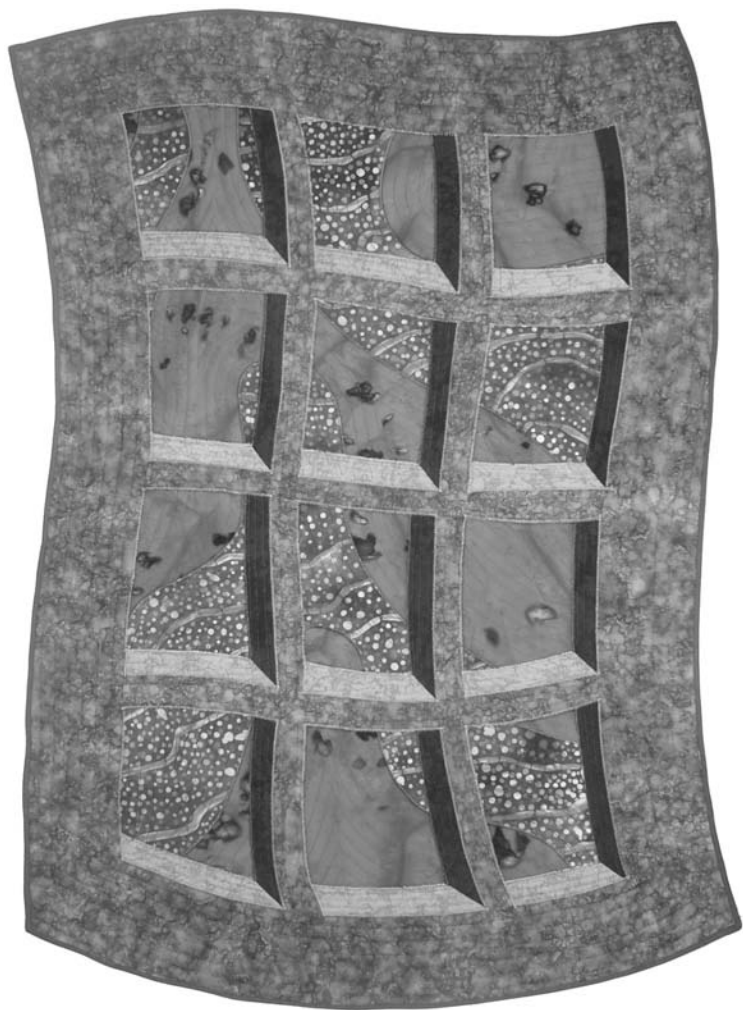
When Talmage states: "[T]hat child to be born of Mary was begotten of Elohim, the Eternal Father, not in violation of natural law but in accordance with a higher manifestation thereof" (*Jesus the Christ*, 81), this does not necessarily equate with sexual relations. Natural law could refer to the fact that the child was conceived as a result of a sperm uniting with an egg (a natural process), the result grew within Mary's womb (a natural process), and Mary delivered the child in the natural manner of women on Earth. Likewise, when Brigham Young alludes to "the marriage relation," he is not necessarily referring to a sexual relation. Indeed, the marriage relation is so broad and expansive that he could be referring to something as basic as "men are from Mars and women are from Venus."

Part of the ambiguity is due to language. In the days of Brigham Young and in ancient times, writers did not use language as explicitly and, in some cases, crudely as we do today. They did not write, “The Holy Spirit had sex with Mary” but instead used metaphor and euphemism, i.e., the Holy Ghost “c[a]me upon her,” which shows more decorum but also leaves open more territory for interpretation.

In short, I think the author has taken a bold stand in writing this essay, and I am anxiously awaiting the second installment. However, I think the central premise needs to be established

more convincingly before we can rally wholeheartedly behind the subsequent arguments. Then again, our post-mortal bodies must be good for something more than celestial surfing or pick-up basketball, so maybe Cherniak and my former seminary teacher are right after all. If we believe all things and hope all things, why not add celestial sex to the mix? Until we have more compelling evidence, it’s pure (and wishful) speculation.

*Michael Fillerup  
Flagstaff, Arizona*



Anne Muñoz; *Aquatic Voyer*; quilted batik;  
34 x 23 in.; 2005; private collection

# A Defense of the Authority of Church Doctrine

*Nathan Oman*

Authority is a key concept in Mormonism. If one were to ask most Mormons what makes their religion different from ordinary Christianity, many—perhaps most—would respond that Mormons believe in continuing revelation, modern prophets, additional scripture, and the restoration of priesthood powers. All of these stock elements in Mormonism involve claims of one sort or another to special authority. Given the central place that the concept of authority occupies in Mormonism, there has been surprisingly little disciplined reflection about the concept among Mormon intellectuals and scholars.<sup>1</sup> This chapter seeks to begin filling this gap by asking a fairly simple question: “Can the authority of Church doctrine be justified?” My conclusion is that, given a fairly weak<sup>2</sup> set of assumptions, a number of arguments justify the authority of Church doctrine over believing Latter-day Saints.

In exploring these arguments I hope to illuminate some of the issues with which Mormon thinkers must grapple if they are to make sense of the important concept of authority in their theology. My project in this paper, however, is limited. I do not purport to be talking about all aspects of authority within Mormonism. In particular, I am not addressing the personal authority of the leaders of the Church per se, nor am I trying to grapple with the idea of priesthood. Rather, this chapter is concerned with a particular kind of authority—namely, the authority of Church doctrine. Finally, I do not seek to justify the authority of Church doctrine to religious skeptics. My goal is not to convert the unconverted but rather to show that many of the intuitions and implicit assumptions of ordinary Latter-day Saints with regard to the authority of Church doctrine can be



made explicit and justified by arguments resting on premises that are widely shared among Mormons.

Mormons regularly invoke the idea of Church doctrine to differentiate between those teachings and practices that have some claim on them and those teachings and practices that are merely opinions or suggestions. For example, Heber might claim that evolution is a false and evil teaching. Brigham then responds by saying, “That is just your opinion. That is not Church doctrine.” Likewise, Brigham might suggest that the Word of Wisdom, properly understood, requires abstention from all meat. Heber then responds by saying, “That is just your interpretation. That is not Church doctrine.” The clear implication in both exchanges is that, were the opinion or practice in question Church doctrine, it would have a claim on Heber or Brigham that it does not otherwise have.

I have presented arguments elsewhere about the problem of identifying what is or is not Church doctrine.<sup>3</sup> Rather than restating those arguments here, I will simply restate my conclusions. Mormons lack a clear rule that allows them to identify what is or is not Church doctrine. The various possibilities—teachings that have been formally added to the standard works, statements that have been formally accepted in general conference, statements that have been made by prophets and apostles in the appropriate context, etc.—all turn out to be over- or under-inclusive when examined in detail. To be sure, all of these proposed rules are useful in orienting us toward Church doctrine, even if they are not foolproof methods for identifying it. Nevertheless, we do have unambiguous cases of Church doctrine. It is clearly Church doctrine that Jesus Christ is the Savior of humankind and that Mormons should not drink coffee or alcohol. Rather than relying on a rule of recognition for identifying Church doctrine, Mormons rely on a hermeneutic approach. We determine what is or is not Church doctrine by offering interpretations—stories, if you will—that seek to make sense of clear instances of Church doctrine against the backdrop of Mormon scriptures, teachings, history, and practices. In offering this interpretation, we seek to present Mormon texts, practices, and history in the best possible light, not for any apologetic purpose but rather because, in seeking what is normative, we reject interpretations that we would regard as normatively less attractive. This does not mean that Church doctrine is simply a matter of what we think is best. It is not. It is a matter of charitably interpreting Mormon practices, texts, and experience.

Because this is a complicated and inherently normative task, the

precise contours of Church doctrine are always contestable. This characterization needn't imply that there are no right answers to the question of whether something is Church doctrine. It simply means that we are unlikely to arrive at a formula that will allow us to definitively answer the question in every circumstance. Rather than relying on an intellectual formula, the Church seems to cope with the potential problems of doctrinal disagreements ethically and institutionally. Ethically, we are told not to contend in anger about points of doctrine. Institutionally, the practical difficulties of doctrinal disagreement can be resolved by the fiat of whoever has the stewardship for a particular institutional setting. Thus, doctrinal discussions in a ward Sunday School class are "managed" by an ethic of being charitable to one another in our disagreement and by the bishop's ability to direct teachers to teach in a particular way or release them from their callings. Neither of these coping mechanisms, however, requires that we have a formula for incontestably laying to rest what is or is not Church doctrine in every case.

Given this understanding of Church doctrine (and it is the understanding that I will assume for the rest of this article), can its authority be justified? Ultimately, I believe that the answer is yes, but to understand why, we must first have a clearer notion of what we mean by authority.

### On the Nature of Authority

Ultimately authority is a form of reason giving. The manifest successes of philosophical modernism and philosophical liberalism, both of which rest to a greater or lesser extent on overt hostility to the notion of authority, however, can make it difficult to recognize this fact. Indeed, for some people authority seems like the antithesis of reason giving. The oddity of authority as a form of reason giving comes from the fact that authority offers a peculiar kind of reason. Consider the following dialogue.

Heber: I think that drinking wine should be fine for everyone. Alcohol needn't be destructive if it's consumed in moderation, and science has shown that modest amounts of wine are good for your heart.

Brigham: True enough and I suppose that makes sense. However, as a matter of Church doctrine, Mormons must abstain from alcohol. Therefore, Mormons ought not to drink wine.

Heber offers two reasons for his conclusion, namely that moderate alcohol consumption isn't destructive and can actually help one's heart. Brigham denies his conclusion, but he doesn't deny Heber's reasons. In-

deed, he concedes that they are true. Rather, he offers Church doctrine as a reason for reaching the opposite conclusion. Yet on its face, Church doctrine does not consist of a denial of the truth of Heber's reasons. Rather the way that Brigham invokes Church doctrine suggests that Heber's reasons simply don't matter. The authority of Church doctrine excludes them.

In his classic work on the concept of authority, Oxford philosopher Joseph Raz focused on this exclusionary quality of authoritative reasons. When one offers authority as a reason, he argued, it interacts with other reasons in a special way. It simply excludes them. For this reason, Raz spoke of authority as an "exclusionary" reason. He wrote: "There is a sense in which if one accepts the legitimacy of an authority one is committed to following it blindly. One can be very watchful that it shall not overstep its authority and be sensitive to the presence of non-excluded considerations. But barring these possibilities, one is to follow the authority regardless of one's view of the merits of the case (that is blindly). One may form a view on the merits but so long as one follows the authority this is an academic exercise of no practical importance."<sup>4</sup>

Hence, the denial of authority consists not in disagreement with it, but rather in the denial that an authority has the ability to exclude other reasons. Likewise, to accept an authority involves more than simply agreeing with it. Paradoxically, one can agree with everything that an authority claims and nevertheless deny that it is an authority. At the same time, one can disagree with everything that an authority says and yet still accept it as authoritative.

The example of the law illustrates how authority operates as a reason. It may be that one follows the law only because one regards it as embodying desirable policies. One is punctiliously obedient to its demands, but only because one happens to agree with them. In such a case, one does not grant to it authority. In contrast, one might believe that, as a substantive matter, the policies embodied by the law are misguided. Yet if one regards the law as authoritative, then this disagreement becomes, as Raz says, "an academic exercise of no practical importance." One follows the law because it provides an exclusionary reason for acting.

We can identify Church doctrine as a species of authority precisely because it purports to be an exclusionary reason. This fact provides us with a structure for our arguments about its possible authority. In order to show that the authority of Church doctrine is justified, we need to have ar-

guments for why it should act as an exclusionary reason. This, in turn, means that we cannot justify the authority of Church doctrine solely by reference to its substantive content. For example, one cannot defend the authority of the Word of Wisdom by marshalling arguments for its beneficial health effects. Indeed, if it were possible to compile an exhaustive catalog of every Church doctrine and then one by one offer arguments in support of their substantive content, one would not have demonstrated the authority of Church doctrine. In a sense, each of these arguments would consist of a rejection of the question of authority, and all that their success would produce would be accidental agreement with Church doctrine. Put in concrete terms, a person who abstains from tobacco because he or she believes that it is harmful does not thereby accept the authority of the Word of Wisdom.

The key question for the authority of Church doctrine thus comes in justifying its claims in those cases where we are otherwise disposed to reject its substantive conclusions. The question is vital for both practical and philosophical reasons. Practically, it is of importance because it is precisely in those cases that Church doctrine is potentially the most valuable. To the extent that Church doctrine simply tracks my substantive beliefs there is a sense in which it is not really all that practically important to me. Furthermore, if I am willing to grant legitimacy to the claims of Church doctrine only in those cases where I already substantively agree with it, there is a sense in which it lacks any power to teach or change me. It is precisely those instances where I find myself in disagreement with the substantive content of Church doctrine that it has the real possibility of altering or changing my beliefs and behaviors.

Philosophically, the point at which we disagree with the substantive content of Church doctrine is key because this is precisely the point at which we are confronted with the question of its authority. Accordingly, any argument for the authority of Church doctrine must meet a simple test. It must justify the claim of Church doctrine over Latter-day Saints in precisely those cases where they are otherwise disposed to believe or act differently. Such an argument must therefore be independent of the substantive content of Church doctrine in any particular instances. Only by being substance-neutral can the argument provide an exclusionary reason. For example, suppose that one believes that—all things being equal—women should have absolutely symmetrical institutional authority with men. An argument for the authority of Church doctrine would jus-

tify the denial of the priesthood to women without reference to why the practice is substantively desirable.

There are at least three such arguments for the authority of Church doctrine that meet this criterion of substantive neutrality: the argument from covenant, the argument from epistemic advantage, and the argument from community participation.

### The Argument from Covenant

The first basis for the authority of Church doctrine is covenant. Promises, like authority, provide exclusionary reasons for acting. Consider another dialogue between Heber and Brigham.

Brigham: We should go to Emma's birthday party. She has been very kind to us, and I think that if we went it would make her happy.

Heber: I agree. Unfortunately, I have already promised to attend Eliza's birthday party, which is at the same time.

The structure of the reasons in this dialogue should be familiar. Brigham has offered reasons for acting that Heber accepts in the abstract. Yet his abstract agreement has become "an academic exercise of no practical importance." The reason is that Brigham's reasons have been excluded from Heber's consideration by the force of Heber's promise. Promises, however, have other qualities beyond the exclusionary nature of the reasons that they offer. Most prominently, they seem to have the ability to transform wholly unrequired action into an obligation. Even assuming that Heber has no other relationship to Eliza, his promise is sufficient to create an obligation to attend her party.

Some theorists of promising have found this bootstrap quality of promising unacceptable, proposing theories of promise-keeping that link the obligation to keep a promise to the promise's substantive content. For example, medieval jurists argued that, in making a promise, we are always seeking some end. The obligation to keep a promise is linked to the end that the promise-maker is pursuing. Hence, for example, a promise that has the goal to further the torture of innocent babies does not create an obligation. On the other hand, a promise whose end is the expression of some virtue, such as generosity or kindness, does create an obligation.<sup>5</sup>

Other theorists have embraced promissory bootstrapping. In particular, writers in the tradition of liberal political philosophy have argued that the force of a promise is an extension of a commitment to personal freedom, allowing people the liberty of, in effect, creating their own moral

universe.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, promise-making has proved so attractive a normative basis for liberal thinkers that those in the social contract tradition have sought to show that virtually *all* political obligations—and perhaps social obligations as well—can be founded on the power of promises.<sup>7</sup>

Both of these approaches, however, see promises as providing exclusionary reasons.<sup>8</sup> It is true that the teleological theories of promise-making offered by medieval jurists did not see the obligations of promises as independent of their ends. This doesn't mean, however, that they believed that promissory obligations lacked the ability to trump other reasons. Rather, in effect they claimed that to promise for an unworthy end constituted a kind of failure, analogous to the person who attempts to make a promise but because of some misadventure does not do so. The wicked-ended promise attempts to create obligations but fails to do so. On the other hand, a morally successful promise does, in this view, create ordinary promissory obligations. The liberal theory of promising, of course, is premised on acceptance of the exclusionary nature of promises. It simply disagrees with the older, medieval theory about the conditions necessary to create a morally successful promise.

At numerous points in their religious lives, Mormons make covenants, which, at least in part, take the form of promises. Provided that we can legitimately interpret those covenants as containing a promise to accept the normative claims of Church doctrine, then they provide an argument that meets the conditions set forth above for a successful theory of Church doctrine's authority. A promise explains why Church doctrine requires us to reject otherwise compelling reasons and does so independent of the particular content of Church doctrine—although, in the teleological view of promising, the underlying end for which one enters covenants does matter.

We are therefore presented with two questions. First, do Mormon covenants contain a promise to accept Church doctrine? Second, do Mormons in fact successfully make such promises? The first question goes to the meaning of the covenants that Mormons make. The second goes to conditions under which they enter their covenants.

There are three main contexts in which Mormons make covenants: baptism, the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, and the temple. A fourth possibility is when Mormons sustain their leaders in ward, stake, and general conferences. The first and most obvious objection is to point out that nowhere in any of these rituals do words to the effect "I promise to submit

to Church doctrine” explicitly appear. Despite its initial plausibility, however, this objection is considerably less powerful than it appears. Its problem lies in the fact that the meaning of our linguistic acts frequently—indeed, almost always—exceeds our explicit statements. There are at least two important ways in which this happens. First, there may simply be a well-established but implicit understanding of certain actions. Second, linguistic action will include some assumptions that are necessary for it to be successful, even if these assumptions are not necessarily a part of our social understanding.

Consider two separate situations. In the first situation, Heber, Brigham, Eliza, and Emma are sitting around. Heber suspects that one of them has earlier received a plane ticket to New York in the mail, but he does not know which one it was. He asks, “Are any of you going to New York?” Brigham replies, “Yes. I will go to New York next week.” In the second situation, Heber asks Eliza if she will go to New York and find his lost friend. He extends his hand to Eliza and asks, “Will you go to New York next week for me?” She shakes hands with him and responds, “Yes. I will go to New York next week.” Both Brigham and Eliza uttered precisely the same words, yet their actions have quite different meanings. Brigham has merely made a statement that predicts his future actions. Eliza, in contrast, has made a commitment that includes going to New York and finding Heber’s lost friend. We can infer this latter meaning not only from the context in which it was given—Heber’s concern for his friend and his manifest desire to extract a commitment from Eliza—but also from the fact that they shook on it, a ritual with a well-understood meaning of commitment. In other words, the unstated meaning is implicitly understood on the basis of context and social convention.

The second way in which the meaning of some linguistic act can exceed its explicit words has to do with the necessary assumptions involved in what we say. It is a matter of content that is logically necessary for some linguistic act to have the meaning (explicit and implicit) that it does. Legal philosopher Lon Fuller gave the analogy of an absent-minded professor who walks out of his office door. The professor doesn’t explicitly assume that the floor outside his office door will be there, yet the floor’s existence is a necessary assumption of his actions.<sup>9</sup> When Brigham says, with complete earnestness, that he is going to New York City, his statement carries a host of assumptions. For example, it assumes that New York City has not been utterly destroyed by a gigantic, rampaging ape, even though the ab-



sence of rampaging apes is not part of our implicit understanding of Brigham's statement. Rather, it is a logical necessity for the statement to be true. Brigham can't go to New York City if New York City no longer exists. Hence, in understanding the meaning of linguistic acts, we must also look to the implicit understanding of the meaning in the context in which the linguistic acts are used and to the assumptions that are logically necessary for both our explicit and implicit understandings, in addition to the literal meaning of the words.

In understanding whether baptism involves a promise to follow Church doctrine, we must first establish the social meaning of baptism, since promises are fundamentally social acts. While the scriptures do not explicitly state that at baptism one promises to be bound by Church doctrine, what they do say about baptism, coupled with common teachings within the Church, seems sufficient to support an implicit understanding of such a promise. Restoration scriptures contain several prominent discussions of baptism. In the Book of Mormon, Nephi teaches that Christ's baptism was necessary to show an example to all. In explaining the meaning of baptism, Nephi states that it shows a willingness to keep commandments (2 Ne. 9:14). Later, Alma the Elder teaches that baptism is a covenant to serve God and keep his commandments (Mosiah 18:8–10). Finally, Moroni notes that baptism causes one to be numbered among the Church and notes that one loses this status by an act of the Church itself (Moro. 6:4, 7). Section 20 of the Doctrine and Covenants also provides a summary of the procedure and meaning of baptism. Pointedly, the passage on baptism begins with a colophon stating "Duties of the members of the Church after they are baptized" (D&C 20:68), implying that baptism creates obligations for Church members.

Church publications also support the idea that baptism contains an implicit promise to follow Church doctrine. For example, the Church's *True to the Faith* booklet, a brief compendium of Church teachings, states: "When you are baptized, you enter into a covenant with God. You promise to take upon yourself the name of Jesus Christ, keep His commandments, and serve Him to the end. . . . When you take upon yourself the name of Jesus Christ, you see yourself as His. You put Him and His work first in your life."<sup>10</sup>

More pointedly, in *Preach My Gospel*, the manual that provides the basis for instructing prospective converts, baptism is explained as bringing with it an obligation to keep a host of commandments commonly associ-

ated with Church doctrine including following the prophet and obeying the laws of chastity, tithing, the fast, and conforming to the provisions of the Word of Wisdom.<sup>11</sup> In citing these sources, I am not offering them as authorities on the meaning of baptism, but as evidence of a particular social understanding—namely, that when one is baptized, one promises to be bound by Church doctrine.<sup>12</sup>

One can make a second kind of argument that baptism involves a covenant to follow Church doctrine. Rather than arguing that baptism involves an unstated but well-understood promise to follow Church doctrine, one can argue that the presence of such a promise is a necessary assumption of what is in fact baptism's well-understood meaning. I take it to be uncontroversial that baptism creates obligations. A person who is baptized is now a member of the Church and as such has a host of obligations that he or she did not previously have. The question thus becomes how one accounts for the fact that these obligations, which did not exist before, are now thought to exist. Put another way, because baptism is unquestionably seen as a gateway to certain kinds of obligations, as an analytic matter it necessarily involves something that creates these obligations. This "something" is a necessary assumption of the act of baptism in the same way that the floor is a necessary assumption of the absent-minded professor who steps out of his office, regardless of what the professor thinks or understands. Promise-making seems like a particularly good candidate for this obligation-creating something. What we need is a concept that allows us to explain why something that was previously unobjectionable or non-obligatory—such as the moderate consumption of wine or fasting on the first Sunday of the month—now becomes forbidden or obligatory. The concept of promise would fill this role perfectly, precisely because one of the things that promises do is to make obligatory what was previously not obligatory.

There is, however, a very powerful conceptual competitor to promise: divine command. In this view, the obligations associated with baptism do not exist because of any kind of promise on the part of the person being baptized, but rather because God commands them. The divine command argument can take one of two forms. Under the strong divine command argument, all of the obligations associated with baptism are actually universal and the unbaptized are either sinning in ignorance or willfully disregarding divine demands. This position, however, is ultimately untenable. For example, for the obligations associated with baptism to be uni-

versal it would have to be the case that the moderate consumption of wine is wrong for all people. Not only is there no support for such a proposition in the text of the Word of Wisdom, which is explicitly directed to Church members (D&C 89:1), but it seems to be rejected by other scriptures indicating that the responsible consumption of alcohol is unobjectionable. Most prominent, of course, are Jesus's apparently positive attitude toward wine, witnessed by the miracle at the feast of Cana (John 2:1–11) and the accounts of his drinking wine with his apostles (Matt. 26:26–29). Hence, even if one thinks that some of the obligations commonly associated with baptism are universalizable, it is difficult to believe that all of them are.

Under the weak version of the divine command argument, the obligations associated with baptism are not necessarily universal—it really was just fine to drink wine before becoming a Mormon—but nevertheless find their basis, not in promises, but in divine commands. In this view, some of God's commands, rather than taking the form of "thou shalt . . .," take the form of "Mormons shalt . . ." or "those who have been baptized shalt . . ." For certain behaviors, this argument seems entirely adequate; but if applied to all of the uniquely Mormon obligations associated with baptism, it runs into two problems. First, in many instances our understanding of what is or is not a divine command is decisively mediated by Church doctrine. The Word of Wisdom and temple work provide two striking examples. One can plausibly argue that the text of the Word of Wisdom endorses the drinking of beers and ales. Verse 17 commends the use of "barley for all useful animals, and for mild drinks" (D&C 89:17). In historical context, one might claim, "mild drinks" are opposed to "hard drinks." The distinction being drawn was between beers or ales and higher alcohol-content beverages such as whiskey or bourbon. Yet any Latter-day Saint who invokes verse 17 to justify drinking beer will be met with the objection that, whatever its merits, this interpretation of verse 17 is not Church doctrine.

Likewise, Latter-day Saints view themselves as having an obligation to perform temple ordinances in behalf of the dead. Yet there are no scriptural passages commanding that vicarious sealings and endowments be performed. Only baptism for the dead makes an appearance in the scriptures (D&C 128). The obligation to perform vicarious sealings and endowments is derived by expansively interpreting scriptural passages in light of later historical practice and consistent teachings within the Church. In other words, we discover the obligation to perform endow-

ments and sealings in behalf of the dead, not from any unmediated divine command or even from a clear sacred text, but from Church doctrine itself. Yet this process suggests that we have some sort of background obligation to follow Church doctrine that then makes it possible to identify particular obligations as divine commands. Put another way, the obligation to follow Church doctrine seems to be logically prior to any of the various interpretations that we use to discover particular divine commands.

Second, even if certain obligations might be plausibly—if problematically—traced back to a divine command, some of our obligations seem to have no basis other than Church doctrine itself. There are many aspects of Church government that fall into this category. For example, there does not seem to be a strong basis for thinking that there is a direct divine command that the president of a ward Sunday School should be a priesthood holder. Yet these are nevertheless practices that seem to be embedded in the structure of Church doctrine such that a bishop who called a woman to be a Sunday School president would plausibly be deemed to have violated an obligation to follow Church doctrine. In the absence of some reason for supposing that God has commanded in general terms that Mormons should follow Church doctrine, a promise to obey Church doctrine seems the better way of accounting for such obligations.<sup>13</sup>

To the extent that baptism involves a promise to follow Church doctrine, one might nevertheless object that, when one is baptized, one fails to make a binding promise. For example, the words “I promise to pay you \$1,000 next Thursday” unambiguously purport to create an obligation. One could nevertheless say that these words fail to create any obligation. No one would claim, for instance, that saying these words in response to a threat to torture your only son creates a morally binding obligation. Likewise, if we were to trick an Esperanto speaker with no understanding of English into saying these words, assuring him—in Esperanto—that they actually mean, “I enjoy eating fresh oysters with my Diet Coke,” no obligation to pay the \$1,000 has been created.

There are, of course, many different ways in which one might fail to make a promise by being baptized. For example, presumably children baptized by over-zealous missionaries in a “swimming party” have not made any sort of a binding promise. Likewise, a person who is baptized in the mistaken belief that in so doing he is becoming a Zen Unitarian or joining the Priory of Zion has probably failed to make a promise to follow Church doctrine. Such idiosyncratic failures to promise, however, present no real

challenge to the authority of Church doctrine *per se* because they go only to the absence of obligation in particular cases. Of far greater concern are objections suggesting that there is some systemic failure in the practice of baptism itself that keeps it from creating obligations in most cases. It seems to me that there are two main such objections.

First, one could argue that, when a person is baptized, he or she doesn't really understand Church doctrine and therefore cannot intend to be bound by all of its strictures. It is a mistake, however, to think that the meaning and obligation of a promise is exhausted by our conscious intentions. Consider a promise to care for an ailing loved one. When one makes such a promise, it is entirely possible that one has no conscious understanding of the precise nature of the obligations that one has undertaken. The nature of the ailment, its progress, and the course of treatment may all be unknown. Yet one's promise is neither meaningless nor limitless. One has simply undertaken the specific—but unknown—obligations that flow from one's promise, an obligation undertaken with the understanding that it would have unforeseen requirements. If the arguments offered thus far are correct, persons being baptized should understand that they are becoming a member of the Church and committing to following Church doctrine. Like the promise to care for an ailing loved one, the specific obligations of the promise may be unknown; but they flow from a fairly straightforward and well-understood commitment.

The second systemic objection is that, because many Mormons are baptized as children at age eight, they lacked the capacity to make a promise so important as the promise associated with baptism. This objection could take at least two forms. First, one could argue that an eight-year-old cannot understand the obligations associated with baptism. Second, one could argue that, given the fact that most eight-year-olds likely received baptism at the instigation of adults whom they are practically unable to resist, any promise made at baptism is coerced. There are two responses to both arguments. First, one can simply deny that eight-year-olds lack freedom or understanding. In this view, while eight-year-olds lack sophisticated theological understanding, they nevertheless grasp that, by being baptized, they agree to be bound by Church doctrine. Likewise, eight-year-olds who are baptized to please adults nevertheless do so willingly. This line of argument, however, is somewhat less than compelling.

The second response is to reject the idea that the promises associated with baptism necessarily occur at the discrete moment of baptism. In

contract law, for example, it is possible to make a legally binding promise even if the discrete moment of promising cannot be located. Rather the promise can arise out of a course of dealing whose cumulative effect can be understood as giving rise to a legitimate and identifiable commitment. Participation in the Church, especially the ordinance of the sacrament, can likewise become a kind of cumulative promising. It is a commonplace of Mormon teachings that, when we partake of the sacrament, we renew our baptismal covenants. Hence, even a member of the Church baptized as a child without full freedom or understanding has an opportunity each week to make—or not make—the same promises that he or she may have failed to make at the time of baptism. Emerging from this process of repeated rituals comes a promise to follow Church doctrine that is both fully voluntary and sufficiently informed to create binding obligations.<sup>14</sup>

### **The Argument from Epistemic Advantage**

Many Mormons, if asked to justify the authority of Church doctrine, would likely reply that Church doctrine has authority because it is given by God.<sup>15</sup> This claim is problematized by the fact that Church doctrine can be identified only by recourse to a complex set of interpretive arguments. We lack a clear rule that allows us to identify Church doctrine in all cases, let alone one that will vouchsafe to us the assurance that every aspect of Church doctrine is dictated directly by God. Church doctrine emerges from our interpretation of Mormon texts, practices, and history. Whatever the role of God in the production of these texts, practices, and history, they always and necessarily involve more than simply the divine mind, and accordingly they cannot be unproblematically identified with the literal word of God.

Nevertheless, despite these necessary concessions, we can still craft an argument for the authority of Church doctrine based on revelation from God. Ultimately, the objection to justifying the authority of Church doctrine on these grounds lies in its apparent fallibility. Even granting that God is infallible, so the objection goes, Church doctrine is always and necessarily mediated through fallible human beings. Given its fallibility, Church doctrine cannot operate as an authority. The argument for the fallibility of Church doctrine is, in my opinion, quite strong. The scriptures themselves declare that they contain errors. It is a fairly easy matter to locate statements by prophets that have proved to be mistaken. Church practices change, and some of these policies have been mistaken. To the

extent that Church doctrine consists of an interpretation of texts, history, and practices that are fallible, it will itself be fallible.

To be sure, the process of interpretation can exclude certain mistakes and errors from Church doctrine. For example, one can dismiss mistaken prophetic statements by insisting that they represent personal opinions rather than binding Church doctrine. But as long as humanity is involved in the production of the materials from which Church doctrine emerges, it will be fallible. Even when Church doctrine is identified according to the most charitable possible interpretation, it will no doubt contain errors, some of which we may be able to identify and many of which we cannot see. The final step of the argument is to claim that fallibility precludes authority. To be sure, one may still agree with much of Church doctrine and one may find it a useful source of ideas and insights, but it cannot function as an exclusionary reason on the basis of its connection to God for the simple reason that, notwithstanding any divine connection, it might be wrong.

The problem with this objection is that fallibility need not be fatal to authority. In other words, one can accept something as providing exclusionary reasons even while acknowledging that it may sometimes be mistaken. Suppose that, while granting that Church doctrine is fallible, one has two other beliefs. First, one believes that despite its errors, on average Church doctrine is likely to be more reliable than one's own conclusions in the absence of Church doctrine. Second, one believes that one cannot identify with any certainty when Church doctrine is likely to be mistaken, particularly in light of the fact that the interpretive process of discovering Church doctrine involves difficult normative choices. In other words, if, after looking at all of the evidence, one finds oneself in disagreement with Church doctrine, one cannot be certain whether it is oneself or Church doctrine that is mistaken. Under these conditions, the best way of maximizing the number of situations in which one arrives at correct conclusions is to follow Church doctrine in every case, including those cases where one believes it to be mistaken.<sup>16</sup>

To understand why, imagine that we are gambling on horse races. I can pick the right horse in about 60 percent of the cases. Sitting next to me is an experienced bookie who can pick the right horses in about 90 percent of the cases. I have two options. First, I could choose to follow the bookie only when I agree with his conclusions about which horse will win. If I do this, then I will pick the right horse about 60 percent of the time.



Second, I could choose to follow the bookie on every single race, even when the bookie and I disagree. This may mean that sometimes I will bet on a horse other than the one that I would have chosen on my own, and the horse that I would have chosen will win. However, so long as, on average, the bookie is right 90 percent of the time and I am right only 60 percent of the time, by following the bookie blindly I will increase my total payoff by 30 percent.

The bookie example demonstrates that even a fallible authority can act as an exclusionary reason. We don't need to believe that Church doctrine is infallible to follow it in cases where we would otherwise reach different conclusions. We only need to believe that it is, on average, more reliable than our independent conclusions. Suppose, however, that one believes that there are certain cases where we are particularly good at identifying errors in Church doctrine, such that, in cases of disagreement in this particular area, we can be more confident that our own conclusions are correct and Church doctrine is mistaken. This would not mean, however, that Church doctrine can no longer act as an authority. In other words, even if we can identify areas where Church doctrine is more likely to be mistaken, we can still be justified in following it blindly.

To understand why, return to the bookie example. Suppose that I notice that the bookie has a fondness for black horses. If a black horse is in the race, he seems to always bet on the black horse, and his bets on black horses are less reliably correct than his bets on other horses. Would it then follow that, when the bookie bets on a black horse, I should simply bet on the horse that I think will win? The answer is that it depends. So long as the bookie's bets on black horses are more likely to be correct than my own bets, then I am still better off following the bookie blindly, even when he indulges in his fondness for black horses. If, however, when it comes to black horses, my bets are more likely to be right than the bookie's bets, then I ought to follow my own conclusions *as to black horses*.

Ironically, however, the fact that I know that the bookie is less accurate when it comes to black horses means that I should be more rather than less willing to follow him blindly in other circumstances. To understand why, imagine that I am betting on 100 races. Ten of the races involve black horses. As to all of the races, I can pick the winners 60 percent of the time, and the bookie can pick the winners 90 percent of the time. However when it comes to black horses, the bookie picks the winning horse only 50 percent of the time, while I pick the winning horse in black-horse

paces 60 percent of the time. What this means, however, is that, in the races where there is no black horse, the bookie will pick the correct horse slightly more than 94 percent of the time. The numbers here, of course, give an illusion of precision that does not exist. They do, however, usefully illustrate the relationship between different variables. If I believe that, on average, the bookie is more accurate than I am, this belief can be maintained only if I believe that the bookie is especially accurate in those cases that do not fall within the set where I know that I am more accurate, on average, than the bookie.

To return to Church doctrine, even if we believe that we can identify areas where it is more likely to be mistaken, we should still follow it blindly so long as we believe that, on average, it has an advantage over our own conclusions in that weakened area. Furthermore, to the extent that we have a rough sense of how much more reliable Church doctrine is, on average, than our own conclusions, the fact that we might be able to identify areas where the chances of mistakes are higher, strengthens rather than weakens the case for following Church doctrine in other areas. The argument against the authority of Church doctrine on the basis of fallibility ultimately makes a simple mistake. It assumes that to follow something in the face of one's own differing conclusions requires that it be perfect. This is wrong. To be justified in following something, one must only believe that it is more reliable than the alternatives. Comparative rather than absolute advantage is all that is required. Accordingly, to make an epistemic argument in favor of Church doctrine, one need only assume advantage not perfection.

Recall that ultimately we have no rule that allows us to identify Church doctrine simply and unproblematically. We cannot simply look it up. Rather, Church doctrine consists of the conclusions that emerge from our best efforts to charitably interpret Mormon texts, history, and practices. Because Church doctrine necessarily seems to exceed the text of the scriptures, it cannot be reduced to the charitable interpretation of scripture alone. Nevertheless, the scriptures provide a useful model for thinking about the epistemic advantage of Church doctrine. Mormons believe that the standard works contain the word of God and for that reason provide privileged access into the divine mind not available in other texts. Nevertheless, we do not believe that scriptural texts are inerrant. We believe that the Bible is the word of God "as far as it is translated correctly" (Eighth Article of Faith), a capacious concept that can include wholesale

changes and additions to the biblical text unconnected to any known biblical manuscript. We believe the Book of Mormon to be the word of God despite the fact that the title page itself refers to the “errors of men” contained within its covers. We believe that the Doctrine and Covenants is the word of God even though it explicitly provides a description of revelation in which a prophet is a coauthor with God, rather than a divinely inspired automaton (D&C 9). And so on. In short, the ability of the scriptures to reveal the mind of God is not a function of their infallibility. Rather they are revelatory because, despite the “errors of men,” God was decisively involved in their creation in a way that gives them special theological advantages over other texts.

Church doctrine is like the scriptures. It does not consist of some sort of pure and wholly unmediated access to the mind of God. Nevertheless, for believing Latter-day Saints, God is at work in the Church. This does not mean that he is not at work elsewhere. Nevertheless, for Mormons, he is decisively involved in the Church in ways that he is not involved elsewhere. This does not mean that the texts, practices, and history of Mormonism are infallible. Far from it. Yet they nevertheless instantiate the divine will, albeit in a form inevitably shaped and mediated by human beings. The unifying interpretation of these texts, history, and practices through which we discover Church doctrine therefore gathers together and seeks to capture the divinity in the restored church. It is this faith in the special involvement of God in Mormonism that provides to believing Latter-day Saints the basis for assuming the epistemic advantage of Church doctrine.

### **The Argument from Communal Participation**

The final justification for the authority of Church doctrine is the argument from communal participation. Stated in its simplest form, this argument amounts to the claim that, for a practicing Mormon, the failure to follow Church doctrine is a kind of cheating. Consider a formalized game like chess. The game is made possible by certain rules. Indeed, in some sense, chess simply consists of moving pieces around a sixty-four-square board according to certain rules. If a person plays chess with another person, these rules become obligatory for the second player such that willful flouting of the rules is deemed to be morally objectionable. It is cheating.

There are two things worth noting about cheating at chess. First, the rules of chess become obligatory for a player by virtue of playing the

game. Prior to sitting down to the pieces, neither player pledges to follow the rules. Certainly, if one were to attempt to castle out of check, nudge a pawn forward when an opponent was not looking, or otherwise break the rules, it would be no defense to argue that one never promised to obey the rules. Nor does the obligation flow from any inherent evil in the act itself. Moving a knight from a black square to a black square is not inherently immoral. It becomes cheating—and therefore wrong—only when done by a person playing chess. It is participation itself in the game that makes the rules obligatory.

Second, the misdeed of cheating does not consist *per se* in harm to the other player. Suppose, for example, that I was to play chess against Gary Kasparov, widely regarded as the strongest chess player in history. Somehow, I manage to distract Kasparov momentarily and intentionally make an illegal move, say, pushing a pawn forward two squares on its second move. Notwithstanding my cheating, however, Kasparov is able to defeat me easily. The wrongfulness of my illegal move cannot consist of depriving Kasparov of his rightful victory. Indeed, given his massive preponderance of skill and ability, Kasparov's victory was not in the least doubt. Nevertheless, it was wrong for me to cheat by illegally moving my pawn.

These two features suggest some reasons for cheating's immorality. The rules of chess are what make chess possible. In philosophical terms, the rules of chess are constitutive to the practice of chess.<sup>17</sup> To flout the rules of chess while playing chess undermines the game itself. Notice, however, that disobeying the rules of chess undermines the game of chess only if one is playing chess. When one plays checkers, one moves pieces on a sixty-four-square board in ways that violate the rules of chess, but playing checkers does not undermine the practice of chess. There is also a personal aspect to the immorality of cheating. To play a game necessarily conveys a willingness to abide by the rules of the game. In a very real sense, to play a game simply is to follow the rules of the game, as it is the rules that make play possible. To cheat while playing, then, negates the very commitment inherent in play itself. One's actions become fundamentally incoherent. It is not that one lies, for it is possible to cheat without deceiving. The concept that best conveys this aspect of the misdeed of cheating is hypocrisy. To cheat while playing a game is to be a hypocrite.

To be a member of the Church is to participate in an inherently normative activity. The Church is more than simply a community defined by a particular history. Rather, it is an activity defined by certain constitu-

tive norms. For example, to receive baptism as a Mormon simply consists of the actions defined by the rules governing baptism. An act similar to Mormon baptism—for example, a Baptist baptism—is not a Mormon baptism for the fully sufficient reason that it fails to comply with the rules that define Mormon baptism. In this sense, to participate in the Church as a member is to play a kind of game. One may, of course, participate in Mormonism as simply a community, culture, and history. Such participation, however, is not ultimately normative. It views the structure of Mormon beliefs and practices as essentially a matter of historical accident and participation in that structure as an exercise in taste, nostalgia, or perhaps solidarity. A normative activity, in contrast, is one that is defined, not by memory, but by rules and norms. One may know the history of chess and participate in the community of chess players without playing chess. Likewise one may play chess without knowing anything of the history and community of chess players. The difference is participation in the activity defined by the norms of chess rather than simply by the history or community of chess players. The ecclesiastical structure, ordinance, and rituals of Mormon life are constituted by norms that find their source in Church doctrine. To participate in these aspects of Mormonism is normative. It is how we “play the game” of Mormonism.

Participation in the game creates an obligation to follow Church doctrine. Like the rules of chess, Church doctrine is what makes the Church as a normative practice possible. Willful flouting of Church doctrine by one who participates in “the game” is a form of cheating. It abuses the practice of Mormonism by undermining what makes Mormonism as a practice possible. Furthermore, any disclaimers aside, it is not possible to participate in the normative practices of Mormonism without conveying a willingness to submit to the norms that make the practice possible. To then flout those norms is hypocritical and, in that sense, is morally objectionable.

It might be objected at this point that, even if cheating is blameworthy, the obligation to follow the rules of the game one is playing cannot create exclusionary reasons. Consider this dialogue. Heber and Brigham are playing chess.

Heber: Hey! That’s an illegal move. A knight on a black square cannot move to another black square.

Brigham: I know, but an odd chess-phobic millionaire has just pledged his entire fortune to keep innocent children who would otherwise

slowly starve to death from their terrible fate provided that I move my horsey to a black square.

Heber: But this is chess!

Brigham clearly has the better of this exchange. Whatever moral lapse is involved in Brigham's cheating clearly cannot justify allowing the children to starve. This example, however, seems to suggest that mere participation in an activity is insufficient to transform its norms into exclusionary reasons.

A further testing of our intuitions about cheating, however, suggests that we should not be too hasty in rejecting the exclusionary power of game playing. Imagine that Brigham and Heber are once more playing chess, but this time there is no pledge from a chess-phobic millionaire. Brigham makes an illegal move.

Heber: Hey! That's cheating!

Brigham: But by making this move, I choose to express my disapproval of allowing children to starve.

Heber: So what? We're playing chess right now. You can express your views on child starvation without cheating.

Heber clearly has the better of this exchange, just as Brigham had the better of the exchange in the preceding paragraph. Yet in both cases, Brigham's actions were motivated by a moral revulsion against starving children; and in both cases, Heber simply invoked chess as his reason for disapproving Brigham's action. The decisive difference lies in the significance of Brigham's action. In the first case, his action saved innocent lives, which is clearly more important than chess. In the second case, he merely made a statement in one way rather than another, an act that does not seem to be more important than chess (although it may be more important than lesser games such as checkers or Monopoly). Generalizing, there is a certain asymmetry involved in cheating for some goal beyond the game. The good accomplished by cheating must be reckoned in the particular, i.e., the actual children saved or the particular manner of merely making a statement. The evil of cheating, however, must be reckoned in terms of the value of the game itself rather than, say, the value of moving a pawn backward. This reckoning suggests a kind of limiting hierarchy in the reasons excluded by the requirement to avoid cheating. Acts that are less important than the *practice* are excluded, while *acts* that are more important than the *practice* are not. All other things being equal, Brigham would prefer to make a statement about child hunger by making an illegal

chess move. By playing chess, however, he has excluded this consideration because chess is more important than his desire to make a statement in an idiosyncratic way. However, the rules of chess do not exclude all reasons. Saving a starving child is not a reason for action excluded by the rules of chess.

If this analysis is correct, then participation in the Church can justify treating Church doctrine as an exclusionary reason. Consider the logic of this dialogue:

Heber: I'm very hungry this morning, and last night I bought some strawberries that must be eaten soon or they'll rot. Let's eat them for breakfast.

Brigham: That makes sense, but it's fast Sunday and the Church is more important than your strawberries.

Notice how Brigham's response deals with Heber's reasons. He does not try to argue that the act of fasting standing alone is more important than Heber's strawberries (although he might have). Rather, Brigham appeals to a doctrine of the Church—the law of the fast—to justify ignoring Heber's reason. He then defends this appeal to authority by pointing out that the Church is more important than Heber's strawberries. The implication is that Heber's failure to fast would either undermine the Church or reflect poorly on his character. Both of these implications, however, make sense only in the context of Heber's participation in the Church. The same argument could not be made to a Russian Orthodox priest for the simple reason that he is not playing the Mormonism "game." Furthermore by implicitly invoking the obligations created by Heber's participation, Brigham throws the value of the Church as a practice—rather than the discrete act of fasting—into the balance. This strategy, in effect, claims that Church doctrine excludes any consideration less important than the Church itself as a practice.

### **The Limits of Authority**

At this point it is easy to misunderstand the import of the arguments that I have offered. In particular, it is tempting to suppose that claiming authority for Church doctrine is tantamount to claiming that the obligation to follow Church doctrines is absolute. This is a mistake. The argument from covenant, the argument from epistemic advantage, and the argument from community participation are all meant to provide plausible justifications for supposing that Church doctrine can provide an



exclusionary reason for action and belief. Yet to say that something is an exclusionary reason does not imply that its claims are absolute.

Once again the law provides a useful illustration. It is entirely coherent to believe that the law has authority—i.e., that it provides exclusionary reasons for action—without believing that the claims of the law are absolute. Consider the example of John Adams. An accomplished attorney with a deep respect and love for English law, he regarded the law as providing exclusionary reasons for action. That is, he believed that one had an obligation to obey the English law even if one regarded some of its particular commands to be misguided or unreasonable.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless in the summer of 1776, Adams found himself willingly committing high treason by signing the Declaration of Independence, the ultimate repudiation of loyalty to English laws. For Adams, his decision to repudiate English law flowed from the nature of his commitment to the law itself. When the basis for that commitment—the implied contract between sovereign and subject—was dissolved, the law ceased to act as an exclusionary reason.

Sir Thomas More—at least as he is presented in Robert Bolt's play *A Man for All Seasons*—provides another example. In one memorable passage, More debates with his son-in-law, Roper, over whether or not he would give the Devil benefit of law. Roper insists that he would gladly tear up any law to get at the Devil.

Roper: So now you'd give the Devil benefit of law!

More: Yes. What would you do? Cut a great road through the law to get after the Devil?

Roper: I'd cut down every law in England to do that!

More: (*Roused and excited*) Oh? (*Advances on Roper*) And when the last law was down, and the Devil turned round on you—where would you hide, Roper, the laws all being flat? (*He leaves him*) This country's planted thick with laws from coast to coast—man's laws, not God's—and if you cut them down—and you're just the man to do it—d'you really think you could stand upright in the winds that would blow then? (*Quietly*) Yes, I'd give the Devil benefit of law, for my own safety's sake.<sup>19</sup>

This exchange is ultimately about the authority of the law. Roper denies the authority, insisting that it has no claim when one is engaged in the pursuit of the Devil. More's response is a pragmatic argument for the law's authority. He has no brief for the Devil but insists that even "getting" him—an admirable goal—is excluded by the law. Later in the play, however, More finds himself confronted by a law—Henry VIII's assumption of supremacy over the Church of England—to which he cannot submit. In the

clash between his loyalty to the law and his loyalty to the Church of Rome, More found a reason that the law's authority could not exclude, and he went to the executioner for high treason.

Adams and More illustrate the ways in which the claims of authority are defeasible. Both acknowledged that the law excluded certain considerations, but neither took the authority of the law as absolute. They had quite different sorts of reasons, however, for limiting the law's authority. Adams found a limit in the foundation of the law's authority itself. When the basis for treating the law as an exclusionary reason failed, so did the authority of the law. In contrast, More's rejection of the law's authority came because of the claims of an even higher authority. Hence, the actions of the king in parliament could exclude some reasons, but even those acts could be excluded by the higher authority of the Pope as the successor of Saint Peter. Hence, on the scaffold, Bolt's More says, "I die the king's good servant, but God's first."<sup>20</sup> These examples suggest two ways in which authority may be limited without rejecting the idea that authority acts as an exclusionary reason. The reasoning that Adams and More went through did not involve a weighing of the claims of the law's authority against other reasons. Rather they offered reasons that either showed that authority no longer had the power to exclude other reasons or that one authority was excluded by a higher authority.

Both of these strategies may be used to limit the authority of Church doctrine. The three arguments offered above for the authority of Church doctrine—the argument from covenant, the argument from epistemic advantage, and the argument from communal participation—all rest on certain assumptions. When these assumptions fail, then the arguments can no longer justify treating Church doctrine as an exclusionary reason. (Because the arguments are essentially redundant, a complete rejection of the authority of Church doctrine would have to involve some sort of simultaneous failure of assumptions for all three arguments.) For example, the argument from epistemic advantage rests on two assumptions. First, Church doctrine is systematically more likely to be correct than our own conclusions. Second, we cannot identify areas where Church doctrine is likely to be less reliable than our own conclusions. However, when either of these assumptions fails for whatever reason, the argument from epistemic advantage can no longer justify treating Church doctrine as an exclusionary reason. Thus, if we are able to identify some area where we are justified in concluding that our own judgments are sys-

tematically superior to the teachings of Church doctrine, then the argument from epistemic advantage no longer holds. Such a failure of a basic assumption is analogous to John Adams's rejection of the English law's authority in the American Revolution.

Alternatively, one might believe that there are certain kinds of authority or other exclusionary reasons that could trump Church doctrine. For example, one might believe that personal loyalty to a presiding authority should trump Church doctrine so that one should be willing to follow directions from such an authority even when they contravene Church doctrine. Likewise, one might believe that there are certain moral injunctions that have a Kantian absoluteness that allows them to exclude the lesser authority of Church doctrine. Both of these examples share the notion that there is a class of exclusionary reasons that excludes the authority of Church doctrine. In that sense, they are analogous to More's rejection of the authority of the law when it conflicted with the authority of the Church.

Such examples do three things. First, they defend the concept of authority that I offer in this essay from the charge that it recognizes no limits. Such is not the case. Second, it shows that accepting limits on authority does not mean that the idea of authority as an exclusionary reason is mistaken. Exclusionary reasons can be defeasible without altering their basic conceptual structure. Third, it serves to discipline the analysis of arguments offered by anyone suggesting that one can accept the authority of Church doctrine while simultaneously refusing to follow it. Such claims are not *prima facie* contradictory, but they can be justified only by using a fairly limited set of arguments that will need to have a structure that acknowledges the basic legitimacy of authority as an exclusionary reason.

### Conclusion

Church doctrine is a central but under-analyzed concept in Mormon discussions. We discover Church doctrine by offering the best possible interpretation of Mormon texts, practices, and history. Accordingly, Church doctrine is a necessarily interpretive concept and a contestable one at that. It is neither a perfect reflection of the mind of God nor a clear and complete set of theological and ethical propositions. Nevertheless, I conclude that covenants, divine involvement in the production of Church doctrine, and participation in the Church all justify treating Church doctrine as an authority. Furthermore, while I think that Mor-

mons are, in some sense, under an obligation to follow Church doctrine “blindly,” I do not believe that this means that the claims of Church doctrine on Latter-day Saints are absolute or limitless. Arguments for ignoring Church doctrine in the context of continued allegiance to its basic authority, however, must take the conceptual structure of that authority seriously and, accordingly, will be limited by it.

### Notes

1. To be sure, many good and eloquent things have been said by Mormon thinkers about the tensions between authority and the intellect. Indeed, there is something of a cottage industry among Mormon intellectuals in talking and thinking about their relationship with the authorities of the Church. For a particularly thoughtful example of the genre, see Armand Mauss, “Alternate Voices: The Calling and Its Implications,” *Sunstone*, Issue 76 (April 1990): 7–10.

2. I use the term “weak” here in its logical sense of meaning assumptions that apparently contain very little content in relationship to the conclusions that they support. In contrast, “strong” assumptions virtually restate the conclusion that they are meant to support. An argument based on “strong” assumptions shows us very little beyond the initial premises themselves. In contrast, an argument based on “weak” assumptions shows us much more. My hope is that the assumptions on which the arguments in this article are based are “weak” enough for the arguments themselves to be independently illuminating.

3. See Nathan Oman, “Jurisprudence and the Problem of Church Doctrine,” *Element: The Journal of the Society for Mormon Philosophy and Theology* (forthcoming); and Nathan Oman, “How Do You Know If Something is ‘Church Doctrine’?” in a forthcoming anthology edited by James Faulconer.

4. Joseph Raz, *The Authority of Law: Essays on Law and Morality* (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1979), 24–25. I take it that, in the quoted paragraph, Raz is using “practical” in its philosophical sense of “relating to action” rather than in its more general sense of “useful.” Nothing about Raz’s theory suggests that thinking about authority is useless.

5. For the most detailed modern discussion of the development of these ideas, see James Gordley, *The Philosophical Origins of Modern Contract Doctrine*, Clarendon Law Series (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1991).

6. See, for example, Charles Fried, *Contract As Promise: A Theory of Contractual Obligation* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981).

7. See, for example, John Locke, *Second Treatise on Government* (1690), in

*The English Philosophers from Bacon to Mill*, edited by Edwin A. Burt (New York: Modern Library, 1959).

8. They do not, of course, necessarily use the terminology used here, which was developed by Joseph Raz in the 1970s.

9. Lon Fuller, *Cases and Materials on Contracts* (Minneapolis, Minn: West Publishing, 1947), 666. This is the first edition.

10. *True to the Faith* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2004), 23.

11. *Preach My Gospel: A Guide to Missionary Service* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2004), 75–81.

12. This does not mean, of course, that these sorts of sources cannot function as authorities about the true meaning of baptism. However, to the extent that we are interested in obligations arising from promises, what matters is how a concept is actually understood rather than how it should be understood.

13. Of course, this argument implicitly assumes the coherence of our pre-reflective understanding of the obligations associated with being a member of the Church. It may simply be the case that this pre-reflective understanding is mistaken and ought to be rejected. The problem becomes that there is a certain circularity involved in either affirming or rejecting the coherence of our pre-reflective beliefs. If we reject their coherence, then assuming a promise to follow Church doctrine at baptism is a philosophical *deus ex machina*, invoked gratuitously to save the coherence of what is incoherent. On the other hand, if one accepts the coherence of pre-reflective understanding, then rejecting the assumption of a promise to follow Church doctrine at baptism seems to rest on little more than the *a priori* rejection of any theory that renders such understandings coherent. I am skeptical of our ability to escape from this basic circularity. My own view is that the best we can hope for is a kind of reflective equilibrium in which we constantly measure our pre-reflective beliefs against our theories and vice versa, oscillating between them and adjusting each in light of the other until the two converge.

14. My argument here is wholly separate from the argument from community participation that I make below. Here the claim is not that participation in the rituals of the Church *per se* creates an obligation to follow Church doctrine. Rather it is a purely promissory argument. It rests on the inherently promissory meaning that we assign to the repeated taking of the sacrament. The argument from community participation, on the other hand, does not rest on any implicit promise.

15. I ignore here the question of why it is that we ought to obey God, taking this assumption as given. For a fuller philosophical treatment of the is-

sue in the context of Mormon theology, see Blake T. Ostler, *Exploring Mormon Thought: The Problems of Theism* (Salt Lake City: Kofford Books, 2006), chap. 3.

16. I am indebted to Professor Frank McIntyre of the Brigham Young University Economics Department for this argument. Although its presentation here is mine, the underlying insight is his.

17. See John Searle, "How to Derive an 'Ought' from an 'Is,'" *Philosophical Review*, 73, no. 1 (January 1964): 43, for a discussion of the distinction between constitutive and regulative rules.

18. See, e.g., Hiller Zobel, *The Boston Massacre* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1970), recounting John Adams's politically unpopular defense of the soldiers indicted for murder as a result of the Boston Massacre and explaining his attitude toward English law.

19. Robert Bolt, *A Man for All Seasons* (New York: Vintage Books, 1960), 66.

20. *A Man for All Seasons*, a video recording of the movie, adaptation by Paul Schofield, Columbia Pictures Associated (1966).

# The Gospel in Communication: A Conversation with Communication Theorist John Durham Peters

Ethan Yorgason

## Introduction

“John Durham Peters may well be the most original thinker in the broad field of communication and media studies in the United States.” So claims Michael Schudson, professor of communication at the University of California, San Diego.<sup>1</sup> Nor is Schudson alone in these sentiments. Peters, who is F. Wendell Miller Distinguished Professor of Communication Studies at the University of Iowa and president of the Iowa City Third (Young Single Adult) LDS Branch, has achieved acclaim as a scholar and even as something of a public intellectual in recent years for work that untangles knots within basic communication debates. His *Speaking into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999) wrestles with the longing for authentic communication between souls, given the inevitability of communication breakdowns. It became something of an instant classic within communication studies, was translated into multiple languages, and students can even purchase a pre-written review paper about it over the internet—perhaps a sure sign of its status within the field. His more recent *Courting the Abyss: Free Speech and the Liberal Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005) reinvestigates the tradition of free speech while questioning its absolutist expressions.

Peters's work is admired both within and outside of communication studies for its sparkling phraseology, suffusion of religiosity, and refusal to tie itself to scholarly or political trendiness, as well as for its stunning breadth, depth, provocativeness, and originality.<sup>2</sup> In the following inter-

view, conducted in Iowa City in March 2006, Ethan Yorgason explores with John Durham Peters the relationship between his ideas, Mormon thought, and Mormonism.

*Ethan: John, religion permeates your scholarly work, and you are devout in your Mormonism. Yet aside from the essays you wrote a while back for Sunstone and BYU Studies, there's little in your work that draws attention to your Mormonism. When you write—and I'm thinking especially about the books now—are you thinking of a Mormon audience?*

*John:* Not particularly. There are little clues and cues for those in the know, but that's true of any audience for any subject. In a discussion of good and evil at the climax of one of the chapters of *Courting the Abyss* I drop in the phrase "opposition in all things." Those who know 2 Nephi 2 will recognize the theological context; those who don't won't have any harm done to them.

*Ethan: Do you hope that your work gets read by Mormons?*

*John:* I think that Mormon audiences will sometimes find extra resonances. I certainly hope they will. I'm always surprised at what people read and what they don't. Last week in Princeton, I spent a lot of time with a group of undergraduates; and after I had mentioned that I was LDS, one of them said, "Yeah . . . I thought I heard a familiar approach to knowledge—that is, that you kind of have a mission and ambition to go gather as much of it as you possibly can, and to bring it in." He said it sounded like everything he's been raised with. He's a Princeton undergrad from somewhere in Utah.

*Ethan: Do you ever get that recognition out of the blue, without your mentioning something about your LDS allegiance first?*

*John:* Not often. I'm pretty open about mentioning it in university settings because I kind of feel like a part of the university's mission is to foster diversity, and so many people are "out" in various ways around the university about their ideological or cultural or political positions; I mean, I figure why not add a little spice to the mix?

*Ethan: How would you characterize the reception of your books, in terms of the religious content, by university audiences in general?*

*John:* Well, *Speaking into the Air* especially has a fairly explicit religious content, chapter 1 focusing on Socrates and Jesus. One of my colleagues said this book had mastered the Protestant voice, a comment much more about how he read the inkblot of the book in terms of his own interests. I re-



member walking sort of by accident into one of the Spiritual Communication Interest Group sessions of the National Communication Association and discovering much to my embarrassment that I was something of a local hero there. Someone else told me he thought it was the best Christian account of communication ever. So, Christian people inclined to get a Christian reading will find it. I've got some Jewish friends who like it, and there is no doubt that many of the most perceptive students of communication—and of communication breakdown—have been Jewish. That's the case for a number of complicated reasons. But if it's Christian, it's a fairly ecumenical brand, and Chapter 2, after all, treats much of the Christian tradition as "the history of an error." I just got invited to speak at a conference in Cairo this summer about religion and communication with a Muslim scholar, so perhaps we will yet find connections there as well (I hope).

One of my closest colleagues observed that the book is crypto-Mormon in its overall story: Jesus has it right, but Christianity soon goes off the rails by turning communication into a spiritual affair of impossible angelic connection; in early nineteenth-century America, Emerson comes along and restores the good old sense about the fragility of words. Apostasy and restoration. Augustine plays the same role in both my story and the LDS one; Emerson stands in for Joseph Smith.

*Ethan: Do you have any idea if there's more resonance among certain groups ideologically?*

*John: Courting the Abyss* has gotten a nice lease on life thanks to the Muhammad cartoon controversy [in which the prophet Muhammad was condescendingly portrayed in a Danish newspaper, provoking a great uproar among many Muslims worldwide]. In Norway, where I was visiting in January of 2006, I gave some talks and even was interviewed by the Communist newspaper, *Klassekampen*. During the interview, I frankly said I was a Latter-day Saint and that part of my mission in life was to show that believers aren't necessarily stupid—the reporter assured me that he would not publish that comment, and I said please do, and he did—along with the comment encouraging him to publish it! Apparently such openness about religion's intellectual contribution to public life was a bit shocking in Norway, and I even received a grateful email from a Catholic priest there. But ideology is a really interesting question because my politics are sort of those of a radical democrat, I would say, although I think you could spin them in different kinds of directions, right and left. Values conservative, social radical would be the right mix.

*Ethan: How would people label it ideologically? I ask because, at least among the scholars who I think are doing some of the better work in [my discipline of] geography, few are inclined to revisit liberalism, as you do in *Courting the Abyss*.*

*John: That's one of the things that I'm still trying to sort out, because *Courting the Abyss* is very sarcastic in spots about a certain kind of liberalism—something I regret, since conservative talk show hosts have already patented that way of talking and I don't want to sound like them. When I first talked about the book in Norway, I offended some people there because they thought I was defending terrorists and pushing fundamentalists.*

*Ethan: Oh really? I didn't get that impression from the book.*

*John: Yeah. The basic line was if you had anything beside reason as the entrance requirement for the public sphere, then you're just defending people who are violent and know nothing. . . . I was trying to say that it's a more subtle problem, in which what counts as a reason needs be considered, especially if reason is defined as anti-religious. If liberals are to be the voices of a true diversity of ideas, they have to cede monopoly control of the discussion.*

*Ethan: Of course, it's hard for anybody to know exactly what kind of democracy they're promoting at the end of the day.*

*John: Yeah, well, the final hero of the book is Martin Luther King, when he's thinking about global, economic justice, and not just American civil rights justice; the Martin Luther King that is off the radar of official memory in this country, criticizing the war in Vietnam from a combined Christian and radical position. . . . I think that the central question of political theory is building Zion. At the end of *Speaking into the Air*, I don't use the word Zion, but I talk about "a peaceable kingdom," which I think of as another way of saying Zion.*

*Ethan: A lot of *Courting the Abyss* gets at the conditions of democracy and what it means to speak in public. Does that apply to what goes on in the Church?*

*John: Sure.*

*Ethan: We often say the Church is not a democracy.*

*John: Yeah, it isn't. I would say that Mormonism has a very complicated history regarding public space. It's a culture of confidentiality, if not of secrecy. You could draw a history from the concealment of the golden plates, the smashing of the *Nauvoo Expositor*, the silence in Nauvoo about "the Principle," through the code names in the Doctrine and Covenants, the secrecy about temple work or Church finances, to everyday confidentiality about Church callings before someone is sustained.*

We don't talk about certain things. There's just a kind of deep sense of nervousness, or, more positively, caution or care about the sanctity of certain kinds of information or communication. In fact, what the sacred may be is not a particular kind of content, but just the simple fact of not being circulated. And so I see having a temple that is off limits as a cool thing, because it sanctifies and safeguards a certain mode of being, a certain kind of time and space, which is not easy to come by in a world that doesn't suffer from an excess of the sacred.

One reason I got interested in free speech was thinking about LDS debates, *Sunstone* debates in the 1980s, and just kind of getting annoyed at the simple liberalism that some people propounded. I remember one particular essay by Jackson Newell that I found a bit strident and self-righteous in *Dialogue* called—I'm going to get this wrong—"Let Reason Ring from the Foothills."<sup>3</sup> And anyone who has the slightest acquaintance with the geography of the Salt Lake Valley knows that the foothills are not where the temple or Church Office Building is. That's where the University of Utah is. So reason, for him, is ringing from the university. And the university becomes the center of culture and of open debate and of truth. He's a very admirable fellow, a great teacher, and he's always been very nice to me. I, too, teach humanities in a university.

But I basically suspect intellectuals. I distrust our motives. I don't think intellectuals always know what's good, and we like to think we know what's good. To use the Book of Mormon phrase, we often do things because it sustains our craft. Intellectuals want to make sure that people keep arguing and keep reading and keep writing. And that isn't necessarily the best or at least only good way to live. Anyone who's spent any time around universities will know that smart people can say the dumbest things. Some Mormon intellectuals have recreated a simple language—free speech and reason versus authority and the Church—when in fact I'd rather see that what the Church has is something wonderful. I mean, the Church gives an alternative to modernity and to modern liberalism and its empire, which is oozing everywhere, so why call for more of it? . . . [laughs]

I dislike censorship as much as the next guy, but I dislike even more the moral bonus gained by those who denounce censorship. The toxic biproduct of free speech is smugness; and if you claim censorship by the other guy, then you are automatically in the right and you have a moral monopoly and there are a lot of people that will flock to you because you're fighting the big evil church. That's a well-established narrative that goes

back to Enlightenment. The brave publisher faces down the Inquisition by force of quill pen alone, and you have this self-serving, heroic rhetoric. Historically, the attack on religious faith has never been far from the call for free speech.

If what Mormon intellectuals asked of us required something harder to do, rather than easier to do, then I might be convinced that they—that we—were really looking for truth. It's easy for an intellectual to call for more inquiry. But reason, like child care, reverence, music, service, or gardening is only one of many human goods. I sustain a prophet as someone who can say something that is difficult and upsetting and shakes you up a little. I mean, what's the point of having a religion that doesn't require really hard stuff?

*Ethan: Insofar as Mormon studies exists and where it's at, what do you think it should be doing?*

*John:* Such an interesting question. In meeting with Richard Bushman last week, he was saying that he really thinks that we should just let a thousand flowers bloom, that the most important thing is to enrich the tradition, and that scholarship should be trying to elaborate as many interesting things as we possibly can about it. He said something like: "Let's be bold, let's not let the anti-Mormon people scare us off by exploiting these strange little nuggets. Let's be bold and look at Mormon thought and just enrich the tradition." I guess I find that an inspiring vision—that we're sitting on all these riches and should be unafraid to explore them.

*Ethan: Are there any particular questions that you would personally like to see answered or maybe take on yourself some day?*

*John:* I would like to write something on the Mormon media imagination, because Mormonism has always engaged itself with questions of communication; and indeed, based on what I said about public space before, there is a long missionary effort and history of development of media genres and institutions for promoting the Church. Joseph Smith was a *translator*. The Book of Mormon is—we were talking with Richard Bushman again about this—the most self-reflexive book that you could possibly imagine. It's a book about bookness. And it's a book within books: it is positively Borges-like in its labyrinthine self constitution. It has authors who anticipate textual tidbits 1400 years later, and it's just an amazing performance. And Joseph Smith's revelations can be amazing feats of mediation.

*Ethan: I was wondering whether many of the key themes in your book are informed by your Mormonism. The body is one theme I liked in both books, especially*

*your thoughts about the inseparability of what we call the inside and the outside. Is that partly your Mormonism?*

*John:* That is totally my Mormonism.

*Ethan:* All of it? Completely your Mormonism? Could you have come to it in any other way?

*John:* Well, you could come to the centrality of the body from a certain kind of feminism, and you can come to it through a certain kind of pragmatism—or Marxism for that matter. And my feminism, inasmuch as any man can claim to have any, is certainly a Mormon feminism, one that was trained by my mother, Carolyn Person, who did research on her great-grandmother Susa Young Gates. My consciousness was formed as a teenager by overhearing all these Mormon women in my living room in suburban Boston discussing how to organize *Exponent II*—remarkable women such as Judy Dushku and Claudia Bushman and my mom and many others. So I always had the sense of the holiness of the body and the holiness of the feminine as one way of thinking. I'm a pragmatist, I would say, philosophically speaking, a kind of an Emersonian pragmatist, and for the pragmatist, mind or consciousness is always a function of life or embodiment or biology.

*Ethan:* Another theme is finitude. I'm particularly interested in the issue of ethics across space. Speaking into the Air talked about all people as part of one family. How do you deal with finitude, the sense that you can't care about everything? You can't try to solve every problem, but you want to; and in some sense you feel obligated to be aware of problems that are bigger than your sphere.

*John:* What does Joseph Smith say, that as soon as a man has pure religion, he ranges abroad through the world seeking to do what good he can everywhere? But there certainly is another strand in Mormonism that says, if you want to improve the world, have a good family. This can take the form of a kind of survivalist rejection of involvement in the world, and that's certainly not what I'm calling for. I guess this anti-political strain is more of a general Christian theological idea than a particularly Mormon one.

*Ethan:* In one of my classes at Brigham Young University-Hawai'i, I want to do something on the geographical scales of Mormon ethics. My initial impulse is to discuss an LDS cultural tendency to be really active within the Church at improving our own place, all the while not being aware that colonialism happens, that capitalism is wreaking its destruction, global warming, and whatever else happens at larger geographical scales. What would you say about how we can deal with the various scales?

*John:* Well, it seems that there are elements within LDS theology of an obligation to the planet, the idea that the Earth is alive, that it, too, is subject to the ordinances of baptism by water and fire, that we owe a certain respect to it, that Adam and Eve's dominion over the earth was not mastery. I think Doctrine and Covenants 49 has some really cool verses, where it is not meet that one man possess that above another wherefore the whole world lieth in sin. And I think what's really interesting is that this verse comes in the context of the discussion of meat-eating. . . . And you can read it, as I tend to do, as a kind of "diet for a small planet."

But obviously the agenda of large-scale social questions is not only environmental. When you talk about social justice issues, Mormons tend to not be good about structural evil. We are very much a culture of personal evil. This is something that Richard Bushman noted about *Speaking into the Air*. He wondered if my point about the impossibility of communication was connected with the strain of radical individualism in Mormon theology—that is, that we're all separate intelligences that have always existed so that, in communication, we can at best kind of rub sparks off each other but can never fuse. And I hadn't seen that, but I thought that it was interesting.

But we do tend to be granular in our social efforts. What's our biggest scale unit for ethics? It tends to be the ward, yourself, your family, the people you home teach, the community. Go ye into the world. Mormons would sooner work with IBM and the CIA than criticize the corporation or the state.

*Ethan:* Although when it comes to certain social issues . . .

*John:* Yeah, but those things are almost always non-structural ones. They're always framed as moral issues, choice issues. They always have to do with sex.

*Ethan:* Yeah. That's right.

*John:* I think, here again, who am I to say that the Church isn't right? It's just great to have something that's fighting against the grain of modernity. The last forty or eighty years you've seen this huge shift toward sex as the key sign of self-expression and self-emancipation, though [French historian and philosopher Michel] Foucault would want to place it in a longer historical context. That's certainly part of our era and our moment, and maybe there are good things that come with that, but why not have an alternative?

*Ethan:* Another issue: the contrast between dialogue and dissemination, in

*which you argue that the priority usually given to dialogue over dissemination is misplaced.*

*John:* I have a friend who says that, when he reads my stuff, he hears me still as on a mission, that I write in such a way that I'm trying to persuade and pull people in. Maybe that is true, but one of the chief tropes that we European missionaries had to use, I don't know if you used it in Sweden, but since we saw such a meager harvest, we were always talking to ourselves about sowing seeds for later harvest [laughs].

*Ethan:* *That's interesting. We used that trope, but I hadn't thought of the connection to communication in that way.*

*John:* I think a good bit of the basic and ironic vision of communication in *Speaking into the Air* must come from my missionary experiences, specifically the experience of teaching memorized discussions, in which so-called dialogue is really a form of cloaked dissemination. I had a greenie who was caught red-handed by a couple of savvy investigators—he couldn't really say a word in Dutch but then he rattled off the Joseph Smith story verbatim with its preposterously fancy vocabulary. *Speaking into the Air* is a response to the modern ethic of communication that implies that spontaneous and original is always best: I mean, there was a lot of soul-transforming stuff in the discussions, so why quibble whether the messenger is able to supply what the sociologist Erving Goffman called "fresh talk"? In any case, *Preach My Gospel*<sup>4</sup> is a welcome shift to a more dialogical model of missionary work.

*Ethan:* *Politically, you emphasize the radical center. Do you think there's a radical center in the Church?*

*John:* Yeah. I don't know where it is, but I thought the best analysis of recent Church intellectual politics came in the first volume of Orson Scott Card's Book of Mormon pastiche series called *Memory of Earth*. In this novel, you basically have three political parties. You have the fascist thugs, who are kind of brutalizing the city with a masked police force, and you've got the international cosmopolitans who basically don't care about the city and want to be out doing what's cool and whatever's happening abroad. And then there's this sort of obscure group—no one really knows who they are and Card called them the Party of the City. And it seems to have a lot of women in it, for one thing, and this is the group that really holds on to the values. And it kind of struck me that that was the scene in contemporary Mormonism. You have some authoritarians around who want to keep order and legislate against things like wearing sandals in church. And you've

got the kind of cosmopolitan intellectuals who want to make things safe for the world, and then you've got the Party of the City who quietly and invisibly are centered on the true principles.

So who would be the Party of the City? They would be the humble people who home teach, who do temple work, who raise children. . . . I think there's a lot of people like that. I don't know if it's the radical center in the same way that I mean it in the book. In *Courting the Abyss*, the radical center would be someone who allows for a kind of spiritual order to the universe but who also sees the injustice of the world and wants to do something about it.

*Ethan: Who'll stand up for it with their body.*

*John:* Yeah, exactly. The whole thing about witnessing is putting your body on the line. In *Courting the Abyss* I talk about a triumvirate of options today: the rational liberals, the fundamentalists, and the postmodern hospitality people. It doesn't quite line up with Orson Scott Card's triad but there are some similarities. I basically try—this is the thing that initially offended my Norwegian hosts—to keep the fundamentalists from always being stuck with the crappy end of the stick, and the other two from always thinking that they're so righteous. I actually kind of regret the use of the word fundamentalist, because there are a lot of non-religious fundamentalists and a lot of religious non-fundamentalists, and only some American Protestants actually call themselves “fundamentalists” anyway.

*Ethan: Right.*

*John:* That's the reason why the Apostle Paul ends up being a kind of hero, because he's rational, he's a deep believer, and he also recognizes otherness. So he inhabits all three of those positions but is also beyond them.

*Ethan: Yeah, as long as you're bringing him up, how would you present this to Mormon audiences: Paul's idea that “for myself, I'm not necessarily bound by the law, but for others who feel bound by the law, I respect their view and their field of vision.” This is a very different Paul than most Mormons would feel comfortable with, I'd guess.*

*John:* This is actually a deeply Mormon Paul, one who combines deep devotion with respect for reason and care for the other; he is believing, modern, and neighborly all at once. It seems to me that Paul's argument is that, if you have higher knowledge, you should prove it by your higher kindness, rather than by exposing or insulting or belittling people. So, I think Paul kind of gives a mission for the intellectual, the task of understanding those who are not intellectuals. He talks about those who have *gnosis* (knowledge),



the Gnostics. What are the Gnostics supposed to do? They're supposed to respect the narrower field of vision of the other.

*Ethan: Does that mean that you accept what the other has and don't try to ask them to stretch themselves?*

*John: Well, why should just I ask them to stretch themselves if they're not asking me to stretch myself? I may have knowledge, but what's that worth if I don't have love?*

*Ethan: Well, we all ask ourselves to stretch. I don't know, don't we ask others to stretch?*

*John: I mean, we're probably supposed to, aren't we? To expound and preach and exhort and so on? But too often, intellectuals assume that it's our job to ask others to stretch and open their mind.*

*Ethan: Well, in some cases we get paid for it.*

*John: Good point. And we professors want to teach people to think critically. But how do you teach someone to stretch their mind except by stretching your mind yourself? And the best way to stretch your mind yourself is sometimes to stretch your mind into a smaller box. [laughs] And see how I've let condescension into the idea that it is a *smaller* box—maybe it's just a different one. I don't know. . . . If it's not a mutual enterprise—this is going to sound like dialogue instead of dissemination—but why should it just be a one-way thing? We all know that the best teachers are those who are vulnerable, those who are ignorant, who really want to know. The best teacher is the best learner. So the most tolerant person should be the one who most recognizes their own bigotry. So ensuring the program of liberal openness requires liberals, as John Stuart Mill said, to be open towards bigots.*

On the other hand, something that I've made my peace with a long time ago is that I believe in proselyting. There are people who think proselyting is offensive and wrong and bad and colonial. It can be all those things, but also I've got no problem with trying to persuade people. I think everybody's trying to persuade—every word or deed has an effect somewhere on a mind, heart, or body. So, this isn't a static picture where you just kind of admire the splendid blindness of some other creature and say, "Oh, how lovely." But, I mean God is the only one who can condescend, or should be able to.

*Ethan: In addition to the body itself, I'm also curious about all these bodily issues that run through your books: laughter, death, pain, violence, love and care, sympathy and its impossibility.*

*John:* Did you ever read my thing on bowels published in *BYU Studies* in '99?<sup>5</sup> That's probably the most explicit place I try to deal with the bodily aspect of Mormon theology and of the Atonement—picking the most abused and gross of all body parts. What do the viscera have to do with virtue? No one thinks that bowels are romantic, but why is “bowels of mercy” such a powerful phrase? The bowels turn out to offer a back-door revelation of the meaning of the atonement . . . I also think bodies are pretty wonderful . . . not pretty wonderful, just wonderful. What is the best argument for why God has a body? Because how could the Supreme Being not possess the most beautiful thing in the universe?

*Ethan:* *How does your philosophical pragmatism relate to your Mormonism?*

*John:* William James's pragmatism resonates for me because it combines skepticism about our ability to know for sure with the idea that we produce truth by our actions—very much the moral of Alma 32. James makes the so-called postmodernist insight about the sliding sands of our knowledge into something useful for faith and action. A risky universe does not disable us; it calls us to action. A second key pragmatist idea for me is that of the “community of interpretation.” I guess my fundamental maxim is that you choose your community first, and then you choose your ideas second. Some people say that they are driven from the Church because they can't believe things, but I'm convinced that it's really just because they want to either act a certain way or hang out with a certain kind of people. And so I think the question is deciding who you want to belong to and who you want to talk with and how you want to live first.

Third, I adore the notion of “evolutionary love” by the pragmatist Charles Sanders Peirce, which offers a cosmology of growing perfection and eternal fruitfulness. For him, as for Mormon theology, divinity and dynamism are not opposed.

*Ethan:* *Courting the Abyss makes a big deal about the riskiness involved with free speech. Those who champion free speech are literally courting the abyss.*

*John:* I think Joseph Smith authorizes the idea of courting the abyss, and maybe I got the image of the abyss from the Liberty Jail letter where he calls on the human mind, in essence, to stretch as high as the utmost heavens, and search into and contemplate the darkest abyss, and the broad expanse of eternity. There is something about certain strands of Mormonism that authorize courting the abyss as a kind of education. Certainly many humanities professors at BYU in the later 1970s when I was there said something like that. Those were exciting times . . . After class once I quoted to

Ed Geary B. H. Roberts's complaint about the "sewer air" of modern literature, as we had just read *The Heart of Darkness* in his class. And he says, "Well, look what Marlow says. He says that task is to breathe the stench of dead hippo meat without being corrupted. That's what reading literature teaches you how to do."

*Ethan: We inoculate ourselves?*

*John:* Yeah. Certainly we have abyss redeemers in Mormonism, including liberal humanities professors, and then you have abyss avoiders. We have lots of people who simply stay away from it. And who's to say that they're any dumber?

*Ethan: What does the Danish cartoon controversy tell us? How do we respond as people who are both religiously minded and also, at least a good many of us, somewhat partial to the free speech tradition?*

*John:* I think that the world of value is internally contradictory. You can't have all your values at once. This is finitude. And that to hold up one value at the expense of all other values is sophomoric. Often times that's what you get with certain kinds of journalists and free speech crusaders. They stand for what one wag called "free speech über alles." [laughs] . . . One of my former students teaching at NYU made a really interesting geographical point. He said that it's about the globalization of sovereignty, and the question is how you control a cultural property when it becomes globalized. Once upon a time the image of Muhammad could be controlled by Muslim caliphs or nations but now when there are Muslims in Denmark, how do you control that?

Another point is that Christianity is the religion of irony, as the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard said. The whole Western tradition loves to court the abyss. In Homer, the Bible, Dante, Milton, Dostoyevsky, Rimbaud, you name it: a whole literary tradition says you can pass a season in hell and it'll make you better. And the whole Christian tradition represents its god in a state of extreme agony, with spilt blood and in the state of being killed. That's a pretty ironic thing. When you look at the crucifixion, you're supposed to recognize transcendence over death and over sin, but the actual surface picture is of an apparently mortal human being who's bloody and torn and bruised. That kind of ironic way of looking at the world—that you can represent the divine in its most degraded state and think it a sign of triumph—seems to have little resonance in the Muslim tradition. (Obviously the LDS tradition isn't that big on crucifixion scenes, but it has an appreciation for ironic redemption.)

*Ethan: Justice and mercy: in Speaking into the Air, toward the end . . .*

*John: Good catch. Alma 42:15.*

*Ethan: Loving one another, treating one another with justice and mercy is more important than communicating with each other. I don't know if you want to try to define what you mean by justice and mercy. Do you think we tend to pair these concepts and talk about them in relation to one another more than other Christians do?*

*John: Yeah. I think that Alma 42 gives you that kind of ready-made theological opposition. What I meant there is that justice has to do with blindness and generality, and so according to justice you treat everybody the same. You just treat everybody as a person pure and simple. Mercy is a very different kind of principle where you treat someone not as a person but as Ethan, in all of their particulars. In a just society, you have to have both the blind general indifference to persons and a very specific approach to persons.*

True love also, however, has a kind of indifference to it because you love your children regardless of what they do. Your love is absolutely unaffected, unmodified by anything your kids are going to do. Obviously lots of things in your relationship can be affected and modified by what they do, but your love is invariant, just as true justice would have to always consider the particulars of the case, without cut and dried rules. So love and justice actually turn out to trade places. A judge is supposed to have judgment about particulars and love is supposed to be immovable. So this whole opposition of justice and mercy starts to break down, once you look at it.

I also think it's cool that in Alma 42 they're treated in gendered terms. Here it is: Alma 42:24: "For behold, justice exerciseth all his demands, and also mercy claimeth all which is her own." In some sense my take on justice and mercy is also an argument for the reconciliation of male and female. *Speaking into the Air* ends in this reconciliation, with an allusion to "the milk and sperm of humankindness" from *Moby Dick*, in that absolutely far out and amazing scene in its chapter 94, "A Squeeze of the Hand."

*Ethan: You talk in Speaking into the Air as well about similarities between love and faith, if I remember right, about love being a kind of hope requiring leaps, rather than a melting of souls into one another. Is that right?*

*John: I think that's an improvement on your part. I wish I had said that. . . . No, but I like that a lot.*

*Ethan: "The moment a lover can answer that objection [why he fell in love with one person among countless possibilities] he is eo ipso not a lover; and if a be-*

liever can answer that objection, he is *eo ipso* not a believer" (Speaking into the Air, 134).

John: This is a quotation from Kierkegaard. I'm trying to define zones of acting with integrity that are not reducible to rationality. The structural similarity of love and faith lies in the primacy of commitment, something singular and faithful, over rationality, something plural and faithless.

Ethan: *You spend a lot of time in Speaking into the Air discussing the impossibility of the union of souls. . . . How would you characterize conversion, or the work of the Spirit in the LDS sense, in terms of that?*

John: I think conversion, or the work of the Spirit, works precisely in the way that communication with another person does. With other people and the Spirit, time and effort and love and care and attention are the things that forge meanings. The spirit does not always signal with matter-of-fact clarity—in Romans, Paul refers to its "groanings"—but then neither do we, and neither do most of the most moving and meaningful things in our lives such as music, art, clouds, spouses, and children. Just as we risk misunderstanding everyday interaction by making the telegraph our model of communication, so we set ourselves up for failure if we expect the Spirit to be a kind of divine telepathy. It is something more primal, moving, groaning, singing, pushing, lifting, caressing.

Ethan: *On pages 265–66 toward the end of Speaking into the Air, you discuss William James's concealed fraud. (During a demonstration on physiology, James manipulated the image on the projection screen after he realized that the turtle heart was not responding and pulsating as it should have been.) Why should we consider the performing of such an untruth as the better path than admitting that the demonstration wasn't working right?*

John: It's the same point about Paul and the meat sacrificed to idols: to attend more to the communicative well-being of the other rather than to yourself. If James had stood up and said, "Oh, no, the turtle heart's dead, I'm just faking it," he would've deprived the whole audience there of a good lesson about physiology. So he bore his private duty, the private burden of knowing that there is some fraud here, for the sake of the edification of people he cared about. Except that fraud is too negative a term, since it suggests that there is intentional fudging of an indisputable truth. In communication, some truths are transactional.

Ethan: *How can you be confident that you know the needs of the other in any communication situation?*

John: You can't. It's guesswork, but in James's structured situation,

people were there because they wanted to learn something about physiology. And in a Church setting, people are there because they want, in part, reassurance that they made a good choice to show up there. I often think about our forms of testimony bearing, and about why we make “I know” such a central term, when the question really is, “How do you live?” So, should you adhere to some kind of internal standard of truth and integrity and say, “Well, I don’t really know, because ‘knowing’ isn’t the right word, and I don’t really know anything”? It’s kind of easy to recognize once you have a couple of philosophy classes under your belt just how tenuous knowledge of anything is. So do you honor your supposed internal integrity? Well maybe; maybe that’s integrity and maybe that’s just prissy selfishness when you could be serving people by getting up there and saying “I know the church is true,” when what you mean by that is “I have felt the Spirit moving and plan to stay committed to the Church the rest of my life and be a good home teacher and be the most upstanding Latter-day Saint I can be.” Maybe we should say that in church. Maybe we should get up and say, “I’m never going to leave, and I’m committed to lead the best life I can within the Church context.” Maybe that’d be more powerful. I don’t know.

*Ethan: This is certainly one thing I have never worked out to my own satisfaction.*

*John:* I sometimes wish we had a more supple vocabulary for statements of belonging, and the relation of truth to covenant and belonging; and maybe my point here about putting the edification of others before semantic rigor may be a very conservative way of preserving the status quo. But it is clear, obviously, that your private epistemological hygiene can be just a kind of narcissistic thing as well: “I’m going to be true to what my philosophy professors taught me rather than care about the people you’re actually dealing with in church.” Here again, it’s a vote about who you associate with.

*Ethan: So in that sense we need to probably shape the words to the different audiences?*

*John:* Yeah. That’s the question about Paul. Paul clearly confesses his adaptation to diverse audiences in 1 Corinthians 9. I am not endorsing the fudging of facts, and Mormonism is a religion that takes historicity and truth very seriously. Knowledge is a religious duty for us, and truth is knowledge of things as they are, as they were, and as they are to come. Here you see that knowledge is of different orders. Knowledge of things as they are—it’s a sunny day today—is not the same kind of thing as knowledge, say,

of God's existence. Even in the most rigorous science, as Peirce argues, there is a social or community dimension to truth. Our faith deserves a richer conception of truth than the either/or logic we sometimes hear—that the Book of Mormon, for instance, is either true or fake. Recognizing that we enact truth in our deeds is not the easy way out: it only ups the ethical responsibility.

*Ethan: What would you see as the role for intellectuals in the Church?*

*John:* I think the role for the intellectual in the Church would be to lead in terms of Christian service. I don't like the model of the loyal opposition. Church is not parliament. I don't like the model of the intellectual as beacon unto the world. I think we are, like most people, selfish and self-serving and defensive of our craft. I think that Lowell Bennion had the right answer. You know, that if you really want to philosophize, go out and paint houses for the elderly. Instead of excommunicating dissidents, why not call them on a mission to Africa and have them dig wells or teach parents there how to keep their kids from getting diarrhea or something. [laughs] I don't know; I think intellectuals can help clear away the traps that the inquiring young will fall into. A simple-minded conception of true and false, such as that retailed by the hard-boiled culture of modern science, is not religiously productive.

So I guess I'm giving a kind of pragmatist line again—what the philosopher does clears the brush off conceptual problems and keeps people from getting themselves metaphysically entangled in insoluble dilemmas. Intellectuals should also be more savvy about global issues and community issues and political-structural issues. I'm not sure that a critical voice in the wilderness is as good as a kind of humble servant would be, a community servant. I really believe that, though I'm not very good at doing it, if I'm honest with myself.

*Ethan: One last question: Jesus and Paul are among the heroes of your first two books. Will we see Joseph Smith showing up as a hero in a future book?*

*John:* For me to write about Joseph Smith adequately would require a completely different kind of book than what I've done so far. We'll have to see what the future has in its womb.

### Notes

1. Schudson's assessment comes from an email to Ethan Yorgason, June 21, 2006.

2. Reviews of Peters's books yield additional acclaim. Paddy Scannell asserts that "*Speaking into the Air* is, quite simply, the most original and thought

provoking book on communication I have read.” *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture* 1, no. 1 (2004): 93. Joan Hemels would make *Speaking into the Air* “compulsory reading for every . . . student of communication science.” *Journal of the History of Behavioral Sciences* 38, no. 4 (2002): 428. On the back cover of *Courting the Abyss*, John Keane, of the University of Westminster’s Centre for the Study of Democracy, calls the book “the best scholarly book on free speech in more than a generation.” Of course, some reviews of Peters’s work are more glowing than others, but virtually all reviewers find Peters’s ideas well worth wrestling with.

3. L. Jackson Newell, “An Echo from the Foothills: To Marshall the Forces of Reason,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 19, no. 1 (Spring 1986): 26–34.

4. “*Preach My Gospel*”: *A Guide to Missionary Service* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2004).

5. John Durham Peters, “Bowels of Mercy,” *BYU Studies* 38, no. 4 (1999): 27–41.



# Hands Raised Up: Corruption, Power, and Context in Bolivian Mormonism

*David Clark Knowlton*

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has a strong authority structure. Power seemingly originates at the center of the Church, with the prophet and apostles, and radiates outward from there.<sup>1</sup> This system of authority developed in the context of the Church's efforts to colonize the U.S. Intermountain West, in its struggles with the U.S. federal government, and in its shift from a village to a suburban faith.<sup>2</sup> Now this system must take account of its growth in many countries.

Although the system has been carefully reorganized to manage an international religious organization and associated business interests, when the Church leaves the boundaries of its homeland it enters different socio-historical contexts. There its forms and procedures take on a different relevance and reality, some intended and some unintended. As a result, one must observe and theorize how the organization takes motive, purpose, and even form from the varied contexts in which it operates. It is not enough, when one attempts to understand Mormonism in other societies, to simply take account of the formalities of Church structure. One must also see how local context is created and provided by the Church's existence in local societies, its local thinking about them, and about the Church. But this project is not simple, in part because of the way Mormonism understands itself.

## **Prelude: Form and Content**

The LDS Church struggles to impose not only form, but also content, as it builds its authority structure around the globe. It expects the form and content to follow as a manifestation of people's acceptance of

Mormon principles and as a sign of their faith.<sup>3</sup> It expects that people will adopt a “gospel” culture and a “gospel” attitude toward authority and power. For example, Apostle Dallin H. Oaks articulated this general logic in the Church’s general conference after working to manage the Church in the Philippines while residing there:

[The Gospel] requires us to make some changes from our family culture, our ethnic culture, or our national culture. We must change all elements of our behavior that are in conflict with gospel commandments, covenants, and culture . . . I am not contrasting the culture or traditions of one part of the world with another. I am contrasting the Lord’s way with the world’s way—the culture of the gospel of Jesus Christ with the culture or traditions of every nation or people. No group has a monopoly on virtue or an immunity from the commandment to change. . . . We say to all, give up your traditions and cultural practices that are contrary to the commandments of God and the culture of His gospel, and join with His people in building the kingdom of God. There is a unique gospel culture, a set of values and expectations and practices common to all members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This gospel way of life comes from the plan of salvation, the commandments of God, and the teachings of the living prophets. It is given expression in the way we raise our families and live our individual lives.<sup>4</sup>

Building a universal Church organization and culture is important to Mormon leaders.<sup>5</sup> But reading Oaks against the grain illustrates that national, ethnic, and family Mormonisms are also developing as the LDS Church interacts with local societies through its members, if through no other medium. That seems to be the point of his warning. Nevertheless, little scholarly work has been done as yet on the international Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and on how, though a transnational organization, it builds local religious structures and organization.<sup>6</sup>

This paper provides one ethnographic example of this more general process by exploring the context in which local LDS leadership was challenged in 2004 in the city of El Alto, Bolivia. To do so will require discussing the conflict in some detail, based on ethnographic fieldwork.<sup>7</sup> Following the idea of Victor Turner that, in social dramas, one often sees the structure of a society more clearly arrayed than in ordinary circumstances, I hope that this paper will bring better understanding of the mechanics of transnational religious authority and the specifics of how this international structure requires and acquires local contexts.<sup>8</sup>

### **The Drama: Act One**

Just after a public conflict occurred in the ward conference of an active and strong ward in an area of former miners in El Alto, Bolivia, I arrived on June 27, 2004, at the home of central players in the conflict.<sup>9</sup> I had frequently stayed in this neighborhood over the years and knew these members well. I was also well acquainted with other families in this ward and other wards in the stake. Everyone was talking about the conflict. So, although this was not a situation I was formally researching, I took notes. What follows is based on those notes.

At ward conference, the second counselor in the stake presidency had asked, per standard procedure, for people to lift their hands to manifest support for their bishop. He had been bishop for several years. This time fourteen people, some of them ward leaders, raised their hands against him. The second counselor, I am told, paused in the reading of the names of ward authorities and said in a severe tone, "No member in good standing would ever raise their hands against their [leader's] authority." He further said that members could be excommunicated for doing so. The meeting was put on hold, and each of the fourteen, as well as some who had not raised their hands in opposition, were called one by one into an office to meet with the stake president. He challenged them, people said, about why they lifted their hands in opposition to the bishop. He asked who set them up to do it and suggested there was a plot in the ward against the bishop. He named a particular family in the ward as the authors, precisely the family who was so soon to be my host. In this particular family, the wife had raised her hand in opposition; the husband had not.

### **Interlude: Making Context**

It is unusual for members to lift their hands in opposition during a ward conference, especially such a large number of people. Including children, the congregation that day may have numbered perhaps two hundred. If so, more than 10 percent of the adults raised their hands. Even more strikingly, many of them were senior members of the ward.

Up to this point in our argument, this social drama can be understood completely within standard Mormon terms. However, that afternoon and evening, and during the following days, people could not stop talking about the events. Since I stayed with one of the families that had participated against the bishop, I unwittingly found myself among the op-

position. Inevitably this turn of events colors my presentation, but it did give me a depth of material about those who felt motivated to lift their hands. I have also carefully chosen a theoretical frame to mitigate any bias I might have.

In those conversations, the members present created a context for their actions grounded in the gospel and in the experience and culture of their neighborhood. Over and over people made reference to the role their *villa*, as neighborhoods are often called, had played in the overthrow of the nation's president in October 2003. They mentioned the bullets that flew through their neighborhood, the trenches they dug to stop armored personnel carriers from circulating, the tear gas, and those killed. They spoke about their heritage as miners who had stood up against the Bolivian state on many occasions and how, when miners had marched from rural mines to support the uprising against the president, their neighborhood had received them with communal tables and support. They cited two popular slogans that justified the actions in 2003, "*El Alto de pie, nunca de rodillas*" and "*Sangre de minero, semilla de guerrillero*." The first means "El Alto on its feet, never on its knees," the second: "miner's blood, warrior's (or fighter's) seed."

These members said they had fought to bring down a corrupt governmental regime and must fight against injustice wherever they are. As people talked, their theme of injustice began to focus on corruption and favoritism. They discussed how the central government of Bolivia had been corrupt and celebrated their villa's role in overturning it. They argued strongly for the importance of transparency in governmental affairs. In order for transparency to occur, they held that people had to demand it and stay alert for corruption in order to name it and challenge it. They felt that this responsibility was incumbent on ordinary people.

They argued that the bishop was corrupt and provided much detail of the alleged corruption. It included pocketing tithing funds and inflating ward numbers to get more money from the Church (budget allotments from Church headquarters are based on membership and attendance) which he would then pocket on the basis of false receipts. They said he favored his friends and was actively promoting those friends by giving them benefits. Many people claimed to have personally witnessed these actions and said this was why they had voted against him.

The interesting issue here is not so much the accusation of corruption against the bishop and, as we shall see below, against stake officials.

Unfortunately accusations of corruption are quite common in the Latin American LDS Church, as an anonymous reviewer of this article pointed out. Troublesome though these charges are, the importance of the situation for this paper lies in how Church authority was submitted to the filter of Bolivian political events as the members who narrated the events justified their actions in breaking with the LDS norm and raising their hands against the bishop by casting it as a struggle against corrupt leaders—leaders who, the members felt, violated priesthood covenants. Following the violent events in their community some nine months earlier, the people claimed it was their obligation to stand up against corruption and improper use of authority.

They also argued from Doctrine and Covenants 121 that the bishop had exercised “unrighteous dominion” and, borrowing from the Book of Mormon, “priestcraft.” In Spanish, the parallel term is *superchería sacerdotal*, literally priestly superstition or the worship of priesthood. But the justification for action came not from their reading of LDS scripture alone but from the way they narrated local history. The two bases merged and fed on each other.

### The Drama: Act Two

Two days later I was awakened at 6:00 A.M. when someone knocked heavily on the metal gate on the street outside the home of the family whom the stake president accused of organizing the opposition. The dog started barking fiercely and the head of the family went to see who was there.

It was three members of the stake high council, dressed in black slacks and black leather jackets. They were long-time friends of the family and fellow Church workers. The family’s father asked them into the house. Although I stayed in my room, I heard almost everything. They greeted the family members, commented on the weather and on national politics, and then handed them a letter summoning them to a disciplinary council in the stake center scheduled for the following Sunday. The family read the letter, and then invited the high councilors to sit down at the dining room table to have breakfast with the family. I was invited to come to the table as well, where we discussed national political events.

Since the family was scheduled to travel to Lima and would not be in town that Sunday, it mobilized its own networks, including the area leader, Elder Carlos Amado. As a result, the disciplinary council was post-

poned until August. On Sunday, August 15, 2004, the family members appeared before a stake disciplinary council on charges of “conduct unbecoming members” because of the allegations of corruption they had made against their ward bishop and stake presidency.

I was away from La Paz for more than a month but happened to arrive, unknowingly, on the day of the rescheduled council. The father of the family I had stayed with asked me to attend. As part of the council, the stake president told some ten people who had come as witnesses in favor of the family that their testimony was not needed. While the family was in a separate room alone, he said to the gathered witnesses and high council members that the stake presidency knows things the members do not, which he was not at liberty to discuss in order to protect the privacy of the family. He said, “Good members of the Church do not need witnesses.”

Standing before some twenty people in the stake center classroom in a gray suit, white shirt, and tie, the president shook his head with its shock of prematurely gray hair and said, “You come before us to tell us that the xxxx<sup>10</sup> family did not organize opposition to Bishop xxxx of the xxxx ward but we know they did. We know the xxxx [family is] very popular in the ward and that they have performed lots of service to individual members. But we have spoken with members who say they were urged by the[m] to raise their hands against the bishop at the same time the xxxx family made allegations of corruption against us leaders of the Church. You say one thing. The others say something else and we believe them.”

The president stared at one young man, who had closely cropped hair and a pained look in his eyes, and said, “You . . . say that you doubt that the[y] organized any opposition. How can you say that when we know they did? This is not about doubt, it is about knowledge. Can you say you know they did not organize opposition to their leaders?”

“Yes, I can say I know they did not,” the young man said as he raised his head to look the president. He later said in the disciplinary council hearing, “As I told you in our interview, President, I have my own reasons for raising my hand against [the] bishop. . . . That is why I raised my hand. I am not a puppet.”

In response to the question of whether the stake president could stand before the members and the witnesses and affirm that the leadership—he, his counselors, and the bishop—were free of corruption and had never performed corrupt acts, the stake president became angry and refused to answer the question. He said, “The accusations are against [the]

Bishop. I am a Judge in Israel. That is my calling. This is not about the leaders but about whether the xxxx [family] has organized opposition to them.”

Ultimately, after this unusual, and perhaps improper proceeding, the family was disfellowshipped. Subsequently, other members wrote to General and Area Authorities protesting this treatment of the family. Some also wrote, without mentioning the family, to protest the corruption in the stake. Uniformly, they were told to support their leaders and place the issue in the Lord’s hands. After attendance and ward participation declined, the bishop was replaced in 2005. By the end of 2005, the stake presidency was also replaced. In 2006 the family was restored to full fellowship.

### **Background: Mormonism in Bolivia**

Bolivia currently has twenty-two stakes, six in the city of La Paz and its suburb, El Alto. Mormonism entered Bolivia in 1964.<sup>11</sup> It had achieved a membership of 137,817 by the end of 2003, according to official Church records, growing since 1995 by 77 percent.<sup>12</sup> However, if Bolivia’s membership is like that of Chile’s and Mexico’s, then only about 20–25 percent of those listed as members (somewhere between 28,000 and 34,000, or about 1,200 to 1,600 per stake) are the committed, active members who operate the Church’s lay authority structure and minister to the rest.<sup>13</sup>

It appears that this core active population of Mormons is committed and passes on that commitment to succeeding generations, according to data published by the Bolivian anthropologist Javier Albó. Eighty-two percent of people born to Mormon households continue to claim LDS membership. In contrast 68 percent of those born into Holiness households, 72.4 percent of those born to undefined non-Catholic households, 76 percent of those born Adventist, 81 percent of those born to families in the historic Protestant denominations, and 88.9 percent of Pentecostals remain with their faith.<sup>14</sup>

These numbers indicate the strong hold that new Latin American religions have achieved. Mormonism seems particularly strong. This finding, significantly, suggests that concepts of Mormon hierarchy are not an easily abandoned religious philosophy but have probably sunk deep roots into the hearts and souls of those who strongly affirm a Mormon identity. It also means that it would be highly unlikely for Bolivian members in this

committed group to openly express or proclaim controversies that arise within their religious world unless they felt strongly motivated to do so. Protest over controversies would require a religious motivation as well as a motivation in harmony with the social context. It would indeed require unusual circumstances and a strong feeling of rightness for them to speak out against Mormon leaders. The uprisings and violent repressions of 2003 that led to the overthrow of the nation's government provided such conditions.

The people who challenged the bishop and stake president did not see their actions as contrary to their religious devotion. Although they consciously drew from local history, they also nested those actions in religious devotion. They saw it as their role to challenge what they saw as bad local leadership to encourage the upper-level Church authorities to take action. As a result, they did not see their activities as conduct unbecoming members, as the stake president charged, but as necessary acts of faith and devotion to the gospel.

### **Analysis: Three Issues of Authority**

The conflict we are exploring calls attention to at least three deeply resonant concepts of authority. Each connects Church processes in various ways with Bolivian reality. One sees conflicts as struggles between self-interested factions. The second recognizes the right of people at the base of social organizations to oversee and correct the performance of their leaders. The third argues that power relationships in the Church should proceed from the top down. This last concept did not afford any way to publicly and legitimately ventilate the claims of corruption and assess their validity. As we shall see, these concepts of authority have a rich ethnographic basis in Mormon and Bolivian society and experience. These concepts deepen the local context of Mormon action and religiosity.

#### *One: The Logic of Factionalism*

In the stake president's interviews with members following their opposition to the bishop, the stake president relied on a logic of authority that has deep resonances within the Bolivian world, factionalism. This concept appears to be the basis for the disciplinary council against a single family, one in which only the wife actually raised her hand in opposition;



the husband did not. To my knowledge, none of the other members who raised their hands were subjected to Church discipline.

The family singled out was susceptible to claims of factionalism because of their sociological status in the villa, ward, and stake. The husband, the son of a miner, grew up in the mining camp of Huanuni. He is also a long-time member of the Church, a returned missionary, and a former high councilor. At the time he was a temple worker and a popular Gospel Doctrine class teacher for the young adults. Furthermore, he is a college graduate. His wife, also college educated, holds a lucrative job in the city. Due to an accident, the husband stays home, cares for the house, engages in neighborhood politics, and works to help his wife's business. The wife, also a long-time member, was a popular Young Women's stake leader. Although born in the country's south, she is from an Aymara family—the majority population of El Alto—and grew up in La Paz. Their home is a hive of social contacts.

The family stands out in the ward and stake, then, for many reasons. Its members are professionals in a hard-scrabble, working-class neighborhood with high levels of poverty and unemployment. They are widely respected within the neighborhood, and particularly the ward, for their civic involvement and for their concern for local people. They are deeply connected with both the miners and Aymara populations of the neighborhood, as well as with Bolivia's secular, professional elite. Many of their neighbors, especially members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, visit them frequently. Their family home evenings on Monday nights almost always have invited, and sometimes surprise, guests who join in the singing of hymns, the gospel discussion, and the sharing of refreshments. Furthermore many people call them first, before seeking Church leaders, when someone is hospitalized suddenly or has some other crisis. They are respected in the ward and community.

In other words, they have a base of power in the respect that people have for them and in their class position; this respect exceeds that of the bishop at the time of the incident, a former miner employed as a janitor for the Church. They have been in the Church as long as anyone there; they are well educated and reasonably well off financially, yet they do not depend on the Church for income. They are better connected in Bolivian society than most of the stake leaders, but they are less integrated into the patronage system of the stake—that is, the network of connections and mutual support that appears to lead to callings and to rising in the hierar-

chy. However, they are very well connected in the broader society of regional Mormonism.

In response to the focus on this family, many people in the area, both members and others, saw the stake presidency as a faction, built from a set of interrelated families who were not from La Paz or the mining community. They claimed that these families formed a *logia tupiceña*, a “mafia” from the southern Bolivian town of Tupiza. For more than twenty years, my interviewees claimed, this interrelated set of families had controlled the stake and had drawn a group of bishops and stake leaders into their domain by providing access to goods and wealth. It has been argued that they have treated the Church as a basis for personalism—the practice of personal ties taking precedence over formal procedure—and prebendalism—using political office for personal exploitation and gain to finance loyal supporters.<sup>15</sup> Many in the group are Church employees and, people say, consequently receive salaries far above the going rate for people of their educational level in the country. The Church was an important base for the social mobility of this group whether its members were corrupt and prebendal or not. This dependency on the Church for economic success gave plausibility to all the claims that circulated about their other activities, as did statements that the stake president and colleagues made about their wealth vis-à-vis the bulk of the poor members in El Alto. The stake president was reported to have said that Church leaders received material blessings because of their obedience to Church authority. Many saw this statement as an attempt to sanctify a very Bolivian logic of self-interest and prebendalism under the guise of a very Mormon theology of prosperity—that is, that blessings flow to the righteous.

That factionalism should underlie both sides’ understandings of the logic and motives of the other is ironic, given that the manifest question was one of obedience to Church authority or legitimacy of Church authority. Though the family and the stake presidency are situated differently in local society in ways that make both susceptible to be considered factions caught in struggle, the claim of each side in justifying itself was, as we have seen, to following the gospel and to legitimacy in using contemporary Bolivian concerns. Arguments about factionalism were attempts to take away the legitimacy of opponents.

The conflict had not emerged overnight in June. Rather, there was a history of disagreements involving the family and the stake authorities. In March 2004, the wife, then the stake Young Women’s president, had

been called to a disciplinary council for publicly accusing the stake presidency of corruption. She had questioned the budget disbursement by the stake in a stake meeting. Whenever the Young Women asked for money to carry out activities, they would almost always be told there was no budget. She found out from an area authority that the total budget for the Young Women was some 6,000\$bs, about 700\$US. "But none of that money ever flowed into the organization," she said. She further claimed that the funds for the Young Women were spent improperly on personal interests of the stake presidency, rather than on the Young Women. A former journalist and well connected, she had become aware of the many accusations circulating about the stake presidency's misuse of funds and power to enrich themselves. As a result, in exasperation she claimed, she said, "The leaders are corrupt."

After being called before the stake presidency to answer for this statement, she was denied the sacrament for two months. By June 2004 that issue had been resolved, however, and she was back in good standing.

The argument of factionalism against the stake presidency stems from observation by many people in the stake that a group of interrelated families seemed to have had a lock on stake authority for years. Despite concern at the local level that others should also be allowed a chance to exercise stake leadership, external Church leaders seemed to support this group of outsiders who had migrated to El Alto and assumed Church authority over the Alteños (the people of El Alto). Since 1985, when I first came into the area while doing doctoral work, I have heard complaints from many people about this set of leaders and their methods of exercising Church authority. Nevertheless, in 2004, these concerns escalated from mere complaints to concrete action against the bishop and stake presidency because of political events in Bolivia.

Factionalism runs deep in Bolivian society and is the counterpart of prebendalism and personalism. The idea that secular, political affairs develop from the struggle of factions, with their representative leaders obtaining prebends to finance their networks of supporters, is a strong one. This notion was part of the accusation against the Bolivian president, Gonzalo Sánchez de Losada, that led him to resign and flee the country. He tried to label his opposition as driven by the factionalist interests of outsiders, particularly on the radical political left, but was not convincing. A claim of factionalism is a way of attempting to dismiss the action of

mass movements, instead displacing the focus toward individuals and factional leaders.

Furthermore, in 2004 factions in many parts of the country used arguments of corruption to challenge the leadership of entrenched elites. This challenge took its most violent form in actions against several mayors in rural municipalities. In the case of Ayoayo, opponents of the mayor accused him according to claims of Indian law and community justice.<sup>16</sup> He was sentenced to death and burned alive. Then, as a means of challenging the claims of the mayor's opposition, the national press argued that a *faction* had abused Indian justice and national law by submitting the mayor to capital punishment.

I was doing formal fieldwork in Copacabana in early June 2004 when I went to La Paz and found this crisis in the stake. In Copacabana, a group of townsmen rose up against the mayor who, they argued, was corrupt and represented a mafia that had taken over the municipal organization.<sup>17</sup> They accused him of depending on an abusive group of rural supporters to keep him in power. When challenged, these supporters marched into town and threatened the townsmen with violence unless they acquiesced to the mayor. When the townsmen, in turn, threatened to kill the mayor, he was saved only by the intervention of the Bolivian marines.

Factionalism in Bolivia depends on a fragmented social order built on relationships to elites for power and benefits. But the term can also be an accusation to deny legitimacy to one's opponents. This usage was intended to deny legitimacy on both sides of our drama, although draped by the two sides in a different quilt patched together from both Bolivian and gospel arguments.

### *Two: The Logic of Vigilance from Below*

As we have seen, people in this ward and stake in El Alto, Bolivia drew not only on Latter-day Saint scriptural and official logics to understand the crisis and decide on courses of actions, but they also relied on understandings drawn from their Bolivian experience. These latter emphasized the social and moral responsibility of the social base to exercise oversight over authority. As a result, at the same time that they challenged Bolivian discourses of authoritarianism, personalism, and prebendalism, the people's commitment to exercise oversight on officials' use of authority stemmed, as they openly claimed, directly from recent political experi-

ence. But that experience is also important because, as García Linera observed, facing lethal force and overcoming it strengthened people against the ordinary fear that underlies traditional relations of power in Bolivia.<sup>18</sup>

In September and October of 2003, Bolivia underwent one of the most significant crises in its entire history, one which transformed the feeling of political possibilities in the face of power. Although it impacted the entire country, the crisis depended on the active mobilization of El Alto's population.<sup>19</sup> Within that area, some of the strongest conflicts and greatest degree of mobilization were in the neighborhood covered by the ward under consideration here. Because of protest and resistance by people in El Alto, the nation's president, Gonzalo ("Goni") Sánchez de Losada, was forced to flee the country and resign the presidency in October 2003.

Sánchez was caught between the demands of the multilateral lending agencies, which sustained him and his administration of technocrats, and the social movements that were rising on the basis of the Indian movements, the labor unions (including the miners), and the neighborhood associations. These latter made a strong critique of Goni's government. They challenged its authoritarianism, its resistance to the demands of the common people, its implementation of the will of the international sector (symbolized by the United States), and its human rights violations, particularly the use of violence and repression against citizen's groups, to stay in power. They argued that power comes from the people and that government's responsibility is to consult with and carry out the will of the people. When it loses that legitimacy, they claim the right to mobilize against it and force change.

Social movements became central political actors in Bolivia during the years of neoliberalism, between the mid-1980s and the present.<sup>20</sup> The country has found itself in a situation where pressure on the government by social mobilizations, strikes, marches, the blockading of roads, etc., leads to negotiation and changes in government policy. In many ways, social movements have become an arm of the country's system of government. If nothing else, they have opened a way for people to make their voices manifest beyond the simple system of elections, occasional consultations, and polls. They give importance to pressure from below, and the public becomes a direct voice in government and not just a voice represented.

Although Goni's administration justified itself in terms of bureau-

cratic efficiency and professional ethics, as well as claiming to be a movement against corruption, it was widely felt that the regime continued the old order of personalism, the building of political coalitions through the giving of prebends, and corruption—in the sense that individuals could take personal advantage of political office. After Goni left, substantial reports were published in the press about the many millions of dollars Goni and his followers allegedly took from this impoverished country where many people survive on two dollars a day.<sup>21</sup> The neoliberal discourses of modernization and development that Goni promoted were subsequently skeptically received as a kind of disguise for business and exploitation as usual. Many concluded that neoliberal regimes can function only with the severe repression of ordinary people. Equally significantly, this episode led to a general critique and suspicion of authoritarian discourses, such as those arguing for trust and faith in leaders and their authority.

In response to Goni, the movements proposed a kind of representative government in which the government was not the maker of decisions but primarily the implementer of decisions taken by the people as a whole. This latter idea was important because part of the criticism of the central government was that it merely implemented and administered policies and decisions made by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the U.S. government. Authority delegated from international political or economic entities became suspect in contrast to power from the people. Sovereignty, not of the government, but of the people, became an issue, and the government as the people's representative became an ideal to many people. Throughout the country, governments and business organizations were suddenly evaluated according to norms of transparency. Accusations of corruption and questions about representation became standard ways of questioning the legitimacy of political leaders and authorities.<sup>22</sup>

The neighborhood of the ward under consideration here contains primarily miners and their families. The miners were relocated to the cities after the economic collapse of the government-owned mining corporation (COMIBOL) following the imposition of neoliberal reforms in the eighties. Despite their new class position and new lives, this population retains strong historical memories of the mid-twentieth-century miners' movement's radicalism. At that time, miners were probably the most significant political force in the country and one generally resisted by U.S. interests.<sup>23</sup> This memory was drawn on openly during 2003, along with a

memory of Indian community, in both the collective mobilization, the solidarity given to contemporary miners who marched from camps far outside of La Paz, and the collective tables or *apthapis* (in which pooled resources fed locals and visitors during the crisis). Furthermore, the experience of facing bullets and tear gas led the people of this neighborhood, along with many others in El Alto, to claim the historical right and obligation to question structures of exploitation.<sup>24</sup> If their heritage was, as they felt, the historic struggle of the working class, then they should continue that struggle against authoritarianism and domination wherever they found it.

This changed sense of possibility has transformed much of social life and process in El Alto. It recently forced Bolivian President Carlos Meza to recognize the will of the people rather than that of the multinational water company or the multinational petroleum companies. Feeling himself caught between the social movements and the autonomy movement of lowland Bolivia, Meza resigned in June 2005. The head of the nation's Supreme Court, Eduardo Rodríguez, thereafter assumed the nation's presidency in preparation for national elections. The winner was Evo Morales, not only the first Indian president of an American nation but the first in Bolivian history to be elected by a majority of greater than 50 percent. Never before in Bolivian democratic history has a candidate for president won with more than half the votes. Now, under Morales, the social movements continue to be a vanguard in the struggle over the privatization or nationalization of water utilities and the nation's petroleum resources. Their pressure has changed the political field in which the current president operates and requires that he take them into account. They promise to be an important force in Bolivia's politics for some time to come.

Thus, as the clouds of tear gas lifted and the trenches filled that had been dug to stop the advance of armored personnel carriers in late 2003, El Alto settled into a more ordinary existence. Nevertheless people discussed their contribution to the events of October 2003, related those events to their miner heritage, and discussed the impact that experience would have on their lives. They were justifiably proud of the pivotal role they had played. They came to see El Alto as a central player in national affairs and, furthermore, as a kind of conscience and watchdog of the nation.

This newfound pride and power were manifested in the aforemen-

tioned slogans: *El Alto de pie, nunca de rodillas* (El Alto on its feet, never on its knees), and *sangre de minero, semilla de guerrillero* (miner's blood, warrior's seed). Given the feeling, memory, and experience behind these slogans, it is not surprising that Mormons in El Alto voiced similar sentiments about Mormon leadership and the management of LDS property and congregations in what they felt to be an act of religious obligation.

### *Three: The Logic of Authority in Mormonism*

Mormonism emphasizes the delegation of power from the top. This emphasis symbolizes the authority to act in the name of God and stresses that the centralized authority embodied in the General Authorities represents God.<sup>25</sup> In contrast, the allocation of power from the bottom to the top, from the many to the one, is generally considered untenable in Mormonism, since the Church views itself as a restoration by God of proper Christianity, rather than as a church of the people.<sup>26</sup> Mormon central leadership sees itself as sanctioned by its proximity to God and as authorized to act in his name. This idea leads to a sanctification of the leadership structure itself as an argument for Mormonism's religious validity and, therefore, "truthfulness." Nevertheless, as in the case of all power or authority, its functioning depends socially on the acceptance of its legitimacy by local members of the Church. The Church may wish not to recognize allocation of power by the grass roots; but without some form of such allocation, the Church would effectively cease to exist. People have to agree to a group's power for the group to function. The group may obtain independent bases of power that allow it to impose itself on people, but that does not change the fundamentally relational nature of power by which people agree to accept its claims and acquiesce to it.

As a result, Mormonism lives in tension between its insistent claim to divine authority, grounded in a structure of revelation to prophets and apostles who guide the Church in the Lord's name, and its reality as a social organization that requires people to accept its claims and allocate power to it. Instead of seeing this act as part of the creation of the power of prophets and apostles, Mormons tend to see it as a moral act, i.e., obedience and acceptance of "the Lord's way." As such it becomes labeled as submission to the will of God, rather than as an act of giving power to a social organization. The reality of allocation from the base to the center, then, disappears from view in a Mormon understanding of power and authority, obscured by the idea of power coming solely from God and the



importance granted to its acceptance. Other kinds of power, such as when someone feels authorized to disagree with the Church, are therefore marginalized as coming from Satan and as questions, not of personal views or a social organization, but as an attack on God's sacred authority and as a rejection of God's will. The self is generally not seen as a very stable or useful basis of organizational power.<sup>27</sup> Allocation is necessarily invisible and generally unspoken, except in the narrow frames allowed by this structure.

In its corporate structure—control over Church property and resources held by the Quorum of the First Presidency, control over the naming of leaders, and control over finances and independent wealth from business investments—the Church has built a structure that favors the ideology of delegation of power from the top. Its social organization and its independent, legally protected base of power support the idea that power comes from a pinnacle that represents God. Individuals have little independent power, other than that of acquiescence, despite the fact the Church would cease to exist if people quit acceding to its power demands.

This basic theological stance and the social structuring of authority are further instilled within Mormon religious practice. Members are regularly encouraged to “support” and “sustain” their leaders. The image of “support” recognizes and makes real for members the Church's divine sanction. Members regularly lift their hands in public to affirm their support of the Church's leadership. Members must give satisfactory answers about their support to gain entrance into LDS temples. Acquiescence moves here from a passive acceptance to an active affirmation that is manifested in key symbols like “priesthood,” “support,” “prophet,” “leadership,” and “authority.”<sup>28</sup> This movement is an important spiritual and religious act, consonant with the general Mormon emphasis on action and activity. It becomes one of the markers by which Mormons evaluate their own and others' “righteousness” and “spirituality.”<sup>29</sup>

As a result, members are expected to demonstrate in their hearts, minds, and bodies acceptance, deference, and obedience to authority.<sup>30</sup> In this very lay Church, all worthy men hold the priesthood and expect to have a specifiable line of authority stretching from Jesus to them. The order and direction of authority are important and organize the Church and much of Mormon life. Within Mormonism, authority becomes one of the major markers of status, and people learn to recognize it and perform it appropriately through the use of titles and language, as well as appropriate

body stances.<sup>31</sup> As a major aspect of Mormon life, it is hard for authority to be emphasized too strongly.

Nevertheless, the required acquiescence of members to Church hierarchy is not always forthcoming. Despite the emphasis on obedience by Mormon hierarchy and its instantiation in Mormon practice, there is real diversity among Latter-day Saints.<sup>32</sup> Individuals vary about when they see the concept of “support” as the best way to shape their response to a leader’s actions and words, and they also vary on what “support” entails in particular circumstances. They likewise vary by the broader philosophies and practices of power they use to make sense of their Mormon world. As a result, LDS authority can be the subject of other discourses and other readings, as people attempt to understand and evaluate Church leadership within their own, including locally dominant, frames of reference.<sup>33</sup> Mormonism does not exist in isolation, either as an organization or within the lives of its members. Because of this fact, the function of Mormonism at local levels depends on that context. Church authority and leadership acquire, by this means, a connection with local understandings of how power and leadership should operate. Sometimes that connection enables the system to operate as the elite would prefer; and at other times, it leads to tension, argument, and even social drama.<sup>34</sup>

Mormon authority moves within local sociopolitical structures that either support it or enter into tension with it. Although it operates within the specific sphere envisioned by Mormon theology and the space given to religion within society, the general understandings of authority that typify secular society also influence this religious sphere. Despite the different domains of government and politics on one hand and of religion on the other, the ideas, understandings, expectations, patterns, and histories of leadership play with and against each other. One example of these mutual influences is the way Mormon leaders speak about the political system within Church meetings.

Mormon leaders in Bolivia frequently contrast the secular system with what they call “the Lord’s way.” Part of this comparison juxtaposes the concept that the Church’s authority comes from God against the constant struggle for power and its maintenance in the Bolivian political system. LDS leaders contrast the Church, with its focus on sacrifice, service, respect for divine authority, and stable trustworthy processes, with a Bolivian system of personalism, prebendalism, corruption, venality, constant struggle, etc. The experience of people in Bolivian politics, with its con-

stant strikes, arguments, blockades, military actions, and accusations of corruption versus their experience in wards and stakes should give them a “testimony” of the sacredness of the latter. Indeed, its difference from Bolivia is argued to be a proof of Mormonism’s divine sanction.

This frequent comparison results in an ongoing dialogue between local processes and Mormon structures through the actions and discussions of local leaders and members. Generally, as we have seen, this dialogue affirms Mormonism’s authority structure if the person wishes to see himself or herself, and be seen by others, as a righteous, active Mormon. Sometimes, however, it can call into question Mormon understandings of leadership. Mormon authority can be challenged when popular democracy becomes important locally, as it did in Bolivia’s increasingly prominent social movements, and when members discern that Church leaders function more like the political leaders the movements contest than the spiritual leaders they claim to be.

### **Conclusion: Universalism Needs Local Context**

The stake presidency in this incident no longer hold their previous positions, nor does the bishop. They have been replaced. The disfellowshipped family is now back in full fellowship. This crisis is over. Nevertheless, this social drama illustrates how Mormonism can operate in the context of local areas. As a social drama, the issues show fissures in a stark clarity not often found in ordinary life.

The social reality of El Alto and its role, amid violent repression, in overturning the national presidency of Gonzalo Sánchez de Losada arguably made possible a break with existing practices of Mormon authority. People broke with deeply established convention and raised their hands against the bishop in ward conference. The secular events, as processed in the minds of members, offered a justification for challenging a deeply engrained logic of delegation of power from above. These members argued, borrowing also from LDS scripture, for the allocation of power from below and for the important role of the base in guaranteeing the proper functioning of institutions that have been captured by corrupt elites. They saw themselves acting to preserve religious authority by using religious and secular arguments for allocation over delegation.

The stake presidency and previous holders of those offices had often used Bolivian society and politics as the Other that contrasted with the Lord’s way. They claimed legitimacy for themselves as the Lord’s

anointed on the basis of power delegated from the central Church and, ultimately, from God. They claimed that opposition to the bishop and themselves was due to a single family and their followers, whom they depicted as a faction. For their part, the opposition claimed that the stake presidency was a venal faction that exploited the Church for personal gain and to build networks of supporters. Such logic is deeply embedded in Bolivian society and politics, especially in the antecedent events of 2003.

Though crises such as the one described above offer particularly sharp illustrations, Mormonism does not draw on local context just in moments of crisis and social drama. Rather the larger background of this case illustrates how deeply the structure of Mormon authority is engaged with Bolivian society. Even though the Church hopes to give form and content to its authority structure, neither form nor content is very meaningful without local context to interpret it. In this sense Mormonism is deeply syncretic; its attempted global universalism of the gospel depends inevitably on local understandings and practices to function. But to fully understand this syncretism, we need many more studies from places around the globe where local Mormonisms are being born.

### Notes

1. See D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books 1994), and his *The Mormon Hierarchy: Extensions of Power* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997). There is a need for a careful and thorough analysis of how LDS power operates, but such is not the purpose of this paper.

2. Thomas F. O'Dea, *The Mormons* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957); Ethan R. Yorgason, *Transformation of the Mormon Culture Region* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003).

3. This point develops from thinking through Douglas Davies's *The Mormon Culture of Salvation: Force, Grace, and Glory* (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2001), and from meditation on the writings of such LDS General Authorities as Dallin H. Oaks's October 2003 general conference address, "Repentance and Change," on culture and the gospel, <http://www.lds.org/conference/talk/display/0,5232,49-1-401-12,00.html> (accessed May 5, 2005).

4. Oaks, "Repentance and Change."

5. The Mormon insistence on universalism is just one of many attempts to create or impose the universal in this globalized world. As such, it conflicts with attempts to maintain or create the particular, the local, and the nonuniversal.

6. For Mormonism in Latin America, see F. Lamond Tullis, *Mormons in Mexico: The Dynamics of Faith and Culture* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1987); Marcus Martins, "The Oak Tree Revisited: Brazilian LDS Leaders' Insights on the Growth of the Church in Brazil" (Ph.D. dissertation, Brigham Young University, 1996); and Mark Grover, "The LDS Church in Latin America: A Bibliography," compiled March 2002, <http://www.lib.byu.edu/departs/hum/markweb/LDSchurchinla.htm> (accessed May 5, 2005).

7. I was in Bolivia in 2004 to research the intersection of neoliberalism and rural workers. Portions of that research are reported in David Knowlton, "Queremos hablar: El bloqueo de junio de 2004 en Copacabana como ejemplo de la sociología de movilizaciones masivas," in *Conflictos políticos y movimientos sociales en Bolivia*, edited by Nicholas A. Robbins (La Paz, Bolivia: Plural Editores, 2006), 19–32. The crisis broke out in the LDS ward while I was in La Paz. I started taking field notes and interviewed as many of the participants as I could. I returned to Bolivia with self funding to fulfill an obligation to the rural school of Huacuyo and again happened to be in La Paz for the court held against the family mentioned here. Again I conducted interviews and kept notes until I had to return to the United States. This was not a planned project but research in which I observed what happened and tried to gather as much information as possible. The critique of Church leaders and the relationship to secular social change and miners' history is from the people of the area. The theoretical framework in which it is placed is mine. One caveat: Despite my efforts to interview both supporters and opponents of the factions in this crisis, I was not able to interview the bishop and had only a brief conversation with the stake president; I did, however, interview supporters of their position.

8. See Jonathan Friedman, *Cultural Identity and Global Process* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 1994); and for a discussion of issues with global Pentecostalism, see David Martin, *Pentecostalism: The World Their Parish* (London: Blackwell, 2001). See also Victor Turner, "Social Dramas as Ritual Metaphors" in his *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1975), 23–59.

9. El Alto has two stakes and numerous wards. The editor of this special series on international Mormonism asked me to veil as much as possible the location of this drama and the identities of the actors, given the ethically troublesome nature of the accusations of corruption. Although this was a public drama, well known to many Church members in the area, I have tried to do so to the degree possible without negating the way that the specific location was important for the formation of context.

10. Given the sensitivity of this situation, the series editors asked me

not only to veil the identities of these people but to avoid the use of pseudonyms. This makes for a bit of stylistic awkwardness, but has merit.

11. *Deseret News 2005 Church Almanac* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 2004), 278.

12. Calculation mine, based on figures in the biennial *Church Almanacs*.

13. David Clark Knowlton, "How Many Members Are There Really? Two Censuses and the Meaning of LDS Membership in Chile and Mexico," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 38, no. 2 (Summer 2005): 53–78.

14. Xavier Albó, *Una casa común para todos: Iglesias, ecumenismo, y desarrollo en Bolivia* (La Paz, Bolivia: CIPCA, 2002), 73, Chart 3.5C.

15. See "prebendalism," *Wikipedia*, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prebendalism> (accessed September 18, 2006).

16. See David Clark Knowlton, "Indigenous Law, National Law, and Multilateral Institutions: The Problem of the Assassination of Mayors in Bolivia," in *Law, Justice, and Civic Virtue: Proceedings of the Sixth Annual Utah Valley State College Conference by the Faculty*, edited by David Keller (Orem, Utah: Center for the Study of Ethics, Utah Valley State College, 2005), 91–102.

17. David Clark Knowlton, "Rechazo del alcalde y bloqueos de caminos: Notas de Copacabana para analizar el problema de las municipalidades" (Rejection of the Mayor and Roadblocks: Notes from Copacabana toward an Analysis of the Problem of the Municipalities), Paper presented at the Association of Bolivian Studies Third International Conference, February 2005.

18. Álvaro García Linera, Raúl Prada, and Luis Tapia, eds., *Memorias de Octubre* (La Paz, Bolivia: Muela del Diablo Editores, 2004).

19. This important conflict is becoming part of the literature. See, for example, Hugo José Sánchez, *Una Semana Fundamental: 10–13 de Octubre 2003* (La Paz, Bolivia: Muela del Diablo Editores, 2003); and García, Prada, and Tapia, *Memorias de Octubre*. See also David Clark Knowlton, "The Burned Palace and the State in Flames: Neoliberalism and the Politics of Sovereignty in Bolivia," Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association, 2003.

20. On the importance of the social movements, see Roberto Laserna, *Conflictos Sociales y Movimientos Políticos en año 2000 en Bolivia* (Cochabamba, Bolivia: CERES-DFID, 2001); Fernando Calderón and Norbert Lechner, *Más allá del estado, más allá del mercado, la democracia* (La Paz, Bolivia: Plural Editores, 1998); and Fernando Calderón and Alicia Szmukler, *La Política en las Calles* (Cochabamba, Bolivia: CERES, 2000).

21. As I was writing this section, a Bolivian wire service, for example, more than a year and a half after Goni's departure, carried a report of new

charges being brought against Goni and his ministers for acts performed while in power. "Ministros de Goni fueron imputados por masacre sangrienta y homicidio, Caso Octubre Negro tiene nueve imputados," *Bolpress*, May 19, 2005, <http://www.bolpress.com/politica.php?Cod=2005000625> (accessed May 21, 2005).

22. See, for example, Knowlton, "Indigenous Law, National Law, and Multilateral Institutions."

23. See, for example, Herbert S. Klein, *Bolivia: The Evolution of a Multi-ethnic Society* (Oxford, Eng.: Oxford University Press, 1992).

24. Anne Marie Ejdesgaard-Jeppesen, "Change and Continuity in Political Dissent: Re-examining Miner's Memories," Paper presented at the Bolivian Studies Association meetings, Miami, Florida, 2005; photocopy in my possession.

25. For background on the anthropology of Mormon authority and its relationship with Mormon theology, see Davies, *The Mormon Culture of Salvation*.

26. I rely here on Richard N. Adams's distinctions in *Energy and Structure: A Theory of Social Power* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979), 42–43.

27. I have been struck for many years by the use of the term "self-styled," "self-proclaimed," or "so-called" as adjectival phrases that dismiss the authority of people who contrast, for one reason or another, with the views of the Mormon hierarchy. While these terms have a use in broader American culture, they are particularly relevant for Mormonism, where agency is seen as being more about choosing to follow either the divine or its opposition, rather than being a development of some self as in more normative American discourse. This usage strongly supports the institution and organization as sources of legitimacy and authority, dismissing any individual thought or action.

28. Sherry Ortner, "On Key Symbols," *American Anthropologist* 75, no. 5 (1973): 1338–46.

29. David Clark Knowlton, "Celestial Bodies, Celestial Selves: Sex, Semiotics, and Drama in Mormon Persons and Cosmogony," Paper presented at annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association, 2001.

30. Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1977); Thomas Csordas, *The Sacred Self: A Cultural Phenomenology of Charismatic Healing* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Davies, *The Mormon Culture of Salvation*; and Knowlton, "Celestial Bodies, Celestial Selves."

31. The theme of internal hierarchy and status differentials in people's interactions in Mormon group life remains to be adequately explored.

32. This variety can be seen in the conflicts between intellectuals and LDS General Authorities that obtained substantial press. As an entrée to this literature, see Bryan Waterman and Brian Kagel, *The Lord's University: Freedom and Authority at BYU* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998); and Richard Ostling and Joan K. Ostling, *Mormon America: The Power and the Promise* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 2000).

33. David Clark Knowlton, "Authenticity and Authority in Mormonism," *Religion and the Social Order*, special issue on "The Issue of Authenticity in the Study of Religions," edited by David G. Bromley and Lewis F. Carter, 6 (1996).

34. Turner, "Social Dramas as Ritual Metaphors."



# “The Other” in the Limelight: One Perspective on the Publicity Surrounding the New LDS Temple in Finland

*Kim B. Östman*

Media attention is a two-edged sword with the potential for both positive and negative publicity. Still, many societal actors find it important to stay in people’s minds through media exposure. Religious movements, for example, often want their share of attention in order to shape public attitudes and attract converts.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is no exception. In the United States in recent years, the Mormon Church has been given the broadest exposure through events not directly related to it, such as the candidacy of presidential hopeful Mitt Romney. The Mormons and their faith also had worldwide coverage during the 2002 Salt Lake City Winter Olympics. Furthermore, the Latter-day Saints tend to surface in mainstream media through their missionaries, humanitarian projects, and sometimes features perceived as peculiar.

At the local level, new Latter-day Saint temples are probably one of the largest single sources of media attention. The stated purpose of temple building is, of course, to give devout Mormons easier access to their most sacred religious ceremonies. Nevertheless, these building projects are always accompanied by media attention as a highly welcome side dish, especially during the public open houses that are organized before the completed temple is dedicated. Thus, while the Church spares few means to make the temple construction project itself successful, it also expends great efforts to make the public open house a success in terms of public re-

lations. With temple open houses as interesting intersections between the esoteric and the exoteric, the Church also takes great care to train temple tour guides (usually local Latter-day Saints) and to give an understandable picture of its sacred and partly secret temple tradition to the public.

According to Jan Shippo, interested observers have of late been able to witness a “templization” of Mormonism.<sup>1</sup> While this means, among other things, an increased focus of Mormon discourse and religious practice on the faith’s temples, templization can also be seen in the accelerated pace with which Latter-day Saint temples are being built around the world. During five-year periods from 1987 to the present, the number of new temples dedicated has been four, five, fifty-eight, and seventeen, respectively.<sup>2</sup>

The result of this proliferation is that public open houses at temples occur much more frequently than they did a couple of decades ago. Thus, the general public is more frequently exposed in its own locale to Mormonism, often a foreign faith phenomenon. Considering how frequently open houses currently occur and how important a role they play in introducing individuals to Mormonism (and, not least, in shaping the Latter-day Saint image through the media), research literature on the topic is surprisingly silent.

The purpose of this article is to begin filling that gap by discussing some of the publicity accompanying the recently built Helsinki Finland Temple, located in the southern Finland city of Espoo. Discussions of the public open house among Latter-day Saints in Finland have understandably tended to emphasize positive feedback from the general public. After years of rejection and difficulties, many saw the great interest of the public as something miraculous. In order not to skew the overall picture, however, it is important to also discuss the wider variety of thoughts Finnish people had concerning Mormons and their temple. While many visitors had highly positive things to say, most Finns did not visit the temple, nor was every visitor’s experience positive.

This article represents one attempt to nuance the picture by focusing on Mormons as the cultural or religious “other” in media stories related to the Helsinki Temple building project. The analyzed discourses can be roughly divided into an otherness-promoting hegemonic discourse and into a counter-discourse that seeks to remove the Mormon image of otherness. By otherness-promoting discourses, I refer to modes or manners of speaking that seek to construct an image of something as foreign,

as not belonging to one's own group, "not us," as simply "the other." By counter-discourses or otherness-diminishing discourses, I refer to those modes or manners of speaking that seek to eliminate mental images of "the other" and to construct an image of familiarity, normalcy, and something related to and part of "us."

My material consists of more than 100 newspaper and magazine clippings, radio stories, and television news reports from around Finland.<sup>3</sup> The greatest interest in the temple project was naturally displayed in the media of the capital city region around Helsinki. However, bulletins by the Finnish News Agency or other writings on the Mormons were published in general newspapers around Finland and in professional, religious, and other magazines or periodicals.<sup>4</sup> Chronologically, the material begins in May 2001 when the location of the projected temple was announced and ends in December 2006. It is most abundant for the fall season of 2006. As a general observation, the spectrum of Finnish media where information about the temple appeared is fairly wide geographically and especially wide ideologically.<sup>5</sup> Billing it as "Finland's first Mormon temple" also naturally aroused interest outside the capital city region.

The context of the publicity is a culture in which a stereotypical and passive Lutheranism is thought of as the most characteristic form of religiousness. Lutheranism often forms the base against which all other religiousness is evaluated.<sup>6</sup> In the case of foreign religions, the media have often concentrated on what is appropriate in Finnish society.<sup>7</sup> My discussion is thus theoretically anchored to the religious and cultural identity of Finns and to the power of the media to maintain boundaries between "us" and "them"—in this case, between average Finnish religiosity and Mormonism.

I will first discuss ways in which the foreign image of the Mormons was brought up by the general media, the religious media, and ecclesiastical representatives of other churches in Finland. Second, I will discuss how Finnish Latter-day Saints sought to diminish or remove images of themselves as "the other." The subheadings in this article are actual quotations from the publicity and exemplify the themes and attendant discourses. Due to the mass of material, I will limit my discussion and perspective to only a few recurring main themes. One should thus keep in mind that this article is not a general overview of the publicity related to

the new Helsinki Temple. Rather, it discusses the publicity from a very specific perspective.

Before engaging with the material, however, I will first build a context by describing the Finnish religious landscape and Mormonism's place in it, discuss the Helsinki Temple project and open house, and evaluate the role of the media in discussions of phenomena perceived as foreign by the cultural mainstream.

### **Religion and the Mormon Church in Finland**

Finland is a country with 5.2 million inhabitants. About 80 percent are members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland. According to some sociologists of religion, however, the situation can most aptly be described as the Finns believing in belonging to rather than believing in the tenets of the Lutheran Church.<sup>8</sup> One must also keep in mind that only a fraction of Finns who are Lutherans are active churchgoers. In general, Finland can be said to be a highly secularized country, where membership in the Lutheran Church is more a sign of cultural belonging than a mark of religiosity.

In addition to the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland and the Finnish Orthodox Church (comparatively small), both of which hold the status of state church, several smaller churches and religious movements operate in Finland. These can be roughly divided into older Christian or Christian-based churches, the religious traditions of immigrants, and new religious movements. Studies show that Finns often have reserved feelings toward religions that deviate from the mainstream.<sup>9</sup> Although the reasons for these feelings have not been studied in depth, I surmise that the negativity is a reaction to proselytism, popularized images of brainwashing, and the culturally foreign.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has been present in Finland in one way or another ever since the first missionaries entered the country in 1875. The country was first dedicated for the preaching of the Latter-day Saint gospel in 1903, with a rededication following in 1946. Since that year, missionary work has continued without interruption. According to the Church's own statistics, there are currently approximately 4,500 Mormons in Finland, assembling in thirty congregations around the country. LDS meetinghouses have been constructed since the 1950s. Approximately half of the membership is "active" by Latter-day Saint standards, meaning that they attend at least one religious service per month.

The Church is ecclesiastically divided into the Helsinki and Tampere stakes in the south while the Finland Helsinki Mission's districts cover the rest of the country.

Finnish Mormons have often been described as very dedicated temple attendees. They have regularly organized temple excursions since the dedication of the Bern Switzerland Temple in 1955 and, since 1985, to the temple near Stockholm, Sweden. With a temple now completed in their own country, Finnish Mormons have entered an interesting new era, the effects of which remain to be seen.

In spite of the relative normalcy of individual Finnish members who compare well to the general Finnish population, the Mormon Church in Finland has never shaken off its foreign image. Finns are accustomed to religion that is historically tied to Finland and led by their own countrymen. The Mormon Church, in contrast, is transnational but strongly American. LDS leaders who visit Finland are usually American. Mormon missionaries working in Finland are mostly Americans who speak Finnish with clearly perceptible accents and very limited vocabularies. In the past, these American missionaries have even been suspected by some of being spies for the U.S. government.<sup>10</sup> Compared to Lutheranism, the Mormon Church is conservative in biblical interpretation, sexual ethics, and its male-only priesthood. In addition to its non-Finnish features, then, the image of the Church's otherness in contemporary Finnish society is strengthened by the values it espouses.

The foreign image is, of course, not unique to Mormonism in Finland. Mormonism fights an identity of otherness and foreignness in all new host cultures into which it spreads. To conquer these difficulties, Latter-day Saints would have to arrive at unique acculturation solutions in each country. So far, however, the operating model has emphasized the international unity (and, by extension, the American nature) of the Church. Policies and operating models are formed in the United States and spread worldwide to other countries and cultures through a hierarchical leadership and organizational structure. Thus, it may be said that the Mormon Church, when detached from its culture of origin, operates to some extent as a colony; the organizational model, methods of action, and Church culture are American-influenced, and there is relatively little leeway for cultural adaptation.<sup>11</sup>

Attitudes toward Mormon otherness are ambivalent among the general population in Finland: some want to draw strong boundaries,

while others champion religious pluralism. Globalization and immigration have increased Finnish tolerance for and understanding of other cultures, even though these processes have not removed the traditional feelings of foreignness and otherness. It is clear, for example, that membership in the Mormon Church is not thought of as normative Finnish religiousness. Rather it is something foreign that creates an identity of otherness.

Mormons themselves generally seek to remove boundaries. Undoubtedly, their purposes vary from promoting mutual respect to creating cultural continuity in Christian host cultures and thus lowering the threshold of conversion.<sup>12</sup> In this, the Mormons are not alone; most churches that seek to increase their membership numbers and their influence in society court acceptance by the mainstream to various degrees. Some sociologists of religion speak of a search for optimum tension. A church has to be sufficiently different from the mainstream to be an attractive alternative. On the other hand it cannot be too different, as that would lead to the church's societal marginalization.<sup>13</sup>

### **The New Temple in Finland**

New buildings have great symbolic power because they change the existing physical landscape. They serve as landmarks and visible reminders of changes in a country's culture. People sometimes voice objections to building projects if they find them unsuitable for one reason or another. Examples of this are the "not in my backyard" objections encountered by the building projects of foreign religions. In the southern city of Turku, Finland, for example, some people have objected to the construction of an Islamic cultural center with its minarets.<sup>14</sup> Difficulties with mosque-building projects have been reported also in Sweden, a country similar to Finland in many respects.<sup>15</sup>

The southern cities of Helsinki and Vantaa responded unenthusiastically to the prospect of a Mormon temple for reasons that have not been made public. However, a building site was eventually found in the neighboring city of Espoo, where assistant city manager Olavi Louko voiced his own feelings that Mormonism was a foreign religion, explaining to a newspaper reporter that "Espoo had just included multiculturalism and tolerance in its values. I thought that values must be lived by and promised to find a site."<sup>16</sup>

The Helsinki Temple was completed in the fall of 2006, about six

and a half years after the temple project was announced.<sup>17</sup> An open house was scheduled for September 21 through October 7, 2006,<sup>18</sup> with local Latter-day Saints serving as guides. The temple tour consisted of a short introductory video in the nearby accommodation building, a walk through the temple itself, and refreshments and possible further individual discussions after the tour in a tent outside the temple. Depending on the number of people and the length of queues at the temple site, the tour lasted anywhere from about one to three hours. The temple was open from 10 A.M. to 9 P.M., with the evening hours often extended to 10 P.M. to accommodate those who had been waiting.

A press conference was held on September 19, 2006, during which both local and American LDS officials spoke. The conference and the temple tours for the media that followed resulted in television and newspaper stories across Finland, which in turn attracted visitors. In addition to small pass-along invitation cards, the Church also prepared an eight-page advertisement in tabloid form, financed largely by local Latter-day Saints. It was distributed professionally to homes in the Helsinki region and, to a lesser extent, by local congregations elsewhere in Finland. Three weeks after the open house had begun, a total of 55,791 visits to the temple open house had been logged. Some of these visitors were, of course, local Mormons and repeat visitors from Finland and other countries in the temple district. Still, a very large number, mostly Finns, visited the temple of a religion often thought of as foreign and as “the other” on the Finnish religious landscape.

The high number of visitors is, in fact, an interesting and to some extent a puzzling phenomenon, because recent studies show that the Latter-day Saints do not have a good public image in Finland. A poll from 2003 shows that 57 percent of Finns had a negative attitude toward the Latter-day Saints.<sup>19</sup> The figure is 40 percent for the fifteen-to-twenty-nine-year-olds who were interviewed for the 2006 Youth Barometer.<sup>20</sup> In view of the Church’s own goal of 25,000–30,000 visitors, from the numbers alone, the open house was a resounding success. (See Table 1 for a daily breakdown of visitors.)

### **The Media’s Role in the Discussion of Otherness**

In discussing the media’s presentation of “the other,” the media themselves cannot be thought of as the primary source for discrimination or images of otherness. Instead the media reflect attitudes already present

**Table 1**  
**Number of Visits by Day at the Helsinki Temple Open House**

September 16, Sat.	248	September 28, Thu.	2,809
September 19, Tue.	615	September 29, Fri.	2,993
September 20, Wed.	552	September 30, Sat.	4,432
September 21, Thu.	1,518	October 2, Mon.	3,280
September 22, Fri.	2,127	October 3, Tue.	3,688
September 23, Sat.	4,180	October 4, Wed.	4,490
September 25, Mon.	2,710	October 5, Thu.	4,828
September 26, Tue.	2,706	October 6, Fri.	5,837
September 27, Wed.	2,774	October 7, Sat.	5,846
		October 8, Sun.	158
		Total	55,791

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*Source:* The figures are taken from statistics compiled by the Mormon Church in connection with the temple open house. It includes non-public days reserved for special visitors.

in the mainstream of society. The real origin of otherness must be sought in other social processes.<sup>21</sup>

However, there is a sort of symbiotic relationship between concepts of otherness and the media, a relationship in which one feeds the other. The media affect individual attitudes and may thus promote an image of various minorities as groups that are foreign to the culture. The media also have a primary position as an actor that articulates the host culture's relationship to "the other."<sup>22</sup> Moreover, the religious media in particular interpret and evaluate current events from the perspective of a certain religious worldview.

The media are usually thought of as an objective news producer and thus become crucial when reporting on minorities, since they often function as the majority's primary contact with the minority. If the image they construct is distorted, the actual reality of a minority group remains inaccessible except to individuals who have special knowledge of it through, for example, an acquaintance who is a member of it. In short, the media occupy a responsible position, as the information they transmit strongly impacts the construction of the minority's public image.<sup>23</sup>

The role of the media is especially problematized in the case of



churches and religious movements. While the media should provide a neutral and objective look, religious movements often seek to mediate a growth-promoting image of themselves. This characteristic, of course, also holds true for any non-religious group with a special interest or bias to promote. In such cases, the media must tread carefully to avoid stereotypical views and to give correct information based on credible sources. At the same time, the media should not function as a critiqueless propagator of the interests of either minority groups or their antagonists.

Achieving a balance can be difficult, and reporting on minority faiths has often been negative, even to the extent that a negative public image can become part of a religious movement's identity.<sup>24</sup> This is probably true to some extent in the case of the Latter-day Saints in Finland. After the public open house at the Helsinki Temple, for example, the official *Church News*, a special weekly section of the Church-owned *Deseret News*, stated in a somewhat black-and-white manner that Finnish media had been the Church's "long-time detractors" but that things had now changed.<sup>25</sup> Actually, however, Finnish media had already earlier balanced negative descriptions with neutral and positive information on the Latter-day Saints.

Even with good intentions, the media often produce discourses that follow the perspective of the mainstream population. This can occur, for example, due to the private feelings and thoughts of the reporters themselves. Hence, discourses about the Mormons often show features that deviate from average Finnish culture. Furthermore, media reporting can construct an image that creates differences between society's majority and minority, between "us" and "them."<sup>26</sup> For example, when Finnish media describe "the Mormon way of life," it is hard to imagine that they would similarly employ such a blanket generalization in speaking of "the Lutheran way of life." That way of life is thought of as part of the mainstream's attributes, and it is therefore not necessary to speak of it in the same way.

Although journalists strive to be fair, their manner of speech can easily promote a foreign image of various groups. Smaller churches may be called religious "communities" or "societies," while the Evangelical Lutheran Church is often merely called "the Church." In this kind of discourse, the Lutheran Church becomes familiar and safe, while other churches and movements are something out of the ordinary. In some cases, a sinister label can be implicitly attached to smaller churches. For ex-

ample, when reporting on the recent suicide of a religious person, a journalist wrote that “no particular denomination or sect was found” behind the matter. Instead the believers accused of aiding the now-deceased person to commit suicide had become acquainted with her in “a completely regular Lutheran Bible circle.”<sup>27</sup>

As a simplified summary, then, it can be said that the choice of topics and words by the media affects the image of familiarity or foreignness attached to churches and religions. At the same time, it must be remembered that the point of analyzing discourses is not to criticize individual reporters; they function within the larger discourses of society and may thus maintain images of otherness without noticing it themselves.<sup>28</sup>

A few clarifying words on the media specifically in Finland are appropriate to contextualize the following discussion. The television media in Finland consist mostly of a handful of nationwide channels and a larger number of small regional channels which, in general, are less popular than the nationwide channels. The radio media similarly consist of a handful of nationwide stations with both nationwide and local broadcasts and a fairly large number of local stations. The print media consist of three truly nationwide newspapers, some larger regional newspapers, a multitude of smaller local papers, and a wide variety of secular and spiritual newspapers, magazines, and periodicals. Material for the news media is distributed nationwide by the Finnish News Agency (Suomen Tietotoimisto, STT) and is often printed in the same form in newspapers around the country. In addition to this source of news, every news outlet also creates its own stories in normal fashion. (See Appendices 1–2.)

### **The General Media:**

#### **“The Feeling Is Different Than in Churches Usually”**

The purpose of this section is to illustrate Mormon-related discourses of othering in the general media. While these media are aimed at the general Finnish population, even Finns who are not actively religious are likely to be members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland and therefore likely to accept it as an element of the national identity of Finland. As sample themes, I have chosen the special nature of the Helsinki Temple as a construction site, the temple as a closed place of worship, the American image of the Mormon Church, and distancing reactions to the religious ceremonies performed in Mormon temples.

*"The Week's Special: The Mormon Church's New Sanctuary"*

Temples are especially sacred to Latter-day Saints. Whereas weekly worship services are held in ward and branch buildings, temples can be interpreted as sites of pilgrimage that are visited less often. The sacredness of the temple can be seen in, among other things, the special arrangements at the construction site and the entry requirements of a completed temple. Both of these issues received attention from the Finnish media.

On the construction site, the Mormon Church instructed its contractors not to smoke, swear, or listen to the radio. Moreover, the press juxtaposed this unusual site with regular worksite conditions by commenting that "not even a girlie calendar hangs on the walls of work site booths."<sup>29</sup> The quality requirements for the work were extremely high, and the site was lauded widely as a place of high quality where professionals could utilize the full range of their skills and do their jobs properly.<sup>30</sup>

In contrast to Lutheran churches, Mormon temples are closed places of worship. According to a Finnish LDS public affairs representative, the temple is "isolated from the world and a protected space. Only the worthy may enter."<sup>31</sup> Many newspapers emphasized the significance of the open house in contrast to its future inaccessibility: "This building is not open for everyone,"<sup>32</sup> and after the open house, "the temple will be dedicated, and those not of the religion have no business in the temple after that."<sup>33</sup>

People in Finland are used to seeing the symbol of the cross associated with buildings of Christian churches. The cross is perhaps the most important symbol creating unity among the Christian ingroup. Latter-day Saints do not use it, however. Some media outlets noticed this omission: "There is something like a Church tower seen on top of the trees [as you approach], *but* there is a golden angel on the top."<sup>34</sup> The comment shows the surprise concerning this element. The ban on photography inside the temple also differs from many other religious buildings and was a regular comment in articles about the temple.

Finnish churches often contain a large hall where the congregation gathers. When looked at from the outside, Mormon temples give the impression of containing such a spacious assembly room instead of the numerous smaller rooms they actually contain. One reporter in the capital city region commented: "By the way, the temple doesn't, to the surprise of many, have any large undivided hall space like our churches do, Lutheran churches and others."<sup>35</sup> The innocuous contrast between "our churches"

and the Mormon temple implicitly labels the temple as part of “the other.”

*“Light for the People in the American Way”*

While it may be quite difficult to exactly and objectively define the essential differences between American and Finnish culture, many reporters thought they saw Americanisms as they visited the open house. The practical arrangements of the temple open house were taken care of by Finnish Mormons. The general instructions, however, came through supervision from Church headquarters—in effect, from Americans, and perhaps were thus culturally slanted.

Some reporters thought the temple felt American due to its architecture and its furnishings. One journalist noticed artificial flowers and even pondered in a lighter mood, based on the general impression, whether the teeth of the visitors were possibly whitened,<sup>36</sup> whereas a radio reporter noticed the “American [interior], . . . deep carpets and shiny thick panels, light and space like . . . in Hollywood props.”<sup>37</sup> The totality was, in one writer’s opinion, “undeniably ‘American’ and has little in common with cool Nordic or austere Finnish design.”<sup>38</sup> As another writer put it, “There is just something too American in it, even if most of the building work is Finnish.”<sup>39</sup> Indeed, a reporter thought the Mormons were now offering “light for the people in the American way.”<sup>40</sup>

Many open house visitors met—especially on the day of the press conference—foreign Mormon leaders and missionaries in addition to Finnish temple tour guides. The reporter of a nationwide tabloid newspaper wrote that he was greeted in English as soon as he entered the temple site, and “along a strip of 20 meters I meet at least three young men speaking broad American English.” In addition, he wrote, a “slew of American brothers” presented “in the beyond-the-puddle style what felt like an unending amount of thank yous.”<sup>41</sup> The experience implicitly mediates a message depicting Mormonism as a foreign phenomenon. This foreign image was strengthened by a news feature shown on nationwide television, which included an American Mormon leader’s comments in English.<sup>42</sup>

A radio reporter in the capital city region commented on his positive experience among the visiting crowd by saying that “the Americans are splendidly competent at handling large crowds punctually and effi-

ciently. . . . [The crowd] is kept in control very well, and the atmosphere is upheld in a really professional manner.”<sup>43</sup> The comment is interesting, considering that Finnish Mormons handled the local arrangements. Does the comment represent the reporter’s subjective assessment, preconceived notions, arrangements that really deviated from Finnish norms, or something else?

*“A Foreign Sect Enters Finns’ Forefathers into Its Baptismal Registers”*

Latter-day Saint temple ceremonies are esoteric and Mormons do not normally speak of them in public in a detailed manner. In spite of this, or perhaps because of it, the practice of proxy baptism in particular generated negative feelings in some of the general print media, mostly during the spring of 2004 and usually in the more popular media rather than traditional “quality” papers.

An article in a nationwide tabloid newspaper was headlined “The Deceased Will Soon be Baptized Here” and stated among other things that Adolf Hitler had received Mormon proxy baptism.<sup>44</sup> A regional newspaper stated shortly thereafter in a small piece on its front page that the “baptism of the deceased” and other proxy ceremonies that Hitler had received were “hair-raising rituals.”<sup>45</sup> A column in a newspaper distributed free, mainly in the capital city region around Helsinki, was headlined “Baptized against One’s Will.” The writer thought that “the fact that the sect has already married Adolf Hitler and Eva Braun by proxy should ring the warning bells.”<sup>46</sup> A nationwide magazine article reinforced the image of Mormonism as a foreign and strange religion by stating that “the American Mormon Church is going to baptize into its own faith the forefathers of the Finns.”<sup>47</sup> The writer, identifying former Finnish president Urho Kekkonen as an icon of the nation, stated that a proxy baptism had been performed for him, too.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, the Latter-day Saints financed microfilming parish registers of the Lutheran Church in Finland.<sup>48</sup> While the Church advises its members to perform proxy ceremonies in behalf of their own ancestors, such ceremonies have also been performed without regard for kinship relationships through Church-sponsored “name extraction” programs. Some Finns have voiced their disappointment and their irritation that their Lutheran forebears have received Mormon proxy baptisms. Said one: “My forefathers have been members of the Lutheran

Church as far back as parish registers are available. It is therefore very insulting that Mormons in their temple rites use the names of my ancestors.”<sup>49</sup>

The juxtaposition of Finnish forefathers and foreign Mormons has been strengthened by stating that many people find “detestable the thought that a foreign sect is entering their forefathers into its own baptismal registers” and that “the sect” in so doing forgets the will of the deceased.<sup>50</sup> The Finnish Data Protection Ombudsman stated that it is a surprise for many Finns “that the information of their relatives is in the Mormons’ books.”<sup>51</sup> A former Mormon stated that she had gotten upset about the doctrine of proxy baptism a number of years ago and that the Lutheran Church “awoke to the newcomer too late” to prevent the construction of the temple near Helsinki.<sup>52</sup>

In summary, some see proxy baptisms as a practice offensive to Finnish customs and even as dishonoring the deceased. Such an emotion-invoking discourse can be seen as a strong reinforcement of images of otherness. Its main message seems to be that “Mormon activity is not within the bounds of good taste and offends Finnish identity.” This and the aforementioned otherness-promoting discourses support my original assumption that the Mormons are to some degree regarded as foreign in Finnish society.

### **The Religious Media and Ecclesiastical Representatives: “Interest Can Be Dangerous”**

The religious media reflect the attitudes of the general media toward Mormonism but with a particular emphasis and from a different perspective. While the general media may be more interested in the position of religions and churches as actors in society at large, the religious media and ecclesiastical representatives are often interested more in questions of faith content and theology.

In the case of the religious media and ecclesiastical representatives, word choice and particularly its mental associations create a window into the religious values of the person who employs the particular discourse of othering.<sup>53</sup> And since religious newspapers, for example, are often the organs of specific churches, they may emphasize the drawing of boundaries between themselves and other churches and religious movements. Ecclesiastical representatives may also feel that the drawing of such boundaries is necessary in their public comments.

One could surmise that religious actors in a secularized society would show understanding and less prejudice toward other churches that are also fighting the common problem of secularization and indifference toward organized religion. However, these religious actors also take part in discourses of othering and in drawing distinct boundaries. Their reasons lie in matters such as mutually contradictory truth claims, cultural differences, and perceived rivalry.<sup>54</sup>

Examples of both affinity and rivalry can be seen in connection to the Mormon temple in Finland. A former minister of the Lutheran Leppävaara Parish in Espoo gave some positive public statements concerning the temple. For example, he thought that the temple was beautiful to the point of nearly arousing envy and that the Mormons were dedicated people with high morals. He “doesn’t see the Mormons as competitors.”<sup>55</sup>

On the other hand, about a dozen signatories announced to Espoo city officers that they objected to “the Mormon heresy’s coming to their home area.”<sup>56</sup> The boundary between Lutherans and Mormons is also clear when the parish minister hopes that the Lutheran Church will be believable enough, so “that people won’t feel the need to change religion.”<sup>57</sup> One writer thanked the Espoo Parish Union for drawing a clear boundary in its newspaper “on the strange doctrine that has become situated in the area of its parishes.”<sup>58</sup>

In the next section, I describe some discourses of othering brought up by the religious media and by ecclesiastical representatives. For thematic examples, I have chosen the contested Christian identity of Mormonism, the drawing of boundaries, and the temple’s religious ceremonies.

#### *“The Mormons’ Doctrine Deviates Greatly from Christianity”*

The term “Christian” is problematic due to its multiple definitions. Parties can define the term in a way suitable to them in order to make their own division between Christians and non-Christians or, sociologically speaking, between “us” and “them.” Protestants, for example, often want to draw a boundary and create a dichotomy with Christians on one side and Mormons on the other. Mormons, on the other hand, regard themselves as clearly Christian and sometimes wonder how anyone can think differently. The situation is problematic: Who has the right to judge

which definition of the term “Christian” is correct and which definitions of Christian terminology and symbolism are correct? An analysis of religious newspapers shows that some Finnish Protestants do not like the Mormon way of using familiar terminology with meanings different from Protestant custom. Mormons may in those cases be thought of as misleading evangelizers and may even be accused of “duplicitous ecumenism.”<sup>59</sup>

The religious media and ecclesiastical representatives sometimes connect Mormons with new religions that have their basis in Christianity. However, sometimes they say clearly that the Mormon Church is not Christian,<sup>60</sup> basing their exclusion, for example, on theological arguments concerning the atonement of Jesus Christ or on the Mormons’ rejection of the traditional Christian creeds.<sup>61</sup> Sometimes they justify their exclusion in part by arguing that “Christian churches” do not accept the Mormons as Christian.<sup>62</sup> This appeal to majority opinion is an example of the difficulty of making a judgment based on objective criteria.

One representative of the Free Church compares Protestantism with Mormonism and uses the expression “the thing that makes Christian truth superior” in referring to the crucial difference.<sup>63</sup> By doing so, he creates an interesting dichotomy; the wide diversity of the Christian ingroup is diminished, perhaps owing to the crucial importance of maintaining the boundary. In reality, of course, “Christian truth” is not a monolithic whole but rather consists of a great variety of diverging opinions. The diminishing of the differences within one’s own ingroup can be done for effect in a discourse of othering.

Finally, the relationship between Protestants and Mormons may sometimes feel uncomfortably unclear for the Protestants themselves. The following comment shows the uncertainty that can surface when boundaries are unclear: “Christ has a very central place in their doctrine. . . . Then again their concept of God is very different than the one people are used to in Christian Churches. . . . Many Christians think that it is easier to deal with religions clearly different from one’s own faith, such as Islam or Judaism, than with the kind of ‘cousin’ of the Christian faith as Mormonism. In the latter case one contradictorily feels both close and far away at the same time.”<sup>64</sup>

*“Mysteries and Secrets, Closed Temples and Unknown Religions”*

In addition to denying the Christian identity of Mormonism, the



religious media found other reasons to be suspicious of the temple construction project. According to one observer, the project meant that “an American faith is conquering Finland.”<sup>65</sup> Finland was seen as a mission field “where souls are fought over”<sup>66</sup> and where the Mormons would begin to operate more eagerly than before.

Half-humorously, one writer mused on the difficulty of abstaining from alcohol, coffee, and tea and decided that she would “remain Lutheran after all.”<sup>67</sup> A letter to the editor stated: “I cannot refrain from informing *Kyrkpressen*’s Christian readers that the Mormon Jesus is a brother to Lucifer. The one with the horns.”<sup>68</sup> The writer did not attempt to describe the Mormon belief in a premortal existence in which all beings, mortal and supernatural, Jesus and Lucifer included, are brothers and sisters. Thus, the letter creates an even more strongly alienating image of Mormon theology.

As might be expected, the religious media tended to be suspicious of the secret Mormon temple ceremonies. One writer characterized the Church as “nearly like a sect of freemasons.”<sup>69</sup> Another reporter stated that “a Mormon has to perform secret oaths and rituals in the temple.”<sup>70</sup> The depiction is technically accurate, but a Mormon would probably have chosen the words “sacred ordinances” instead of the more frightening words “oaths and rituals.” As a parallel example, an outsider perspective of the Christian communion could create an even stronger image of foreignness by depicting it as a cannibal feast, where believers eat and drink their god’s flesh and blood. The depiction is technically correct but generates strong feelings of otherness and completely ignores the symbolic and well-known meaning of the communion to the believers themselves.

One writer regarded the Mormon form of church government with suspicion, calling it an “aggressively authoritarian” organization that sought to “control the entire lives of its members.”<sup>71</sup> Another writer described it as a “syncretistic composite religion,”<sup>72</sup> possibly meaning that it was a compound of elements from Christian and non-Christian sources. From a larger perspective, one can, of course, view Christianity itself as a syncretistic composite religion. In any case, one-sided choices of words and perspectives distance and alienate Protestant readers from Mormons and create sometimes alarming images of otherness.

#### *“Next to Desecrating Graves and Tampering with the Deceased”*

The concept of proxy ceremonies was dealt with in the religious me-

dia and by ecclesiastical representatives with greater disapproval than by the secular media. Christian baptism has been thought of as a once-in-a-lifetime event, and proxy baptism can thus be seen as meddling with the faith choices of a deceased person. In Finland, proxy baptisms aroused such strong feelings that their compatibility with legislation on religious freedom has been called into question. In answer, an officer of the Ministry of Education, which is the highest authority in matters of religion and state in Finland, pronounced proxy baptisms as being within the bounds of the law.<sup>73</sup> A letter to the editor reported that a feud among some older persons in an extended family had broken out due to proxy baptisms having been performed by a young LDS relative.<sup>74</sup>

Representatives of the Lutheran and Orthodox Churches have at times been very critical of proxy baptisms. For example, the archbishop of the Finnish Orthodox Church was reported as stating that proxy baptisms are “a completely impossible and unbelievable thing: baptizing popes and marrying nuns. Just preposterous.”<sup>75</sup> The bishop of the Lutheran Church’s Kuopio Diocese felt Mormon activities were “dubious” and that proxy baptisms were akin to “desecrating graves.”<sup>76</sup> A representative of the Tampere Parish Union stated that the Lutheran Church “does not in any form approve of the Mormon custom of baptizing the dead.”<sup>77</sup>

When criticizing Mormon proxy baptisms, the Protestant mainstream does not usually acknowledge that Christian theology itself could be criticized on the same basis: It requires belief in the doctrine of a Savior who atoned in behalf of every person. An officer of the Ministry of Education came up with another similarity: “I don’t know if we’re talking about anything much different from a Christian praying for somebody who is dead even though that person may not be a Christian.”<sup>78</sup> Regardless of these similarities, many religious writers have portrayed proxy baptisms as foreign and unsuitable in the Finnish religious landscape.

Thus, generally speaking, it can be said that the otherness-promoting mode of discourse used by the religious media and ecclesiastical representatives is stronger than that employed by the general media, although there are exceptions.<sup>79</sup> They feel that more is at stake than just relaying information on the Mormons. In their eyes, the Mormons are not only culturally foreign but also religiously heterodox actors who compete for the same resources and individuals, and against whom one’s own troops must be “vaccinated.”

### Finland's Mormons:

#### **"We Would Like for This Veil of Mystery to Be Taken Away"**

During the nineteenth century, Latter-day Saints tended to withdraw from the rest of society and define their identity by differentiating themselves from others. The internal discourse often maintained an image of the rest of the world as evil and of their own group as the only place of salvation. During the twentieth century and especially toward its end, Mormonism changed and, at present, seeks to identify itself to some extent in the general population's mind with Protestant and Catholic Christianity, normal "mainstream Christianity." Ignoring their polygamous past and other eccentricities, Latter-day Saints seek to generate an image that emphasizes the general Christian features of their faith.

To some extent this desire is justified, because much misleading and sensationalistic information on the Mormons has been distributed throughout the years, a problem Mormonism shares with many other religious minorities. On the other hand, this mainstreaming discourse may in itself create a misleading image of the Latter-day Saints, because Mormonism also has clear differences from traditional Christianity. Latter-day Saints have also been accused, often on solid grounds, of withholding their higher and more controversial teachings from the general public through this mainstreaming discourse.

The public open house at the Helsinki Temple gave the Mormons in Finland an opportunity to employ their otherness-diminishing discourse in public outside their own publications. According to a public affairs representative, the open house was a clear opportunity "to increase knowledge concerning the Mormon religion and to rectify flawed views."<sup>80</sup> In a nationally televised interview prior to the open house, another public affairs representative hoped that the forthcoming publicity would improve the Mormon Church's image in Finland: "We believe that the completion of the temple will bring at least good publicity. The completion of the Copenhagen Temple in 2004 didn't really bring new members, but attitudes toward the Church changed. The Church became a better match with society. This will hopefully happen also in Finland."<sup>81</sup>

In the following section, I will deal with some LDS ways of utilizing an otherness-removing counter-discourse in connection with the Helsinki Temple open house. As themes, I have chosen the emphasis upon the normalcy of the Church and its members, the temple and its ceremonies, and Mormon Church relationships with Finland.

*"When They Learned to Know, the Prejudice Departed"*

One way that the LDS Church sought to promote a familiar image of itself was by referring to its worldwide dimensions. One newspaper article quoted a foreign Mormon leader at the temple open house as stating that the Mormon Church is "one of the fastest-growing churches in the world."<sup>82</sup> The Mormon-produced press package also claimed that the Church is "one of the world's fastest-growing Christian churches."<sup>83</sup>

The Church's growth since the second half of the twentieth century has, in fact, been numerically impressive. It has grown from a 1 million member denomination to a worldwide church with more than 12 million members. However, claims of rapid growth are to some extent misleading. The Church typically reports only numbers of members of record without acknowledging informal disaffiliations or even that some members' whereabouts are unknown. Unless members formally resign or are excommunicated, they continue to be counted as members, even though they may no longer regard themselves as Mormons. This is one reason that Mormonism is still in many ways a North American phenomenon, although large numbers of baptisms have been performed elsewhere.<sup>84</sup>

In some highly secularized countries including Finland, actively religious individuals of whatever denomination is sometimes thought of as peculiar. In connection with the temple open house, Mormons sought to emphasize their normalcy. An American sister missionary working in Finland, for example, commented on claims of peculiarity by saying that "we do, for example, use makeup and watch TV; we do normal things."<sup>85</sup> A Mormon public affairs representative on national television described herself and her husband as attending "all kinds of places" and social events without, for example, drinking coffee or alcohol. But "we haven't been considered oddities in any way." She also emphasized that Mormons do not use external religious symbols, that they invest in education, and that they belong to all classes of society. She tries to "live as probably every other Christian person tries to live," thus emphasizing the Mormon identification with Christianity.<sup>86</sup> "The Church offers a healthy way of life that fits with modern times," commented a Mormon bishop in Espoo. He continued: "The Church is at its best when it offers its members solace and safety."<sup>87</sup>

In Finnish society, the most easily recognizable Mormon image is the missionary stereotype: Dark-suited Americans who speak Finnish with a distinct accent and go from door to door explaining their faith and

Church. Their presence has even made its way into Finnish popular culture.<sup>88</sup> During the temple open house, the Mormons emphasized that the door-to-door technique was less utilized at present as “not so suitable in Finnish culture.” For example, missionaries had been serving as officials in the Jyväskylän Suurajot rally.<sup>89</sup>

Religious evangelization is sometimes thought of as negative and pushy with a message that people are not really interested in. Although the ultimate goal of LDS missionaries is for individuals to accept the doctrines of the Mormon Church and join it, this purpose can move to the background in normalcy-emphasizing discourses. According to a public affairs representative, for example, the missionaries are “not so much seeking to convert, but to help people find a new lifestyle.”<sup>90</sup> She is speaking of the same thing, but the mainstreaming discourse presents the matter in a more neutral manner.

Mormons have also emphasized their Christian identity,<sup>91</sup> explaining the lack of the Christian cross in Mormon iconography as a desire to concentrate on Jesus as a living person. A typical explanation is: “Although we are a Christian Church, we don’t use the cross, since we want to remember Jesus as a living person, not as a dead person.”<sup>92</sup> However, since the presence of the cross does not prevent Christians from believing in the resurrection (and, hence, in Jesus as a living person), it seems reasonable to ask to what extent the omission of the cross represents early Mormonism’s efforts to draw a boundary between itself and mainstream Protestantism.<sup>93</sup>

*“There Is Nothing Secret [in the Temple]”*

The ceremonies of the temple are very sacred to Latter-day Saints. The ceremonies are not discussed in detail with persons not of the faith, with Church members who have yet to participate in them, or even with other temple-going Mormons outside of the temple itself. The esoteric, symbolically “unwritten” nature of the ceremonies promotes an experience of sacredness and strengthens the social ties of the members.<sup>94</sup> Consequently, in the minds of the non-Mormon public, Mormon temples are a mystery. Moreover, narratives concerning temples by former Mormons may reinforce the foreign and mysterious image.

A public open house at a new temple is thus always an interesting challenge for the Mormon Church: how to inform the public in an under-

standable, clear, and normalcy-emphasizing manner, while at the same time preserving the esoteric nature of the ceremonies. Latter-day Saints themselves emphasize the sacred nature of the temple and usually sidestep the esoteric nature of the ceremonies. The Church's spokesman in Finland,<sup>95</sup> for example, stated in a nationally televised news interview, "There is nothing secret there. We think there are sacred things there, and now we have the chance to show it and tell about it to people."<sup>96</sup> Similarly, a public affairs representative said in another nationally televised interview, "There are no mysterious rituals connected with visiting the temple, but instead everything is very beautiful, simple, symbolic, and pure."<sup>97</sup> In practice, the ceremonies are partly secret chiefly *because* of their sacredness, as was clear during the guided tours during the open house. Of course, a reasonable question is the practical issue of trying to engage laypersons in discussions of ceremonies and symbolism that require a deep understanding of Mormon theology, especially in an open house setting where time is limited and conditions are crowded.

Latter-day Saint explanations of temple ceremonies usually emphasize the "family-centered" nature of the ceremonies and often mention eternal marriage and proxy baptisms for the dead. Mormons think of these ceremonies as uniting families for eternity, and the person in the street can connect marriage and baptism with his or her own experiences. Allusions to the endowment ceremony proper are more vague, while initiatory ceremonies are even rarer in public descriptions of the temple ceremonies by Mormons. LDS spokespersons usually stick to a general explanation that the temple teaches the purpose of life.

As has been mentioned, proxy baptism has been met with criticism as tampering with the religious choices that the deceased made during his or her lifetime. Mormons themselves have acknowledged that people may consider such a state of affairs offensive, and a public affairs representative in Finland commented: "Because of that we neither baptize or perform marriages for other deceased persons than our own relatives,"<sup>98</sup> and "The custom is that our Church's members want to give their deceased relatives a chance" to accept the gospel in the next life.<sup>99</sup> This limited and misleading picture, which ignores the hundreds of thousands of ordinances performed by nonrelatives through name extraction programs, is probably motivated to promote a discourse of mainstreaming.

In contrast, other Latter-day Saints have sometimes clearly explained that, while proxy ceremonies are primarily performed in behalf of

the deceased relatives of Mormons, the activity is not limited to them. Another Church public affairs representative commented that “the purpose is to give everyone a chance, and they will then decide whether they accept baptism or not. There should not be anything stranger in it than that.”<sup>100</sup> Mormons have emphasized that proxy ceremonies do not bind the deceased in any way nor change their religious choices against their desire. Mormons have also compared proxy baptisms to the universal nature of Jesus’s atonement.<sup>101</sup>

However, the universal nature of proxy work has sometimes placed the Mormons in difficult situations. For example, because God’s justice in principle requires that salvific ceremonies be performed by proxy for all those that did not take part in them while alive, in order to give the same chance to everyone, they have been performed also in behalf of Adolf Hitler. From the Mormon point of view, such a step is theologically consistent because Hitler was, despite his atrocities, a human being like everyone else. Others have been shocked that Mormons consider such a person worthy of salvation and would be willing to associate with him on any basis. Perhaps partly due to the difficulty of explaining this theological point, the Church has erased these ceremonies from its records and stated that it is not appropriate to perform proxy work for persons such as Hitler.<sup>102</sup> Some Finnish Mormons have mistakenly denied, for example, that a proxy sealing has been performed for Adolf Hitler and his mistress, Eva Braun, although such a ceremony has in fact been performed. When a newspaper reported this fact and a Mormon spokesperson requested a correction, the newspaper that reported these “hair-raising rituals” obliged by stating that “the article’s claim that Adolf Hitler and Eva Braun would have been married later is not accurate, either.”<sup>103</sup>

Latter-day Saints maintain a database of those in whose behalf proxy temple ceremonies have been performed. In contrast to other genealogical information provided by the Church which is openly available on the internet, the temple ordinance files are not. Attempts to obtain the information have raised suspicion in the minds of some non-Mormon Finns.<sup>104</sup> A Church public affairs representative sought to erase this suspicion by claiming that “all information is freely available to everyone. There are no secret registers, only normal genealogical information.”<sup>105</sup> This statement is accurate except that it applies only to genealogical (i.e., birth, marriage, and death dates) information, not temple ordinance data.

In summary, although it is true that the symbolic meaning of the

temple ceremonies would be difficult to explain in a brief, clear way, it can also be claimed that the Mormon Church does not explain its temple ceremonies in a more detailed manner to defuse its image of otherness. Nonetheless, despite the efforts of the Latter-day Saints to appear normal, the secrecy of their temple ceremonies maintains a boundary between them and the Finnish population in general.

*"The Atmosphere in Finland Used to Be Different. . . .  
Fortunately Things Are Different Now"*

In their mainstreaming discourse, the Mormons have also emphasized the connection between the Church and Finland. During the guided tour at the Helsinki Temple, for example, the introductory video explained how Finnish President Tarja Halonen had met LDS Church President Gordon B. Hinckley in connection with the 2002 Salt Lake City Winter Olympics, and how Mormon missionaries helped out in the 1952 Helsinki Summer Olympics. Presumably these items were mentioned to reduce the boundaries between the Finnish identity and Mormonism and bolster the credentials of Mormonism among the Finns.

The Church's spokesman in Finland also emphasized how architects worked to make the temple's architecture compatible with Finnish designs. He stressed a common element: "This kind of rising, strong tower stands out on Finnish churches."<sup>106</sup> He also commented reassuringly that "there were no problems with obtaining the building permit."<sup>107</sup> No Mormon mentioned the earlier less-than-enthusiastic general reactions from the cities of Helsinki and Vantaa in any media reports that I have seen, thus muting a source of possible differences.

However, some Latter-day Saints also acknowledge their label of foreignness on the Finnish religious landscape. According to the Church's spokesman, "General lack of awareness of us is perhaps our greatest problem." A Finnish Mormon who had been to the United States compared the religious atmospheres of both countries and contrasted the U.S. acceptance of religious pluralism with Finland's general uniformity and lack of religious interest. "In Finland you do not talk that much about religion. If you do not belong to the state religion, then it is something different," she stated in an interview on a national television network.<sup>108</sup>

At the same time, Mormon discourse lowers boundaries by emphasizing that the atmosphere has changed and that diversity is better tolerated nowadays. "Contemporary youth have a lot of knowledge and they



are open-minded, which reduces unnecessary prejudice,” a Mormon bishop commented in a newspaper interview.<sup>109</sup> When people “learn to know,” prejudice departs.<sup>110</sup> The open house at the Helsinki Temple gave the Latter-day Saints an excellent opportunity to help Finnish people “know.”

### Summary and Discussion

This article has dealt with the Helsinki Finland Temple open house through the perspective of discourses on Mormon otherness in Finnish society. I have focused on three different viewpoints, each with a limited number of representative themes: the general media, the religious media and ecclesiastical representatives, and Latter-day Saints themselves.

Themes in the general media dealt with matters such as the temple as an atypical building and construction site, American features in the Mormon Church and the temple’s architecture, and proxy ceremonies performed in the temple. The religious media and ecclesiastical representatives dealt more deeply with Mormonism by approaching its theology, comparing LDS doctrines with “Christian” doctrines. The result was usually to distance Mormons from what was seen as the Christian ingroup. In all, the entire spectrum of media contained fairly similar and clear discourses that strengthened the foreign image of Mormons in Finland to varying degrees.

Mormons themselves sought to reduce their image of otherness and to be regarded as a legitimate and normal part of Finnish religiosity. They emphasized the sacred nature of the temple and its meaning to them, downplaying or not mentioning the temple’s symbolic ceremonies but instead presenting them in general statements about the purpose of life and the important family-building ceremonies of proxy baptism and eternal marriage. Mormons also reminded the public that they consider themselves to be part of Christianity.

Although Mormons are thought of as foreign and as representatives of “the other” in Finnish discussions, they are not unique; any religion different from Lutheranism probably must explain its doctrines and existence. This is true for Christian minorities, immigrant religions, and new religious movements. Mormonism’s status as “foreign” in Finland is also interesting because, while the highest leadership mostly comes from the United States, the local membership and leadership in Finland consists of Finns. Those adhering to Islam and Hinduism in Finland, in contrast, are

usually immigrants and often of visibly foreign origin. Does this Finnish element diminish the image of Mormons as foreign in Finland? Or, in contrast, does Mormonism in Europe practically demand that its adherents replace pieces of their own national culture with American-colored features—becoming, in anthropologist Walter van Beek’s terms, “European Mormons” instead of “Mormon Europeans?”<sup>111</sup>

On the whole, it can be argued that the wide media coverage of the open house at the Helsinki Temple tended to make Mormons less other. Invisible psychological barriers about visiting the temple diminished as generally positive news reports came out and as early visitors told friends about their own experience. The success of the open house had a snowball effect (indications of which are seen in Table 1), resulting in more visits than the popular fair featuring summer vacation homes, arranged that year in Koli, northern Finland (approximately 56,000 versus 38,000). Many visitors even had to queue in the rain, but they still wanted to see the Mormon temple. Of course, the temple’s location in the well-populated capital city region certainly helped produce the relatively high number of visitors.

It is important not to skew the overall picture, keeping in mind that most Finns did *not* visit the temple and that some visitors had a negative or indifferent experience (not reported in this article). Still many people clearly felt very positive about what they saw and the peace and beauty they experienced. Church members were mostly happy about their friends visiting and reckoned that the experience had reduced feelings of foreignness. A Finnish Latter-day Saint explained: “For years, family and neighbors have thought us to be different. A group of 10 colleagues came. They felt the spirit of the edifice and shed tears. Now they understand my life. It is not strange to them anymore.”<sup>112</sup>

The Church gathered comments from visitors by making available a feedback form in the refreshment tent after the guided tour. Nearly 6,000 forms were returned and would constitute an interesting corpus for further study. What did people think about what they saw? Did their image of the Mormons become less or more foreign, or was it foreign to begin with? Were their preconceived notions strengthened or did their thoughts change? The source material is not, of course, representative of all Finns because of the method through which it was gathered; but such a study could nevertheless provide interesting perspectives on Finnish religiosity

and Finnish people's thoughts as they got acquainted with a religion many perceive as being foreign.

However, one must also be cautious not to overemphasize the degree to which the Mormons actually are thought of as foreign in Finnish society. Much reporting was positive from the Mormon point of view, praising the aesthetics and peacefulness of the temple. Articles also mentioned features of Mormonism that were thought of as "normal" in Finnish society, such as routine Mormon participation in military service.<sup>113</sup> A fairly lengthy radio interview with a Finnish Mormon lawyer profiled him as a well-educated and busy professional man and father in whose life faith is an important component.<sup>114</sup>

Conversely, it is also important to acknowledge that the Mormons themselves maintain boundaries between themselves and mainstream Finnish society. Accompanying the mainstreaming discourses emphasized in this article, the Church has practices that clearly strengthen an image of otherness. For example, the LDS Church in Finland does not participate in ecumenical cooperation with Christian churches except in providing humanitarian aid, rarely takes part in societal activities in a visible way, and does not usually announce its local activities through established information channels such as newspapers. The temple tradition is itself exclusive. Not even all believers are automatically welcome in Latter-day Saint temples.

The Mormon Church is thus, like other churches, continuously facing the challenging problem of optimum sociocultural tension mentioned earlier. How may it balance inclusiveness and exclusiveness so that its own doctrine and core identity are not excessively diluted and so that the tension between itself and society at the same time is not so strong as to inhibit growth? This question in and of itself would form an interesting field of research with regard to changing Mormon identity and avoiding an otherness-promoting public image in Finland. Comparative data already exist from the perspective of Mormonism in the United States.<sup>115</sup>

It must also be kept in mind that the rough division into general and religious media that this article used for reporting convenience disguised nuances among different actors that belong to the same group. In general, looking at media groups as monolithic entities can be misleading. Nevertheless, I have chosen this approach to provide a detailed overview from one particular sociological perspective. In the future, it would be interesting to compare a broader report of publicity associated with the Hel-

sinki Temple with publicity connected to new temples and their open houses elsewhere. Scandinavia alone, for example, would provide comparisons with the 1985 open house of the Stockholm Sweden Temple and the 2004 Copenhagen Denmark Temple, at least the latter of which used approaches, models, and publicity materials very similar to those employed in Finland. Comparisons with temples in other countries and on other continents would provide further illumination.

### Conclusion

In this article, I have discussed otherness-promoting and otherness-removing discourses related to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Finland. My data came from publicity related to the newly completed Helsinki Finland Temple, specifically comments and statements by professional media journalists, religious entities and representatives, and the Latter-day Saints themselves. The findings show that the Latter-day Saints do indeed have a foreign image in Finland. Finnish media projected an image of the Latter-day Saints as “the other” through, for example, evidence of American culture, allegations of suspicious activities, and deviation from traditional Christianity. Latter-day Saints, for their part, often employed a counter-discourse intended to emphasize the normalcy of Mormons as Finnish citizens with a worldview slightly different from that of the mainstream.

The completion of the Mormon temple in Espoo and the accompanying publicity thus provided a clear example of the existence of otherness-promoting and otherness-diminishing discourses for one religious minority in Finland. The participants looked at matters from their own perspective, which framed and shaped their comments. The mainstream Finnish population finds the Mormons foreign in many ways, while Mormons themselves feel that they are simultaneously part of the regular mainstream population in many ways yet different from it. As is so often the case when constructing an image of society and evaluating the place of various groups in it, the problem culminates in difficult questions. Where should the boundaries of a questionably homogenous mainstream be drawn? And perhaps most important of all, who is authorized to draw them?

### Appendix 1

#### General Newspapers and Magazines

<i>Name</i>	<i>Main Area</i>	<i>Circulation</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
Aamulehti	Greater Tampere region	138,258	
Helsingin Sanomat	Nationwide	426,117	
Helsingin Uutiset	Helsinki	270,000	Free
Hufvudstadsbladet	Helsinki region	51,130	Swedish-language
Iltalehti	Nationwide	133,007	Evening tabloid
Iltä-Sanomat	Nationwide	186,462	Evening tabloid
Loviisan Sanomat	Loviisa region	4,185	
Länsiväylä	Espoo region	126,000	Free
Metro	Largest Finnish cities	130,000	Free
Nykyposti	Nationwide	68,926	General, now closed
Östra Nyland	Kotka region	3,785	Swedish-language
Pohjolan Sanomat	Greater Kemi region	22,161	
Rakentavasti	Nationwide	25,000	Construction trade
Satakunnan Kansa	Greater Pori region	55,217	
Seura	Nationwide	191,309	General
Turun Sanomat	Greater Turku region	112,360	
Vartti	Greater Helsinki region	87,400–108,200	Free, localized editions
Vasabladet	Greater Vaasa region	24,435	Swedish-language

### Appendix 2

#### Religious Newspapers or Magazines

<i>Name</i>	<i>Main Area</i>	<i>Circulation</i>	<i>Orientation</i>
Esse	Espoo	80,870	Lutheran
KD Kristillisdemo- kraattinenviikkolehti	Nationwide	3,515	Christian-Democrat
Kirkko ja Kaupunki	Helsinki	207,382	Lutheran
Kotimaa	Nationwide	46,547	Lutheran
Kyrkpressen	Nationwide	100,513	Lutheran
Ristin Voitto	Nationwide	11,000	Pentecostal
Sanansaattaja	Nationwide	10,500	Lutheran
Uusi Tie	Nationwide	12,500	Lutheran
Vantaan Lauri	Vantaa	86,500	Lutheran

*Note:* I compiled this circulation data primarily from information provided by the Finnish Audit Bureau of Circulations ([www.levikintarkastus.fi](http://www.levikintarkastus.fi)) and the media monitoring company Observer Finland ([www.observer.fi](http://www.observer.fi)). The data are generally valid for 2005 or 2006.

### Notes

1. Jan Shipps, “No More ‘Mormon’ Church?,” Sunstone Symposium,

Washington, D.C., 2001. Audio online at <http://www.sunstoneonline.com> (accessed October 1, 2005).

2. Data from the chronological listing, <http://www.ldschurchtemples.com> (accessed January 21, 2007).

3. I sincerely thank all those individuals who have helped me compile the database of material that served as the basis of this study and without which it would not have been possible to conduct the study. The English translations of most of the quotations from Finnish or Swedish in this article are mine. I have also provided English translations of newspaper article headings in parentheses and of newspaper names or broadcast program names in brackets on first usage.

4. The temple district consists of the countries of Belarus, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, and Russia (partly). I've limited my material to items published in Finland, although there was some publicity in at least neighboring Estonia.

5. I have collected much of the material by monitoring media outlets closely, especially during the public open house, assisted by several interested individuals located around Finland. Additionally, I have been in contact with Mormon Church Public Affairs in Finland in order to benefit from that office's findings. The resulting database seems more than sufficient, especially as the purpose of this article is not to give a full overview of all media attention to the new Mormon temple, but rather to give examples of certain types of discourses related to the Mormons.

6. Martti Junnonaho, "On Religious Otherness in Finnish Discourse," in *Beyond the Mainstream: The Emergence of Religious Pluralism in Finland, Estonia, and Russia*, edited by Jeffrey Kaplan (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 2000), 191-99.

7. Tuomas Martikainen, "The Houses of Foreign Gods," in *Urbanism and Globalization*, edited by Frank Eckardt and Dieter Hassenpflug (Frankfurt, Germany: Peter Lang, 2004), 180.

8. Grace Davie, *Religion in Modern Europe: A Memory Mutates* (Oxford, Eng.: Oxford University Press, 2000), 3.

9. Kimmo Kääriäinen, Kati Niemelä, and Kimmo Ketola, *Religion in Finland: Decline, Change and Transformation of Finnish Religiosity* (Tampere, Finland: Church Research Institute, 2005), 79.

10. Kim B. Östman, "The Mormon Espionage Scare and Its Coverage in Finland, 1982-84," *Journal of Mormon History*, 33, no. 1 (Winter 2008).

11. Walter E. A. van Beek, "Mormon Europeans or European Mormons? An 'Afro-American' View of Religious Colonization," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 38, no. 4 (Winter 2005): 3-36.

12. Rodney Stark, "Why Religious Movements Succeed or Fail: A Revised General Model," in *Cults and Religious Movements: A Reader*, edited by Lorne L. Dawson (Malden, Eng.: Blackwell, 2003), 259–70.

13. For a theoretical discussion of the concept of sociocultural tension, see, for example, Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge, *The Future of Religion: Secularization, Revival, and Cult Formation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 19–24.

14. Martikainen, "The Houses of Foreign Gods," 175–89.

15. Pia Karlsson, "Making Room for Islam—Mosques in Sweden," in *Islam and Christianity in School Religious Education: Issues, Approaches, and Contexts*, edited by Nils G. Holm (Åbo, Finland: Department of Comparative Religion, Åbo Akademi University, 2000), 183–202.

16. "Kirkko valittiin mallikirjasta" ("Church Chosen from a Model Book"), *Helsingin Sanomat* [Helsinki Gazette], July 21, 2006, A10.

17. Gordon B. Hinckley, "A Time of New Beginnings," *Ensign*, May 2000, 87.

18. In addition to the public open house, tours were also organized for construction workers and their families on September 16, for VIPs and the media on September 19–20, and for workers at the Stockholm Sweden Temple and their families on October 8. I include the number of visits from these days in the total number of visits. The temple was closed on Sundays, which is interesting, considering that Temple Square and the Museum of Church History and Art in Salt Lake City are open on Sundays.

19. Kääriäinen, Niemelä, and Ketola, *Religion in Finland*, 79.

20. Sami Myllyniemi, "Nuorisobarometri," in *Uskon asia—Nuorisobarometri 2006*, edited by Terhi-Anna Wilska (Helsinki: Nuorisooasian neuvottelukunta, Nuorisotutkimusverkosto ja Nuorisotutkimusseura, 2006), 79.

21. Sari Pietikäinen and Heikki Luostarinen, "Vähemmistöt suomalaisessa julkisuudessa," in *Vähemmistöt ja niiden syrjintä Suomessa*, edited by Taina Dahlgren et al. (Helsinki: Yliopistopaino, 1996), 172.

22. Junnonaho, "On Religious Otherness in Finnish Discourse," 196.

23. Pietikäinen and Luostarinen, "Vähemmistöt suomalaisessa julkisuudessa," 178.

24. See Markku Ihonen, "Mediakummajainen? Herätysliikkeen julkisuusongelmien äärellä," *Tiedotustutkimus* 23, no. 4 (2000): 68–78, for the case of Laestadians in Finland.

25. "Open Hearts Abound: Some 56,000 Finns Attend Open House of New Temple," *Church News*, October 28, 2006, 7.

26. Pietikäinen and Luostarinen, "Vähemmistöt suomalaisessa julkisuudessa," 175, 184.

27. "Uskonystäviä syytetään naisen surmanhypystä parvekkeelta Kangasalla" (Faith Friends Accused of Woman's Death Jump from Balcony in Kangasala), *Aamulehti* [Morning Paper], November 7, 2006, A7.

28. Stephen Harold Riggins, "The Rhetoric of Othering," in *The Language and Politics of Exclusion: Others in Discourse*, edited by Stephen Harold Riggins (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1997), 25.

29. "Mormonitemppelin rakentaminen on kolmen vuoden urakka: Tempelin työmaalla ei kiroilla eikä tupakoida" (Building of Mormon Temple is a Three-Year Job: No Swearing or Smoking on Temple Work Site), *Länsiväylä* [Western Route], May 25, 2005, 4.

30. "Millintarkka temppeli" (A Millimeter-Precise Temple), *Rakentavasti* [In a Constructing Manner], Summer 2005.

31. "Mormonitemppelin rakentaminen on kolmen vuoden urakka."

32. "IHAN vähän amerikkalaista" (JUST a little American), *Vartti* [Quarter], September 24, 2006, 6.

33. "Helsingin uuteen temppeliin tutustuu tuhansia ihmisiä: Lars Gröndahlilla fantastinen tunnelma" (Thousands of People Getting to Know New Helsinki Temple: Lars Gröndahl Feeling Fantastic), *Loviisan Sanomat* [Loviisa Gazette], September 29, 2006, 12.

34. *Horisontti* [The Horizon], Yle Radio 1, September 24, 2006, emphasis added.

35. Ylen aikainen, Yle Radio Suomi, October 3, 2006.

36. "IHAN vähän amerikkalaista," 6.

37. Ylen aikainen, Yle Radio Suomi, October 3, 2006.

38. "Tung utanpå, prålig och glittrig inuti" (Heavy on the Outside, Fancy and Glittery on the Inside), *Hufvudstadsbladet* [Capital City Paper], September 20, 2006, 4.

39. "IHAN vähän amerikkalaista," 6.

40. "Valoa kansalle Amerikan malliin: Suomen ensimmäinen mormonitemppeli häikäisee prameudellaan," (Light for the People in the American Way: Finland's First Mormon Temple Dazzles with Its Glitter) *Iltalehti* [Evening Paper], September 20, 2006, 12–13. In contrast are other glowing descriptions of the interior that make no reference to American architecture. See for example "Kirkko kuin koru" (Church like a Piece of Jewelry), *Seura* [Company], 72, no. 39 (September 29, 2006), 14.

41. "Valoa kansalle Amerikan malliin," 12. "Rapakon takana," meaning "beyond the puddle," is a Finnish saying sometimes used when referring to the United States on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean.



42. *Seitsemän uutiset* [Seven o'clock News], MTV3, September 19, 2006.
43. Ylen aikainen, Yle Radio Suomi, October 3, 2006.
44. "Vainajia kastetaan pian täällä" (The Deceased Will Soon Be Baptized Here), *Ilta-Sanomat* [Evening Gazette], April 17, 2004, 12–13.
45. "Vainajakaste" (Baptism of the Deceased), *Satakunnan Kansa* [The People of Satakunta], April 23, 2004, 1.
46. "Kastettavana vastoin tahtoaan" (Baptized against One's Will), *Metro* [Metro], April 29, 2004, 6.
47. "MAP-kirkko pystyttää temppeliä Espooseen: Esi-isämme kastetaan mormoneiksi" (LDS Church Erecting Temple in Espoo: Our Forefathers Are Baptized as Mormons), *Nykyposti* [Modern Post], 27, no. 5 (2004): 14–18.
48. Maria Ollila, "Käsin kopioinnista mormonien rahoittamaan mikrofilmaukseen: Suomalaisten kirkonkirjojen jäljennystyö 1924–1955" (M.Th. thesis, University of Helsinki, 2003).
49. "Sex gänger döpt" (Baptized Six Times), *Vasabladet* [The Vaasa Paper], September 23, 2006, 11.
50. "MAP-kirkko pystyttää temppeliä Espooseen: Esi-isämme kastetaan mormoneiksi," *Nykyposti* 27, no. 5 (2004): 16.
51. "Mormonien kasterekisteri arveluttaa tietosuojavaltuutettua" (Data Protection Ombudsman Iffy about Mormon Baptism Register), *Ilta-Sanomat*, April 20, 2004, 11.
52. "Vainajia kastetaan pian täällä."
53. Pietikäinen and Luostarinen, "Vähemmistöt suomalaisessa julkisuudessa," 184.
54. Gordon W. Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1979), 444–57.
55. "Laaja keskus palvelee myös Venäjää ja Baltian maita: Espooseen kohoo mormonitemppeli" (Large Center also Serves Russia and Baltic Countries: Mormon Temple Rises in Espoo), *Kotimaa* [Homeland], 101, no. 28 (July 14, 2006): 3. A new parish minister has also been positive. Quoted in "Miten seurakuntaan lisää jäseniä Leppävaarassa?" (How to Get More Members in Leppävaara Parish?), *Länsiväylä*, January 17, 2007, 4.
56. Espoo city planning board minutes, September 11, 2002. Nonetheless, in comparison with many other planned Mormon temples (e.g., Boston), the Helsinki Temple project seems to have proceeded with minimal protest-related problems.
57. "Laaja keskus palvelee myös Venäjää ja Baltian maita: Espooseen kohoo mormonitemppeli," 3.
58. "Mormonien ja kristinuskon erot" (The Differences between Mor-

mons and Christianity), *Verkko-Esse* [Net-Esse], <http://www.esse.fi> (accessed October 3, 2006).

59. "Emävale-ekumeniaa" (Duplicitous Ecumenism), *Sanansaattaja* [The Messenger], 131, no. 40 (October 5, 2006): 2.

60. "Laaja keskus palvelee myös Venäjää ja Baltian maita: Espooseen kohoaa mormonitemppeli," 3; "Kirkko ei hyväksy" (The Church Does Not Accept), *Aamulehti*, October 30, 2006, A4; "Opetusministeriön edustaja mormonien sijaiskasteesta: Kuolleiden puolesta kastaminen ei ole lainvastaista" (Ministry of Education Representative on Mormon Proxy Baptism: Baptizing in Behalf of the Dead Is Not Illegal), *Kotimaa* 101, no. 40 (October 5, 2006): 3; "Menestyykö mormonismi meillä?" (Does Mormonism Thrive Here?), *KD Kristillisdemokraattinen viikkolehti* [Christian Democrat Weekly], 40, no. 41 (October 12, 2006): 3.

61. "Mormonismi kiinnostaa Espoossa" (Mormonism Interests in Espoo), *Uusi Tie* [New Road], 42, no. 39–40 (September 28, 2006): 4.

62. "Menestyykö mormonismi meillä?," 3.

63. "Mormonikirkko ei ole kristillinen kirkko" (The Mormon Church Is Not a Christian Church), *Länsiväylä*, October 22, 2006, 16.

64. "Mormonit uskovat Kristuksen julistaneen Pohjois-Amerikassakin" (Mormons Believe Christ Preached in North America Too), *Esse* [Espoon Seurakuntasanomat, Espoo Parish Gazette], 34, no. 36 (September 28, 2006): 10.

65. "Menestyykö mormonismi meillä?," 3.

66. "Emävale-ekumeniaa," 2.

67. "Jos olisin mormoni" (If I Were a Mormon), *Vantaan Lauri* [The Vantaa Lauri], 11, no. 34 (October 5, 2006): 12.

68. "Missförstånd? Nej!" (Misunderstandings? No!), *Kyrkpressen* [The Church Press], 36, no. 40 (October 6, 2005): 5.

69. "Melkein kuin Vapaamuurarien lahko" (Nearly Like a Sect of Freemasons), *Ristin Voitto* [Victory of the Cross], 95, no. 38 (September 20, 2006): 13.

70. "Mormonismi kiinnostaa Espoossa," 4.

71. "Menestyykö mormonismi meillä?," 3.

72. "Melkein kuin Vapaamuurarien lahko," 13.

73. "Opetusministeriön edustaja mormonien sijaiskasteesta," 3.

74. "Kuolleiden kaste repii perhepiiriä" (Baptism of the Dead Tears Family Circle), *Kotimaa* [Homeland], 101, no. 49 (December 8, 2006), 31.

75. "MAP-kirkko pystyttää temppeliä Espooseen," 17.

76. "Haudan häpäisemistä ja vainajiin kajoamista" (Desecrating Graves and Tampering with the Deceased), *Ilta-Sanomat*, April 21, 2004, 10.

77. "Kirkko ei hyväksy," *Aamulehti*, August 30, 2006, A4.

78. "Opetusministeriön edustaja mormonien sijaiskasteesta," 3.

79. Two particularly strong examples of promoting otherness are "MAP-kirkko pystyttää temppeliä Espooseen," 14–18, and "Vainajia kastetaan pian täällä," 12–13.

80. "Avoimien ovien suosio yllätti mormonitemppelin väen" (Open House Popularity Surprised Crew of Mormon Temple), *Turun Sanomat* [Turku Gazette], October 8, 2006, 11. This brief piece by the Finnish News Agency was published in varying lengths in several newspapers around the country on the same day.

81. *Aamu-TV* [Morning TV], Yle TV 1, July 24, 2006.

82. "Mormonitempeli valmistui Espooseen: Avoimet ovet kaksi ja puoli viikkoa" (Mormon Temple Completed in Espoo: Open House for Two and a Half Weeks), *Pohjolan Sanomat* [Gazette of the North], September 20, 2006, 7.

83. "Helsinki Finland Temple Media Kit" (n.p.: Myöhempien Aikojen Pyhien Jeesuksen Kristuksen Kirkko, n.d.), 5, also available at [http://www.mormonit.fi/docs/Media\\_english.pdf](http://www.mormonit.fi/docs/Media_english.pdf) (accessed January 27, 2007).

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85. Quoted in "Saarnaaja kulkee myös hameessa," (Preacher Walks Also in Skirt) *Helsingin Sanomat*, July 21, 2006, A10.

86. Interview, *Aamu-TV*, Yle TV 1, July 24, 2006.

87. "Pyhien profeettojen polulla: Suomen ensimmäinen mormonitempeli vauhdittaa MAP-kirkon sanomaa" (On the Path of Holy Prophets: Finland's First Mormon Temple Speeds Up the LDS Church's Message), *Helsingin Uutiset* [The Helsinki News], September 22, 2006, 4.

88. Juha Itkonen, *Myöhempien aikojen pyhiä* (Helsinki: Tammi, 2003).

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90. "Saarnaaja kulkee myös hameessa," A10.

91. "Mormontemplet färdigt i Helsingfors" (Mormon Temple Ready in Helsinki), *Östra Nyland* [Eastern Uusimaa], October 3, 2006, 14, and "Emävale-ekumeniaa," 2.

92. "Pyhien profeettojen polulla," 4.

93. On early Mormon thoughts concerning Christian identity and boundary maintenance, see my "Kristillisen identiteetin ongelma varhaisen mormonismin aatemaailmassa," *Teologinen Aikakauskirja* 111, no. 2 (2007): 123–134. Also forthcoming as "The Problem of Christian Identity in Late

Nineteenth-Century Mormon Thought” in a Joseph Smith Summer Seminar anthology edited by Richard L. Bushman.

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95. This person is usually the senior stake president in Finland, in this case, the Helsinki Finland Stake president.

96. *Uutiset* [News], Yle TV 2, September 19, 2006.

97. *Aamu-TV*, Yle TV 1, July 24, 2006.

98. “Släktforskaren fick en chock: Mormonkyrkan hade döpt och vigt döda anhöriga” (Genealogist Got Shocked: Mormon Church Had Baptized and Married Dead Relatives), *Kyrkpressen*, 36, no. 24 (June 16, 2005): 7.

99. “Några missförstånd” (Some Misunderstandings), *Kyrkpressen* 36, no. 38 (September 22, 2005): 5.

100. “Vainajia kastetaan pian täällä,” 13.

101. See, for example, “Kuolema ei ole raja” (Death Is Not a Border Barrier), *Ilta-Sanomat*, May 3, 2004, 4, and “Sijaistyöllä on suuri merkitys” (Proxy Work Has Great Significance), *Metro*, May 5, 2004, 17.

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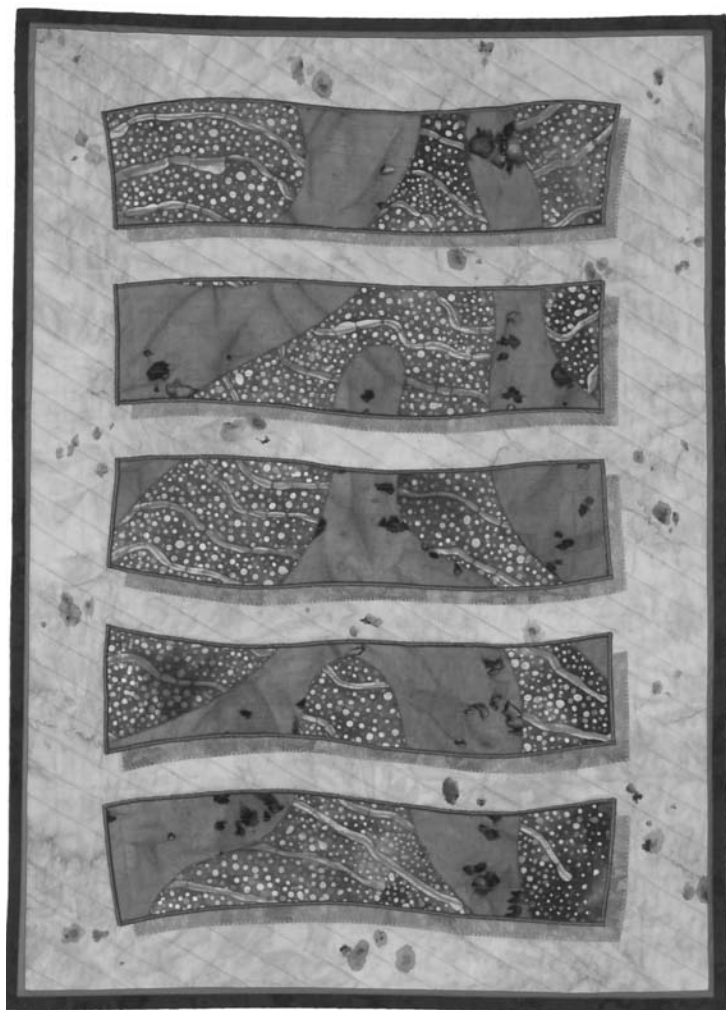
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Anne Muñoz; *Operation Tridacna Freedom*;  
quilted batik; 35 x 25 in.; 2005



Anne Muñoz; *Rainbow Serpent*; quilted batik; 36 x 35 in.; 2002

# Charity Never

*Matthew James Babcock*

This is how I remember it.

The morning before my business flight to England, our two-year old daughter, Myra, started shrieking as if a Ninja assassin had infiltrated her room. I wrapped a pillow around my head and waited for her to exhaust herself. But the longer I waited, the more frantic her sustained volleys of wailing became. Unable to rouse Rhea, my wife, I stumbled out of bed and tripped over a toy plastic barn into Myra's room.

I flipped on the light. She was raving. She sat in her crib, hands clamped on the slats like an inmate. Tears had glued her eyes shut. I picked her up to soothe her, but she squirmed and shoved me away as if I were the source of her pain. In the chafing light, I hummed haggard lullabies to her, but all the while I was growing angrier at Rhea, who was slumbering soundly in our room.

As I rocked our daughter, I thought about the argument Rhea and I had had the day before. The resentment rattled a trunk of broken toys in my head. I found myself grinding my molars as I tried to lull our daughter back to sleep.

We had argued about the name for our soon-to-be-born daughter. At first, it had been an offhand discussion. But before long, the whole thing had escalated into a shouting match, and neither of us had been able to stifle the eruption. I had named our first daughter: Myra Dawn. So Rhea had tacitly laid claim to the right of naming our second daughter.

"Carmen," she'd cooed during her first trimester, sitting cross-legged on the couch and pouring through *1001 Fabulous Baby Names*, a book published by Hawthorne House, Inc., the company I work for. "Anne Marie," she'd intoned with maternal relish as thick as a milkshake. "Michelle, Daphne. Oh, here's one! I just love it! Listen: Simone. Doesn't

that sound majestic? Simone.” She’d repeated its mystic mantra: “Simone, Simone.”

To jam a boulder in her craw, I’d offhandedly mentioned something about naming our second daughter “Charity.”

“Charity?” she’d spat back. A black trace of sarcasm had laced her response: “Never!” She’d flung her rejection in my face like a dirty sock. Then she’d gone back to reading *1001 Fabulous*.

To spite her, I’d started blathering on about my list of names, names that were also characteristics: Felicity, Faith, Hope, Miracle. I’d insisted that they were exceptional names for a girl because they emanated timeless wonder and virtue.

Rhea had laughed in my face, and the whole thing had spiraled into a cat-and-dog fight. She’d yelled at me. I’d yelled at her, and Myra Dawn had started bawling like an air raid siren.

In an effort to deliver the knockout punch, I’d bumped up my business flight on the spot. I’d called Hawthorne House’s travel secretary and requested to fly right away, with Rhea and Myra fuming in the kitchen next to me. It was a childish thing to do, but I just had to get away. Then, the night before my flight, Myra Dawn went ballistic, and the guilt drove me from bed to try and comfort her. But she wasn’t comforted. I wasn’t either.

At the airport, I felt groggy and irritated. I wore a comfortable blue business suit with suspenders and a red tie splashed with drunken gold dots. My cavalier exterior included an umbrella and overcoat hooked over one arm. In my free hand, I swung my trusted and well-traveled oxblood leather attaché. Rhea handed me a paperback crime novel. We traded strained goodbyes at the security checkpoint.

“Call me,” Rhea said, bouncing Myra Dawn in her arms.

She looked beautiful. They both looked beautiful. Rhea wore her hair in two springy ponytails, like a college co-ed. Her freckled face glowed with a fresh application of makeup, and she had rolled up her overall cuffs to display her sculpted siren’s ankles. Her breasts and belly were swollen beneath her William & Mary sweatshirt in a way that made my head ache with desire and regret. I wanted to slap her, to tear her clothes off and make love to her on the security conveyor belt. The night of our anniversary, she had played up the college girl part to get me to promise her a cruise to Cancun. She was irked now, the way she was when we learned our second pregnancy would postpone our cruise.



"Sure," I said.

"Think about Simone," she said, planting a dry peck on my cheek.

"Think about Charity," I said, kissing Myra's forehead.

"Never," she winced.

"Think about it," I said, passing through the security check, waving.  
"I'll call you. I'll be home in two days. Maybe three. 'Bye."

I waved to them one last time and stalked toward the boarding gate. A storm brooded in my head, the way it always does when I leave Rhea and Myra in the oilslick wake of unresolved conflicts. But I'd gagged down too much animosity for one week. I needed to get away for a while, finish some pressing work, and recharge. I was running from trouble, plain and simple.

The flight was long, and I slept most of the way, watched the in-flight movies, and did some drowsy reading. I sat next to a Polish gentleman in a cinnamon cardigan who told me the tragic story of his alcoholic sister, a woman he called "Meesha," how she died of sclerosis of the liver before they could "make things right" with one another.

On the way over, as we soared over futuristic cathedrals of purple clouds and the moonlit ocean, I thought about them: my wife and daughter. The feud had wrenched open a personal Pandora's box in both of us. And why had we fought? Over a name for our next daughter? *What's in a name?* I asked myself, forgetting the writer and reference. *What did it matter what we called her?*

My wife's list of names materialized on an imaginary chalkboard in my mind: Simone, Carmen, Daphne. Then mine: Charity. I thought about it, saw the cute babbling doll face that would match the name, felt the fingers curled around my one large finger, listened to the crying gurgles. *It would fit*, I thought. *And why'd she laugh at me? She always laughs at me. I like Charity. Charity's nice.* It wasn't so much that I hadn't liked Rhea's list of names as much as it was that she'd laughed at and utterly rejected mine. When I latched on to that thought, I felt the resentment wedge back into my throat and lodge itself in my intellect like a hunk of bad cheese. *It would be Charity*, I thought. *Yes: Charity.*

As we touched down in Gatwick, I told myself that Rhea would never laugh at me again. *Besides*, I thought, passing through customs and shuffling out into the gray drizzle of Thursday morning in London, *she'd grow to like it. My wife needs to understand me*, I thought, stepping on to the

Gatwick Express to Victoria Station. *To appreciate me*, I told myself, *to understand where I'm coming from*.

I stayed a day in London to get over jet lag and the next day caught a train from St. Pancras to Sheffield. On arriving, I confirmed some appointments by phone from Sheffield Central and caught a bus, a No. 59, to Darnell. I'd traveled to Darnell many times before, so the route and the bus numbers were like reading my own social security number. I caught the No. 59 downtown, near Hole-in-the-Road. At the city's buzzing hub, top-heavy red and beige double-decker buses jostled like groggy circus animals, waiting to pick up passengers. Black taxis crawled in and out, horns braying. A few stumpy benches lined the walks there, and there was a big black statue of some important figure—I confess, I don't know who—over which jittery pigeon colonies clambered, whitening out its sculpted surface with splattered refuse.

I like Sheffield. It's a colossal bother, but there's something about the bustle, the congestion, and the pigeons that makes it an ideal charade into which to vanish. Whenever I return, I take the city and, like its enigmatic ebony statue, wrap the urban mantle of feathers, exhaust fumes, and concrete around me like a cloak of anonymity and just go—walk, take a bus, hop a train—to where I want. I can be who I want to be.

That day, I felt the same. I sat on the No. 59 to Darnell, practically invisible. For a blitz of time, I'd forgotten about Rhea and our fight, our unborn daughter's litany of names, the screeched hullabaloo. My past and future had blended into the city's wonderful, nameless roar. I sat in my seat, chewing on a sandwich I'd bought at Cobb's of Doncaster. It was a farmer's cobb: turkey, beef, mustard. I was idly vetting the pastiche of people on the bus. It was the usual for the late afternoon crowd: smokers, anachronistic punks, fossil men wearing their caps like the past, women in plastic hoods, mothers lugging bags of oranges, eggs, bananas, and tea.

Automatically, I ran over the trip in my mind. I'd done it before. I could see my route like a red laser darting across a map—leaving town center; the bus crawling away like a sick mammoth, and then doddering up toward Manor Top; leaving Manor Top, and then harrumphing down Prince-of-Wales Road; the gears grinding, the bus leveling out at the bottom of Prince-of-Wales Road, passing under a pigeon-stained flyover, and then hitting the shopping hub of Darnell. Once at Darnell, I'd find one of our many U.K. booksellers—R. F. Finch's—do the song and dance I had to

do there, let the chit-chat break off before it got wearisome, and then reverse the whole thing. It was a simple and yet intricate bit of business.

The faceless day wore a mizzly cowl. People hurried by, shoulders hunched, hands crammed in pockets or umbrellas parrying the wind. The upper level of the No. 59 was smoky, too smoky for my liking. Darkly, I considered scenarios that would allow me to make up with Rhea without having to admit I was in the wrong. The whole problem revolved in my head like a three-dimensional puzzle, accompanied by the off-key sigh of deflating bagpipes. No matter how I reconfigured it, I couldn't get the win-win solution's cubic pieces to snap together.

The bus still wasn't moving. Dismayed, I leaned my head against the glass, watching the doomsday stream of people outside. They hurried past the buildings: Cobb's of Doncaster, Barclay's, Oxfam, W. H. Smith's, and a flurry of tobacconists and off-licenses. I gazed through the dizzy flutter of pigeons, waiting impatiently for the packed bus to crawl away from the curb. I looked over at the anonymous black statue, counting and classifying the pigeons on its head and shoulders: white, gray, mixed, speckled, genetically diseased, crippled. I counted thirty, wishing the bus would move, growing more and more annoyed as we waited. The square was packed, and the buses and taxis were gridlocked. All around me, passengers complained along with the engines.

On the lower level, someone swore and got off. I watched the young man who had disembarked—hair sculpted in filth, angular, in a green army jacket and plaid pants, motorbike boots, chains, Union Jack appliqué stitched to the left shoulder—stalk off into the flawed mural of the crowd. I watched him for as long as I could. He looked back and raised his hand in a reversed peace sign—the British bird—barked something vulgar, and disappeared around the corner.

Then I saw them.

At the moment that I saw them, I realized that they'd always been there, but I hadn't been focused enough on the scene to pull them out of the crowd. I saw them both because *she* was walking toward *him*. On the sidewalk, a homeless man crouched cross-legged on the sidewalk like a grungy, emaciated Buddha. He sat with his back against Barclay's granite facade, his grimy shoeless feet splayed out like prosthetic limbs. And the woman. She strode directly toward him. As I watched her, I realized the homeless man had no idea he was the target, but I knew she was aiming at him, a warship bucking a gale of bodies to reach home port. She wore a

conservative maroon uniform, a kind I'd never seen. She wore no bonnet, but her uniform—knee-length skirt, blazer, deep maroon dye and somber navy blue borders—classed her as some kind of religious volunteer or civil servant. Her blond hair hung in greasy streaks around her face. She wore smeared glasses that showed slits for eyes. Her movements projected a weightless but direct energy, and not the fatalistic schoolmarmish languor you might have expected from such a volunteer. Her skin was the color of cold cream. Caught in the drama, I watched her stride through the crowd like a duck churning up a waterfall. I watched every step, as I chewed on my farmer's cobb. In the rows up front, others on the stalled No. 59 were watching her, too.

The more I tracked her swift vector, the more interested I grew. It was as if the city of Sheffield had jumped the cogs in the grandfather clock of the cosmos. For some reason, I felt, this man and woman were destined to meet, and the puzzle of time would be solved or confounded at their meeting. As she approached, I could see she carried something heavy, something the passing crowd had previously obscured. Her thin but muscular frame tilted to the right to compensate for the burden that swung in her fist. She was plain, but she wore the determined look of a stone saint. Her nose was narrow, and she wore no makeup. Her hair was parted in the middle, and it trembled like grass in the breeze of the streaming crowds. She wore black shoes and light-blue elastic stockings she had yanked up to her knees. I had suspicions about her motives, but the strange mix of militarism and resignation in her manner confounded me. *There aren't people like this anymore*, I told myself, looking around at the reactions of others, still wishing the bus would move. Camouflaging my scrutiny behind my sandwich, I squinted to see what she was carrying. I expected to see in her chaste grip a massive gong of antediluvian design with which, on reaching the homeless man, she would bang out over the city an invocation to the apocalypse. She reached the homeless man and knelt. As she did, I could see the observers in front of me on the upper level of the No. 59 lean forward and scrutinize her, as I did. The heavy object she carried was a bucket filled with soapy water, which she set down on the sidewalk. Out of the bucket, she produced a bright orange sponge. In the double knot of her fists, she wrung out the excess water, and—as we murmured on the bus—began to wash the homeless man's feet.

With the businesslike detachment of a bricklayer, she worked the sponge over his ankles and heels, slowly at first. Then, as she sensed the re-

silience of the filth's tacky armor, she began to rub with more ardor, gritting her teeth, jerking her torso forward like a piston. All the while, the homeless man gave no sign that he registered in his mind the significance of her actions. She worked at his feet, trying to scour away the evil crust of Sheffield grime. Like a scullery maid, she worked her sponge. But still he sat motionless, watching dumbly, staring with concrete eyes through the whirl of suds and benefaction.

He chewed robotically on what looked like a stale wedge of bread, examining his feet as if they weren't attached to his body. His ragged hair and matted beard shot from his head and chin like a mane of smoke. His Victorian chimney sweep's face was creased in soot. His pants were slashed from the knees down, and he wore the tornado rags of a trenchcoat around his shoulders. From our seats, we watched the narrative unfold in silence, as if someone had pressed our fingers to the pulse in the city's wrist.

No one outside the bus noticed them. The herds of Sheffield nobodies stampeded by, too hungry and hurried to care. After the woman finished one foot, she started on the next. A prim escutcheon across her back and shoulders—"Sisters of Salvation," in filigreed gold embroidery—reflected the dull light like damselfly wings. Her energy had begun to wane. She plunged the sponge in the bucket, wrung out the dirty water, and attacked the remaining foot, pumping her elbows as if trying to eradicate every Satanic stain in the world. Damp snail curls of hair clung to her forehead and cheeks. Even after she switched to the other foot, the homeless man chewed meditatively on the wad of his bread, scrutinizing the woman's actions from another dimension.

Farther forward in the bus, someone couldn't take it anymore and laughed out loud, pointing. It was a young man in an old Puma T-shirt and shimmering shamrock warm-up pants. Suddenly self-conscious, the young man went silent, plucked a cigarette out of a pack, and lit it, spinning away from the window. Turning from the laughing young man, I looked out the window again.

The sister had finished. Having scrubbed her befouled corner of the world free of dirt and sin, she stood, gathered herself, and prepared to leave. All of us, including the young man who'd laughed, leaned toward the windows and examined the homeless man. It was indeed a miracle. He still sat on the sidewalk, as dismal and smoggy as an English day. But at the end of each leg was affixed a glossy pink doll's foot. In place of two dis-

gusting naked feet, he now possessed two new ones, bright as plastic, as if a fairy toymaker had snapped on replacements.

Still he didn't act as if anything had changed. Quickly, the Sister of Salvation collected her bucket and sponge and walked to the gutter. Her forehead sparkled with perspiration, lending an angelic glister to her common features. At the curb, she knelt again and poured out the dirty water. She wrung out the sponge with both hands. The grimy water drove a black torrent of muck down the gutter, flooding filth into filth. The gutter was already running like a septic wound, poisoned with dark green foam, brown slime, and pulpy yellow gunk. As she emptied her bucket, she appeared to be humming something cheerful to herself, a hymn perhaps. A transfigured look of bliss had settled on her face. I waited for a flock of angel pigeons to descend and pluck her skyward.

But then he flew—at her. An electric shock from the sidewalk jolted him forward, and he lunged. We all shrank back from the bus windows. Helplessly, we watched him hurtle like a ragged ghost toward the unsuspecting Sister of Salvation. On the lower level of the bus, a woman screamed. With the agility of a panther, he ambushed the Sister from behind. He seized her in a bearhug around her midriff. She didn't scream. She jerked: once. The burst of electricity that jumpstarted his body paralyzed hers from crown to sole. In his embrace, she twitched and then stiffened into a wax statue.

"Do some' it, love," said an old man on the bus.

"Aye," others said. "Gi' o'er."

Nobody stopped to help. Nobody on the sidewalks outside broke stride as the urban wildman grabbed the Sister of Salvation, who had crumpled to a sitting position. He began to strip off her shoes and socks like a frenzied ape shearing the rind from an orange. First, he clawed at the laces and yanked off her shoes. The Sister had melted into stupor. She stared at a bare patch of cement, unable to move. Her shoes sailed over the crowd into the street. One bounced onto the roof of a waiting taxi. The cabby got out, retrieved it from the roof, examined it quizzically, and tossed it into the gutter.

Then, ignited by a lust for action, the homeless man peeled off the Sister's light blue stockings. Her naked feet and legs shone like white columns in the gray revelatory light. Despite her public defrocking, she remained stunned. With a dignified air, the man cupped the Sister's un-

spotted feet in one of his paws and, one at a time, began to smear them with handfuls of mire from the gutter.

The bus became a hive of shock and amazement. A few outraged horns bawled, and taxis gunned their engines. Shouts of dismay clashed with the traffic's feeble protests, but nobody intervened. Handful after handful, he smeared the toxic gunk from the gutters onto the Sister's legs and feet. With each scoopful, he grew more animated, more determined. He seemed to sing as he worked, incomprehensible songs of mythic revivals and ancient world orders. Soon, her feet, ankles, and calves were sheathed in go-go boots of gutter slime. Convinced his job was complete, he stood and wandered off, leaving her to sag on the curb like a wrecked mannequin. He melted into the slipstream of the crowd, and still she didn't move, a blank stare on her face, the orange sponge gripped like a counterfeit relic in her white-knuckled fist.

For a second, I thought of running to her aid, but thoughts of my imminent appointment, coupled with fatigue, buckled an invisible belt across my lap and strapped me to my seat. I looked down; I hung my head between my hands. The floor was littered with cigarette stubs, candy wrappers, and food packets. I was desperate for the bus to pull away from the station.

Then, as if prompted by my thoughts, the bus hitched forward, and everyone expelled a collective sigh. A few people cheered. The No. 59 to Darnell was lumbering away, past the black statue and pigeons, away from the trauma and grief of the busy sidewalks. In my bowels, I felt the raspy baritone engines rev and mumble. I looked out the window for the Sister of Salvation, wishing her some kind of benedictory saving grace in the teeming indifference of the crowds.

She was gone.

Quickly, I scanned the moving sidewalks, hoping to spot her maroon uniform coursing like a fleck of martyr's blood among the fleet of cars, buses, and taxis. As we entered traffic, I craned my neck back to see the black statue of the unknown dignitary, but his stoic expression indicated that she had disappeared, that perhaps she had never really existed. I examined the faces of my fellow commuters, but they were all staring at the floor, as I had done, as if avoiding the face of the future.

They were avoiding her.

Like a supremely disheveled dream, she walked unsteadily down the aisle of the upper level on the No. 59 to Darnell, trying not to inhale a

wall of cigarette smoke. She carried her soiled shoes and socks in one hand and like a refugee searched the rows for an empty seat. The bus swayed like a creaking galleon, nosing its way through the traffic toward Manor Top. A fine fog glazed her eyes, and I could tell she'd been crying, though not hysterically. Smudges of brown muck dotted her China doll's cheeks. She chewed her bottom lip as she hunted for a place to sit.

Now that she was closer, I could see how young she was. Her feet and legs were still smeared with street slime. Using the poles and seat backs for support, she stepped over the trash in the aisle, as if tiptoeing across the spires of one hundred miniature holy cities. She was sniffing, trying to keep any further weeping boxed up. Still, as she came closer, I could see that a grim smile as level as the horizon had replaced her shocked expression. A veil of clarity and haggard reason shrouded her eyes. She was no longer the dumb doll from the street. She was simply searching for a seat where she could plant herself amid the ruins of the day.

Then I realized that all the seats were taken. Despite what we had all witnessed, no one had yet offered her assistance. Out of instinct, I rose. A coil of energy lifted me from my seat, and I grabbed my coat, attaché, and crushed sandwich paper. Stepping to the side, I indicated with a gentlemanly gesture that she could have it. For a moment, as the No. 59 rocked drunkenly back and forth through the towering urban sprawl, we faced each other in animal silence. The Sister of Salvation gazed through me toward the bus's emergency exit door. I gestured for her to take my seat. She glanced into my eyes, searching for a hidden fire from a prehistoric ritual, seeking the secret the city hadn't yet translated into scripture.

Our impasse drew the attention of the entire upper section. Everyone stared. Then, as if channeling her own spirit, she widened her eyes and cocked her head to one side, weighing the intrinsic merit of my actions on a tiny golden balance. She smiled. Disarmed, I smiled back and motioned toward my seat again. In one movement, she shifted her dirty socks and shoes to her other arm to free her right hand. The slap she shot across my face delivered a thunderclap that severed earth and heaven. Like a taxi backfire, it scattered the pigeon congregations on both sides of the bus, sent them flapping for the sanctuary of the skies and the sunny cathedral heights. My head rocketed to the right. My cheek swarmed with pain. Reeling, I dropped my attaché in the aisle.



"Ow dare ya?" she raved in a halting Yorkshire accent. "*Can't find me own seat? Can't bear to stand, eh?*"

"Sorry," I muttered, holding my ringing face.

"*Can't stand on me own!*" she screeched above the noise of the bus, shaking her socks and shoes at me. "*A helpless woman, eh?*"

This is how I remember it.

Except that when I got back to my room, I called Rhea. She answered the phone, and I could hear Myra Dawn calling to me in her baby language in the background.

"I miss you," Rhea said. "It's weird—"

"I'm coming back," I said. "I'm—tomorrow—"

As we talked, the timbre of her voice seized on the wedge of resentment beneath my breastbone. She spoke, and I watched out the window as a crusade of pigeons ascended, only to be consumed in the gray fire high over Sheffield, city of cities.

"Simone's fine," I said. "I was—just—"

"Charity's good," she said.

"Charity?" I challenged, a laugh catching in my throat. "Never."

# The Buzzard Tree

*Johnny Townsend*

Patty Lou looked out the door. She was waiting for her grandson, Robert, to come. She hadn't seen him since her ninetieth birthday party three months earlier, when the whole family had come out to Brookhaven, Mississippi, to celebrate with her. Robert came up from New Orleans to see her only three or four times a year, and she was looking forward to seeing him.

She looked out at the sky. There were four buzzards circling slowly and gently over the farm. She remembered the rhyme she'd learned some eighty years earlier. "One for sorrow. Two for joy. Three for a letter. Four for a boy." Well, she'd be getting a boy today. Robert. She'd actually be getting two boys. Robert would be coming with his friend, Joseph.

Patty Lou had long since stopped worrying about Robert being gay. At first, being Mormon, she'd worried that he'd go to hell, but he still seemed like a decent man. Then she'd worried about him catching AIDS. But he'd told her six years ago he had the AIDS virus, and he still seemed okay. He'd been taking medication right from the start and assured her he'd be fine for many years to come. Now she just worried she wouldn't see him enough.

Patty Lou went and sat back down on her sofa. She had a window unit air conditioner, which the family had forced her into buying five years ago, threatening not to visit her again during the long summer months unless she got one; but even though it was 90 degrees outside, she decided to wait until closer to the time Robert and Joseph were coming before turning it on. She still believed natural air was healthier. She'd lived eighty-five years before getting an air conditioner, hadn't she? And now, facing leukemia, she needed all the natural air she could get.

It wasn't the same kind of leukemia her daughter, Marsha, had died of twenty-one years earlier. Patty Lou still remembered seeing her daughter in her temple clothes in her casket. She herself hadn't converted till af-

ter Marsha's death, doing so largely so she could be with her daughter again. Marsha had had acute leukemia, while Patty Lou had chronic. There was more to the name than that, but she couldn't remember it. Patty Lou remembered when she'd been diagnosed ten years earlier. The doctor had said, "With this disease, I'm afraid you've probably only got ten years to live." Patty Lou had replied, "Well, I'm eighty. I'll take it." But now that the ten years had passed and the Leukeran pills no longer worked, ten years didn't seem like enough. She knew heaven would be nice, and it would be great to be with Marsha again. Patty Lou had had Marsha sealed to her in the temple by proxy after joining the Church, and she felt that the afterlife with her would be pleasant enough. She just wasn't ready to go yet. Was it being selfish to still want to live when you were ninety years old? It might be, but she couldn't help it. She liked being alive.

As it neared noon, Patty Lou turned on the air conditioner in the living room, and she heated some field peas and green beans on the stove. She also heated some mashed potatoes and a pot roast she had cooked earlier. The family had always loved her cooking, though it was simple enough. It was one thing she could still do, so she did it. She ate well, even though she was just cooking for one most days. She wanted to stay healthy, and she was in pretty good shape, except perhaps for a bruise or two lately.

Around 12:30, Patty Lou heard the dogs barking outside. She went to the door and saw Robert and Joseph walking up. Robert had dark hair and a graying beard, and Joseph was short and Italian-looking. Robert was forty-three, the same age his mother had been when she died, and Joseph was fifty-five. How could her grandson be so old?

"Hi!" said Robert as she opened the screen door. "How're you doing?"

"Okay." They hugged, and both boys gave her a kiss.

"Here. We brought you some treats." Robert handed her a bag, and she saw inside it a pack of chocolate-covered peanuts, some peanut butter cups, and a pack of maple-covered peanuts. She loved peanuts.

"Thank you," she said. "Come on in the kitchen. Dinner's ready."

The boys went in the bathroom to freshen up after their two-and-a-half-hour trip while Patty Lou poured some Coke. She knew the Church frowned on caffeine, but she also knew Robert liked Coke, so she always served it when he came to visit. The boys soon joined her at the kitchen table, which was already set. Robert's father, Henry, had made the

table some forty-five years earlier. He'd left New Orleans to come back to the country after Marsha had died and had married a local woman, Joann, a Baptist, a few years later. He no longer came to the Mormon meetings, but he still came by Patty Lou's house every few months to bush-hog her weeds.

"Would you like to say the blessing?" Patty Lou asked Robert.

He nodded and bowed his head. "Dear Heavenly Father. We thank thee for this food, and we ask thee to bless it that it will be good for us. And we ask thee to please bless Grandma that her medicine will work and she'll be okay. And we ask this in Jesus's name. Amen."

Patty Lou liked to hear him use Jesus's name. Robert had started going to the Jewish church in New Orleans when he'd been with his last friend, a Jew. She wasn't sure God would take him to heaven as a gay person, but there was no sense making it worse by being a Jew. Of course, her doctor was Jewish, and he seemed nice enough. Maybe being a Jew didn't matter, either.

"Your sister Joyce was up here last night for your dad's tractor pull. She came by for about fifteen minutes with Veronica before going to your dad's place," she informed them. Joyce was a year older than Robert and also lived in New Orleans. She came up to see her even less frequently than Robert, usually just for Christmas and maybe one other time a year. While Veronica was seventeen and still lived at home, Joyce's oldest child, Mark, was twenty-seven now. He also lived in New Orleans and came up to visit his grandfather Henry several times a year. Patty Lou knew this and couldn't help but feel hurt that he usually never bothered to stop by to see her as well.

"They're doing okay?" asked Robert.

"Yeah, I think so."

"Did Mark come up, too?"

"I don't know."

Mark usually rode in each of Henry's tractor pulls, but Patty Lou hadn't asked Joyce if he was coming up yesterday. If he didn't show up to visit, it was better not to know he was in town. They were all still active in the Church, at least, and that was some comfort. If they couldn't be together now, they might still be together later. Maybe she'd be more fun to be with in heaven.

"Veronica still in the ROTC?"

"I think so. They were only here fifteen minutes." She took a sip of

her Coke. She had to admit, she liked it once in a while, too. "Y'all didn't want to come up for the tractor pull?"

"It's not really our thing."

After the meal, Patty Lou went out on the back porch and brought in a yellow cake with chocolate icing. She brushed a few ants off the plate and set it down on the table. "I've got some Robbie-cake for you." As a child, this was the only one of the several kinds of cake Patty Lou made that Robert would eat, so it became known in the family as Robbie-cake. She still made it every time he came to visit.

"Thanks, Grandma."

When they'd finished eating, Robert washed the dishes in the sink. The other grandkids never helped clean up. Patty Lou felt awkward about it, not liking to impose when they were visiting, but appreciating the thought. If they helped, it made her feel as if they thought she was weak, but their not helping made her feel unappreciated. It was bad either way. When Robert was through, they all went back in the living room to sit down on the two sofas.

"How's work?" asked Patty Lou, hoping she'd be able to hear over the sound of the air conditioner.

"It's okay," said Robert. "A new girl just started at the library. She's obsessive-compulsive, so she drives me crazy."

Patty Lou didn't exactly know what that meant and didn't really care to ask. She was sorry Robert didn't do something more important with his life, but no one in the family really had. Being a good person was more important than being successful, but why couldn't you be both? "And how's work for you, Joseph?"

"I just finished teaching summer school this week. I had some good students. The fall semester starts in three weeks."

"Y'all going anywhere?"

"We're going to San Francisco for several days next week," said Robert.

Patty Lou nodded. The boys had spent two weeks in Europe in the spring and now were going to California for a week, but they were coming to see her only for the afternoon. They weren't even staying the night. Of course, she knew she never had anything interesting to talk about. She never did anything different. Robert used to ask her to tell stories about when she was growing up, and he'd written her early history up in a forty-page booklet and given copies to everyone in the family, but there

were no new stories to tell. At first, seeing the printed booklet had made her feel important. But after a while, she felt dismayed that her whole life, her whole being, had been reduced to a mere forty pages. It seemed somehow disappointing.

"How's your blood count?" asked Robert.

"It's at 100,000. It was at 160,000, but it's supposed to be 4,000, so they want me to start chemotherapy tomorrow."

"You have to go to the hospital?"

"No, I just go to the doctor's office for a half hour. They'll give me an IV for thirty minutes a day every day this week. Then I'll be off it for three weeks, and then we repeat it again the next month the same way, for four months."

"What's the name of the drug?"

Patty Lou got up and went to her dresser, returning a moment later with a piece of paper. "It's called Fludara." She handed him the paper and let him read about the drug.

"Possible kidney problems," said Robert. "I guess you better drink lots of water. Unless your feet swell up. I guess the doctor will tell you what to do."

"I just hope it doesn't make me sick. Remember your mother? I think the chemotherapy killed her before the leukemia would have."

"Well, diarrhea isn't supposed to be a problem," said Robert, still reading the paper, "but nausea might. You could be okay, though. The paper doesn't say what percentage of people experience these side effects."

"I'm just glad I don't have to go to the hospital. People die in hospitals. You never knew my sister Margaret Missouri. She went in the hospital to have a tumor removed, and she got lockjaw and died. She was only thirty-eight."

"Tetanus," said Robert. "How awful. Your whole body is just one big charley horse for two days and then you die."

"And my sister Nelda Sue. She was forty-four when she went in to have her tonsils out. And she bled to death on the operating table."

Patty Lou thought about the rest of her family. She was the ninth of ten children, and now she was the only one left. James had died of diphtheria when he was three, and Aubrey had died in his twenties when the glass in the back of the truck he was driving caved in and the dirt he was carrying suffocated him. Virginia, the youngest, was the last to go five years ago, of cancer. Patty Lou's parents were gone, her brothers and sis-

ters were gone, her husband was gone, her daughter was gone. She should be ready to go, too, but she still wanted to stay a bit longer.

It wasn't that the grandkids were so good to her, but she still liked being around to see that they were okay. Her son, Shane, lived a couple of miles away and either he or his wife, Lisa, stopped by to see her every day for at least five minutes, but their two teenage sons didn't come by any oftener than Robert or Joyce.

No one called her, but she knew that was her fault. She could never think of anything to say over the phone, and the conversation never lasted more than two minutes. But Robert did write her every few months. Her eyesight was still good, so she enjoyed that. He often wrote her about his gay friends, but that was okay. They seemed to be nice to him, and that made her feel good. She didn't know if he was going to hell, but she still wanted him to have a good life. A good life was important.

"They'll probably stick you in a different vein every day this week," said Robert, "but I'm sure they have someone who will do it right and won't hurt you."

"You think they'll use a big needle?"

"I expect it'll be about medium."

"I hope I don't start going downhill," said Patty Lou. "I don't want a lingering death. I want to go in my sleep."

"I hope you go in your sleep, too."

Patty Lou smiled. The others wouldn't even talk about death, but Robert did. She liked that. She wasn't really afraid of death. She felt she was going to heaven, maybe not the highest degree in the celestial kingdom, but heaven nevertheless. She'd always tried to be a good Christian back when she was Methodist, and she tried to be a good Mormon now. So she believed the afterlife would be good. She simply wasn't ready to go just yet. When she was a girl, they didn't have running water. They had a horse and buggy to get to town. They had kerosene lanterns for light in the evening. The world had changed so drastically since then. It certainly wasn't all good, but it was definitely interesting. She didn't want to miss it.

They managed to talk till 3:00. So often when the grandkids visited, they would all just sit on the sofa in silence, struggling for something to say. But today it had gone pretty well. Then at 3:00, Robert said he and Joseph had to go over and see Henry for an hour but would be back.

Patty Lou just sat on the sofa waiting for them. She didn't really like to read, and there was never anything good on TV on Sunday afternoon.

She could listen to music or watch one of the videos the kids had given her, but she preferred just sitting and thinking. She always had lots of thoughts. She just never had anything to say. She thought again now of the possibility of death. She had her will made out already. She'd had it done twenty years ago. Everyone got an equal portion. Of course, they'd have to sell the two hundred acres and divide the money. She couldn't divide the land seven or eight different ways.

Robert and Joseph came back around 4:30. The dogs barked again but let them pass. "We went by the old buzzard tree down near the creek," said Robert. "There must have been seventy-five buzzards in it. It was incredible."

"Yeah, they're always out circling, waiting for something to die."

Patty Lou opened the pack of chocolate-covered peanuts, and everyone ate a couple. She used a twist tie to close the package, and though the conversation had flowed pretty well before, now it seemed to flounder. "So you like San Francisco?" she asked.

"It's great," said Robert. "The weather's always nice, in the 60s in the day and 50s at night. The hills are pretty. And the city is clean and lively, not at all like New Orleans."

Patty Lou had never been out of Mississippi, but of course she had seen a lot on television. "Y'all planning any other trips?"

"We'll probably go see my mom in New York for Thanksgiving," said Joseph. "She's eighty-five and is having trouble walking."

"Oh, that's too bad."

They found a couple more things to talk about, and at 5:30, Patty Lou heated up the supper. They ate mostly in silence.

"I want you to be one of my pallbearers," said Patty Lou. It sounded too abrupt.

Robert stopped eating and nodded. "Okay. If I'm not too old by then."

"You won't be."

They had cake, drinking milk with the evening meal instead of Coke. Then they went back to the living room.

"Joann said she could take you to your doctor's appointment a couple of times this week if it was too hard for Lisa to take you every day," said Robert. "She's a retired nurse, so she could probably answer some of your questions, too."

"I'll think about it." It was nice of Joann to offer, but Patty Lou



thought she'd feel too awkward with her, the woman who had replaced her daughter.

They sat in silence a while, looking at the wooden floor. Robert had varnished it a few years ago on one of his trips up, but it was starting to get worn in places. Maybe if she was still alive next spring, he could do the floor again.

Around 6:30, Robert stood up. "Well, I guess we better go before it gets too dark. We'll be praying for you tomorrow."

Patty Lou hugged Robert and Joseph and opened the door for them. "Will I see you before Christmas?"

"We'll have to see what our schedule is like."

"All right."

Patty Lou gave Robert a jar of homemade pickles, and she stood on the porch with the dogs as he and Joseph got in their car. They all waved, and soon the car had gone off down the curving gravel drive. Patty Lou stood on the porch a moment longer after they left. There were still three buzzards circling in the sky overhead. Three for a letter. Maybe someone would write to her soon.

Patty Lou went back inside and turned off the air conditioner. Then she sat back down on the sofa and stared at the floor. An hour later when the sun went down, she was still sitting there, thinking.

Chemotherapy started tomorrow at 9:00, and she wanted to live. She went to the kitchen, took out the pack of chocolate-covered peanuts, and brushed off the ants. She didn't usually have two desserts, but if she was going to be nauseated this week, putting on a few extra ounces now wouldn't hurt. She poured some milk and sat down to eat.

POETRY

## One Tree

*Mary Lythgoe Bradford*

Outside my window  
one lone dead tree  
is standing firm  
in brave desiccation  
among other hickories,  
that share the light  
of their chlorophyll  
while swaying in the wind.

Already my bark is stringy,  
my fruit drying as it drops.  
leaves falling quickly.  
Soon my roots will give way,  
and my frame will crack.  
But there is this to say:  
Naked limbs against the sky  
will open windows on the sun  
as it leaves its message  
in blazing signature.

## The Word

The Word was made Flesh  
and the Flesh made Words.  
He fed the Five Thousand  
on words shaped like loaves  
as fragrant as the breath  
of God,  
easy to digest  
sweet as honey.

His words were  
liquid as the water  
where fishes spawn,  
bracing as rain,  
cool to the taste:  
    Blessed are the poor in spirit.  
    Blessed are the peacemakers.  
    Blessed are the meek.

The Five Thousand were filled and refreshed.  
For one whole season they were pure  
and peaceful and meek.

## Land's End 1997

*Don W. Jenkins*

The wind is simple  
a thing with pacific bite.  
Lifting foam tatters, cold.

We accept it,  
determined to see all we see  
with it, lean into it.

It has ways,  
leading rain sideways, driving  
sand unseen between teeth.

Two of a tangle  
of branches lean and meet,  
frame ponded rain.

Massed gulls take wind,  
simple circle woven away  
into the pacific bite.

## Moving the Story, with Conviction: On the LDS Church and the Marriage Amendment

*Johanna Wagner*

For them,  
there was no between  
they believed the tale  
and trekked to testify  
and walked and walked

It explains now  
why it's either for or against

so much black and white  
in a world of gray  
so much hard and dry  
in the story  
so much certainty  
about eternity  
about unity  
that it should be  
about one cup and one rod  
when the black and white  
the hard and dry  
in actuality  
was before so gray  
so damp  
filled with girl-bones and bodies  
spinning on the axis of a first wife  
on emma  
on my mary hafen  
who wasn't the first  
who walked anyway  
so wretchedly

so damp  
so gray  
But now  
so black and white  
and hard and dry  
forgetting inheritance  
forgetting faith  
commanding the gray that  
walked  
from walking  
between ponds  
between piano keys

## To My Teacher

*Darlene Young*

*In Memoriam: D. Brent Collette, Institute Teacher, Berkeley, California  
(died November 2000)*

You light between tall trees, never trip  
on roots—and yet leave heavy footprints.  
Bounding toward the surf, you pause for me:  
together we will touch the sacred.  
You dance barefoot before mystery.  
At once lamb and lion, holy fierce  
in childlike wonder, serpent wisdom,  
you tune your ears to hidden music:  
intelligence, the glory of God.

## Patriarchal Blessing

The boy, sixteen, is taller than his mother, taller than  
the creaky man with shining eyes and trembling hands.

Mother comes fasting, something she's good at,  
years of honing her physical yearnings  
into empty bowls to catch spiritual manna.  
And now she is empty of all but her hope  
of hearing the voice of God through this old man.  
Her son, the first fruit of her labors,  
a rough-cut stone but the best she could do—  
and would God touch this stone with his finger?

Her son folds into the chair with a quick glance  
at her, an echo of the glance he gave her long ago  
the day he stood to join his father in the font.  
And maybe now the father will join them  
in spirit? She, longing, glances to the corners of the room.

The trembling hands are stilled on the boy's head,  
as if the words of power give them weight,  
words that dart like lightning in the air  
And dance upon her eyelids. She opens them  
to watch the old man, ageless, shine like sun,  
his voice a whisper still but piercing bright.

The mother sits and holds the hand of God—  
for once she feels she's truly not alone  
in her sweet knowledge of her son's good heart.  
She weeps to hear God tell her of the man  
he will become, this boy she's nursed with blood  
and milk, and tears,  
this boy, a shining sword, a man of God.

And in the silence when the blessing's done  
 the son stands up and shyly takes her hand.  
 The old man, feeble now, stands at the door,  
 winking in the glitter of the stars.  
 For days those flashing words will dance like sparks  
 around her ears, behind her eyes and in the air—  
  
 as if she walked with diamonds in her hair.

## Nephews

*Lee Robison*

Their shovels grate rock and gravel to fill  
 the grave she'd scoff empty of their grief—  
 "Hey, guys, I'm with God!" she'd proclaim.  
 "I'm not here, guys! I'm with Jeeeeezus, singing!"  
 She, the guru Champion of Miners to China—  
 the Pretty Rocks Assessor who made flint shine—  
 the Prime Minister of Girl-Friend Confidences—  
 She, Queen of Rock Chuck Hill, would laugh.  
 "There's nothing there!" she'd exclaim, if she  
 were here to boss them how rocks are tossed.

But, even with the joy God's glory sings,  
 how can laughter fill heaven's hall  
 while these boys strain backs to fill the first  
 empty thing their hearts have ever found  
 on this earth, where (except for what  
 they cover) Aunt Jen, the Great and Good, is not?

## Hunter's Visitation

Most of my life I've believed what these eyes see  
 these hands can touch,  
 that seeing and touching—being touched—  
 ends when they nail the coffin lid on.  
 But, my mother—your grandma—had the last word  
 on this creed the fall after she died,  
 when I saw her one last time.

I'd started late, ridden slow, dawdling  
 thinking, if at all, of her and the frontier  
 between those that love that you're always crossing,  
 never conquering and that darkens and closes  
 suddenly and irrevocably when one of you goes.

When you're like that in winter mountains, night  
 slips down sly, a panther's shadow,  
 first a hint of something dark in shadows  
 then suddenly, it's on you quick. Blank and cold.  
 So, it was full brittle winter night  
 when I reached camp and learned a visitor  
 had been to dine and left a mess for "thank you."  
 Bear by all sign. It was leveled, tent shredded.  
 Just white mounds in snow. My late night breakfast  
 gone to a gamier paunch than mine. Gone,  
 with the job not done and fifteen miles to the Lodge  
 and it closed by the time I'd worked down  
 those winter ridges through night. And suddenly,  
 it was dark, with dark you could almost touch.  
 Wind has a sound in winter mountains—a mournful,  
 hymn-like thrum—that tells you nothing's there  
 in a way that teaches hope there might be.



I salvaged what I could by touch in the dark,  
tented tarp scraps and tatters over  
my lariat, tree to tree. Swept a floor  
with my mittened hand down to ground.  
The fire shook shadowy fringes in the dark.

I couldn't sleep. Started thinking how iffy  
the drift is between wake and sleep,  
quick and not, just a slip—  
like a fish you've touched, nearly landed,  
your hand numb in water, almost feeling—  
Then it's gone, a shimmer in water shadows.

Then—she was there. Jennie.  
Your grandma.  
Mother, the way I knew her before  
the war, not young—  
like her picture there,  
but in her prime, the way  
you always know your mother.  
She was there—  
like your hand is there  
on the table, and  
she spoke to me.  
*Why don't you have more faith, son?*  
*Where's your faith?*

She said my name in her gentle voice.  
That's all she said. I don't know what I answered.  
I said something. Don't remember sleeping.  
It wasn't sleep. Sleep I would know.  
But I was sitting there with the air of something  
I'd been saying lingering in the frost of my breath.

I'll stop with that because it's all I know.  
Besides, your smirk tells me you wonder if I'm touched—  
if I believe she breached the grave to caress,  
cool as stone, the rasp of this old beard?

'Course not, no more than I fingered that bear  
that welfared on my supper in the mountains.  
But both were real as the shadow of your thumb—  
there, where you rub it on your cup of soup.

## REVIEWS

### A Plurality of Competing Selves

Wayne C. Booth. *My Many Selves: The Quest for a Plausible Harmony*. Logan: Utah State University Press, 2006. 321 pp. Cloth: \$34.95; paper: \$24.95 paper.

*Reviewed by Neal W. Kramer, BYU English Department, former student of Wayne Booth, and author of reviews and articles about and stimulated by Booth's ideas*

Wayne C. Booth's autobiography is unusual for its genre. My first response, quite frankly, was disappointment. Unlike some authors who deem their life stories important enough to publish, Booth chose not to celebrate his tremendous successes. He tells us little about teaching awards, critically acclaimed scholarship, positions of great responsibility, the money he made, or even a strong sense of personal satisfaction with his life. Instead, he chose to write a rhetorically sophisticated critical autobiography. Its basic premise is the rejection of the idea of a unified self and its replacement by a plurality of often competing selves. Thus, the book focuses on a set of internal and external conflicts among the various selves. This device, obviously, could easily have turned into a simplistic account of conflicts between good selves and evil selves, or an attempt to replace worse selves with better selves. At times, it comes perilously close to being just that.

The book is redeemed by its creation of dialogues among the many selves, dialogues that never promise a final truth about a single self. These dialogues are at various times brutally honest, contradictory, shallow, gently loving, and seriously intellectual. They address personal moral failings, perceptions of weakness, moments of achievement, and great personal loss. The work taken together produces what the title promises: a plausible harmony among the selves. In this review, I will address three aspects of the work that help to produce that harmony and that make the book worth the effort of reading it: method, Mormonism, and morality.

#### **Method**

Wayne Booth the literary critic and theorist is best known for his commitment to two methods of understanding texts: rhetorical criticism

and pluralism. Both are present in his autobiography from beginning to end. In fact, one could easily say that the autobiography is as much an attempt to show the limits and powers of the methods as it is an attempt to tell a story of his life.

Booth's rhetorical criticism is effective because he understands the complex relationships among authors and readers, orators and audiences. In *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, he postulates that authors are mixed selves: actual and implied. The actual author is the person who writes. The implied author is the author the text desires the reader to infer from it. By making such a distinction, Booth separates the actual author from the text and strongly suggests that the author whom readers engage is as much a part of the text as that author is a person whose intentions inform a work of fiction. Booth does not deny intentionality, but he certainly complicates it. The same holds true for readers. The implied reader is the reader an author imagines, the person he or she hopes will read the novel. The actual reader is the person, desired or not, who actually reads. *My Many Selves* overtly employs these distinctions.

The autobiography is rhetorically complicated by the presence of multiple texts by the same author. The first is the collection of journals Booth kept over his lifetime. The second is material written by the contemporary Booth, who is interpreting and editing those original texts. Thus, we get Booth the actual author, Booth the implied author, Booth the implied reader, and Booth the actual reader. The rhetorical situation is even more complicated by the other implied and actual readers, those of us Booth hoped for and those who actually choose to read the book. The complexity leads to a very rich interplay among perspectives: Booth interpreting Booth, being interpreted by the reader, etc.

At the same time, the book is unabashed in its awareness that multiple authors and readers generate multiple perspectives. Booth chooses to present us with a plurality of Booths, characters as it were, who represent different perspectives from which to consider his life. These characters include a puritan, a lover, a luster, a hypocrite, an ambitious man, an idealist, a Marxist, a bourgeois, a cheerful poser, a very private griever, a soldier who conscientiously objects, a petty thief, a conscientious giver, a comforter, a generalist, a musician and a true scholar. We meet other characters: WayneB, WayneC, VainB, HypocriteB, MoralB, AmbitionB, etc. All of them, under the direction of our implied author, engage in meaningful dialogue about the actual Wayne C. Booth. The method is risky but ulti-

mately satisfying, because at times it coaxes out genuine wisdom. One of the sources of that wisdom is his lifelong engagement with Mormons and Mormonism.

### Among the Mormons

Many readers of *Dialogue* will be especially interested in how this lapsed Mormon, who achieved so much in his life, engaged the church and culture of his childhood. In this book, the engagement is often superficial, with Mormonism serving as a weak straw man against which to measure Booth's escape from a parochial culture he remembers, without much critical evaluation of his often superficial and immature responses to it. As an intellectually gifted young man in American Fork and then Provo, Utah, Booth found himself constrained by claims to certainty he found to be parochial, naive, and dogmatic. He overtly rejects Mormonism's "monolithic dogmatic truth" (12). At times, he emphasizes the certainty he cannot abide with italics, as in "*The one true faith*" or "*This is the place*" (5). His own naive certainty, which later in the book he calls being "deflected by too much 'Enlightenment' rationalism" (306), protests that "the thinker in me had cast off dogmatic ignorance and could now pursue truth, obtain learning, even become genuinely wise" (6-7). He comes across as a very smug, overconfident scholarship boy and appears not to realize that many other intellectuals made peace with the same doubts and found happy lives inside the Church by helping change those very attitudes. Thus, having become a "scientific" truth seeker, he believed he could rationalize himself into giving away his faith. Indeed, by early adulthood, he had convinced himself to become an atheist. He turned his back not only on Mormonism but also on religion.

Beyond the problem of absolute certainty, which is a life-long concern, Booth also focuses on his family's readiness, which he attributes to Mormonism, to deal harshly with "lapsed." He tells the story of a visit from the California side of the family who had slid away from the faith and recalls their treatment by his Utah County family as hypocrisy. His family's actions, familiar to many who grew up in strict and judgmental homes, Mormon or otherwise, were not very Christian: "They were always treated with explicit contempt behind their backs and with implicit anxiety and sometimes even open exhortation when they visited" (11). He goes on to express frustration with "piety tests" (14) like the Word of Wisdom, violations of which he deems relatively harmless. He decries Church

leaders who seem to hide the facts about LDS history and replace them with myths of Mormon moral superiority to all other peoples in the world. There is nothing surprising about this; in fact, today it seems more like a caricature or cliché than serious engagement with the culture.

What, then, does his engagement with his Mormon past reveal? The clichéd response would describe Mormons as “those dogmatic faithful ones [who] threaten the world with ignorance and intolerance.” Here is the revelation: “Now I see this as a gross distortion. Those ‘dogmatic faithful ones’ are on average among the most generous-spirited, most admirable of human creatures” (7). The earlier, clichéd response still crops up throughout the book, but there is also a generosity of spirit that suggests Booth made peace with the past. “Even now the contrast between the lives lived by insiders and those of many lapsed shocks me and sometimes drives me back toward being fully active” (7). It reveals the admirable side of a lifelong pursuit of “the deepest of all human values: understanding—sympathetic, serious listening to others” (133). Booth’s most profound offer to his readers is a guide to the morality of understanding, derived from his commitment to pluralism.

### Morality (Ethics)

At what now looks to be a crucial moment in Booth’s career, he received a grant from the Ford Foundation to read “ethical philosophy on my own” (215). His work afterward suggests that it was a genuine turning point for many reasons. Among other things, he sought to learn “the genuine philosophical grounds for ethical judgments” (215). Perhaps the most important remnant of his upbringing was his ongoing desire not only to live a moral life but also to discover the intellectual grounds for ethical behavior. A side-effect of the search was the discovery that as an atheist, “the philosophers’ Gods made more and more sense to me” (215). But the crux of the effort was to discover a way to think well about ideas that are deceptively simple and often overlooked.

This book barely scratches the surface of what Booth discovered, practiced, and taught about the ethical life of the mind. But Booth does give us a glimpse of his search into “the central moral questions, what is good for us and what isn’t, and how can we come to any kind of agreement about such questions” (218). The key for Booth is agreement. The exclusivist attitudes of his childhood and youth are replaced by an honest quest for understanding, both intellectual and ethical. The place from which the quest begins is the realization that “I can’t hope for anything de-

cisive" (298). Certitude is not the goal. Certitude has as its cruelest consequence the loss of ongoing dialogue. Instead, Booth seeks the joint pursuit of common ground that disputants share, hoping that a genuine discussion of the conflict could become possible. He desires reconciliation.

When we reach the climax in the book's final chapter, Booth's testimony as it were, we are faced with the discovery "that all of the disputes boil down to a simple conflict of three irrefutable, ultimate universal values, oversimplified with the labels Truth, Goodness, and Beauty" (298). Booth's conclusion—that in everyday experience and in intellectual life there are "conflicts among these three absolutes, requiring choices that violate one or the other" (299)—means that one of the three values must prevail. For him, "the supreme value of the three is 'goodness' and . . . the pursuit of goodness dictates negotiation" (299). The rejection of truth as a supreme value may be surprising. But Booth still believes in "pursuing truth" (302). He rejects jumping too quickly to conclusions about truth that undermine goodwill and thereby stifle ongoing efforts to keep communication open. Persuasion, respect, and agreement are ethically more important than grimly hanging on to truth claims that would better be subjected to dialogue. The case for this position is the justification for Booth's career.

In conclusion, I recommend reading this book, not because it brings me into careful intellectual engagement with powerful ideas or gives me insight into the pursuit of excellence. Booth's body of work outside the autobiography does that. Read this book to gain some insight into the need for understanding and goodness in a world where people refuse to speak to one another. Read it to meet a man with whom we no longer have the pleasure of probing, seeking, and learning together. Read it to meet Wayne C. Booth, whose pursuit of goodness made him a very good man.

## Getting at the Marrow

William A. Wilson. *The Marrow of Human Experience: Essays on Folklore*. Edited by Jill Terry Rudy. Logan: Utah State University Press, 2006. vi + 321 pp. Cloth: \$24.95.

*Reviewed by Edward A. Geary, retired from Brigham Young University's Department of English, living now in Huntington, Utah*

*The Marrow of Human Experience* collects seventeen of William A. ("Bert") Wilson's essays from three decades of a distinguished career. The topics of the essays vary, but all of them reflect, in one way or another, Wilson's dominant interests and passions: the promotion of folklore studies as a humane discipline distinct from, yet with vital connections to literature, history, and the social sciences; an advocacy for the concerns and interests of ordinary people in both public policy and the projects of the academy; and a rigorous critique of the assumptions and methods of folklore studies, past, present, and future.

Jill Terry Rudy's well-designed edition arranges the essays topically under three headings, "The Importance of Folklore," "Folklore and National Identity," and "Folklore, Religion, and Who We Are." Each essay is preceded by a brief commentary by another folklorist, including prominent national figures, institutional colleagues from Brigham Young University and Utah State University, and Wilson's former students. The introductions are useful for setting the essays in their disciplinary contexts. The best of them go further by engaging the issues raised by Wilson and briefly exploring some of their implications.

The six essays collected under the "Importance of Folklore" heading include eloquent pleas for breaking down institutional and disciplinary barriers between folklore and related disciplines in the humanities and social sciences. Some of these arguments are directed primarily to folklorists, pointing out the dangers of disciplinary isolation. Other essays are aimed more at historians or literary scholars, suggesting ways in which folklore studies can complement and enrich the work of those fields. One essay, "Documenting Folklore," is designed as a primer for folklore students, but its clarity and succinctness make it an effective introductory overview of the field for general readers.

In "The Deeper Necessity: Folklore and the Humanities," Wilson attacks the "evolutionary view of folklore" that characterizes it as "primitive, subliterate artistic or musical material from which the 'higher' art forms eventually evolved" (15). He insists, rather, that

there is no such thing as folk literature—there is simply literature, which I would define as the artistic expression in words of significant human experience. Sometimes that expression is made through the written words of individual authors, sometimes through spoken words in face-to-face encounters among people usually sharing the same social identity. These different modes of transmission and the different audiences to whom the folklore is addressed will, of course, require somewhat different methods



of analysis. But that should not obscure the fact that behind each expression lies the human urge, that deeper necessity, to communicate significant experience and emotion and to influence the surrounding social world through the artistic, and therefore powerful, use of language. And neither of these expressions is any less literature, or art, than the other. (16)

The essays assembled in the section titled "Folklore and National Identity" reflect Wilson's groundbreaking work on Finnish folklore. Wilson's interest in Finnish culture was formed during his service there as an LDS missionary and strengthened by his marriage to Finland native Hannele Blomqvist. His knowledge of the Finnish language won him a National Defense Education Act fellowship for graduate study at Indiana University. When his interests turned toward anthropology and folklore, it was natural that he should pursue these studies in a Finnish context. A major strand in the development of folklore as an academic discipline was the effort of nineteenth-century Finnish scholars to collect the traditional songs and tales that formed a repository of Finnish language and culture among a people dominated for many generations by the kingdom of Sweden and later by Imperial Russia. As a result, the people lacked a coherent sense of national identity until one was provided by the folklorists, most importantly a rural physician named Elias Lönnrot, who collected peasant songs and arranged them to form the Finnish national epic, the *Kalevala*. Wilson's study of this "romantic nationalism" achieved its fullest expression in his prize-winning book, *Folklore and Nationalism in Modern Finland* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976). Essays in the present volume examine the roots of romantic nationalism in the ideas of Giambattista Vico and Johann Gottfried Herder, and its flowering in the music of Jean Sibelius. Characteristically, Wilson also argues that Finns and Finnish Americans should value the folk expressions of their current societies, and not only their past traditions.

Mormon readers will probably be most interested in the third section of the book, which presents seven essays on Mormon folklore, including pieces on missionary folklore, Mormon humor, and the persistence of legends of the Three Nephites in contemporary Mormon society. In "The Concept of the West, and Other Hindrances to the Study of Mormon Folklore," Wilson criticizes the historical and environmental determinism that long dominated scholarly studies of "Mormon country." He writes: "If we are ever to understand Mormons by examining their folklore, we must turn our eyes from the past to the present, from the rural

landscape to urban centers, and from the West in general to the faith and commitment that give unity and direction to Mormon life. And we must finally discover behind Mormon folklore typical human beings coming to terms through their lore with enduring life and death questions that know neither temporal nor cultural boundaries." And to do that, he points out, "We must begin with the religious individual, with *homo religiosus*" (180).

Wilson follows his own advice to begin with the individual in the concluding essay in the volume, "Personal Narratives," in which he explores how the reminiscences of his mother, Lucile Green Wilson, constitute a kind of "family novel" (270). These family stories are "based on history, [and] sometimes approximate history, but are not history." Instead, "they are fictions—stories created from carefully selected events from their own lives, just as short stories, novels, and epics are created from carefully selected details from the worlds of their authors" (268). Wilson continues:

Reduced to cold print, the stories may not seem particularly artful. But if you could have been there during the tellings, if you could have seen my mother's gestures and facial expressions, if you could have heard her voice rise in excited exclamation, drop now to a hushed whisper, move to a dry chuckle, break into tears—if you, that is, could have heard these stories in live performance, with a charged and ongoing dynamic relation occurring between teller and listeners, you would have understood their power to excite my fancy, engage my sympathies, and move me with joy or terror. (269)

This moving essay probes "the marrow of human experience" by examining simultaneously Wilson's mother's experiences as represented by her stories and Wilson's own experience as a listener-participant at their performance. It provides a fitting culmination to the volume and clarifies Wilson's earlier declaration: "What we must have . . . is not more studies of folklore in literature, but rather careful analyses of folklore as literature" (15).

## Big Wonderful, Little Masterpiece

Kevin Holdsworth. *Big Wonderful: Notes from Wyoming*. Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2006. 192 pp., \$26.95.

*Reviewed by Mary Lythgoe Bradford, Leesburg, Virginia, who once wrote a partial*

*memoir called, Leaving Home: Personal Essays (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1987)*

Kevin Holdsworth is a real salt-of-the-earth Wyoming transplant much like my alkali-of-the-earth ancestors who settled the Big Horn Basin in 1900. A bona fide naturalist-environmentalist, he fearlessly explores trailheads in the mountains around him, speaking honestly about their dangers and amusingly about the god-awful Wyoming winds and treacherous weather patterns. He is frank about his reasons for leaving Utah, that “cemetery with lights,” escaping across the border into Green River, Wyoming (18).

The sub-title, “Notes from Wyoming,” is a catch-all for his poetry, essays, bits of essays, and other people’s poetry in an appealing coming-of-age journal that takes him through his early life in Utah, his move to Wyoming, his second marriage to Jennifer, not a Mormon, and the difficult birth of their only son. He is now in his mid-forties, so we may expect an engaging sequel.

The first section, “Howdy,” introduces Holdsworth as a young man with “the ability to keep two opposites in mind,” which he claims helps him “to negotiate this vale of tears.” It may have something to do with “the way past and present co-exist in our minds. Where we are is also where we have been. We have to escape in order to return” (4). My sentiments exactly!

His desire to leave Utah leads him to Hoboken, New Jersey—on Sinatra’s street—and writing his first Western. He believed that leaving for the Big Apple would satisfy his lust for the larger world. But he found Manhattan to be the “most insular, self-absorbed, indeed the most provincial” (4) destination ever, only twelve miles long, in contrast to Wyoming where you can walk thirteen miles without seeing a soul. While writing his unsuccessful Western, he realized that he had to leave the West in order to make peace with his westernness—and Mormonness.

As a “callow yet sunburned and romantic youth,” he began to think that nature “held all the truth and the beauty” in contrast to Salt Lake City, “the most industrious, business-adept, hard-won-is-virtuous, and heaven-headed society imaginable” (7). Even though Mormon hymns celebrate the everlasting hills, nature is kept at arm’s length and exists to be subdued. He realized that the mountains and their canyons were his true home, their flowery meadows the playground that took him

out of his “stultifying life” (8). He realized that his family is important to him; but despite the sincere efforts of many worthy folk, he knew he could never fit in.

Holdsworth’s family lived in Holladay, Utah, just a few miles south of East Mill Creek, my childhood home, and he attended the same schools, though much later. He begins one of his essays with an apology to his art teacher, one Jay Henefer who won my own pubescent loyalty when he lovingly critiqued my primitive paintings. Holdsworth, who was in Henefer’s detention classes, now knows that Henefer was guarding values buried in the artificiality of today’s malls, home developments, and other materialistic symbols. His teacher liked to be addressed as “Jay of Henefer” as in “Leonardo of Vinci,” a reminder of lost glory. Holdsworth pays tribute to the village of Henefer, which happens to house the graves of my Lythgoe founding pioneers. “Located on the middle run of the Weber River just where the Mormon Trail took a hard wrong-way left . . . to become a crossroads going to Zion or on to California,” Henefer is now “under siege from trophy houses and the Wasatch-back growth” (17).

By leaving Utah, Holdsworth learns to value his ancestry. He becomes an expert on the Willie Company of handcart pioneers and joins a protest movement designed to stop the LDS Church from leasing Martin’s Cove. I myself visited Martin’s Cove with the Mormon History Association in 2006, where I was suddenly gripped by a desire to know better my great-grandmother, Margaret Kewley of the Martin Company, who with her parents and brothers left the Isle of Man for the snows of Wyoming. Holdsworth, too, allows his research into his Willie ancestors to lead him further into understanding and respecting his Mormon background.

Holdsworth objects to Mormon ownership of public lands because it violates church-state traditions and damages the land with its tourism. He looks askance at the “re-creations” of the handcart disaster. “If the pilgrims really want to gain an appreciation of their forebears’ hardships, they should make the journey in February, and if they are interested in historical veracity their pilgrimage should last 100 days rather than the current three days filled with socializing, testimonials, song, propane lanterns, and other modern conveniences” (89). To substantiate his point, he cites a co-founder of the Alliance for Historic Wyoming and also historian Lyndia MacDowell Carter, whose research has documented twenty-five to thirty deaths at Devil’s Gate and none at the site the Church claims as sa-

cred (89). He concludes that “the case for the historical importance of Martin’s Cove is not a strong one” (90).

He also feels queasy about using the deaths of ancestors for missionary purposes. In fact, he thinks it wrong to make a public relations coup out of the handcart tragedy. And still he asks himself, “How can I honor my ancestors’ sacrifice, if I don’t believe the creed?”; then answers his own question: “I cannot reach out to them across the ages except by knowing these places and trying to know what the crossing meant, for it was the singly defining moment in their lives and indeed in ours” (97). “The story is one of faith, surely,” he says. “It is also a story of survival, of fortitude, of Holy Wrath, of humanity . . .” (99–100).

Kevin and Jennifer became plaintiffs in the lawsuit that pitted the ACLU and the Western Land Exchange against the U.S. Bureau of Land Management in the agreement that gave management control of Martin’s Cove to the LDS Church. After many emails and meetings, a miracle happened. The case was settled out of court in a settlement that allowed all parties to claim victory. “Hey,” says Holdsworth, “the system works. Sometimes it is good to talk over one’s differences. It’s possible to reach a compromise, to be realistic about limits. Talking is better than fighting” (92).

The remaining chapters are equally inspiring. Holdsworth crafts a love letter to Wyoming, but his love is not blind. He recognizes its inhospitable climate, its boom-and-bust economy, its go-it-alone mentality. Nonetheless, he cultivates it and learns from it.

Amused at his own inadequacies, Holdsworth treats us to exciting encounters with avalanches, bears, and wild horses. He rescues his beloved dog from a frozen river and lingers over the birth of his son, Christopher, who survives a frightening operation to become his companionable pupil. When Kevin’s mother refuses to attend her grandson’s non-Mormon christening, he is forgiving, especially when his father and brother defy his mother and show up.

Holdsworth closes the book with a beautiful meditation, advising Christopher to “sit still and watch . . . , to dawdle on a warm day becoming windy, to attend to this shallow lake beneath granite hills . . . , to share in the knowledge that none of it lasts long enough, . . . but that the best way to honor its values is to be here to see it” (88).

I agree with the *Deseret News* reviewer (and yes, in the interests of full disclosure, he’s my brother) who called Holdsworth “a convincing presence, and a Western writer with a future” (Dennis Lythgoe, “Big Won-

derful: Notes from Wyoming," *Deseret Morning News*, Sunday, February 4, 2007).

# Seeds of Faith in City Soil: Growing Up Mormon in New York City

*Neylan McBaine*

## **A Miracle in Manhattan**

In June 2004, I found myself, late on a Saturday night, climbing underneath the dressing room doors of the Manhattan New York Temple. Audio/visual equipment for the next morning's temple dedication blocked most of the dressing room doors, but my goal was to reach every locker in both the men's and women's dressing rooms. Each key needed to be labeled with the corresponding locker's number, and then a spare key had to be placed in the temple's facilities closet.

Aside from an unusually private glimpse into the after-hours life of a temple, I also had a remarkable opportunity to serve. Who would have thought that labeling locker keys could bring the level of satisfaction and joy that it did for me that night? I felt as if I had done nothing in my life as productive as labeling keys.

But most remarkable of all is the fact that there is a temple in Manhattan at all. A brief summary of the Church in Manhattan testifies to something amazing: There are currently 42,000 members of the Church in the New York area, there are six separate meetinghouses within Manhattan alone, and most of that growth has occurred within the past 20 years. At the dedicatory services for the temple and at the fireside the night before, the temple was called "a miracle" by President Hinckley and others many times.

I like to think I played a small part in that miracle, which consisted of the fact that, in a large, transient city, there is a committed, faithful

community of Saints strong enough to merit a House of the Lord. After all, I was born and raised three blocks from the building that now houses the temple, on Columbus Avenue in Manhattan, across the street from Lincoln Center where my mother sang for the Metropolitan Opera. For twenty-one years, I walked to church—to the chapel of the Manhattan wards—walking up Broadway on quiet Sunday mornings while the imposing cultural temples of the Metropolitan Opera House, the New York State Theater, and Avery Fisher Hall lay dormant after lively Saturday night performances. I was blessed as a baby in that building and baptized in that building, and I was taught the gospel in that building. During my years in Young Women, I helped set up bake sales on the sidewalk outside, peddling banana bread and chocolate chip cookies to visitors at the Museum of Arts and Crafts next door in an effort to raise money for girls' camp. I played the part of a young shepherdess in *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, which we performed in that building with professional costumes and sets on loan from the neighboring theaters. As a young pianist studying at Juilliard, I thrilled to play the concert grand Steinway piano in the building's chapel. While I was in high school, my walk to the building for early morning seminary happened before dawn, when "the city that never sleeps" was, in fact, asleep, the *New York Times* being thrown to drowsy shopkeepers who were the first to rise.

I believe in the sudden, stark miracles that shock us into believing, like most of the miracles Christ performed during his life of healing the sick and raising the dead. But closer to my experience are the miracles that require hindsight to see their magic. As a child and youth, I didn't think—nor did any of us think—we were part of anything miraculous. I don't think I realized how different my church experience was from other young Latter-day Saints living in less urban environments. I went to Primary, gave talks in church, attended girls' camp. Other young Latter-day Saints were doing those things. But now as I look back on those years and that place from the vantage point of the temple dedication, it's clear that a miracle was in fact occurring as I was busy working on my Personal Progress award and attending seminary. The kingdom of the Lord was being built up all around me, growing the numbers of members and the strength of our faith as the years went by.

Whatever small role I might have played in this miracle, it didn't need me to succeed. But I needed it. While the kingdom grew up around me, it also grew up within me, a direct result, I believe, of the time and



place in which I was living. Yes, New York gave me my testimony. Or, more accurately, the city acted as a sacred conduit in which I could confront feelings and have experiences that led me to Christ.

### A City of Contrasts

New York City might not seem like the ideal place for a young woman to develop a testimony of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Many people I've met since growing up there seem curious about how I remained faithful in the midst of such a Babylon. I suppose the loud city streets and concrete jungle seem contradictory to the stereotypical vision of suburban bliss where the Spirit thrives in backyards of large family homes. But when I examine my childhood and try to determine what elements of my experiences helped form my testimony of the gospel, the fact that I grew up in New York City is high on the list of positive contributors. For me, it was *because* I lived in one of the largest cities in the world that my testimony grew strong.

My testimony grew out of contrasts, out of the black-and-white distinctions that are so prevalent and obvious in a place like New York. A friend of mine gained her testimony after September 11, 2001, when she reasoned that the evil demonstrated on that day had to be counterbalanced with an equal but opposite force for good. That reasoning caused her to investigate and later join the Church. Similarly, I witnessed opposing forces at work in my urban surroundings and had to choose which side I wanted to be on. My conversion didn't happen overnight as the result of some catastrophic event, like my friend's. Rather, my testimony unfolded over years as I observed the choices made by the variety of people around me. Daily life offered people of every political leaning, wealthy people and poor people, righteous people, cruel people, educated and uneducated, successful and unsuccessful. I witnessed some of the finest professionals in their fields, attracted to New York because of the professional opportunities. I saw what choices and sacrifices they had to make to get where they were. I saw women's purses snatched on the street, but I also saw kind strangers offer warm food to the homeless. I saw into the lives of wealthy Park Avenue socialites and discovered they had no greater claim on happiness than the rest of us. I joined the sister missionaries as they taught single-parent, African American families in Harlem who had humility and faith to be envied by every white, middle-class Utahn.

We were all crammed together in an intense and geographically

constrained community. Distinctions and variety among Heavenly Father's vast array of children forced me to constantly ask myself, Who do I want to be? Whose choices do I want to emulate? I had to be deliberate in my choices; too many contrasting forces were swirling around for me not to be. One bitter winter night when I was about ten years old, my mom and I rushed home along the sidewalk, bundled in our wool coats and shielding ourselves from an icy wind. Peeking through our scarves, we glimpsed a homeless woman, crouched against a wall, her possessions held close to her but her hand reached out to passersby. In the 1980s, the homeless population was a serious problem in New York City; but we rarely gave money, preferring instead to pay our tithing and volunteer at soup kitchens. But this particular woman who pled for help as we hurried by pitifully cried out that she was pregnant. We were only a block from our apartment building and so my mom and I hurried home and scrambled to find an old blanket or sweater that we could give her. I donated an old pink ballet bag that was big enough to carry our offerings back across the street. We returned with our contributions which the woman quickly wrapped around herself, but we were surprised to hear her ask us if we had any cash instead. We shook our heads and ran home, warmed by the goodness of our deed.

About six months later, in the summer, we encountered the same homeless woman in the same spot—and she was still “pregnant”! Were we sorry that we had gone out of our way to help a deceitful vagabond, who may not have needed our help as much as she said she did? Should the experience have made us skeptical of those in need? Should we have resented this woman's false need or let the opportunity to serve prompt us to greater Christ-like charity? Should we mete out love only to those who love us back? Such were the dilemmas of my childhood.

Implicit in a faithful Mormon life is the willingness to be obedient, even when we don't always understand the purpose behind a commandment, and childhood in New York City taught me the importance of trusting laws and leaders in an earthly context before I was ever forced to trust in them spiritually. Outside major metropolises, a childhood is often characterized by its freedoms: the freedom to play unsupervised in the backyard, the freedom to run over to a neighboring friend's house, the freedom to ride a bike in the driveway. Growing up in a city, however, I and other New York City children did not enjoy these freedoms. In fact, our lives were characterized by limitations: we had to hold our parents' hands

while crossing the street, we couldn't leave our parents' view while in public, we had to tell our parents where we were at all times. We couldn't go outside and play, we couldn't run over to a neighbor's house (unless the friend lived in the same apartment building), and there was certainly no riding bikes in driveways. We had to take bikes over to Central Park to ride them safely. For a child in New York City, it is a fact of life that dangers and obstacles lurk around every corner.

And these dangers are far less subtle or imaginary than the dangers in suburbia might be. While nightmares for children my age living elsewhere might have involved monsters or images from scary movies, my recurring nightmare was of a homeless man spitting on me (which really happened) or worse, snatching me away from my mother as we walked down the street (which didn't happen). Whereas children outside cities might be warned of getting hit by a car while crossing the street on a red light or, as they get older, being offered drugs or cigarettes, these dangers remain theoretical for much of their childhoods. But for city kids, crossing the street amid traffic is a real danger, and being offered drugs may very well be a real occurrence. Instead of being told never to talk to strangers, we city kids are instructed carefully about which strangers we should, in fact, talk to if we're in trouble. Look for the "Safe Haven" signs in store windows. If you're feeling in danger while walking down the street, take hold of a grown-up's hand while waiting for a green light and ask him or her to help you. Get out of a taxi if the driver takes you on an unknown route.

Learning about danger and how to handle it was a real part of my youth. I distinctly remember the first time I walked the half-block from my apartment building to the corner deli all by myself. I was probably about six years old. My mother and our doorman, Frank, stood outside our building watching me as I walked down the block, lost sight of them for a minute as I bought a quart of milk from the Hungarian deli owner, and walked back to my own building. It was my first foray into the world alone. I also remember my first solo taxi ride in fourth grade as I hailed my own cab from my school on East End Avenue and drove across town to Lincoln Center where I was due for a rehearsal for the New York City Ballet's *Nutcracker*, in which I played a soldier. In both instances, I remember a heightened sense of awareness, both of myself and of my surroundings. Did anyone with me on the street make me nervous? Was I watching the traffic lights and looking out for cars? Was I appropriately firm with the taxi

driver so he knew not to take advantage of me by taking the long route and charging me more? In these instances, my safety depended on my willingness to follow the rules I had been taught and to put my self-preservation above all other distractions or temptations.

If my physical safety depended on rules like holding hands while crossing the street and not taking candy from strangers, it wasn't hard to make the leap to believe that my spiritual safety would also depend on following rules. Hence, what may seem to be a childhood of fear and limitation actually became preparation for an adulthood of wisdom and faith. Laws, leaders, guidelines, and commandments were to be trusted, followed. Not rebelled against. And as I grew older, the principles of physical safety that I had learned and exercised as a child allowed me far greater freedoms as a young adult. I could go anywhere (clubs, bars, unsafe parts of town), interact with any person (drunk friends, an unknown taxi driver), and feel safe and in control. Similarly, following principles of spiritual safety allowed me to expand my intellectual understanding of the gospel while remaining in control of my faith. I trusted spiritual principles, I trusted spiritual leaders, and, like a child who doesn't understand why it's important to hold a grown-up's hand, I sometimes trusted without understanding why.

### **Manhattan Mormons Contribute to My Faith**

While this life of contrasts, extremes, and dangers was forcing me to evaluate who I wanted to be, several specific aspects of Mormon life in New York City helped me find my way to Christ. Music is a flagstone on my path to belief, and the exceptional musical talent unique to New York City created opportunities for me to feel the Spirit at a young age. My mother, opera singer Ariel Bybee, has herself a special love for sacred music; she likes to say that she learned to sing by harmonizing with her siblings on hymns. My own youth was focused on becoming an accomplished pianist, and I spent hours a day and months every summer pursuing this goal. Primary songs, hymns, and religious music from Handel to Gounod to Copland dominated our home worship, especially as my own skills matured and I could accompany my mother at firesides, concerts, and on recordings. Our family's worship was echoed in the Lincoln Center chapel. Students at Juilliard or the Manhattan School of Music, established musicians and those with stars still in their eyes, sang and played practically every Sunday. On guitars, in brass quintets, in chamber trios

and vocal quartets, exceptional musicians spoke the Spirit's language as they praised God.

The chapel at Lincoln Center has the only full pipe organ that I've ever seen in an LDS meetinghouse. In addition, an anonymous donor in the late 1970s gave the chapel a nine-foot concert grand Steinway piano, which itself creates a musical atmosphere there that can't be replicated by the standard issue baby grand Kawai found in most other chapels. These world-class instruments were rarely neglected since New York's musical training and professional opportunities drew exceptional Mormon musicians from across the country.

Aside from my mother, several other respected musicians stand out in my mind for their contributions to my feeling the Spirit: David Fletcher, composer and organist, convinced me I was hearing the choirs of angels when he played the pipe organ in sacrament meeting or led the yearly Christmas concert. I vividly remember singing "Joy to the World" with hundreds of fellow audience members and wiping the tears from my face as David modulated to a higher key for each verse and literally pulled out all the stops. We stood, faces toward heaven, as if watching our worshipful sounds rush to God's ears. David also wrote several original hymns which I have performed often with my mother, repeatedly giving me sacred communion with Heavenly Father and my mother.

Murray Boren, currently the composer-in-residence at BYU, also made his mark in the 1980s. He composed an Easter cantata performed by our stake. Noel and Royce Twitchell, he a singer and she a pianist in Broadway orchestras, never hesitated to share their own exceptional talents. Alison Dalton, currently a violinist with the Chicago Symphony, also lingers in my memory. My own piano teacher, Yoshie Akimoto Eldredge, was a member of the Church (although she lived outside New York in New Canaan, Connecticut); and in our student/mentor relationship, we shared the common bond of musical worship. More recently, I had the opportunity to perform with Jennifer Welch-Babbidge at a multi-stake concert in Carnegie Hall. The moment she opened her mouth, I recognized my mother's own vocal successor. Indeed, Jennifer has had an even more stellar opera career than my mother, appearing on the front page of the *New York Times* when she performed *Lucia di Lammermoor* at New York City Opera while seven months pregnant. And although I haven't met them, the Five Browns currently represent the musical environment in the New York wards. They are the rage among young

pianists: five siblings, each with enough talent to attend Juilliard and record several popular albums of five-piano music.

Music isn't the only art form thoroughly represented by the Manhattan Mormons. In 1999 a local lyricist and poet, Glen Nelson, formed the Mormon Artists Group which Glen himself profiled in *Dialogue*.<sup>1</sup> This group highlights and promotes the work of photographers, writers, visual artists, and musicians who are excelling in their chosen fields. But from the time of W. W. Phelps down to the Tabernacle Choir and now Gladys Knight's Saints Unified Voices, music has been the enduring artistic tradition in the Church. It is predominantly an amateur tradition, evoking visions of well-meaning ward choirs, timid hymn singing, and teenagers struggling through bad pop arrangements of Primary songs. We theoretically believe in the ability of music to be a conduit for the Spirit—hence the oft-quoted verse of the revelation to Emma Smith that the “song of the righteous is a prayer unto me” (D&C 25:12)—but few have had the opportunity to really experience music as legitimate worship, as piercing and testifying as prayer or temple attendance. For me, growing up in Manhattan as someone who was already being taught the language of music, the unique group of world-class musicians that gathered in the Manhattan chapel gave me that experience regularly.

Being raised in the New York wards also exposed me to local Church leaders who, as a group, were of a more consistent quality than I have found elsewhere in the Church. Of course, great bishops, stake presidents, and youth leaders can be found throughout our membership, and their “greatness” can be defined by their rock-solid testimonies, their management abilities, or their talent at relating to young people. But looking back, what I remember most about my local leaders is how they taught me to value the world outside our Lincoln Center chapel. The insularity and fear of being “of the world” that sometimes characterizes our people was completely nonexistent among my leaders. It was replaced by a fierce energy to do whatever it took to get me, as an impressionable child, to look beyond my Mormonness, to replace insularity with an ability to appreciate all of God's children, and to replace judgment with gratitude for variety. Thus, my Young Women's class attended High Holy Days services at a local synagogue; my family attended Christmas Eve mass at St. John the Divine (the largest cathedral in the United States); and youth conferences gave me, a white girl, the opportunity to be a minority among my predominantly Hispanic stake youth.

This external focus may have been because my leaders were often young people who had proactively chosen to come to New York for its offerings, professional or cultural, and who therefore were characterized by a heightened sense of adventure and confidence. This open-minded energy in my leaders is best exemplified by my seminary teacher, Raelene Shelley, who spoke Hebrew fluently, had attended Hebrew University, and regularly attended services at her local synagogue. But no one I've ever met has had a stronger testimony of Christ, so much so that, over the summer after my sophomore year of high school, she arranged to take our entire seminary class to Israel for two weeks. I have since returned to Israel on an archeological dig and on a religious tour with Michael Wilcox, both of which were highlights of my life, but nothing rivals those two weeks spent with Raelene and my friends as she taught us about Christ and his Jewish life.

Lorinda Belnap served as my Young Women's leader while my parents were going through the roughest time of their divorce. Lorinda is the wife of the beloved Brent Belnap, the current Manhattan Stake president, who has overseen the growth of the last ten years and the construction of the Manhattan Temple. Lorinda shares all of her husband's testimony, vision, and leadership, and remains a cherished friend. Another influential Young Women's president was Janae Powell who included us girls in her process of adopting two African American daughters when she couldn't have any children of her own.

There was also the bishop who almost refused to sign my application to BYU, arguing that I should take my mind elsewhere to help spread the Church among other academic circles. And there's the leader who directed our ward's roadshow production one year. In an effort to control the length of each ward's presentation and ensure a commitment to guidelines, each ward was asked to film its skit ahead of time. The movie would be shown to the stake instead of a live performance. Not being bound by traditional roadshow expectations, our director led us downtown to South Street Seaport and we filmed our skit (about repentant pirates) on one of the tall sailing ships docked at the Seaport. Only in New York.

### Looking beyond New York

Would my testimony be as strong as it is today if I had not been raised in New York City? Maybe. There were aspects of my life outside of

my New York-centric paradigm that still offered the kinds of contrasts and extremities that led me to Christ. My family, for one, is a study in contrasts. My parents alone offer me entry into two very different social and economic spheres. My mother was one of five children born to a school-teacher and a secretary in southern California. Born into the Church from pioneer heritage, my mother has always been a faithful woman. She was a strong example to me of someone who could embrace a sophisticated, urban life, yet still remain committed to her humble, spiritual origins. We spent weeks and even months of every summer with her family in Los Angeles; and through those interactions with my relatives, I was reminded that I was part of a larger spiritual heritage that trumped any proud superiority I might feel from my metropolitan upbringing.

At some point in those summers, though, we would drive up I-5 from Los Angeles to San Francisco to visit my father's family. During that six-hour drive, I would transform from the suburban Mormon girl in a large, middle-class family of teachers and musicians to the prim and proper granddaughter of San Francisco's most elite socialites. My father had been raised in San Francisco as the older of two sons of Jane Frances Neylan McBaine and Turner Hudson McBaine. Jane's father, John Francis Neylan, was the best friend and legal counsel to William Randolph Hearst, the media tycoon. In fact, the Joseph Cotten character in the movie *Citizen Kane* is modeled after my great-grandfather. Because of my great-grandfather's wealth and position, my dad was raised in luxury that both fascinates and haunts me—cooks, nannies, horses, and trips to Europe—and then he was sent to boarding school in Andover, Massachusetts, at age twelve. Although much of my family's splendor has been squandered in the generations since John Francis Neylan, the formality, extravagance, and intellectual bravura remain. But Jane died an alcoholic, Turner disassociated himself from my older half-sister because she didn't write a thank-you note for something, and my dad daily feels betrayed by the expectations of his youth that there is no longer any money to support.

So in one day, I could wake up in a southern California beach town where I had to fight my cousins for time in the bathroom; and then that evening, after the I-5 drive, I could be served dinner by my grandmother's cook or watch my grandmother play bridge at her local country club. What affected me most about my two families was not the financial discrepancies or the inequality in educational levels; what affected me was



what I felt when I was with them. I was happier with my mother's family, and I often asked myself why. Why did I prefer backyard barbecues when I could be cooked for? Why prefer hours of family songfests when I could attend a cocktail party? Although I grew fond of my father's family and have always been grateful for their profound influence on my life, I felt early on that something was lacking from the dinner parties and beautiful clothes: the spirit of family, of unconditional love, of commitment to something beyond wealth and education. The juxtaposition of my families created a space where I could bring together the best of both worlds, being taught by the Spirit how to value the spirituality of my mother's family while appreciating the material beauty and academic superiority of my father's family.

A similar space was created for me as my academic schooling contrasted with my religious studies, and I again took the opportunity to fill it with the best of my various worlds. For first grade through high school, I attended a private girls' school in Manhattan called Chapin. This is the school Jacqueline Kennedy attended as a girl. During my time there, a schoolmate was Donald Trump's daughter, Ivanka. Chapin was the school my grandmother Jane picked for me, the one she felt suited my social heritage. After twelve years, I graduated with most of the same twenty-seven girls I had started with in first grade. Mostly daughters of investment bankers and lawyers, these girls shared my social heritage, but not my spiritual one. My experience there might be summarized by the fact that, as a senior, I graduated as student body president without ever having once been invited to a weekend party. A nerd? Yes, perhaps, and probably a little self-righteous, but I was far from being an outcast or a Jesus freak. I simply was unafraid of external influence. I couldn't be touched. With much teenage hubris, I had decided who I wanted to be and no one could sway me from my confident stance. And who I wanted to be was someone in-between my competing worlds: someone with the faith of a pioneer but with the intellect and urbanity of Jackie herself.

Chapin is, of course, situated in New York and it is hard to extricate its impact from its New Yorkness, but similar elite schools exist in most large American cities and I could have had comparable experiences elsewhere. And Chapin was ultimately a stepping stone to the real temple of education, Yale University, which, though maintaining a similar East Coast culture, is wholly separate from New York City. It was at Yale that I met others who had successfully performed the same balancing act that I

had: faithful Mormons who weren't afraid to embrace the best the world has to offer. Among those I met was my future husband, as well as some of the people who had the greatest influence on my testimony.

### **A Perfect Formula for Faith?**

Even with the external influences of my family and education, my experiences as a New Yorker are so integral to my feelings about the gospel that it is hard for me to imagine growing close to God in any other setting. But, of course, people do grow close to God in other settings. In America, at least, Mormons are known as a suburban people, raising our large families as far as we can from the debauching influences of the big city. Most of the faithful, thoughtful, and productive members of the Church have come from this more "typical" setting, so it's hard for me to argue that an urban experience of contrasts like mine is necessary for molding testimonies. But my experience does make me feel conflicted about the young parents I've met in San Francisco and Boston (the two places I've lived as an adult) who are willing to sacrifice the richness of city life so their children can have a backyard and a soccer league. On the one hand, for many young parents the decision to move out of a city is purely economic. Cities are more expensive than suburbs, and families with multiple children can provide more material comforts in a suburban setting. Many would like to raise their children in a city if they could afford a spacious apartment, private schools, etc. (I was the only child of two successful professionals, so financial concerns did not dictate my parents' choices.) But the required sacrifices of economy and space are simply too great. As my own family grows, I can sympathize with their choice.

On the other hand, I feel that, in their flight from the city, these young parents teach their children to value Saturday soccer games over an afternoon at a world-renowned museum. They prioritize playing in the backyard over playing in Central Park, walking across the Golden Gate Bridge, or tracking the Freedom Trail. Maybe these valuations are justified; but because of my experience, I would like to see our people sacrifice more to give our children exposure to the richness and diversity of metropolitan life. As I've lived in San Francisco and Boston, what concerns me most is the fear that many of our faithful people feel toward city life. I've been discouraged by the depressed student wives who stay holed up in their industrial student housing with one or two small children, pining for Utah and bemoaning the absence of an Olive Garden. A lack of

money, a new marriage, the shock of new motherhood, and homesickness are all justifiable excuses; but their lack of curiosity and wonder frustrates me. When I do find a mother who packs up her kids in a stroller or backpack and scours the city for adventure and experience, I consider the gift she is giving not only herself but her children and her future family as she opens their eyes to the world beyond strip malls and minivans.

Are we still a suburban church? Culturally, yes, but statistically our membership belies this mindset. As the Church continues to grow, more and more of our young people are growing up in circumstances that fall outside the stereotypical ideal. They don't have the luxury of attending schools with other Mormons. They don't have safe backyards in which to run out and play. They don't have two-parent homes in which family home evening and family scripture study are norms. In Nigeria, Brazil, Russia, and some day in India and China, our youths gain testimonies of the gospel amid the clutter of urban noise, the confusion of broken families, and the pressure of friends who have chosen differently. It must be lonely for them, as it was sometimes lonely for me. It must challenge every ounce of confidence they have. They are learning about danger, about making choices, and about being peculiar, as I did. But there are many ways to choose the right, and our Asian, African, and South American sisters and brothers are showing us how they, too, can have the confidence to act on what they believe, even though they might not have the traditional trappings of a Mormon life.

But growing up in New York or any other city is not a perfect formula for developing an infallible testimony, just as growing up in suburban Utah has never been the perfect formula either. Several of my Mormon friends who were raised in the same wards, attended the same Primary and seminary and even went to Israel with me eventually stopped going to church. I always liked being different. Making choices that distinguished me came easily to me. But not everyone likes being different. For some of my friends, the city's popular tide of revelry and materialism was too great a temptation. Others found their peculiarity to be too lonely. In some cases, causes completely unrelated to our location, such as family situations or spiritual personalities incompatible with Church culture, were to blame. Church became simply another voice vying for attention amid the urban din.

But now, with my own young children and with career and family choices lying ahead, I have to confront my own argument and ask myself if

I am, in fact, willing to make the sacrifices necessary to raise my own children in the environment I credit with giving me my testimony. My husband is currently in graduate school, and discussion among our peers inevitably hovers around the topics of future locations, jobs, and children. I am often asked, Will we move back to New York? How many children do we want? How many can we afford? Is my husband pursuing a career path that is lucrative enough to support an urban lifestyle? Do we want private or public schools for our children?

I have no easy answer to these questions. Theoretically, yes, I would absolutely love to replicate for my own children as much of my own experience as I can. I would love to live in a pre-war, four-bedroom apartment on the Upper West Side and send my offspring to private schools and have the girls take ballet at the New York City Ballet and the boys sing in the Metropolitan Opera Children's Chorus. I would love for my children to volunteer in soup kitchens, to deliver Christmas presents to a poverty-stricken family in Harlem, and to see the beauty and variety of Heavenly Father's children on the subway every day. But it will be very difficult for my husband and me to afford the same life for our multiple children that my parents provided for just one of me. Now with two children, a priesthood-holding husband, and a two-parent home of my own, I already have moved beyond what my faithful mother provided for me, making it much more financially challenging to recreate the material and educational privileges of my own youth. I am willing to make sacrifices, and I suspect my husband and I will be some of the last to finally pack our bags for the suburbs, but I don't want to be extreme, like the family in my Manhattan ward that raised eight children in a three-bedroom apartment. (The children slept on mats which flipped against the wall during the day.)

Of course, my larger family is a blessing I cherish, especially since my mother always wanted to have more children. I chose a more typical Mormon family under the assumption and with the faith that a more "normal" home would prove equally or even more effective than my childhood at growing my children's own nascent testimonies. But while I rejoice in my ability to nurture a large, intact family, I mourn the fact that my children may not have to pass through the crucible of an urban youth as I did. Since I suspect that my days as an urban dweller are numbered, I'm trying to be one of those mothers I admire who seizes city life and imparts boldness, curiosity, and wonder to her children. Just last week, I took my three-year-old daughter to a kids' matinee at the Boston Sym-

phony, and she has been in every major museum in Boston, San Francisco, and New York. I smile to myself when she asks to take the T (Boston's metro system) instead of the car, or when she instinctively grabs my hand when we get ready to cross a street. On a drive to New Hampshire to see the fall leaves, she asked where all the buildings had gone, and when we got out of the car to walk around, she complained the ground was "bumpy." That's my city kid.

#### Note

1. Glen Nelson, "Mormon Artists Group: Adventures in Art Making," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 39, no. 3 (Fall 2006): 115–24.

# An Old Mormon Writes to Harold Bloom

Henry L. Miles

In the fall of 1990, I was retired and we were back in academia fulltime at BYU: Carol was studying anthropology and I was studying English. We went to the University of Utah to listen to Harold Bloom preview his forthcoming book, *The American Religion*. Bloom said Joseph Smith's "religious genius" enabled him to cut through Christianity and on back to the purest form of Judaism, the form Enoch had taught. I had never heard Mormon scholars dwell on the quality of Joseph Smith's intellect, and the revelation they had talked about seemed a passive process to me. Bloom captivated me for two hours; I read his book as soon as it was published; then Bloom sank into memory.

In the fall of 1993, I found five copies of *Dialogue* in my mailbox and ripped the cellophane from one. I had submitted a poem, but had received a rejection letter, and was wondering if the five copies meant my poem was inside. The poem was inside, on page 186. I had it all: a rejection letter *and* a published poem.<sup>1</sup> Reading my poem, I noticed the article on the facing page, "Intellectuals in Mormon History: An Update."<sup>2</sup> The introduction said the article was a repeat of a survey conducted twenty-four years earlier and reported in *Dialogue* in the spring of 1969.<sup>3</sup> I recalled the article, had read it in Quito, Ecuador, where *Dialogue* was my quarterly ambrosia for four years. Both surveys asked respondents to identify "the five most eminent intellectuals in Mormon History" and they had responded with these results:

## 1969

1. B. H. Roberts
2. Orson Pratt
3. Joseph Smith

## 1993

1. B. H. Roberts
2. Orson Pratt
3. Sterling M. McMurrin

- |                         |                         |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| 4. Sterling M. McMurrin | 4. Leonard J. Arrington |
| 5. James E. Talmage     | 5. Joseph Smith         |

In 1969, I had read about the first survey in *Dialogue* and paged on. I had viewed Joseph Smith as a receptor for revelation and not an intellectual; but for the report of this second survey, Bloom was on my mind. His words about Joseph Smith in *The American Religion* had remained with me: "There is no other figure remotely like him in our entire national history."<sup>4</sup> I turned back to Bloom's book after reading about the surveys. I was pretty sure he would rank Joseph Smith first, not fifth, or even third, but I wanted to know. My interest in seeking his opinion oscillated for eighteen months before I talked with Steven Sondrup, a professor in the Humanities, Classics, and Comparative Literature Department at Brigham Young University. Sondrup had read the articles and had contacts at Yale who might be willing to bring my letter to Bloom's attention if he did not respond. He gave me Bloom's address and I mailed this letter:

13 May 1995  
Dear Dr. Bloom:

Rereading "Intellectuals in Mormon History: An Update" in the Fall 1993 issue of *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* bothered me as much as when I first read it eighteen months ago. This three-page article reviews the results of two surveys of Mormon Ph.D.'s regarding the most eminent intellectual in Mormon history. Joseph Smith ranked third in the 1969 survey and fifth in the 1993 survey while B. H. Roberts ranked first in both surveys. Ranked between Smith and Roberts in these two surveys were Orson Pratt, Sterling McMurrin, and Leonard Arrington.

During both readings of this article, I wondered where you would have ranked Joseph Smith, but I have procrastinated asking you until now.

I appreciate your effort to become so well acquainted with our religion before writing about it. Recently I read pages 126 to 128 of your book to one of the leaders of my high priest quorum; he said, "That man really knows what Joseph Smith taught, and he says it better than any of us can." From what you wrote on these pages, especially the sentence, "There is no other figure remotely like him [Smith] in our entire national history, and it is unlikely that anyone like him ever can come again," I assume you would rank Joseph Smith as the most eminent intellectual in Mormon history. Is that correct? I believe you are the best mind ever to analyze Mormonism and write about it, and I would appreciate knowing your opinion.

I enjoyed your presentation at the U of U on Mormonism before you published your book. Because of the effort of Steve Sondrup, most of the

students in his literary theory class at BYU attended your lecture. Again my thanks for your fine discourse on Mormonism.

Sincerely,  
Henry L. Miles

Working up the letter to Bloom brought to mind my cousin's encounter with scholars regarding Joseph Smith. Larry Elison had been doing a doctorate of juridical science at the University of Michigan; and in my senior year at Idaho State College, he informed me of his conversations with the divinity faculty. In their opinion, Mormonism had yet to produce a theologian. At his first teaching position, Larry had learned that the divinity faculty at Emory University held the same opinion. I recalled the let-down feelings from such responses and contrasted them with the feelings Bloom's book had excited. Two weeks after mailing my letter, Bloom surprised me with an answer on Yale letterhead handwritten in black ink. With anticipation, I read:

24 May 1995  
Dear Mr. Miles:

I can understand the two surveys you cite only if the Mormon Ph.D.'s employed an absurdly narrow definition of an "intellectual." Joseph Smith, even to a Jewish non-Mormon like myself, is the only American creative enough to be called a prophet, seer, and revelator, that is, a religious genius. There was Emerson, of course, but ultimately his was more a literary mind than a religious one. I greatly admire McMurrin, and Roberts also, but if "intellectual" means what it should mean, then Smith clearly is the most eminent intellectual in Mormon history. He was an authentic visionary, and totally original in mind and spirit—really a kind of mortal god. I cannot understand why he is not honored by more Americans.

Sincerely,  
Harold Bloom

"A kind of mortal god" satisfied me like my class in postmodern theory, where I had met Hayden White and metahistory. White says events do not tell their own stories; historians must invent them. He says the historian prepares the chronicle of events and in the process must determine what the events add up to. They add up to what White calls a "paradigm." Developing the paradigm is a creative act; it comes from the historian's mind and not from the chaos of events being examined. The paradigm guides the historian in deciding which facts are relevant, in



other words, which events are to be included in the history to be constructed.<sup>5</sup>

Forty years before reading White, I had encountered my first scholarly work on Joseph Smith, Fawn Brodie's *No Man Knows My History*. For 400-plus pages, I read Brodie's idea on how Joseph was able to deceive people into believing God had assisted him in creating the Book of Mormon and his new religion. And in the context, the stories seemed plausible to me. I was not prepared to argue with Brodie's book and its overwhelming footnotes, and I thought anyone who researched the facts would find in them the same story Brodie had found. Nibley's response to Brodie failed to overcome the power of those footnotes. A few years earlier, my mission president had told me he ended up putting Brodie's book on his shelf of unresolved issues of faith, which he revisited from time to time. As a student at Ricks College in 1957 or '58, I followed President R. Scott Zimmerman's example, created my own issues shelf, and stored away this book. After four decades, I decided to take *No Man Knows My History* from my shelf and apply White to Brodie for my term paper.

After publishing her book, Brodie told a *New York Times* correspondent<sup>6</sup> she had completed two-thirds of her research before she discovered that the events of Joseph Smith's life added up to his being an imposter ("a mythmaker of prodigious talent") and his religion "a fable—one that few converts stop to question."<sup>7</sup> Another researcher, Robert Hullinger, reviewed the same chronicle of events and discovered they added up to a man who "tried to defend faith in the personal God of Christian belief in [the] face of current denominational strife and popular skepticism."<sup>8</sup> Two researchers added up the same facts and one found a religious fraud while the other found a true believer. White was right; facts don't tell their own stories. Writing thirteen single-spaced pages analyzing how Brodie and Hullinger had used the same facts to construct two disparate Joseph Smiths, I came to view history as a constructed artifact.

Now, each time I reread Brodie's page 7, I have to ask myself why she said that "a relative of Woodward took a neat revenge by insinuating that Smith had himself been guilty of making bogus money, and his account was widely believed." Then, in the footnote, she cites *Historical Magazine* (November 1870, pp. 315–16): "Daniel Woodward stated that Smith had been 'implicated with one Jack Downing in counterfeiting

money, but turned state's evidence and escaped the penalty.” She then adds, “The trial of George Downer, the only name corresponding with Downing, makes no mention of Joseph Smith [Sr.] and the other trials at which Smith was a witness make it clear that he was a victim, not an accomplice.”<sup>9</sup> How did inserting an accusation in the text and pulling it out in a footnote impact readers?

“A kind of mortal god” exceeded my expectations. I didn’t think such a statement was possible from a non-Mormon scholar. I knew other scholars besides Brodie and Hullinger had added up Joseph’s teachings and gotten different totals. I knew more scholars would do so in the future. I believed White’s idea applied to any research project: facts in any field do not speak; scholars give them a voice. In spite of this knowledge, Bloom’s comments energized me and I wanted to share his letter. I asked permission to publish it and his response was almost immediate.

29 July 1997

Dear Mr. Miles:

This note constitutes blanket permission for publishing and republishing my letter to you of 24 May 1995. I think I would prefer your letter always to appear first, for context.

With good wishes,  
Sincerely,  
Harold Bloom  
Sterling Professor of the Humanities  
Yale University

As time passed, my excitement cooled, and I was satisfied just to show Bloom’s letter to a few friends. A couple of years later, on November 29, 1999, PBS ran a documentary, *Joseph Smith: The American Prophet*, narrated by Gregory Peck. I watched the program, expecting Bloom to appear and comment, but his face never crossed the screen. I wrote him:

22 December 1999

Dear Dr. Bloom:

Watching *The American Prophet* on our PBS Channel 7, I saw scholars render their opinions on Joseph Smith and waited for you to express yours. The program ended and I was still waiting. Thinking I had missed you somehow, I watched the program when it aired the next week on Channel 11, but again I did not see you. Were you there? If not, did you decline?

I expected to see you on the program, because you introduced Joseph

Smith to the scholarly community, and your analysis of his revelations and accomplishments made him a person for scholars to know. As each of the non-Mormon historians from eastern schools appeared on the program, I wondered if they would have even studied Joseph Smith without being influenced by your writing. And my pondering since the program has led me to the question, "What influenced you to study Joseph Smith?"

Just as President Hinckley is being credited for bringing the Mormon Church out of obscurity, you will surely be credited for bringing Joseph Smith out of obscurity. I am intrigued that you selected him for study and curious to learn how you came to that decision.

Best wishes for the holiday season.  
Sincerely, Henry Miles

Bloom responded with another handwritten note on Yale letter-head:

3 Jan 2000  
Dear Mr Miles-

Thank you for your note. I declined to participate in The American Prophet, because I wanted to say something about the gap between Hinckley and the Nauvoo Smith, and the producer said I couldn't.

As for my interest in Smith, it goes back to childhood & I am going on 70.

Best Wishes,  
Harold Bloom

About this time I discovered "The Religion-Making Imagination of Joseph Smith," a 1992 essay by Bloom in the *Yale Review*, setting his ideas in a scholarly context.<sup>10</sup> In addition, this essay focused on Joseph Smith's imagination, which moved the analysis from religion to the literary arena, where Bloom reigned as king—some said, the American literary critic of a century. Nice tactic. I wondered about the essay's impact on scholars' attitudes and wrote another letter.

20 February 2000  
Dear Dr. Bloom:

I gave a short talk at church this morning regarding your assessment of Joseph Smith in your essay, "The Religion-Making Imagination of Joseph Smith." Many in the congregation were fascinated and a few asked to borrow your essay. They will probably have the same questions I have regarding what imagination means within your view of the universe. As I misread

your essay, I think you use revelation, visions, insight of genius, to refer to processes that take place solely within one's mind. These words do not refer to the presence or influence of superhumans or other beings, who communicate ideas to one's mind. I believe you consider Enoch, Isaiah, Jesus, and Joseph Smith as equals, people with great minds or imaginations. Or do you think some of them received influences from beyond the mind? I am fascinated by the phrase, "Enoch chose Joseph Smith . . ." in the sentence: "Enoch chose Joseph Smith because esoteric traditions always had exalted Enoch as the archetype of man-become-angel and even man-become-God."

In this phrase I see Enoch being used as a metaphor for the process by which Joseph Smith imagined the ideas of Enoch. But I am not sure. Is that what you mean? or do you mean Enoch, as a being from the unseen world, shared his knowledge with Joseph Smith? Enoch in the form of an angel or other divine personage? Or do you mean something else? I think you do not believe in the existence of beings outside this world, do you? If you believe in such, do they communicate with us? Or are we alone? Have you produced a work on your concept of the universe?

I am sorry that the producer's ground rules caused you to decline to participate in *The American Prophet*. I suppose polygamy was the issue and that is especially sensitive here right now. Some are pushing the Utah legislature to decriminalize polygamy while others are calling for funds for shelters for women who leave polygamous relationships. And it gets more complex. Thirty years ago, I considered polygamy essential to godhood. After all, my great-grandfather left London with a fortune in 1878 and sacrificed most of it for polygamy, appealing his conviction to the U.S. Supreme Court. A few years ago, I read the transcript of his trial, began to lose my sympathy for polygamy, and choose for the present to accept The Book of Mormon view of polygamy, a temporary phenomenon. Others, however, believe polygamy is essential to exaltation. This division in attitudes among believing Mormons must concern our leaders, who appear to be keeping the peace by avoiding mention of polygamy at venues under their influence.

Once more I thank you for your keen analysis of Joseph Smith.

Sincerely, Henry Miles

More than a month passed before the following response arrived.

28 March 2000

Dear Mr. Miles:

This is a very belated reply to your moving letter of 20 Feb. It arrived the day before my wife and I departed for two exhausting weeks of lecturing in Italy, and I have been catching up rather slowly since.

As you knew (evidently, but how?) I could not accept the producer's rules for *The American Prophet*—polygamy was only part of the disagree-

ment—essentially it was my conviction that I see little of the authentic Joseph Smith now in the official LDS Church.

I cannot myself unpack my own metaphor “Enoch chose Joseph.” I am a Jew, fierce for the traditions, but Gnostic, not normative. I’ve written a book (*Omens of Millennium*) in which I acknowledge the alien or Stranger God, but I think he wanders in the outer spaces, in exile—he cannot hear us, and we cannot hear him. But part of the God—call him Enoch, Metatron, Adam, whatever—is locked up deep within us, and broke through to Joseph, the authentic American Prophet. Polygamy was part of that breakthrough.

Sincerely—  
Harold Bloom

Bloom did not recall informing me himself about the producer’s ground rules, which had kept him from appearing in *The American Prophet*. I should have realized he was not keeping copies of his notes to me, not reviewing them as I was. I wondered if he thought I was talking to the producers of *The American Prophet*; maybe he saw us as a small group out here in Utah, all in touch, all part of a Mormon monolith. I hoped not.

I saw that the ground rules went beyond polygamy. They must have included gathering to Zion, common ownership, a theocracy and so on, things scholars talk about but lay people don’t. That some Mormons had boycotted the movie *God’s Army* implied that some of us were afraid of who we were. Not including essential teachings of Joseph Smith in a documentary about him had shown that some of us were afraid of who we had been. It reminded me of what Lloyd, a friend and a Mormon bishop, once said, only half-joking: “The Catholic Church says the Pope is infallible and Catholics don’t believe it. On the other hand, the Mormon Church says their prophet is fallible and the members don’t believe it.” Maybe future movies would engage our history successfully, and we’d get used to seeing ourselves as humans and lose our fear of exposing our humanness.

Bloom’s last paragraph fascinated me; my letter had asked what he meant by “Enoch chose Joseph.” He said he could not unpack his own metaphor. I wondered about the implications, and I still wondered why he had chosen to study Joseph Smith. The previous year I had asked Bloom why and he had just said he got interested in Joseph as a child. So I decided to ask for more details.

21 January 2003

Dear Dr. Bloom:

I am thinking ahead to 2005, the 200th birthday of Joseph Smith and know of two projects underway to honor him. One historian is compiling the words attributed to the Prophet, eleven volumes, and another is writing a biography.

I recall the experience of my cousin back in the 1950s, when he did graduate work in law at the U of Michigan and taught at Emory's law school. At each university he talked with scholars of religion about Joseph Smith and they said Mormonism had yet to produce a theologian. As I watched *The American Prophet* and heard scholars applaud the genius of Joseph Smith, I thought of your essay on Joseph Smith in the *Yale Review* of April 1992 and your book, *The American Religion*. I wondered if these scholars had read your essay or book, and I expected to see an interview of you in the production. Later, you informed me of the ground rules you could not accept, which kept you from participating in *The American Prophet*.

I have been thinking about writing a personal essay based on my exchange of letters with you, which could be published in a journal such as *Dialogue* or *Sunstone*. Rereading your letter of 3 January 2000, I noted you have been interested in Joseph Smith since your childhood. I would appreciate your sharing with me how that interest developed. Did Mormon missionaries happen by your home?

Sincerely,  
Henry Miles

I was pleased at Bloom's prompt and personal response.

4 Feb. 2003

Dear Mr Miles—

I have been very ill (bleeding ulcer, open heart 3 way bypass) and am hard pressed.

No—there were no Mormon missionaries in the east Bronx of the 1930's. I was a preternaturally early reader, and encountered Smith in my readings—too far back to identify the books.

With good wishes  
Harold Bloom

I noted the plain stationery, no Yale letterhead, no name of his professorship, no status symbols, just feelings and handwriting. In a letter, not included above, I had mentioned my own high PSA level and enlarged

prostate, the possibility of cancer—and here, Bloom mentioned his bleeding ulcer and heart surgery. We were both old enough to attend our own organ recitals: he was seventy-three and I was sixty-eight and neither of us was in denial about our mortality.

As I close this essay, I can only speculate why Bloom chose to study Joseph Smith and found in him a “mortal god.” I believe the Prophet deserves this assessment, and I appreciate the facet this has added to my faith, a facet nonexistent in my student years, when there was no scholarly support out there from the likes of Bloom. I appreciate his generosity in answering the letters from an old Mormon and his permission to publish them.

I look forward to the time *Dialogue* publishes the results from a third survey to identify “the five most eminent intellectuals in Mormon history.” Will the results suggest that Bloom has influenced the opinion of Mormon scholars regarding Joseph Smith as I believe he has influenced other scholars? I know he has influenced me. Before Bloom I hadn’t considered Joseph to be an intellectual. I had given little thought to the quality of mind required to engage God, angels, and text on gold plates in the process we call revelation.

I suppose, for Bloom and me, the outcome of the third survey will not matter much; just being here to read the results may exceed our present expectations.

### Notes

1. Henry L. Miles, “The Man without Sin,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 26, no. 3 (Fall 1993): 185–86.

2. Stan Larson, “Intellectuals in Mormon History: An Update,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 26, no. 3 (Fall 1993): 187–89.

3. Leonard J. Arrington, “The Intellectual Tradition of the Latter-day Saints,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 4, no. 1 (Spring 1969): 13–26.

4. Harold Bloom, *The American Religion: The Emergence of the Post-Christian Nation* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 126.

5. Hayden White, *The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore, Md.: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973).

6. John K. Hutchens, “People Who Read and Write,” *New York Times Book Review* 7 (January 20, 1946): 24.

7. Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith* (1945; 2d. ed., New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), ix.

8. Robert N. Hullinger, *Answer to Skepticism: Why Joseph Smith Wrote the Book of Mormon* (St. Louis: Clayton Publishing House, 1980), 2.

9. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 7–8.

10. Harold Bloom, "The Religion-Making Imagination of Joseph Smith," *Yale Review* 80 (April 1992): 26–42.





Anne Muñoz; *White Salamander*; quilted batik; 31 x 34 in.; 2005; private collection

## CONTRIBUTORS

MATTHEW JAMES BABCOCK teaches composition, creative writing, and literature at BYU–Idaho. He holds a B.A. from Utah State University and an M.A. in English and creative writing from Binghamton University, Binghamton, New York. He will complete his Ph.D. in literature and criticism at Indiana University of Pennsylvania in 2008. His novella, *Impressions*, a semi-finalist in *Quarterly West's* biennial competition, is forthcoming from Wild Child Publishing. He and his wife, Missy, whose charities abound, have four daughters. An earlier version of “Charity Never” was published under the same title in *Perspective: Expressing Mind and Spirit* 4, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 43–54.

MARY LYTGOE BRADFORD lives in a retirement condo in Leesburg, Virginia, near her daughter and four of her grandchildren. A former editor of *Dialogue*, she is the author of *Lowell L. Bennion: Teacher, Counselor, Humanitarian* (Salt Lake City: Dialogue Foundation, 1995), and *Leaving Home: Personal Essays* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1987). She is working on a novel and a poetry collection, which is scheduled for publication in the spring of 2008.

DON W. JENKINS is originally from Heber City, Utah, but has lived and worked for the last thirty-four years in the San Diego area with his wife, Robyn. With their children grown and gone, he writes poetry, throws pots, and does choral singing. This poem is about Land's End in San Francisco.

DAVID CLARK KNOWLTON, associate professor of anthropology at Utah Valley State College, specializes in the anthropology of religion in Latin America. He presented an earlier version of this paper at the Society for the Anthropology of Religion in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, 2005, and at the Sunstone Symposium in Salt Lake City, August 2005. Portions of the research for this paper were funded by a Presidential Faculty Fellowship, the office of Vice President Brad Cook, the School of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences, and the Department of Behavioral Sciences, all at Utah Valley State College.

NEYLAN MCBAIN lives in Boston with her husband, Elliot Smith, and their two little girls. She is the author of *Daughters of Ishmael: A Mormon Woman's Transition into an Adulthood of Faith* (forthcoming).

HENRY L. MILES retired after a career in the Foreign Service. During his eleven years in Latin America, he served as counselor to three mission presidents while his wife, Carol, served on mission boards and as Relief Society president. After retiring, both took degrees at BYU. They have five children and twenty grandchildren, the oldest just returned from a mission. Henry spends his writing time on family narratives and personal essays. An earlier version of this essay was pub-

lished in *Quire: An English and Literature Department Publication for Scholarly Papers* (Utah Valley State College), 2006, 43–58.

NATHAN OMAN is a professor at The College of William & Mary's Marshall-Wythe School of Law, where he specializes in contracts and jurisprudence. He, his wife, Heather, and their two children live in Williamsburg, Virginia, where Nathan serves in the Young Men's presidency of the Jamestown Ward. He is also one of the founders of Times & Seasons ([www.timesandseasons.org](http://www.timesandseasons.org)) a Mormon-themed weblog.

KIM B. ÖSTMAN is a doctoral student at Åbo Akademi University, Finland, with a focus on issues related to the sociology of religion. He is also a doctoral student in the field of communication microelectronics at Tampere University of Technology, Finland, and one of the founders of the European Mormon Studies Association (EMSA).

LEE ROBISON and his wife, Kathy, live in Poolesville, Maryland. Lee's poems have appeared in several issues of *Dialogue* and in several other journals. For the last ten years, he has been involved with the Hyattstown Mill Arts Project in Hyattstown, Maryland, where he has taken up painting and where he hosts at least two literary evenings a year.

JOHNNY TOWNSEND earned an MFA in fiction writing from Louisiana State University. Over sixty of his stories and essays have appeared in print, including pieces in *Newsday*, *The Washington Post*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Humanist*, *The Progressive*, *Army Times*, *Medical Reform*, *Christopher Street*, and the anthology *In Our Lovely Deseret: Mormon Fictions*. He currently lives in Seattle.

JOHANNA WAGNER is a Ph.D. candidate at Arizona State University and a Ph.D. research fellow at Ghent University in Belgium. She is currently working on the project "Judith Butler Revisited" at Ghent University, where she is also writing her dissertations. Her concentration is modernist American/British women's literature, and her areas of expertise are gender and feminist theories.

ETHAN YORGASON is an interdisciplinary geographer who has written frequently on Mormonism. Among other publications, his *Transformation of the Mormon Culture Region* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), won the Best First Book Award from the Mormon History Association, and a recent article (in Charles H. Lippy's three-volume *Faith in America* series) explores the claim that Mormonism is the quintessential American religion. He began his publishing career with a *Dialogue* article, jointly authored with his wife, Chiung Hwang Chen, on media portrayals of Mormons as a model minority (32, no. 2 [Summer 1999]: 107–28), and has recently guest-edited articles for *Dialogue*'s "Thinking Globally" series. Yorgason, who teaches at Brigham Young University–Hawai'i, took his

Ph.D. at the University of Iowa, where he first became friends with John Durham Peters. Acknowledgements: “I thank Joelle Birano for assistance with the transcription of the interview, and Brigham Young University—Hawai’i for providing funding that facilitated the interview. I especially appreciate John Durham Peters taking time out of a hectic schedule to host me and fit in this interview.”

DARLENE YOUNG lives in South Jordan, Utah, with her husband and four sons. She currently serves as secretary for the Association for Mormon Letters and on the editorial board of *Segullah*, an LDS women’s literary magazine.

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## ABOUT THE ARTIST

*Anne Muñoz*

**A**nne Muñoz resides in Salt Lake City with her husband. Trained in art and textile design, she worked as a free lance graphic artist for many years but continued to produce her own artwork, taking part in art festivals, juried shows, and exhibits. Her creative interest has centered on batik art, which involves the application of wax to textiles in order to achieve layered shades of color.

I start with a piece of white pima cotton. The design is drawn on the fabric in pencil and the colors planned. (I usually do a water color of the piece first.) A mixture of hot beeswax and paraffin is painted onto the fabric in the parts of the picture that are to be white. Then the fabric is dyed the lightest color (say, yellow) and hung to dry. The wax “resists” the dye so I now have a piece that is white and yellow. I next wax the areas of the batik that I want to remain yellow and dye the piece the next color. This process continues until the whole piece is covered in wax except for the final color, usually black or dark blue. Colors must be planned carefully because each color combines with the previous colors to give a new color. When all the dyes have been applied, the batik is ironed out between newspapers (changing them often as they soak up the wax). Only when nearly all the wax is removed do I really know what my picture looks like. As I work on a piece, the wax build-up makes it difficult to see the detail of what I really have. It’s always exciting to iron out a new batik and see the real image emerge. The last of the wax is removed by dry cleaning.

**Front cover:** Anne Muñoz, *Daughters of Gaea*; 60 x 65 in.; quilted batik; 2001 (First Place Award Non-Traditional Quilts at the Winter Celebration International Quilt Festival 2002)

**Back cover:** Anne Muñoz, *Sunset in Sunrise, Kentucky*; 57 x 44 in.; quilted batik; 2005–06 (First Place Award for Wall Quilts at the AQS Nashville International Quilt Festival 2006; First Place Award for Pictorial Quilts at the 2007 National Home Machine Quilting Show)



Anne Muñoz; *Yin / Yang*; quilted batik;  
49 x 29 in.; 2003

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