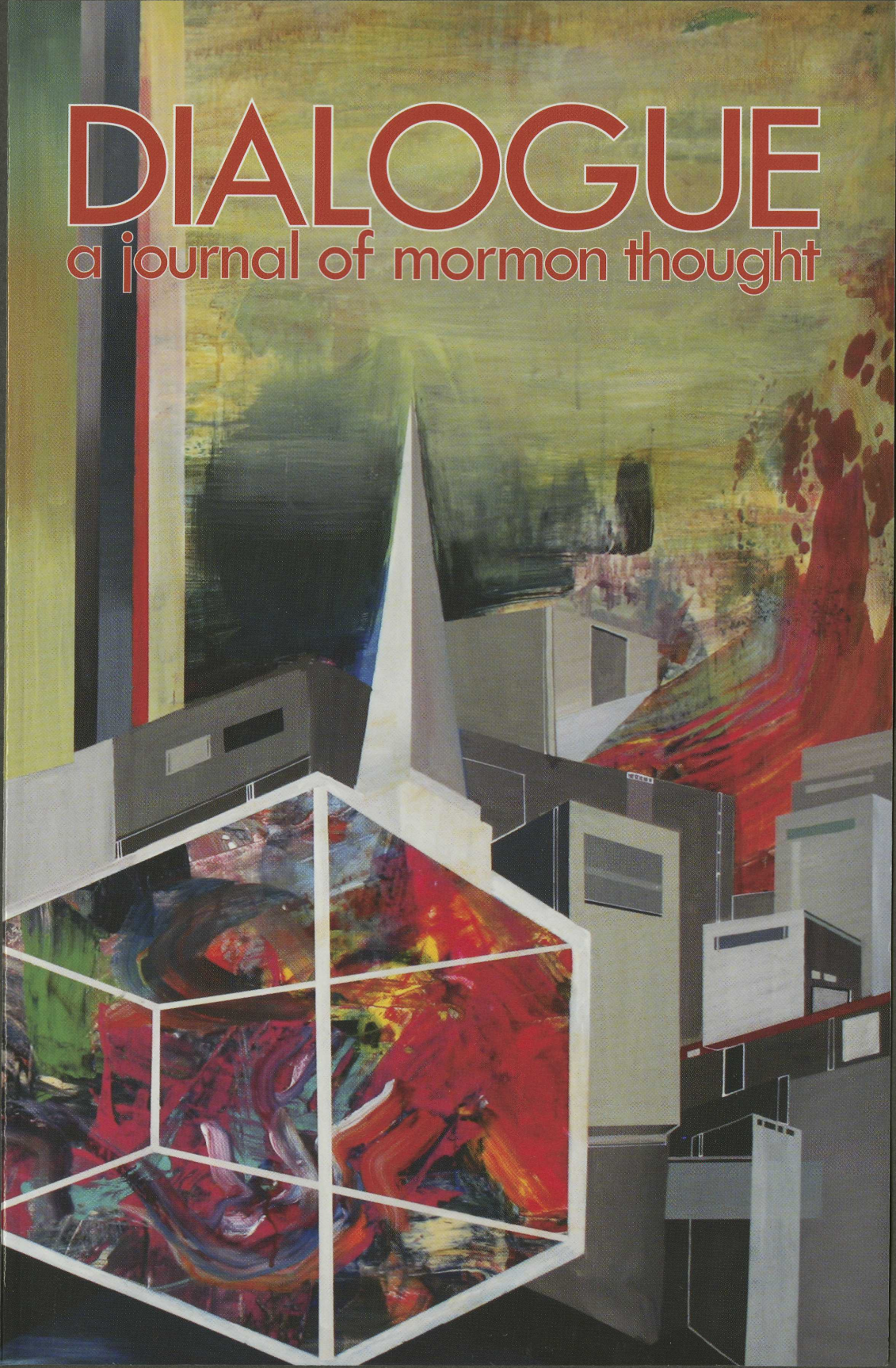


DIALOGUE

a journal of mormon thought



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DIALOGUE

a journal of mormon thought

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

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Letters

A Continuing Dialogue

I have just finished reading the entire current issue (Spring 2009) and realized anew why I appreciate *Dialogue* so much. The volume is filled with many good things—interesting letters, stimulating articles, cogent and penetrating commentary, engaging fiction, beautiful and provocative poetry, informed reviews, an insightful personal essay, and even an inspiring sermon. That's a plentiful cornucopia of Mormon thought and expression!

I particularly appreciate the fact that *Dialogue* creates the space for *dialogue*—for thinking and imagining, for thoughtful reflection, for contemplation, for new insight. I was struck, for example, with the connection between Todd M. Compton's excellent and informative article on Jacob Hamblin (1–29) with its revelation of Mormon anti-Indian practices and policies and what we learn from the various perspectives and reviews on *Massacre at Mountain Meadows* about how Mormons regarded Native peoples (105–38, 207–26). I am sure I was not the only one struck by the parallel between Mormon treatment of the Goshute Indians around Tooele—e.g., with orders “to take another company of men, go after the Indians, to shoot [i.e., kill] all we found” (17)—with the Mormons scapegoating the Piute Indians for the massacre at Mountain Meadows.

Another correspondence be-

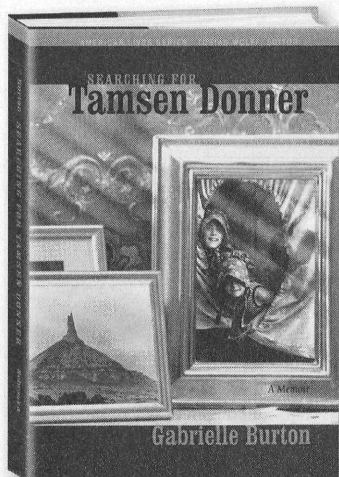
tween Mountain Meadows and contemporary Mormon life is seen in Michael Fillerup's short story, “In a Better Country” (153–207). The murderous vengeance the protagonist seeks to exact for the death of his missionary son is of a piece with the vengeance enacted by Mormon priesthood holders on the killing fields outside Cedar City on that dark September morning.

Regarding Mountain Meadows, I particularly appreciated Philip L. Barlow's deep understanding of how we—Church leaders and ordinary members—are only one to two degrees of separation from our more savage natures. The recent revelation that Mormon attorneys were complicit in approving the torture of prisoners captured in the “War on Terror” confirms Barlow's contention that “we humans, including LDS humans, who ordinarily strive for goodness, are capable of evil. We are, under severe duress, capable of demonizing and even destroying innocent others” (119).

Barlow does not allow us to distance ourselves from the tragedy at Mountain Meadows. He summarizes the process that leads “normal” human beings to become so emotionally caught up in countering some real or imagined enemy that it creates a “recipe that can lead to the distortion of our ordinary moral sensibilities” (119). For some of us, the rhetoric and tactics used

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by some Mormons during the recent Proposition 8 campaign in California validate Barlow's conclusion. It is sobering that Mormons were so willing to distribute material that was false, misleading, and manipulative in what they saw as a grave moral cause. Barlow reminds us that the surrender of individual conscience to authority exacts a price both for individuals and for the Church (122–23).

Finally, I was struck by the relationship between Nathan Florence's beautiful cover of a man and woman in deep, intimate conversation and the cover of the very first issue of *Dialogue* with its engraving of two people conversing under a tree. Florence's painting captures the moment when the woman, hands turned outward, expresses what we imagine is a heart revelation and the man, hands behind his back, listens thoughtfully, also with his heart. It is how I imagine Jesus and Mary walking and conversing on the hills outside Jerusalem. It is for such dialogue that we live.

*Robert A. Rees
Brookdale, California*

Erratum: *Dialogue* regrets the error in Ross C. "Rocky" Anderson, Letter, "A Call for Compassion," *Dialogue* 42: 2, v–vi. The full sentence should read: "The idea that we are all to fall in line when ordered, even when doing so harms others, is abhorrent, dangerous, and contrary to the most fundamental lessons taught by Jesus and other major religious leaders."

“That Which Surpasses All Understanding”: The Limitations of Human Thought

Mark J. Nielsen

One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever. The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose. The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it whirleth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to his circuits. All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full; unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again. All things are full of labour; man cannot utter it: the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.—Ecclesiastes 1:4–8

I remember those verses striking a powerful chord within me when I read them on a bright autumn day in 1980. I was then in the first few months of my LDS mission in central Virginia. But reading those words took my mind and emotions back to the desert mountains of western Utah earlier that year. A friend and I had taken a quick camping trip to collect fossils in that remote area; and something in the desert sun, the bare exposure of earth, and the surrounding evidence of unimaginably ancient life produced a feeling so strong that I recognized it immediately when I later stumbled on that passage of scripture. I couldn't then put my finger on the exact meaning of the emotion—something about the smallness of our place in the universe and our inability to understand it all. It was as powerful as any religious feeling I had ever had, and its duplication at reading the opening of Ecclesiastes

nearly brought me to tears. I read the remainder of the book eagerly, naively hoping to find its resolution.

That same yearning sense of inadequacy returned to me powerfully again several years later on another bright autumn afternoon. This time I was a graduate student pursuing my doctorate in mathematics at the University of Washington in Seattle. I was at the point in my degree program where only the dissertation research remained, so my afternoons were usually spent sitting at my desk scribbling on scratch paper and looking for some significant idea to break. That afternoon I chose to leave my desk and instead enjoy the sunshine outside. Taking my scratch pad and pencil with me, I walked to a quiet area of campus and settled in to work. My research project in geometry involved a technical question about tilings—the filling up of space by geometric shapes. My scratch pads would fill with patterns of tiles and formulae attempting to explain their properties. The emotion I've been trying to describe hit me that day as my eyes changed focus from the pad in my hands to the leaf-tiled ground underneath me. Despite my supposed sophistication in mathematical reasoning, I was only toying with docile patterns. All around me lay complexity I could never capture in any formula. I picked up a single colored leaf, gazing at the intricate veining on its face, and the feeling deepened. My usual pride in thinking of mathematics as a search for pure and ultimate truth faltered as I realized that the patterns I studied were the faintest shadows of an indescribable reality.

That day the way I looked at mathematics changed, and a real interest in the relationship between my faith and my scholarship began. My research interests have remained in geometry, but I have been fascinated by the philosophy inspired and informed by modern mathematics. I've been particularly impressed that some mathematics can touch in me the same chord that Ecclesiastes strikes. In fact, there is a good deal of interesting mathematics that relates directly to those same limits on human understanding. My musings begin with two cautionary notes:

1. What I say here will involve some speculation, both from a theological and a mathematical viewpoint. However, what I say is consistent with current knowledge in mathematics—that is, it is at least within the realm of possibility as far as we presently know. I believe it is similarly consistent with Latter-day Saint doctrine;

while it may be speculative, it contains nothing contradictory to standard Church teachings.

2. The mathematics necessary for this exposition is surprisingly accessible in its general ideas, but there will be some terminology and concepts with which non-mathematicians will not be familiar. Please be patient, and rest assured that we won't have to deal with any actual equation-chasing or number-crunching. What is described here is more meta-mathematics than mathematics itself, not too difficult for a careful reader to follow.

We will return to the theological implications eventually. But first, I offer a (reasonably) quick introduction to some background concepts we'll need.

Historical Background

To understand *what* mathematics says about the limits of human reasoning, it is nearly essential to understand *how* it is that mathematics even came to address such topics.

Numerical calculations were done by several cultures as early as before 3000 B.C. But it was only when the Greeks introduced the philosophical notion of proof in about 600 B.C. that we had true mathematics. For however one chooses to define mathematics (a notoriously difficult task), the use of deductive reasoning to draw conclusions from a set of assumptions is at its heart. Thales (624–548 B.C.) supposedly wrote the first proofs; and by Euclid's time (about 300 B.C.), the Greeks had evolved the axiomatic method, a formalization of the deductive process in which a small set of assumptions (axioms) is set forth initially and then a superstructure of proven facts (theorems) is built up from that foundation. Most of us know Euclid's name from its association with geometry. But the *Elements* (the work for which he is primarily known) is most notable for its remarkable success in its use of the axiomatic method.

The success of Euclid's *Elements* helped to solidify this method as *the* way to do mathematics. Precision in stating and tracking assumptions became the gold standard by which mathematical works are judged. Modern mathematics has taken the axiomatic method to new heights of formality, but the method remains the same: Begin by stating your axioms, then work carefully within the laws of logic to prove the consequences of those as-

sumptions. So fundamental is the axiomatic method to the discipline of mathematics that, just as the sciences are distinguished by their use of the scientific method, one could characterize mathematics as the use of the axiomatic method.

The growth of mathematical understanding in the 2,300 years since Euclid has included long periods of stagnation, false starts, and even regression. There have also been swings in perceptions of the degree to which mathematics can accurately tell us about reality. The Pythagoreans (a semi-religious cult founded by Pythagoras in the sixth century B.C.) believed in the creed that "all is number." They believed that literally all of observable reality could be explained by the properties of the natural numbers (1, 2, 3, . . .) and their ratios. However, medieval scientists developed new methods of empirical observation more quickly than mathematical principles to explain those observations were advanced. As a result, faith that the universe could be described mathematically gave way to fear that its workings might be undiscoverable to the human mind. And while the tool of algebra that emerged in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries A.D. was put to impressive use, its applications were limited in scope. The hope of answering big questions through mathematical reasoning would reemerge only after the Enlightenment.

The invention of calculus in the late seventeenth century marks a turning point, not just in mathematics, but also in human intellectual progress. A century before Newton, the prevailing worldview was laced with superstition. Humans observed a universe whose order remained essentially mysterious to them. But the generations following Newton, with *Principia* in hand, saw a clockwork universe operating according to rules that were describable in mathematical terms. Once again, mathematicians worked with the exuberant hope of a complete mathematical description of everything. The train of deduction the Greeks had set in motion was back on track and running with a full head of steam.

But the train had gotten a bit ahead of its own engine. Much of the voluminous work done by the great mathematicians of the eighteenth century was lacking in the rigor usually associated with the axiomatic method. It was as if the mathematics community was impatient with the slow development of rigorous methods

and could not be held back from exploring the exciting new vistas opened by the calculus. The work of justification could be done after the adrenaline rush.

That time came in the latter half of the nineteenth century. But as usually happens, the work of justification brought many difficulties and generated more questions than were actually answered. As early as the middle of the nineteenth century came indications that the tracks on which our mathematical train was traveling were not headed toward a complete description of the physical universe. Mathematicians generated non-Euclidean geometries, complete with bizarre and counterintuitive theorems, but with an internal logic as mathematically consistent as Euclid's revered *Elements*. Mathematicians realized that the axiomatic method could be applied to many different sets of axioms, giving rise to many different mathematical universes, all of which were internally consistent, and none of which could claim to be a perfect model of physical reality. The discipline of mathematics began to chart a more independent course aimed toward abstraction rather than analytical modeling of physical phenomena.

Infinity Rears Its Head

And then there was the problematic concept of infinity. It runs all through calculus, as any freshman calculus student today can tell you. But because the details of calculus's development had been postponed, the exact nature of the "infinitesimal" numbers it used had not been dealt with. It was not until the late nineteenth century (two hundred years after Newton!) that the German mathematician Karl Weierstrass finally provided calculus with a rigorous base and did so without resorting to a new mathematics of infinity. But the suspicion remained that infinity would need to be conquered.

In 1874 Georg Cantor published a paper announcing the beginning of the battle for infinity. The first startling conclusion from this paper was that there are different "sizes" of infinities, an idea that remains as counterintuitive today as it was when Cantor first announced it.¹ The basic idea is this: the "sizes" (cardinalities) of two sets are compared by considering one-to-one correspondences between the sets. If set X can be put into one-to-one

correspondence with a part of set Y , then we say that the cardinality of Y is at least as great as that of X —that is, $|Y| \geq |X|$. (Here I use the symbol $|X|$ to denote the cardinal number of set X .) This device certainly works for finite cardinal numbers and, in fact, is the way we intuitively learn to think of numbers as children: 3 is less than 7 because we can associate a set of three objects in a one-to-one way with only part of a set of seven objects.

Cantor's breakthrough was to apply this same simple principle to infinite sets: If X and Y are sets with infinitely many elements each, we may still compare the sizes of X and Y by asking if X can be put into one-to-one correspondence with part of Y . If this is possible, then we can still write $|Y| \geq |X|$, just as we do in the finite case. If both $|Y| \geq |X|$ and $|X| \geq |Y|$ are true (that is, if X can be put into one-to-one correspondence with part of Y and Y can be put into one-to-one correspondence with part of X), then we conclude that $|Y| = |X|$ —the sets have equal cardinality.² However, if $|Y| \geq |X|$ holds true, but $|X| \geq |Y|$ is *not* true, then we conclude $|Y| > |X|$. The set Y is strictly larger (of greater cardinality) than X . Cantor managed to show that $|\mathbb{R}| > |\mathbb{N}|$ where \mathbb{R} is the set of real numbers and $\mathbb{N} = \{1, 2, 3, \dots\}$ is the set of natural numbers. The set of real numbers \mathbb{R} includes all numbers most of us ever think about—all those that can be written in decimal form, even if the decimal expansion never ends. The natural numbers are obviously in one-to-one correspondence with part of the real numbers; they *are* part of the real numbers, after all. But Cantor proved that there can be no one-to-one correspondence between the real numbers and any set of natural numbers, so $|\mathbb{R}| > |\mathbb{N}|$. Both sets are infinite, but they are not of equal cardinality.

Mathematicians use the symbol \aleph_0 (pronounced “aleph naught”—aleph is the first character in the Hebrew alphabet) to denote $|\mathbb{N}|$, the cardinal number of the set $\mathbb{N} = \{1, 2, 3, \dots\}$. A set whose cardinal number is \aleph_0 is said to be countable, since putting a set in exact one-to-one correspondence with $\{1, 2, 3, \dots\}$ can be thought of as “counting” that set. But according to Cantor's work, there are cardinal numbers larger than \aleph_0 . In fact, he showed that there are infinitely many infinite cardinal numbers and that there is no largest cardinal number. Any set (such as \mathbb{R}) whose cardinal number is larger than \aleph_0 is said to be uncountable. Informally,

countable sets are “small” infinite sets—much smaller than uncountable sets.

Types of Numbers

A second major implication of Cantor’s paper is a strong theme running through modern mathematics—that most numbers are very strange. To understand this idea, we first need to set out some different classes of numbers. Mathematicians like to classify numbers according to the types of equations for which they might be solutions. Although this system may seem odd at first, it is supported by centuries of experience. And it does make sense, for even informally we tend to think of numbers as solutions to equations. If I were to ask you what $2/3$ is, you might respond that it is the result of the quantity 2 being divided into 3 equal pieces: In other words, it is a quantity x , 3 of which would equal 2—a solution to the algebraic equation $3x = 2$.

Now equations like this one, of the form $ax = b$ where a and b are integers, are called linear equations. Their solutions (the fractions b/a) are called rational numbers. Numbers that are not rational—those that cannot be written as fractions of integers—are called, of course, irrational. Despite the sinister-sounding name, many irrational numbers are actually quite familiar to us. For instance, $\sqrt{2}$ is irrational. But while $\sqrt{2}$ may not be the solution to a linear equation, it is the solution to an only slightly more complex equation, namely $x^2 = 2$. This simple equation gives us a concrete way to think of $\sqrt{2}$; so despite being irrational, it is still fairly understandable.

Generally, a number x is said to be an algebraic number if it is the solution to a polynomial equation $a_n x^n + a_{n-1} x^{n-1} + \dots + a_2 x^2 + a_1 x = b$ where n is some positive integer and $a_n, a_{n-1}, \dots, a_2, a_1$, and b are all integers. So $\sqrt{2}$, despite being irrational, is definitely algebraic. Numbers that are not algebraic are called transcendental. You might be more familiar with the rational/irrational split of real numbers than with the algebraic/transcendental split. But in terms of characterizing which numbers are understandable and which are not, the latter does a much better job. (Again, because we understand numbers in terms of equations, transcendental numbers are not solutions to nice equations, so in a very real

sense, we have no fundamental way to grasp them.) You probably can't name any transcendental numbers other than a very few famous examples like the number π . (Some readers may also be familiar with the number e). It isn't that you don't know enough math to know more transcendentals; it's just that most transcendentals are so bizarre in their makeup as to be beyond human description.

Now, back to Cantor. What Cantor's results proved is that the "nice" algebraic numbers, while infinite in cardinality, form a smaller infinity than the "messy" transcendental numbers. In fact, the algebraic numbers are countable while the transcendental numbers are uncountable. This difference is great enough that, if you choose a truly random real number, the probability that it will be algebraic is zero. Oddly (and disturbingly to Cantor's contemporaries), Cantor accomplished this proof without giving any way of actually generating transcendental numbers. In effect, his conclusion means that almost all real numbers are too strange for us to "see."

Twentieth-century mathematics gave us another division of numbers into two classes—a division that is even more fundamental to the question of what it means to "understand" a number. The ideas came from the theory of computation—a mathematical exploration of what computing machines (represented in this case simply as sets of rules for manipulating inputs into outputs) can and cannot do. The groundwork of this theory was laid even before the development of electronic digital computers. There are several abstract models of computing machines, but the most widely accepted model is called a Turing machine³ (TM). A TM can best be understood as a mathematical model for an algorithmic process. Any computer running any program, and even human decision-making processes, can (in theory) be modeled by a TM.

We say that a number x is computable if there exists a TM that can output x to any decimal accuracy we wish. Clearly any rational number is computable, since we can output the decimal expansion of a/b by the simple algorithmic process of long division. In fact, you probably won't have too much trouble believing that all algebraic numbers are computable (i.e., the polynomial equation

that defines an algebraic number can be turned into a method for generating its decimal expansion). But the class of computable numbers is even bigger than the set of algebraic numbers since many transcendental numbers are also computable. For instance, the most famous transcendental number, π , can be computed using the following striking fact from calculus:

$$\pi = 4 - 4/3 + 4/5 - 4/7 + 4/9 - 4/11 + 4/13 - 4/15 + 4/17 - 4/19 + \dots$$

This does not mean we could ever write down the entire decimal expansion of π . We certainly cannot do that, for we know that it continues forever with no repetition or apparent pattern. But if you want to know the three-millionth digit⁴ after the decimal point in π , it could be computed by this formula.⁵ Since *any* method by which we choose to create a decimal number could be modeled by a TM, the computable numbers are the only numbers we can ever hope to “name” or write down. By definition, you can never write down a non-computable number.

But, as you may have already guessed, most real numbers are non-computable. In fact, the set of all TMs turns out to be a countable set, according to an argument we need not go into here. But the set of computable numbers has cardinality no bigger than the set of TMs, since there is an obvious one-to-one correspondence between the computable numbers and a collection of TMs. So, since the real numbers are uncountable and the computable numbers are just a puny countable part of all real numbers, in a very exact way we can say that “almost all” real numbers are uncomputable, and thus beyond our comprehension.

The Law of Mathematical Unapproachability

The second discovery from Cantor’s famous paper—that most real numbers are strange—is a precursor to a broad theme in modern mathematics, which I call the Law of Mathematical Unapproachability. It can be simply stated as: “Most objects in the universe of mathematics are too wild for humans to describe.” What is the “universe of mathematics”? Most mathematicians inherently believe that there *is* such a thing,⁶ though they would be hard pressed to describe it to you.⁷ But this universe of mathematics is as much a place to a mathematician as any physical location you’ve ever visited, even though mathematicians “go there” only

mentally through their work. But though it may be only a work of the mind, we think of it as real nonetheless. In that universe one can find the never-ending river of real numbers with the integers scattered uniformly along it, the perfect plane of Euclid, many oceans of functions, and the mountains of infinities that build forever on themselves.

But now consider that universe in the light of the Law of Mathematical Unapproachability. While I may visit the mathematical universe and tinker with a few of the pebbles I find there, most of its substance will be invisible to me. (Invisible, not undetectable. I know the non-computable numbers exist. I simply can't "see" them.) The objects mathematicians love to explore are, in fact, for the most part, not within their reach.⁸

The predominance of the transcendental numbers (and its later extension to non-computable numbers) was merely the first proved instance of the Law of Mathematical Unapproachability. Among its many other known occurrences are the following:

- Most continuous functions are hopelessly non-differentiable. This is calculus-speak for saying that most functions have graphs that are indescribably crinkly. In other words, our calculus applies in only a tiny corner of the universe of functions. Yet we study calculus because we can say something about that tiny corner, whereas we have only a few strained examples of what lies outside it.
- Most two-dimensional shapes are fractal, exhibiting infinitely complex behavior viewed at any scale. Traditional plane geometry says little about these objects, and the relatively new field of fractal geometry barely scratches the surface.
- Most mathematical sets cannot be described by any TM, even though sets are, in many ways, the most fundamental objects in mathematics. This limitation puts most of the objects that make up the foundation of mathematics beyond the reach of TMs—presumably, even those within our own skulls.

These instances of the Law of Mathematical Unapproachability are interesting, but they are of limited use in determining limits to human thought. After all, for the most part, they simply say that we can prove the existence of objects with complexity too great for human description. But note those important words:

“we can prove . . .” One could argue that, to a certain degree, we *do* understand non-computable numbers. We can prove they exist. We just can’t write one down. The above items give us tasks we cannot perform but not questions we cannot answer. However, there *are* questions we cannot answer. Their existence was guaranteed in one of the most famous mathematical/philosophical developments of the twentieth century: Gödel’s “Incompleteness Theorems.”

Gödel’s Theorems: Mathematics Discovers Its Limitations

In 1931, Kurt Gödel published his now-famous theorems on axiom systems. The exact statements of Gödel’s theorems are quite technical, but it is possible to lay out the main ideas in simple terms. Recall that an axiom is an assumption—something we agree to accept as true without proof. An axiom system is a set of such assumptions from which we hope to derive a set of useful theorems. An axiom system is said to be inconsistent if it is possible to prove contradictory statements from its axioms—clearly something we want to avoid. If the axioms have no such built-in contradictions, then we say the axiom system is consistent.

Now axiom systems are somewhat stuffy and hard to think about, so let’s switch over to thinking about computing machines. There’s actually an easy correspondence between an axiom system and a computing machine. Imagine loading your set of axioms into a machine’s memory, programming it to use correct logical inference, and then setting it to the task of outputting a list of all possible theorems that can be proved from those axioms.⁹ If the axioms are consistent, the machine will never output two contradictory statements, so we can consider the machine to also be consistent.

In the early twentieth century, there were high hopes that all of mathematics (and perhaps all of the sciences as well) would eventually be axiomatized. If that happened, and if this hypothetical computing machine were constructed to work with those axioms, there would be no more need for mathematicians. If you had a mathematical question, you’d simply ask UMTG (the Universal Math Theorem Generator). But then why stop there? If the sciences are also axiomatized (and human behavior and aesthetics along with them) we could build UEO (the Universal Everything

Oracle) that could predict all events, write the elusive perfect novel, and in short, leave nothing for us to do.¹⁰

Fortunately for all of us, this will never happen, for Gödel's first theorem says that no such machine is possible. In fact, no consistent machine can generate all theorems in just the limited area of arithmetic of the natural numbers. No matter what axioms you build into your machine, either it will be inconsistent or there will be correct statements about arithmetic that the machine can never derive.

The idea behind Gödel's proof is surprisingly simple. Imagine that we have a set of axioms (call it *A*), and from it we build a machine *M(A)* that we claim is a UMTG. Gödel can prove us wrong by constructing a true statement in arithmetic that our machine will never prove. He does this by asking to see how our machine works (that is, he asks to see our axioms *A*); and from the answer, he produces an arithmetic statement *S* that (in a complicated but very exact way) encodes the sentence "The machine *M(A)* will never prove this statement to be true." Now, think about that sentence for a minute:

- If our machine proves Gödel's arithmetic statement *S*, the sentence becomes false, which because of the encoding, makes statement *S* false. In this case, our machine is inconsistent since it has proved a false statement to be true.
- On the other hand, our machine certainly can't prove *S* to be false, for the minute it does, the sentence becomes true. Again, because of the encoding, this makes statement *S* true. Our machine is again inconsistent, having proved a true statement to be false.
- Thus, if our machine is consistent, the only possibility is that it will say nothing about statement *S*. But that makes Gödel's sentence true, and thus Gödel's arithmetized version *S* is a correct arithmetic statement. So we then have an example of a correct arithmetic fact that our machine cannot prove. This proves Gödel's first theorem.

Gödel's second theorem is similar, but with a slight twist. It says that one thing a consistent axiom system (or computing machine, if you prefer) can never prove is its own consistency. That's a nice bit of logical irony—no consistent computing machine I de-

sign can ever prove the statement “This machine is consistent.” In fact, there are only two possibilities for the status of a TM equipped to do arithmetic: Either it will be inconsistent (and thus useless), or it will be unable to demonstrate that it is consistent. Consider what that means for today’s mathematics. We do, in fact, have a set of axioms we use as the basis of arithmetic. Gödel’s second theorem says that either (1) those axioms are inconsistent—flawed by self-contradiction, or (2) we’ll never know that they are not. Those are the only two possibilities.

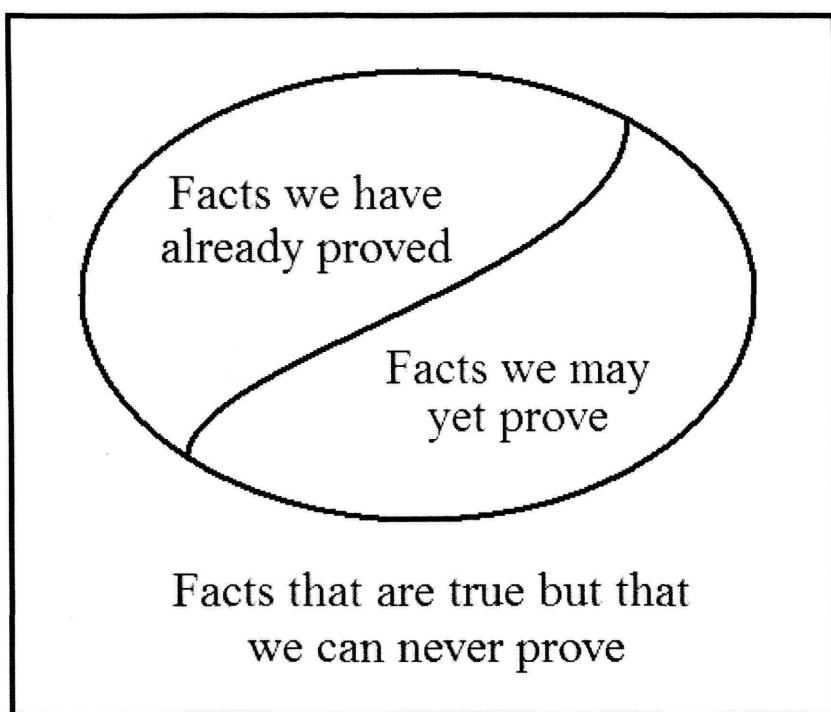
And, of course, the only way we could ever find out which possibility actually happens is for things to go just as we don’t want! It’s altogether within the realm of possibility that we could wake up tomorrow to the news that someone somewhere has discovered a contradiction in arithmetic, proving Possibility 1 true. This would be disastrous. Pretty much all of mathematics rests on the properties of the real numbers; so if arithmetic goes, the whole castle comes down. And if mathematics crumbles, what science would remain standing? The best we can hope for is that Possibility 2 is correct. We can’t prove it, so we have to hope for it. It’s a matter of faith¹¹ and simple pragmatism. Mathematicians act on the assumption that our axioms must be consistent, though thanks to Gödel, we know we can never be certain.

To summarize, then, Gödel’s theorems tell us two things about the limitations of mathematics:

- We can never discover all correct mathematical facts.
- We can never be certain that the mathematics we are doing is free of contradictions.

Mathematicians have grown more or less accustomed to these limitations. Most of us ignore the second one, since it’s a matter of faith, and there’s nothing much we can do about it. The first one intrigues us because mathematicians love unsolved problems. We’re happy that there is a never-ending supply of them.

There are many examples of conjectures in current mathematics that most mathematicians believe are almost certainly true but which seem to elude proof. Perhaps some of them are in fact unprovable (at least with our current axioms) and, hence, are instances of Gödel’s first theorem. That wouldn’t bother us too



The Universe of Mathematical Proof

much. But we are prone to thinking, consciously or not, that the unprovable facts are strange exceptions and that the ones we *can* prove are the rule. After all, we only know of a few genuinely unprovable statements, so surely (we think) there must be only a few of them. In short, our natural tendency as human mathematicians is to assume that nearly all the mathematics problems we encounter have solutions within the reach of human reason. But remember the transcendental numbers! We know of only a few, but they are in fact the rule. The algebraic numbers are the exceptions! What if the Law of Mathematical Unapproachability applies to mathematical truths?

Our Place in the Universe of Truth

Consider the set of all correct mathematics theorems—the Universe of Mathematical Truth. Once we decide on some axioms

to use, that universe divides naturally into three parts as illustrated in the diagram: (1) facts for which we already have proofs, (2) facts that have proofs we haven't found yet, and facts (we know they exist thanks to Gödel's first theorem) that have no proofs from our axioms but that are nonetheless true. Might not the Law of Mathematical Unapproachability suggest that most things in that universe fall into the third category? Might it not be that the "unprovable" part of the universe is in fact nearly everything, with the other two regions making up only an insignificantly thin slice? I don't know if that's correct. (Even if it *is* correct, that fact itself is probably one of those unprovable statements!) I don't even know the best way to measure the meaning of "most" in this setting. But I have a gut-level suspicion that something like this is what we're up against. In fact, I suspect that this picture holds no matter what axioms we use. Gödel tells us that no choice of axioms will eliminate the existence of unprovable truths. I suspect the natural extension holds: No choice of axioms can eliminate the predominance of unprovable truths.

Now I want to consider how these ideas from mathematics might apply to knowledge in general. I have always viewed learning in general, and mathematics in particular, as an adventure—something akin to exploring a world. The analogy of a universe of facts is not really an analogy to me. As a confirmed Platonist I believe in a universe of all truth—a collection of "that which is."

And I find hints of this Platonist view reflected in LDS scripture: "Truth abideth and hath no end," we read in Doctrine and Covenants 88:66. More pointedly, "All truth is independent in that sphere in which God has placed it, to act for itself, as all intelligence also; otherwise there is no existence" (D&C 93:30). In Mormon theology, truth is eternal and exists independent of our ability to detect or derive it. It is absolute.

Given that we exist within such a Universe of Truth, how do we go about finding our way about within it? I have viewed mathematics as a vehicle I can use in exploring (part of) the Universe of Truth. But in fact, the vehicle I call mathematics is one we all use in our exploration. TMs and axiom systems are really just fancy ways of describing the reasoning processes we all use. Perhaps you don't use the mathematical language that I do, and perhaps

you are not interested in the more esoteric mathematical landforms that fascinate me in the Universe of Truth, but we all use deductive reasoning as one way to reach truth, so Gödel's theorems caution us all that there are places this particular vehicle can never take us. In fact, I suspect that the Universe of Truth is a wild and rugged land, and our deduction-driven low-clearance vehicle of conscious human thought can take us to only an insignificant part of it.

The idea that there are truths beyond our reach would not surprise anybody. However, most of us are probably prone to thinking of this limitation as one of volume rather than of substance. We can readily see that there is more information out there than our minds can possibly hold. But the mathematics we have outlined suggests an awesome depth to the picture. There is truth—perhaps most truth, perhaps even almost all truth—that is of an essence and nature beyond our ability to consciously comprehend.

What if the Law of Mathematical Unapproachability is indeed valid and is, furthermore, only a shadow of the larger picture of our position in the Universe of Truth? In that case, the knowledge we are able to obtain through our conscious reasoning would be as sparse in the true substance of truth as the computable numbers are sparse in the real numbers. Almost all objects in the Universe of Truth would defy description or approach by our puny intellects. We might think of labeling bits of truth as either “logical” (capable of being deduced by linear reasoning) or “beyond logic.” If my suspicion is correct, almost everything in the Universe of Truth fits into the “beyond logic” category, but the few scattered “logical” bits are most of what we can see. Of course, the greatest truths—the most precious gems in that universe—are probably of the “beyond logic” category. (This would give new meaning to the familiar phrase “It’s only logical.”)

All of these possibilities run counter to the common tendency to believe in the inevitable ultimate triumph of the human intellect (the same tendency that led the mathematicians in Newton's wake to assume that all things would become predictable through calculus), but it runs in perfect harmony with several scriptural themes, such as the well-known dictum:

My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD.

For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. (Isa. 55:8–9)

I see hints of this theme in the Pearl of Great Price account of Moses's vision. Moses is overwhelmed by what he sees of God's creations. Furthermore, God declares that "they cannot be numbered unto man; but they are numbered unto me, for they are mine" (Moses 1:37) and "Here is wisdom and it remaineth in me" (v. 31). Similar wording is found in Joseph Smith's reaction to his own vision of God's kingdoms: "The mysteries of his kingdom . . . surpass all understanding" (D&C 76:114). The book of Ecclesiastes grapples with the issue of our inability to gain understanding, only to come to the less-than-satisfying conclusion that we cannot ever understand:

All this have I proved by wisdom: I said, I will be wise; but it was far from me.

That which is far off, and exceeding deep, who can find it out? (Eccl. 7:23–24)

Perhaps, though, the haunting feeling of inadequacy we sometimes get—the one I associate with reading Ecclesiastes, being surrounded by desert mountains, or looking into a star-filled night sky—is also ultimately hopeful, because it tells us something about our capacity to sense that which we cannot know. Perhaps that sense of smallness comes from our spirit's sense of how limited our vision truly is.

In fact, there is reason to suspect such a spiritual ability. For certainly God has access to the totality of the Universe of Truth. His ways, higher than ours as the heavens are higher than the earth, allow Him to see what we cannot. Through what means does He do this? Although God's ability to use reason and deduction would exceed our own (again, heaven and earth is no doubt an apropos analogy), Gödel's theorems place limits on what can be obtained through *any* deductive process, whether that deduction is being performed by man, machine, or even God. God must have access to truth through some greater, non-deductive means. I suspect that our reasoning and logic are but a shadow of a

greater spiritual sense for truth—one that we glimpse here through our personal testimonies. Truth, independent in its sphere, is garnered through spiritual means in greater measure than the trickle we obtain through our linear reasoning. Indeed, most truth is inaccessible to deduction and can only be obtained through this greater means. Even now we can “know” far more than we can give reason for. With God, truth simply is. It needs no derivation. So it will be one day for us.

This possibility helps me make sense of this passage regarding the relationship between our efforts to learn in this life and our ability to acquire truth in the hereafter:

Whatever principle of intelligence we attain unto in this life, it will rise with us in the resurrection.

And if a person gains more knowledge and intelligence in this life through his diligence and obedience than another, he will have so much the advantage in the world to come. (D&C 130:18–19)

“Intelligence,” as used in Mormon scripture, is a word that obviously has profound meaning. But given its sparse explanation there (D&C 93:29, 36), its meaning is difficult to grasp. Perhaps it is in some way a measure of our ability to obtain truth. Or perhaps intelligence *is* this greater means for truth-gathering—a means not bound by Gödel’s limitations on deductive reasoning. Perhaps it is the very means by which God knows truth. The “principle of intelligence we attain unto in this life” is what will rise with us; the next life will be a continuation of the search for truth we should be engaged in here.

Of course, in the end, I have no firm, final answers. I can only speculate on the meaning of what I felt that day reading Ecclesiastes. Those of us who work in science or mathematics develop very rigid ideas about what “knowing” something means. I “know” many things from the mathematics that I have studied. A continuous one-to-one function from a compact topological space to a Hausdorff topological space has a continuous inverse. I know this, and I love knowing such things. What humans have achieved through deduction is both beautiful and amazing to me. In a different way, I “know” that what I see here is only a dim shadow of what must really be—“through a glass, darkly” as Paul puts it—but I “know” that some day I will see it all “face to face” (1 Cor. 13:12).

The first kind of knowing I can explain. It is that of a Turing machine; and given enough time and paper, I could transmit this knowing to you. Not so with the latter type. I cannot explain it even to myself. It is unearthly and mysterious. It is the distant land faintly visible to my spirit from here on the shoreline where conscious deduction ends. The gulf between here and there is, I believe, what gives our spirits such pause in those moments of this life when we confront it.

Notes

1. Kent A. Bessey, "To Journey beyond Infinity," *BYU Studies* 43, no. 4 (2004): 23–32, is an interesting discussion of the philosophical implications of infinity.

2. There is actually a subtle mathematical twist here. We would like "equal cardinality" to mean that the two sets can be put into exact one-to-one correspondence. But $|Y| \geq |X|$ and $|X| \geq |Y|$ mean only that we can put X in one-to-one correspondence with part of Y and Y in one-to-one correspondence with part of X . Proving that these two conditions imply an exact one-to-one correspondence between X and Y was difficult enough to stump Cantor, but successful proofs were eventually produced by several mathematicians independently.

3. Named for Alan Turing (1913–54), one of the founders of the theory of computation, who first championed the TM concept as a model for algorithmic processes.

4. The three-millionth digit of π after the decimal point is a 3. In fact, digits 3,000,000 through 3,000,009 in π are 3697067915.

5. Actually, one really wouldn't want to use *this* particular formula, since it converges much too slowly to π . There are other similar (but more complicated) formulas that give much faster results.

6. Belief in this universe of mathematical objects is central to the Platonist philosophy in mathematics. A Platonist mathematician believes that the mathematical objects he or she studies—the integers, the real numbers, functions, shapes, and so on—actually exist, and that his or her work as a mathematician consists of discovering the properties of these objects. In contrast, the Formalist philosophy holds that mathematics is a human invention and that mathematical terms are simply abstract constructs having no real existence. Most mathematicians have a bit of both schools in them and are quite comfortable switching back and forth between the two outlooks as occasion requires, in much the same way that physicists have become comfortable with thinking of light as particle and/or wave.

7. Ian Stewart's *Flatterland* (Cambridge, Mass.: Perseus Publishing, 2001), a modern follow-up to Edwin Abbot's classic *Flatland*, gives the best description I have seen of the mathematical universe or, in his terminology, "Mathiverse." (See pp. 28–30.)

8. Though he lived two centuries before the central ideas discussed in this paper began to emerge, Sir Isaac Newton expressed something very like this sentiment in one of his most famous quotations. Shortly before his death, he wrote in his memoirs: "I do not know what I may appear to the world; but to myself I seem to have been only like a boy playing on the seashore, and diverting myself in now and then finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me." David Brewster, *Memoirs of the Life, Writings, and Discoveries of Sir Isaac Newton* (Edinburgh, Scotland: n.pub., 1855), vol. 2, chap. 27.

9. Though it sounds like every geometry student's dream, it isn't difficult to describe—in theory anyway—how such a machine would work. It would begin by outputting all conclusions reached by "one-step proofs"—conclusions reached by quoting one axiom. Then by beginning with these statements and following them with each of the system's axioms in turn, it can list all of the conclusions reached by "two-step proofs." These would then allow easy computation of the conclusions of "three-step proofs," and so on. Continuing in this way, any theorem that can be proved from the axioms would eventually be output.

10. This section follows ideas from Rudy Rucker's excellent book, *Infinity and the Mind: The Science and Philosophy of the Infinite* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995), chap. 4.

11. Even the most ardently atheistic or agnostic mathematicians and scientists, then, must be practitioners of the principle of faith. Without faith in the (unprovable) consistency of our mathematics, there would not be much point to pursuing mathematical or scientific questions.

FROM THE “FAITH AND KNOWLEDGE” CONFERENCE

Note: The Mormon Scholars Foundation was organized in 2007 to encourage emerging Latter-day Saint scholars and to improve the understanding of Mormonism among academics and other thoughtful observers. The Foundation sponsors conferences, lectures, and summer seminars for scholars interested in Mormonism. The following papers were presented by participants in the “Faith and Knowledge” conferences held at Harvard in 2009 and Yale in 2007. More information about the foundation is available at <http://www.mormonscholars.com>.

Toward a Theology of Dissent: An Ecclesiological Interpretation

Matthew Bowman

My goal here is twofold. First, I want to demonstrate that current notions about dissent in the Church—whether it is good or bad—are inadequate because the language available for talking about dissent is insufficient. Both dissenters and their critics oversimplify and improperly conflate categories, which leads to a great deal of suspicion and mistrust on all sides because we can’t communicate effectively with each other. This deficiency is not particularly anyone’s fault; rather, it indicates that we need a better concept of what dissent is, so that we can talk about it in more subtle ways.

Thus, my second task is to present a particular way of thinking

about Mormon ecclesiology. Ecclesiology is relevant because dissent is inherently a churchly act; the very word implies a particular relationship with authority. What I have to offer, I hope, will aid us in thinking about the roles dissent might play in a Mormon ecclesiological context.

For many Mormons, the word *dissent* functions, more or less, as a synecdoche for *apostasy*—that state defined in official Church publications as a state of being rather than as a particular violation, as a general orientation against the principles of the faith.¹ Elders Neal A. Maxwell, James E. Faust, and Russell M. Nelson, among other contemporary General Authorities, have used the terms interchangeably. There is simultaneously a great deal of line-blurring and very little wiggle room here. Dissenters stand in company with “critics” and “skeptics—anyone who keeps us in darkness and tries to keep us from finding the light,” as President Faust put it.² “Saints of the Lord follow Him and His anointed leaders,” Elder Nelson warned, so inevitably “the path of dissent leads to real dangers.” He offered as an example the corrupted Nephite dissenters referred to in Alma 47:36, who “not long after their dissensions became more hardened and impenitent, and more wild, wicked and ferocious.”³

According to these apostles, dissent is a manifestation of two sins: the specific crime of contention and disobedience but also, consistent with its characterization as apostasy, a sign that one is generally out of harmony with the Church and therefore out of harmony with the faith the Church teaches. Indeed, the identification between assent to authority and commitment is so close that that the Church’s official reference work *True to the Faith* promises: “You can safeguard yourself against personal apostasy by keeping your covenants, obeying the commandments [and] following Church leaders.”⁴

This sort of conflation is unfortunate but also understandable. The most famous dissenters in Mormon history may be the Book of Mormon characters Laman and Lemuel.⁵ Close behind, of course, come the triple anti-Christes of the same book. Given the imperative of “likening” that governs Mormon scriptural hermeneutics, the examples of Sherem and Korihor can be read, not merely as particular events, but also as normative generalizations. Since Sherem and Korihor advocated dissent out of insincerity

and a conscious decision to follow Satan rather than God, and since Laman and Lemuel murmured, and since the Nephite dissenters who followed Amalekiah did so despite their “knowledge of the Lord” (Alma 47:36), it is easy to conclude that dissent is inherently harmful both to the Church and to the believer. Moreover, in all of these cases, dissent is not accidentally or unintentionally harmful but is undertaken with deliberate and malevolent intent.

Consequently, given the scriptural and institutional authority behind these assertions, it seems clear that it is quite Mormon to label dissent evil. But many dissenters insist that their actions are not the fruit of apostasy. Rather they are motivated by deep commitment to the principles of Mormonism. They point to the tradition of Joseph Smith, dissenter from frontier evangelicalism. They insist that Mormon doctrine describes individuals who are born equipped with the right to seek divine inspiration, tools of powerful spiritual discernment, and a conscience uncorrupted by the Fall; thus, they are able to correctly make moral decisions—and all of this independent of the structure of the institution. This argument ought to temper our fear of dissent by reminding us that dissent is as rooted in Mormon theology as the assertions of obedience to authority of the apostles quoted above.

But neither of these competing definitions of dissent is entirely satisfying. Their ways of addressing each other, for instance, seem rather one-sided, each becoming an excuse for disregarding the other. On the one hand, we are told that personal inspiration should confirm what General Authorities have already stated; on the other, we hear the constantly repeated mantra that the Brethren are capable of mistakes, too. These claims do little to resolve the deeper tension between individual conscience and the ordained hierarchy, a tension that exists because Mormonism grants to both a legitimate claim to epistemological authority.

Resolving this tension seems an impossible conundrum. However, Catholic theologian Avery Cardinal Dulles has offered a definition of dissent that uses that tension in a constructive fashion. According to Dulles, dissent, as differentiated from a sinful state like apostasy, is rather a single measured judgment, in which a Church member takes exception to one of the Church’s declared

positions. Further, dissent is, in the best cases, not merely a theoretical or intellectual disagreement but an imperative born of a "divergent sense of moral obligation."⁶

Several points of interest lurking here add texture to the debate between conscience and authority. First, a dissenter can honestly perceive the decision as a moral one. Dulles and other Catholic theologians assert that such a thing is possible within righteousness because human nature, though scarred by the Fall, naturally tends to the moral; conscience, therefore, can, in many cases, be trusted.⁷ Mormon theology, as I have indicated, offers similar warrant for the exercise of conscience.

But at the same time, Dulles reminds us that dissent always occurs within the context of a church, not merely as a rejection of it. This is important because, for both Catholics and Mormons, belonging to a church means membership in an ecclesiastical body that claims to be more than merely a gathering of Christians. Rather, God is in contact with the Church as well as with the individual. In other words, the church is a sacrament; it is a channel through which God extends grace and duty to human beings in ways not possible for individuals alone. In such a religion, authority and conscience exist in dialectic; they condition each other, strain at each other, but neither can exist fully before God without the other. The Church does not exist for its own sake, but neither do we gain salvation in isolation. So one can—and should—dissent as a member of a faith. The act of dissent should not be understood as a departure from that Church but rather as an act within it that draws upon its theology, history, and relationships. A Mormon dissenter should dissent first as a Mormon.

In a way, then, Dulles affirms both sides of the present Mormon debate. But it is in the acceptance of that tension that, paradoxically, we can find a legitimate place for dissent in Mormon theology. While our consciences must be taken seriously, we cannot allow them to serve as an easy escape when the Church's demands seem troubling, because dissent is both an ecclesiological and an individual issue. Membership in the Church is different than membership in a civic or economic body; the Church exerts claims of a spiritual type similar to that of conscience. To invoke, then, the same sorts of arguments that we might offer to justify dissent from a political party is to ignore the sacramental nature

of the Church's communion. It is no wonder that many Mormons, even if they are not theologically sophisticated, at some level recognize the importance of words like *covenant* and consequently are intuitively unsympathetic to the sort of dissent which appears to miss much of what is fundamental about belonging to the LDS Church.

This is unfortunate. As I will argue shortly, I believe that dissent, rightly pursued, strengthens both Mormons as religious people and also the Church as a body. But the power of individual liberty in American culture makes the temptation to invoke it as a self-justifying argument for dissent within Mormonism doubly strong. Much dissent uses trigger words like "authoritarian" or "tyranny" to attack not merely positions of the Church but the very legitimacy of the authority behind them. Such an argument is old, old criticism, dating back to the cultural context of nineteenth-century America, in which political liberalism celebrated the civic freedoms of the individual and looked with suspicion upon institutional power. Protestant evangelicalism similarly maintained that a personal encounter with God, unmediated by institution or authority, was the determinative event of one's religious life. Both forms of individualism crop up in Mormon dissent.⁸

One example is Andrew Callahan, the founder of Signing for Something, a group that opposed the Church's efforts to pass Proposition 8 in the 2008 California elections. Callahan maintained that the Church's position ran counter to Christ's directive to "love one another" but also that it was an attempt to improperly assert religious authority in the public sphere. He claimed that the Church's interjection of its authoritative voice forced him and others into "choosing between the voice of our conscience and the advice of our church's leadership." While the dilemma that Callahan and many other California Mormons faced was a heartbreakingly painful one, I would argue that the form of Callahan's dissent failed to deal with the complicated issues of Mormon ecclesiology. Callahan maintained that the Church's actions were an inappropriate assertion of power because they interfered with "basic civil rights."⁹ This sort of political language is not uncommon among Mormon dissenters or critics. Canadian critic Bob McCue, for instance, has argued that Mormonism's no-

tion of freedom is incompatible with democracy and is therefore to be scoffed at.¹⁰

Let me be clear—I am here neither endorsing nor decrying Callahan's politics; rather, I am saying that Mormon theology needs a more robust language of dissent, one which avoids appeals to political or evangelical language in favor of ideas more in tune with Mormonism's own ecclesiology and anthropology. Finding such a language would, in turn, allow us to escape the simple dichotomies that popular readings of the Book of Mormon create and to separate the particular act of dissent Callahan pursued from the unhelpful language of critics like McCue who judge Mormonism on ideologically inappropriate standards. The Church is essentially a theological organization, after all, and there is no fundamental reason to assume that it *should* be compatible with the political workings of modern liberal democracy.

To provide another example, Grant H. Palmer looks with impatience upon the ecclesiological trappings of Mormonism, maintaining that, while the theological innovations, sacraments, and covenants that Joseph Smith came up with are all very nice, they should, in the end, be merely supplementary pieces in an assemblage of Christianity.¹¹ That form of Christianity resembles the sacramental soteriology that Joseph Smith erected and which the LDS Church has long taught less than it represents liberal Protestantism's emphases upon common grace and social justice. Palmer's particular appeal for Mormonism's refocusing on Christ, then, though worthy as a theological goal, will fail to find much traction in Mormon theological culture, because he is arguing that Mormonism should not be Mormon.

However, these sorts of appeals to vaguely Protestant theologies of grace have long been popular among Mormonism's critics, often because they dovetail nicely with complaints about church hierarchy. Paul Toscano, for instance, expresses bafflement with Russell M. Nelson's claims about the nature of divine love¹² by wearily deeming it "the usual confusion" over works and grace among Mormon leaders, and proclaiming, "All I can do in response is to repeat Paul's teaching in the epistle to the Romans. . . . The works that save us are not ours, but those done by Jesus Christ in Gethsemane and on Calvary."¹³ But of course, Mormon

soteriology, and arguably the Apostle Paul's, are both more complicated than Toscano implies; his appeal to the authority of scripture flattens the internal questions and difficulties of the texts. This sort of Protestant interpretation of Paul may be compelling theology in its own right, but it is not self-evidently Mormon doctrine.

Similarly, Shawn McCraney, a self-styled "Born Again Mormon," states that his book by that title is not "anti-Mormon literature" because it, commendably, does not engage in "gotcha" history or trumpet the failures of Mormonism's founders (though his success at these tasks is debatable). Rather it is a devotional work that seeks to correct certain overemphases in present-day Mormon culture. It explains how Mormons "who have been miraculously born again by the gift and power of God (through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ) can remain active, peaceful, evangelical members of the present-day LDS Church." However, McCraney adds that Mormonism deviates from "orthodox Christianity" by teaching "the idea that there are certain laws and principles that . . . must be adhered to and followed in order for God's people to progress."¹⁴ This theology, McCraney maintains, actually obstructs the salvation of Mormons and must at a fundamental theological—though not, perhaps, at a social or cultural—level be set aside. Unfortunately, this means that McCraney stumbles in the same way as Palmer or Toscano; he regards a great deal of what is foundational to the mature Mormon theology that Joseph Smith enunciated as ephemera to be set aside. The sort of dissent he engages in, then, misses the mark and his book becomes essentially an evangelical mission tract. Again I should state that, as with Callahan, it may be useful here to look past McCraney's stumbles to better understand the possible uses of dissent in the Church. Though McCraney is an excommunicant by request who has been denied rebaptism, his underlying point about the neglected place of grace in Mormon life is echoed by Mormons in good standing like Stephen Robinson. McCraney's work has also been criticized for its sympathetic stance toward the Church by such notable anti-Mormons as Ed Decker.¹⁵ A discussion of his ideas within the Church—unlike those of say, Bob McCue—might aid in the creation of a spiritually deeper community.

So, the aspiring Mormon dissenter is caught between, on the one hand, a Church leadership that finds it alarmingly easy to equate dissent with apostasy and, on the other, critics who fail to engage with Mormonism on its own terms. If Mormon dissent is both to be effective and to find a place within the Church, neither of these situations can prevail. In the following paragraphs, I hope to offer a reconceptualization of Mormon ecclesiology to make the case that dissent of a particular kind might be both acceptable in and enriching to the Mormon tradition.

The first thing to do, I think, is to broaden our conception of the Church beyond the model that Dulles calls “institutional.”¹⁶ An institutional church conceives of itself in primarily organizational and even juridical terms. It lays great stress upon the managerial functions and responsibilities of various offices, upon correct procedure and proper deference. Contemporary Mormonism, postdating the organizational revolution of Correlation, emphasizes the administrative nature of priesthood organization, subordinating Church auxiliaries to the priesthood hierarchy of General Authorities and centralizing control over Church curriculum, activities, and teachings. An institutional church is vulnerable to a lack of flexibility, a tendency toward secularization, and a propensity to minimize the mystical and organic characteristics of the Church in favor of the procedural and quantifiable. It is easy to see how, in such a Church, dissent can be collapsed into disloyalty.

However, I would argue that, for several reasons, thinking of the Church as primarily an administrative and institutional hierarchy of authority is an oversimplification that neglects its sacramental qualities. Particularly relevant for our purposes is the question of how epistemology relates to ecclesiology—that is, where in the Church we might find authoritative truth. Karl Barth said that the greatest problem with Catholicism was its “and”; Catholics embraced faith *and* reason, scripture *and* tradition, grace *and* works. Like Catholicism, Mormonism acknowledges a number of authoritative sources of knowledge about ultimate things: scripture, reason, particular events in the history of the Church, personal inspiration through conscience or “the light of Christ,” and the authoritative statements of the Church leadership.¹⁷ Perhaps because of this epistemological multiplicity, as

Nathan Oman has argued, there is very rarely a clear and conclusive method for determining what official Church doctrine is.¹⁸ Judging what is or is not official, a distinction relatively easy for Dulles as a Catholic, is much harder in Mormonism. Many Mormons would follow Robert Millet and maintain that a unified proclamation of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve is official—but some such proclamations, such as the 1876 Proclamation on the Economy, are not considered official today. Rather, in virtually every case, a slightly different confluence of factors generates a common understanding of what is or is not official, a judgment frequently guided simply by what is or is not emphasized at any given time in official venues.

This is as it should be. Paul calls the church the “body of Christ,” and a church which is a body is also living (as God names His church in section 1 of the Doctrine and Covenants), which means that it is ever changing, perpetually growing and adapting in response to the situations in which it finds itself. This, of course, is why Mormons insist upon the value of continuing revelation and an open canon. Our beliefs are essentially fluid. But all of this is also a signal that context matters to Mormons. We are, like Catholics, bound to a church and therefore to the weight of time, tradition, and history. In contrast, to Protestants, theologies of salvation, the Church, and the power of the word of God can be described as historyless.

This historical awareness is relevant for two reasons. First, it means that the Church is bound to the contingent rather than the eternal and is therefore shot through with the flaws that afflict everything in this fallen world.¹⁹ In the first section of the Doctrine and Covenants God grants that He is pleased with the establishment of “the only true and living church”—but immediately follows that statement with several caveats, culminating in a reminder that “the Lord cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance.” Though we are always striving for sinlessness, God’s approval of the Church does not mean He is unaware of its flaws. This state is unavoidable and ultimately irreparable; the Church, as Bruce McConkie acknowledged, always speaks knowing that it looks forward to more light and more truth than it then possesses in any given now.²⁰ It is what Catholic theologian

Charles Curran described as “a pilgrim church,” the collected faithful bearing each other up on the journey through history toward the redemption at Calvary. Even as history may demonstrate flaws, it also reveals the gifts of grace that have guided a maturing people.²¹ God is in the present, but also in the past, and will be in the future.

Second, the Church’s historical awareness means that Mormon ethical theology is much closer to Curran’s theory of “relational-responsibility” ethics than to a sort of propositional deontology which maintains that context does not matter in moral decision making. Nephi killed Laban in response to a particular set of circumstances. We have continuing revelation in part because context does matter, and particular mitigating circumstances are legion. In Mormonism’s particular soteriology, obedience to God is required, not for obedience’s own sake or because submission to the divine itself is a first principle, but rather because it gestures toward more foundational principles of progress and development. The secondary nature of commandments in Mormonism is the reason we are urged to pray for guidance before making moral choices. As Apostle Dallin H. Oaks has stated: “As a General Authority, I have the responsibility to preach general principles. . . . There are exceptions to some rules.”²² Similarly, as Curran argued, we must judge “the morality of actions not merely in terms of the nature and purposes of individual faculties or substances but rather in relation to other beings as persons.”²³ To cite Thomas Aquinas’s example, normally we are required to return the property of others; but if someone who is drunk, enraged, and threatening to kill people asks you to return the sword he lent you, you have an obligation not to return the sword. The moral dilemmas of any particular situation can be best grasped by those individuals who stand within it and who are therefore best equipped to judge the particulars.²⁴

These two factors combined should not make us wary of official positions which the Church takes, though they may mean that, following Oaks, the Church is better equipped to proclaim general rather than particular principles. What these factors should do is make us think harder about the complex interplay between individuals and institution as we seek to make moral judgments. I would maintain that dissent in Mormonism functions

much like moral judgment; what rises to that category from simple disagreement is necessarily determined case by case and is deeply dependent upon context. This characteristic should indicate to us that there is far more theological room for dialogue on many issues than we usually assume and that, indeed, such dialogue is often essential for the Church to move forward toward greater truth.

This dialogue often occurs at multiple levels of the Church. Brigham Young espoused and taught the Adam-God doctrine. There was some debate within the Church hierarchy about it, but just as significant was the doctrine's failure to gain the widespread approval of the Saints. In the late nineteenth century, multiple Saints took issue with the doctrine; and there was little trouble thirty years later when the First Presidency and leaders like James E. Talmage enunciated a new trinitarian theology.²⁵ Elder Nelson's talk clarifying the nature of divine love has suffered a similar fate; the Saints have not rejected the term "unconditional love" in reference to God as Nelson recommended; it has appeared in a number of works published since the talk and was used by another apostle, Robert D. Hales, in the October 2008 general conference.²⁶

The revocation of the priesthood ban is another example. Though some argue that the June 1978 revelation did not come under pressure, I maintain that the scholarly work of Saints like Lester Bush²⁷ and the discontent—sometimes public—of many more was honest dissent, drawing upon other sources of moral truth to propel the entire Church toward greater righteousness. The Church, to use Curran's phrase, is a place of "communal moral discernment."²⁸ We wrestle with what we are taught, strive to work out moral obligations in our homes and neighborhoods and communities, teach each other through action and word, and gradually come to some sense of the truth through the demands of experience. The Holy Spirit sometimes moves in the hard-won moral sense of the collective community of the faithful; and, as Armand Mauss has pointed out, it can be the role of dissenters to give that spirit voice and to raise questions that General Authorities' own experiences might not have led them to ask.²⁹

What is interesting about this dynamic process of doctrinal

development is the model of the Church it suggests, one similar to Dulles's "community church."³⁰ In this model, organization is not linear, but networked; there is a variety of roles to fill; all are interdependent, and all tools do not rest in any one place. This model is a modern rephrasing of Paul's classic metaphor of the Church as the body of Christ. I should be clear that I am not advocating in any way a reduction of the authority vested in the General Authorities of the Church. What I *am* arguing is that they do not bear all responsibility—a concept different from administrative capability.

Not that the Church's Correlation movement needs another crime laid at its door, but among its effects was to direct the Saints' attention inward and upward toward the priesthood hierarchy, training them to expect all good things to come from Salt Lake City. Further, it trained General Authorities to think of themselves as primarily administrators, responsible to the institution as much as to its members. However, as Doctrine and Covenants 46:11 teaches, "There are many gifts, and to every man is given a gift by the Spirit of God." Inspiration of the Spirit is one of these gifts, but another is "the word of knowledge" (v. 18), while others are faith, prophecy, and wisdom. These gifts are distributed throughout the Church, and each one of them is a way to learn truth about God. This is why the Church as a body is more than the Saints as a group; it is also why overemphasizing the administrative power of priesthood can create a problematic imbalance.

The point here is that the General Authorities of the Church perform essential, but still particular, functions; and holding the priesthood keys to administer the Church and its ordinances is not the same thing as possessing all spiritual gifts. The mandate under which General Authorities govern the Church is pastoral, to maintain the salvific communion the Saints have with each other. The priesthood administers sacraments, cares for the needs of believers, and nurtures the spiritual health of souls. The revelation that is now Doctrine and Covenants 28, for example, instructs Oliver Cowdery to "teach" the Saints (v. 1); indeed, he was the first Mormon to deliver what we today call a talk. But Cowdery's mandate is carefully described and circumscribed in a number of ways. If he was "led . . . by the Comforter to speak or teach . . . by the way of commandment unto the church," he

should do so, but “thou shalt not write by way of commandment, but by wisdom.” Nor may he “command him who is at thy head, and at the head of the church.” The purpose of these gifts was to “cause my church to be established among them [the Lamanites],” among whom he is sent on a mission (vv. 4–6, 8, 14).³¹ Frequently when high officials of the Church like Cowdery, Joseph Knight, Hyrum Smith or even Joseph himself are instructed to preach the gospel, they are told to “exhort,” a particular type of preaching known to nineteenth-century Americans.³² The preaching style described in D&C 15:6 is a good example: “this thing which will be of the most worth unto you will be to declare repentance unto this people, that you may bring souls unto me.” The Doctrine and Covenants repeatedly commands the early leaders of the Church to give primary emphasis to repentance in their preaching; section 19 instructs them to “preach naught but repentance (v. 21) and directs that “of tenets thou shalt not talk” (v. 31; see also 14:8, 15:6, 16:6, 44:3). Furthermore, the apostles in the Quorum of the Twelve, of course, are to be “special witnesses of the name of Christ to all the world—thus differing from other offices of the Church” (D&C 107:23). They speak primarily not to clarify doctrine or to give their hearers God’s opinion about particular issues, but to call people to Christ, to urge righteous behavior, and to encourage the Church to move forward as one. To borrow an evangelical term, the primary responsibility incumbent upon an apostle who opens his mouth is to witness.

Conceiving of the priesthood in this way—as primarily spiritual and pastoral, a role consistent with the Pauline body of Christ—helps us to visualize the Church as a sacramental community that transcends the skeleton of the administrative bureaucracy, a body that fears the rupturing damage of injury more than the transient pain of disagreement. In the Book of Mormon, of course, the most nagging sin is not doctrinal dissent, but those things—often social and cultural—which cause division in the community. Honest dissent is possible, not only because the authorities of the Church are not omniscient but also because the nature of their callings neither demands nor expects them to be.

This view does not minimize the importance of the General Authorities’ role as leaders and administrators. They are due

something similar to the *obsequium religiosum* of Catholicism: the “due respect” or “assent of faith,” an acknowledgement of the particular authority they hold as administrators of God’s church. But numerous threads to moral wisdom are woven into the fabric of human existence; and it is inevitable, given our imperfections, that sometimes some will knot, or particular individuals will suffer blind spots. Because of this, the body of the Church works in synergy; tension is inherent because perfection is impossible, but it is a dynamic tension that pushes the Church forward to greater truth. The pastoral role demands not assertion by fiat, but rather understanding, sympathy, and healing of the dissonant agony that a Saint who feels compelled to dissent may feel, for easing pain is the first mission of the pastor. Recognition of the importance of the pastoral role will help authorities confronted with dissent to avoid defensiveness.

I should close by outlining some of the responsibilities of the dissenter, for they also exist. I hope that what I’ve said already makes clear what many of them are. Dissenters should seek to ground their protest in the language and intellectual traditions of Mormonism. This means that, though the dynamic vagueness of Mormon theology and the multifaceted nature of Mormon epistemology make a great deal of honest dissent possible, boundaries must exist. These boundaries are necessary because, while priesthood leadership may have a limited perspective, so also might the dissenter. The virtue of mutual humility should lead both dissenter and Church leader to acknowledge that neither holds a monopoly on divine truth. This acknowledgement, in turn, dispels the false dichotomy of institution confronting individual in favor of the quest for what Dulles calls “authentic consensus,”³³ an engagement based on charity in which both sides recognize the higher goal of sacred and inclusive communion, a church made healthier through cultivating the dynamic power of its own tensions.

Notes

1. “Apostasy,” *True to the Faith* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2004), 13.

2. James E. Faust, “Put Light in Your Life,” *New Era*, June 2007, 4.

3. Russell M. Nelson, “The Canker of Contention,” *Ensign*, May 1989, 68.

4. *True to the Faith*, 13.

5. For instance, Neal A. Maxwell, "Lessons from Laman and Lemuel," *Ensign*, November 1999, 6, advises Church members that "we should so liken . . . these two" to contemporary dissenters in order to avoid "failing to understand the dealings of the Lord with his children."

6. Avery Dulles, *The Resilient Church: The Necessity and Limits of Adaptation* (New York: Doubleday, 1977), 107; Margaret Farley, "Ethics, Ecclesiology, and the Grace of Self Doubt," in *A Call to Fidelity*, edited by Timothy O'Connell (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2002), 68.

7. Charles Curran, *Faithful Dissent* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1969), 78–79.

8. See Seth Payne, "Purposeful Strangers: A Study of the ex-Mormon Narrative," Paper presented at the Sunstone Symposium, Salt Lake City, August 9, 2008, for a similar distinction between evangelical and secular Mormon criticism.

9. See www.signingforsomething.org/blog/pageid?=260 (accessed October 31, 2008).

10. Bob McCue, "Are Mormons Free?" *By Common Consent: The Newsletter of the Mormon Alliance* 12, no. 1 (June 2006): [2].

11. Grant H. Palmer, *An Insider's View of Mormon Origins* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2004), 261–63; *The Incomparable Jesus* (Salt Lake: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 51–53, 110.

12. Russell M. Nelson, "Divine Love," *Ensign*, February 2003, 20.

13. Paul James Toscano, "For the Love of God," *By Common Consent: The Newsletter of the Mormon Alliance* 9, no. 3 (July 2003), [2].

14. Shawn McCraney, *I Was a Born-Again Mormon: Moving toward Christian Authenticity* (New York: Alatheia Press, 2007) ii, 239–40.

15. See, for instance, Stephen Robinson, *Believing Christ: The Parable of the Bicycle and Other Good News* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992) 14–17. On Decker and McCraney, see Blair Hodges, "Review of Shawn McCraney, *I Was a Born-Again Mormon: Moving Toward Christian Authenticity*," forthcoming in the *FARMS Review of Books* 21, no. 1 (2009).

16. Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1974), 35.

17. See D&C 14:18–20, Moroni 7:18. Robert Millet, "What Is Our Doctrine?" *The Religious Educator: Perspectives on the Restored Gospel* (newsletter of BYU's Religious Studies Center) 4, no. 3 (2003): 15–33.

18. Nathan B. Oman, "A Defense of the Authority of Church Doctrine," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 40, no. 4 (Winter 2007): 1–27.

19. See, for example, Grant Wacker, *Augustus Strong and the Dilemma*

of *Historical Consciousness* (Atlanta, Ga.: Mercer, 1985); George Lindbeck, "Doctrinal Development and Protestant Theology," in *Man as Man and Believer*, edited by Edward Schillebeeckx (New York: Paulist Press, 1967), 138–39.

20. Bruce R. McConkie, "All Are Alike unto God," August 18, 1978, CES Religious Educators Symposium address, speeches.byu.edu/?act=viewitem&id=1570 (accessed October 31, 2008): "We spoke with a limited understanding and without the light and knowledge that now has [sic] come into the world. We get our truth and our light line upon line and precept upon precept. We have now had added a new flood of intelligence and light on this particular subject, and it erases all the darkness and all the views and all the thoughts of the past."

21. Curran, *Faithful Dissent*, 96–97.

22. Dallin H. Oaks, "Dating versus Hanging Out," *Ensign*, June 2006, 15.

23. Charles Curran, *A New Look at Christian Morality* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Fides Publishers, 1968), 244.

24. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, IIa, IIae, 120.

25. Boyd Kirkland, "The Development of the Mormon Doctrine of God," in *Line upon Line: Essays in Mormon Doctrine*, edited by Gary James Bergera (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989), 42–43, 46.

26. See, for example, Drew Williams, *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Understanding Mormonism* (New York: Alpha Books, 2003), 213; Stephen Covey, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Families* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1998), 63; Robert D. Hales, "Christian Courage: The Price of Discipleship," *Liahona*, November 2008, 72–75.

27. Lester E. Bush Jr. "Mormonism's Negro Doctrine: An Historical Overview," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 8 (Spring 1973): 11–68.

28. Farley, "Ethics, Ecclesiology, and the Grace of Self Doubt," in *Call to Fidelity*, 65.

29. Armand Mauss, "Alternate Voices: The Calling and Its Implications," *Sunstone*, Issue 76 (April 1990): 7–10.

30. Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church: Expanded Edition* (New York: Doubleday, 1987), 205–6.

31. See also Dallin H. Oaks's reflections on Doctrine and Covenants 28 in *His Holy Name* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1998), viii.

32. For a contemporary example, see WGT Shedd, *Homiletics and Pastoral Theology* (New York: Scribner, 1867), 158–59.

33. Dulles, *The Resilient Church*, 111.

Belonging (and Believing) as LDS Scholars of Religion

Mauro Properzi

More than half a century ago, sociologist Thomas O'Dea said the following about the university student who is a Latter-day Saint: "He has been taught by the Mormon faith to seek knowledge and to value it; yet it is precisely this course, so acceptable to and so honored by his religion, that is bound to bring religious crisis to him and profound danger to his religious belief. The college undergraduate curriculum becomes the first line of danger to Mormonism in its encounter with modern learning."¹

O'Dea's comments were general to higher education and not specific to the academic study of religion. Still, it is more than likely that he would have predicted an even greater crisis in the lives and in the faith of LDS graduate students who are involved in the academic study of religion. In fact, studies have shown that scientists and students of areas that treat religion as their object of examination are less likely to be believers than are natural scientists and students of other subjects.²

The implication is that the very environments in which we learn and study are permeated with skepticism, which may lead to the erosion of faith. Thus, whether we speak in terms of a full-blown crisis of faith or simply of uncomfortable feelings like confusion, anxiety, and disappointment, the assumption seems both logical and widespread that all LDS graduate students of religion will experience to some degree the predicament O'Dea describes.³

Although questions of belief and of believing are certainly an important element of many a religious crisis, my purpose in this short essay is to focus on what I deem to be another significant component in the nature and dynamics of many of these trou-

bling emotions, namely, the need to belong. Psychology and personal experience have taught me that the more clearly an uncomfortable feeling is understood, the more likely we are to manage it and, possibly, resolve it. Yet intellectual circles which understand religious distress primarily in terms of cognitive dissonance or philosophical and theological uncertainties often fail to address the issue of belonging with sufficient attention.

While it is sometimes useful to distinguish between matters of belief and of belonging, in actuality they are related aspects of individuals' common religious experience. In fact, believing and belonging tend to correlate heavily in the same direction; what we believe and our sense of belonging to a community of believers usually fluctuate in a parallel manner.⁴ Furthermore, causality may apply in various degrees to their association so that, to express it in Cartesian terms, "I believe, therefore I belong," or, as cultural anthropology has taught us, "I belong, therefore I believe." In the Church we also emphasize this correlation: those of us who have been on missions will recall the frequency with which we were taught about the need to facilitate both spiritual and social conversions in investigators. In other words, we were being taught about the importance of the coexistence of believing and belonging.

Still, I am concerned that, in an effort to find stability and to seek resolution to problems of the intersection between religious faith and the academic study of religion, we may focus our energy and time exclusively on issues of belief. Indeed, there are circumstances in which these issues are central; but in other instances, they may be secondary. I will go even further and suggest that the human and spiritual drive to belong is often stronger than our need for cognitive clarity and understanding, as some studies on social conformity may imply.⁵ Hence, although one may learn to accept ambiguity in matters of knowledge, belief, and perspective, prolonged perception of disapproval or rejection by significant groups or individuals will invariably cause emotional pain. I posit that some of the problematic feelings experienced as LDS graduate students of religion may center on issues of belonging, or, more widely, of personal identity. We may, in fact, ask ourselves to what extent the search for truth is the true objective of our studies and, on the other hand, to what degree the ultimate

goal of our endeavor lies in being welcomed and accepted by a particular academic reference group. Is the price paid for such an acceptance a corresponding feeling of rejection by our spiritual reference group, which is the Church?

For example, a few months ago I received an email from a good friend, who is also an LDS graduate student in comparative religions. He is a returned missionary and, to my knowledge, has always been a devoted member, faithful in his callings and strongly committed to the gospel and the Church:

I'm still experiencing my crisis of faith that I detailed for you before. Still hanging on in my calling and so on, but on the mental level I'm close to capitulating and have seriously considered giving up my calling and becoming less-active. It is getting increasingly difficult for me and my integrity with the black-and-white thinking and institutional sugarcoating that we talked about, and it's hard to effect any change in things. I gave a forewarning to my sister some weeks ago . . . and she took it ok. But then again perhaps I won't do anything about my status and my thoughts will change to the better, who knows.

Our earlier conversation had focused on his struggle to accept how the Church presents itself in telling its own history to its members and to the world. He feels that it is dishonest to romanticize our past and to obliterate those aspects of our history that are difficult and problematic. While what he calls "historical white-washing" certainly occurs at many levels among Church members, he is especially bothered by its manifestations in the Church's public relations.

Some time after I received this email, we spoke on the phone; and he confided a few more details that I hadn't expected about his concern. His specific problem may have given rise to comments focused on difficulties with certain beliefs. For example, he may have suggested he did not believe the Brethren to be inspired because of the apparent "dishonesty" in the Church's public relations or he may have expressed skepticism about our sacred history given his perception of the Church's general lack of transparency about its early historical period. However, these were not the questions or issues that troubled him the most. The most troubling aspect of his disagreement is related to his personal identity and sense of belonging to the Church. He now does not feel com-

fortable in speaking about the Church as one of its members. He will not go on teaching appointments with the missionaries, and he feels torn between his desire to be at work in bringing the Church “out of obscurity” (D&C 1:30) and the pressure to employ guidelines that he feels unable to accept. The dissonance between his preferred approach of full transparency and the Church’s official public relation guidelines is less problematic at the intellectual level than it is at the identity level—in other words, to his sense of belonging to Mormonism. Thus, he feels that he is in the Church, but not of the Church—that he is indeed a member, but one who is somehow out of harmony with the body of the faithful. I have sensed that an important part of his identity, at least since his mission, has centered on his ability to function as a representative of the Church in a context where the overwhelming majority of his associates are not Latter-day Saints. In feeling that he does not belong to the Church in the way that he used to, he experiences a sense of loss, disappointment, and confusion. He feels rejected by his faith community for his lack of orthodoxy and does not see any way to reverse this process.

Like my friend, we LDS graduate students of religion may also find ourselves questioning our sense of belonging to the Church even while sensing that connection as deep and heartfelt. Whether we are thinking of issues relating to the international institution, or to our micro-realities of wards and branches, or even to what it means for us to be Latter-day Saints engaged in religious studies, it may be difficult to find a new balance. Certainly, we are not unique if, in our wards, we may be frustrated at regularly hearing clichéd statements that do not seem to be genuine, or recitations of questions and answers in Sunday School that appear superficial, not well-reasoned, or even utterly false. The Brethren probably have similar experiences in their travels throughout the Church.

However, other difficulties may be unique to our group. Think, for example, of those feelings of uncertainty about what new academic “insights” are appropriate to share in a Church classroom because you’re not sure what is “faith promoting” and what may raise doubts. Also reflect about the uneasy feeling that members and leaders are beginning to perceive you with suspicion because of your studies and your novel opinions. Testimony

meeting may represent another moment of inner struggle as you feel that the format or the content of your affirmations differ somewhat from how other members of the congregation express themselves. How will they accept your testimony? And what if you are called to teach seminary, institute, or Sunday School? How are you going to deal with those scriptural and historical comments in the manual that you believe to be over-simplified, lacking in nuance, or unsupported? Will you be perceived as a threat to your students—as a corrupting influence on their faith?

Whatever the issue, both at the micro and at the macro level, one of the most troubling feelings that LDS graduate students of religion could experience may be the realization that, as a consequence of our studies, we do not feel that we belong as much as we used to. We may sense tension between our new membership in the academic community and our enduring membership in a community of faith. Certainly, some may welcome a sense of detachment from the Church through a more tenuous sort of belonging. However, I know many Latter-day Saints in graduate programs of religious studies who have embarked in this work as enthusiastic and excited returned missionaries, with the initial goal of perfecting Mormon apologetics. My own experience has introduced me to many who come to these studies while in the forefront of Church activity and with hearts fully dyed in the colors of Mormonism. And that is exactly what can make the sense of loss and disorientation particularly disturbing.

Finally, consider the experience of disappointment when LDS graduate students of religion compare their previous expectations to the present reality. It may be that where and what we are—spiritually, emotionally, and intellectually—after years of graduate studies is nothing like what we had envisioned and predicted when we first began. Some students may have envisioned themselves as academically trained experts in defense of the faith, but now find themselves wondering about that very faith on which they had always built their lives and futures. Certainly, alongside the ecclesial context, other difficult dynamics may deepen this tension as relationships with one's family, both earthly and heavenly, are included in these problematic equations. Probably few of us have never wondered whether our Heavenly Father approves of

our acquisition of this new and often interesting yet uncomfortable knowledge about religious subjects. How does this concern affect our spiritual relationship with the Divine?

Whatever disturbing feeling may be experienced, we will be driven to seek a resolution. I believe that these moments may provide unique opportunities for growth and maturity, notwithstanding the discomfort. In some cases, students will not feel able to reconcile new academic perspectives with their LDS identity. Some will choose to cease association or activity in the Church, and others will leave the academic world of religious studies entirely to take a different direction in life. Of course, these are highly personal and difficult choices. On the other hand, some will find a way to resolve the tension, perhaps by coming to accept that very uniqueness that has caused personal distress and then by looking for ways to integrate it with their identity and commitment as members of the Church. This resolution is often accompanied by the realization that the Church's needs and policies do not cater primarily to the intellectual, but to the weakest and most inexperienced of its members. There will be resignation to the fact and even desire for a refining and restructuring of one's pre-existing identity in relation to the Church. I hope that conferences like these, journals, blogs, and personal friendships will be forums in which the new identity of Saint-scholar and scholar-Saint can be strengthened and supported by camaraderie and interaction with others who are following the same path.

Furthermore, since belief and belonging are intricately interconnected, these changes in identity will often be accompanied by cognitive forms of restructuring, which allow the coexistence of faith and of secular knowledge of religion. One such form may focus on the recognition of two distinct layers of explanations of reality: a faith-based one, with supernatural foundations, and a secular one, with a focus on human dynamics within the phenomenon of religion. Another approach may involve sifting through the teachings and concepts acquired through years of life in the Church and selecting principles that seem unfalsifiable and absolute, while maintaining a more agnostic attitude in areas where academic study and reflection find their niche. A third approach may be the discovery of a novel structure of explanation that enlarges both faith and understanding. An example of this third ap-

proach is the recognition and acceptance of constant tension and paradox in human theological descriptions at various levels, as Terryl Givens described so accurately in his examination of Mormon culture.⁶

Ultimately, questions and uncertainties will remain. They are built into the very nature of learning. Problematic aspects of history, theology, or ecclesiology will continue to trigger our interest and attention; but as we accumulate more experience, these areas will be less troubling. Then, as we come to look at our relationship with God through different eyes, as we view our membership and role in the Church with humility in our uniqueness, and interact with the world through an increased capacity to acquire truth from it, my hope is that we can cultivate a new and expansive sense of belonging. It will be different than what we experienced in our pre-academic days; but perhaps, to borrow Eliot's well-known lines:

. . . the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.⁷

Notes

1. Thomas F. O'Dea, *The Mormons* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 227.

2. See Edward C. Lehman and Donald W. Shriver, "Academic Discipline as Predictive of Faculty Religiosity," *Social Forces* 47 (December 1968): 171–82; Edward L. Long, *Religious Beliefs of American Scientists* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood, 1971); Edward C. Lehman, "Academic Discipline and Faculty Religiosity in Secular and Related Colleges," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 13 (June 1974): 205–20; Ernest T. Pascarella and Patrick T. Terenzini, *How College Affects Students: Findings and Insights from Twenty Years of Research* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1991). Although some of this literature is dated, I doubt that more recent studies would result in significantly different conclusions.

3. Gerald Stott, "Effects of College Education on the Religious Involvement of Latter-day Saints," *BYU Studies* 24 (Winter 1984): 43–52, has often been used to refute O'Dea's predicament. Indeed, Stott discovered that college-educated Latter-day Saints generally do not experience a negative correlation between most measures of religiosity and their ed-

ucational level, as is common in other denominations. However, he also showed that some Mormons' beliefs were negatively affected by increasing education. A negative correlation was related to belief in God, belief in the existence of Satan, acceptance of the Church president's infallibility in matters of doctrine, and the acceptance of religious over scientific beliefs when the two appear to clash. To my knowledge, no large study has yet been carried out on the effects of the academic study of religion on the religiosity of the Latter-day Saints.

4. Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without Belonging* (Oxford, England: Blackwell Publishing, 1994), popularized the notion of "Believing without belonging." However, David Voas and Alasdair Crockett, "Religion in Britain: Neither Believing nor Belonging," *Sociology* 39, no. 1 (2005): 11–28, seems to contradict Davie's findings.

5. See Rod Bond and Peter B. Smith, "Culture and Conformity: A Meta-Analysis of Studies Using Asch's Line Judgment Task," *Psychological Bulletin* 119, no. 1 (1996): 111–37.

6. Terryl L. Givens, *People of Paradox: A History of Mormon Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

7. T. S. Eliot, "Little Gidding," *Four Quartets*, <http://www.tristan.icom43.net/quartets/gidding.html> (accessed March 23, 2009).

A Year of *Dialogue*: Thinking Myself into Mormonism

Sam Bhagwat

The Green Library stacks are a study in contradictions.

Outside lies Stanford grandeur—three-story stucco architecture spread across multiple thousands of acres, perfectly manicured lawns and plant arrangements, arches, gates, fountains. The rest of Green Library shares that aura: airy rotundas with marble floors and booming ceilings, elegantly decorated study lounges with comfortable, oversized couches, crisp clean top-of-the-line Apple G5 computers, luxurious carpeting, and well-lit lines of bookshelves holding knowledge in tens of different languages.

In contrast, the stacks are cramped and stark. At six foot two, I'm constantly afraid I'll hit my head on the overhanging pipes and the sprinklers. Glaring fluorescent lights shine on the hard floors, and the occasional dusty computer looks to have been plucked from the turn of the millennium.

That's where I went wandering on a warm October day in my junior year of college, searching for some book on Mormonism. I had been baptized LDS a couple of months earlier, after a journey that started when a girl I was dating sent me a Book of Mormon and walked me through 1 and 2 Nephi.

We broke up, but by happenstance I ended up with a Mormon roommate the next year. And in a time when a cloud of darkness surrounded me, I ran across Joseph on his way to church. "For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do" (Rom. 7:19) would have been a pretty good description, if I had known the words then. He was late; and I made him later.

I kept coming back because of the fruits I saw: the tangible goodness of the people, the less tangible meatiness of the Book of Mormon, like the beauty of Lehi's vision.

It was the empiricism of Alma 32 and that “the glory of God is intelligence” (D&C 93:36)—aspects emphasized by the man who would eventually baptize me—that helped me see how such teachings could be true, even grand and wonderful. My occasional prayers to know whether this stuff was true grew in urgency. During one fast and testimony meeting, I received an answer: Feelings of peace and love for the congregation bubbled out of me, and for thirty minutes I could not stop shaking.

Back at Stanford, I was curious about something or another and resolved I’d go to the library. Ascending some solid, utilitarian metal staircases, I found the book I was looking for, but then my eyes were drawn to a wall of red covers of bound periodicals dating back forty years, dominating the Mormon section. On each red cover white letters spelled *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*.

The journal, I soon read, had been co-founded forty years earlier by Eugene England and Wesley Johnson, then both Stanford professors. And, interestingly, Brother England had been in the bishopric of my ward.

I soon read other things. A lot of other things.

“How can I still call myself a member of this church?”

My journal of the time has been lost, but I vividly remember a maelstrom of emotions within a short time span.

The first and hardest-hitting was disappointment. I felt sad. Let down. Shocked. Wanting to close the book, to end the emotional barrage, at the same time being sucked in, trying to learn more and realizing that closing the book was not the answer.

In a corner on the third floor, I turned the pages of Lester Bush’s articles about the priesthood ban and its racist origins and justifications. Others about baseball baptisms and inflated growth statistics in Latin America. Women, or the lack thereof, in the Book of Mormon. Mormon intellectual life and the September Six.

Emotions: estrangement, after an afternoon spent in the library reading *Dialogue*. I remember getting caught up in it and missing a Church activity, wondering, perhaps as a justification for not going, what the point was anyway.

I asked a few questions. On the one hand, I saw the point when the institute director explained why he didn’t focus on his-

torical “bales of straw.” On the other, that attitude assumed that Church teachings were correct in the first place.

It might sound silly, but I remember in particular an institute class on eternal progression. The director taught the opposite position, but to me, Eugene England’s position (God is still progressing in knowledge) made sense and Bruce R. McConkie’s official reprimand seemed overbearing, at the least.

The end result was a question that sometimes popped into my head around then, prompted by these turbulent emotions: “How can I still call myself a member of this church?” Especially embarrassment: The Litany of Embarrassing Stuff is probably longer for Mormons than members of other religions—certainly more immediate. Controversies over Muhammad’s wives? That happened over a millennium ago, in a different culture. Joseph Smith’s multiple wives? That was *yesterday*—in the 1840s, in *Illinois*.

Perhaps at this point, the conservative reader is getting the impression that interaction with less-faithful scholarship loosened my grip on the iron rod.

I’m sure it could have. But I don’t think it did, partly because of my chosen reactions but mostly because of what I was reacting to—and what I came to realize after deep study.

Shaping a story.

I may be a bit wet behind the ears, but seven months full-time as a journalist gave me a bit of experience in recognizing and consciously articulating narratives, stories people tell that make a series of events coherent.

In political crises, old political structures vanish. “The actions that are then taken,” Milton Friedman said once, “depend on the ideas that are lying around.”¹ When personal crises occur, when life throws us unfamiliar data points hard and heavy, our old narratives, too, fragment, reform, and crystallize—usually in the pattern of one of the ideas we have lying around. At such times, we form narratives whether we are trying to or not.

I needed a narrative.

My parents, accepting but opposing strongly my conversion, offered me one, sending me anti/post-Mormon literature. The critiques contained were constructed along historical and secular

humanist lines. They delve into any of the above events and say something like the following:

“I used to be a believing Mormon. Then I learned the truth about Mormon history. I saw how the lens of faith had warped my worldview, clouding my vision of what should have been in front of my face. So I decided to seek truth by leaving the Church, even though it was painful.”

For example: after detailing at length his personal investigation into Mormon history and subsequent departure from the Church, Chris Morin writes: “Scientific theories, which I had previously refused to consider, suddenly became credible, thus completing the demolition of my view of eternity. . . . Using faith and hope to determine truth failed me miserably in the past. Now I feel compelled, by experience, to base my beliefs on evidence and reason. . . . Earlier in our lives, [brother Brad and I] had felt compelled to justify our religious beliefs when we encountered a contradiction. Now we hope to let encounters with truth reshape our views, rather than try to force the facts to fit our faith.”²

The Morins’ narrative is filled with anguish. Sadness over their lost faith, over relatives’ misunderstanding, knee-jerk anger, the severing of family ties, accusations that their estrangement is driven by sin.

This type of narrative—perfect illustrations of Friedman’s thesis—was lying on the floor, ready for me to pick up and make my own. *I guess I didn’t realize what I got myself into. Eek! Let me get out before I get in too deep.*

I’m glad this narrative wasn’t the only one.

Crucially, through the confusion and sadness, I knew I had still tasted sweet fruit. Most certainly, I wanted it all to make sense. Family home evenings were a refuge from the constant beat of school. When I went to the temple to do baptisms for the dead, I saw my fellow ward members looking like angels.

And yet, I knew I needed everything to fit together. While all this was going on, I emailed Church friends saying that there was a “whole host of considerations that I’ve temporarily set aside because of my experiences” and noted that “eventually, my faith will have to encompass and comprehend everything I know about the world, not just what I learn in church.”

And so learning about historical issues, including what was on offer in *Dialogue*, was just creating more problems.

But the way I found out of this swamp turned out to be the way in: a thoughtful examination of what Mormonism *is*.

The narrative I came to might be called “informed and faithful.” It sounds something like this, plucked from the website of amateur apologist Jeff Lindsay: “I recognize that the Church has plenty of those pesky mortals in it, even running much of it, and that means errors and problems and embarrassments from time to time. OK, I can’t give my full endorsement to every historical event and statement and practice over the years, neither in modern Church history or the Biblical record, for that matter. But I do think we have some amazing things that the world should know about, especially *The Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ*. Got one?”³

This approach seems to consist of two basic propositions: (1) Mormonism has historical flaws and embarrassments, but (2) it really does have the truth and goodness it claims. For me, coming to this type of perspective started with reading the historical literature—the apologetics on both sides.

Still, while apologetic arguments giving context and explaining were helpful, for me they only got halfway. They seem largely a defensive tactic. Rarely in themselves do they show strength.

I found chiasmus, Nahom, and explanations of the Utah War helpful, but they still had to contend against divining rods, polygamy, and Mountain Meadows.

But over time, another non-obvious fact became clear to me. The same search process by which I found the problems of Mormonism also helped me feast upon doctrines that continue “to enlarge my soul; to enlighten my understanding; to be delicious to me” (Alma 32:28).

Of the myriad blog posts and articles, and occasional books, some stand out:

1. Blake T. Ostler on how (perhaps only) Mormon assumptions about uncreated humans give human agency teeth.⁴

2. Eugene England, on the application of this agency: how a God who weeps for lost children but cannot interfere with their freedom to reject His love explains evil.⁵ I already delighted in:

“For it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things” (2 Ne. 2:11); this was more good fruit.

And any number of thoughtful commentators—especially Brother Ostler—on how concepts like faith, works, grace, salvation, theosis, covenants, sin, moral law, justice, and mercy are powerfully illuminated by the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith’s teachings.

Like most people, making myself reflect the ideas I believe requires models. I need someone I can identify with. Ideals are too abstract.

Ex-Mormons provide one possibility. They often remember from their days as Church members rigid stances that were unresponsive to and disengaged from different ideas. “At the time, no combination of words could have turned my convictions,” wrote Brad Morin. “My uncompromising zeal closed all avenues for discovering the error in my beliefs. I refused to question.”⁶

They also often recall the pride of Church members that incompletely masks disdain and insensitivity for non-Mormons. Brad recalls: “I once took great pride in Mormons and their goodness. I bristled whenever I heard someone criticize Utah Mormons.” Chris described his wife’s distress when her nonmember parents were excluded from their temple wedding: “I thought to myself . . . given that they had not accepted the gospel that could make their family an eternal family, then surely our wedding could not be important to them.”⁷

Again, this is one model for viewing Mormonism. But it’s not the one I ended up adopting. Rather, I found myself learning from Nephi’s model: collective, self-examining repentance.

That principle of collective, self-examining repentance is perhaps the most important strategy I discovered in identifying with the “informed and faithful” narrative. It allows me to confront human flaws and embarrassments as part of identifying with the “informed and faithful narrative.” I’m convinced that, though such repentance is never perfect in practice, it is still foundational to Mormonism.

On this, Margaret Blair Young’s essay reflecting on the ban prohibiting priesthood ordination for worthy black men struck me deeply. In explicitly or implicitly addressing secular critiques of Mormonism, the first step must be, as Sister Young implicitly

does, to acknowledge the point of such critics. *Yes, it is logically possible to believe with zeal falsehoods propagated by leaders.* But acknowledging this is not the same thing as ignoring overwhelming evidence that the Church's main claims are false. Instead, it could mean that we are simply putting our stock in false beliefs that Church leaders are infallible, or that everything Church-related will be straightforward, neat, tidy, and clean.

Sister Young recalls the irony of a racist seminary teacher who believed that, after his many righteous years, he earned freedom from temptation:

I've wondered if he ever grasped his self-deception, if he ever realized that the most dangerous, most tenuous place of all is an enclosed system where all things are set and known—or pretend to be so.

The inertia invited by a desire for absolute certitude and closure is either the setting for the second law of thermodynamics—the tendency towards chaos—or it is simply death.⁸

Reading that reflection of Sister Young, I felt some words of Nephi become real to me. I remembered that the ancient prophet had dished some choice language at enclosed systems—or, at least, proponents of one type: “Wo be unto him that shall say: We have received the word of God, and we need no more of the word of God, for we have enough! Yea, wo be unto him that saith: We have received, and we need no more! For thus saith the Lord God: from them shall be taken away even that [wisdom] which they have” (2 Ne. 28:27, 29, 30).

Only a few verses earlier in the same chapter, Nephi had cautioned his readers against taking the erroneous position: “All is well in Zion; yea, Zion prospereth, all is well” (2 Ne. 28:21). This is how we are “pacified” and “lulled away into carnal security,” with the result that Satan will lead us “carefully down to hell” (2 Ne. 28:21).

Now, maybe I'm missing Nephi's point. But he seems to be saying: it's the same self-satisfied complacency, being “at ease in Zion” (2 Ne. 28:24), that motivates both of these errors. This complacency makes us assume we have all the Word we need; this complacency makes us assume all is fine and dandy in the Kingdom.

Note that such a self-satisfied complacency opposes both

points of Lindsay's "informed and faithful" narrative. It refuses to acknowledge problems, and similarly—at least according to Nephi—deprives us of the truth we do have.

Returning to Sister Young's piece, she smacks me over the head by making a similar point with a different Book of Mormon passage. "If opposition has ceased and self-examination has ceased," she writes, "then growth has ceased."⁹

To expand on that: Lehi explains at length that, without the ability to be enticed by and choose between good and evil, "all things [would] be a compound in one," and "if it should be one body it must remain as dead, having neither life nor death, happiness nor misery" (2 Ne. 2:11).

So Lehi says a world without choice and struggle is "as dead"; and Nephi says that people who proclaim falsely that all is well—perhaps assuming all choices and struggles have departed—are being led to spiritual death. Embracing this perspective, shaped by uniquely Mormon scripture, has helped me come to terms with another tic.

I sometimes restrain myself from frustration or impatience at various things I hear in church. I'm sure that sentiment is universal, even if the personal triggers of annoyance differ. For me, those include (what I perceive as) ill-phrased or ill-mannered proclamations that everyone will eventually convert, or testimony of divine providence that seems to disregard agency.

But the above perspective helps determine when to raise a hand or apply a mental filter: if others' statements seem to promote collective complacency. This was reinforced for me when I read another *Dialogue* article.

In "Good Literature for a Chosen People," Eugene England notes that we see ourselves, like Israel, as a chosen people—but don't always realize the implications.

Brother England details what he calls "the Amos strategy": a prophet who, at the height of the chosen people's self-satisfied judgment of others, turns the judgment of God on them. Brother England gives as an example a sermon by President Spencer W. Kimball, which uses this strategy to rebuke the Saints for having absorbed the surrounding culture's materialism and militarism. Then Brother England continues:

[In the] Amos view, . . . being chosen means being the ones known and taught by the Lord and, thus, the ones most responsible to keep his commandments and be punished if one does not.

It does not mean being better than others, by definition more righteous and blessed. It does not even mean knowing the correct forms of worship and having special priesthood power to perform them as the core of one's religion.

The Lord makes this painfully clear by saying, through Amos, "I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies. Though ye offer me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them; neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts."¹⁰

So, why didn't I take up the post-Mormon narrative? At least partly because embarrassing stories look different through the definitely Mormon lenses I found in *Dialogue*.

If pride and ease in Zion led the Morin brothers to look down on their neighbors; if the racist seminary teacher certain of his righteousness was really just saying he had "received, and need[ed] no more"; if it is because we think "chosen" means "more righteous and blessed" that we jump to circulate falsely attributed stories about being generals in the war in heaven, we must ask ourselves a question.

Are we willing to own up to our failures to keep the Lord's commandments? I mean not just each of us individually, but we as a people?

Certainly—as in personal repentance—there is a balance between refusing to admit wrongdoing, and going overboard. On the one hand, it is hard to change practices if you refuse to admit fault. On the other hand, it's possible to get so wrapped up in admitting fault that you refuse to acknowledge and benefit from your strengths.

It's a hard balance to keep, and I don't know where it is personally—let alone institutionally. But I do know that the collective, self-examining repentance involved is fundamental to Mormonism. And though we may not speak in terms of collective repentance, we understand both why and how we must do it.

In the October 2008 general conference, after recalling the failure of early Saints to establish Zion in Missouri, Elder D. Todd Christofferson cautioned us against judging them too harshly, because "we should look to ourselves to see if we are doing any

better. 'The Lord called his people Zion, because they were of one heart and one mind, and dwelt in righteousness; and there was no poor among them' (Moses 7:18). If we would establish Zion in our homes, branches, wards, and stakes, we must rise to this standard."¹¹

The message I take from Nephi and Lehi, from President Kimball and Elder Christofferson, from Brother England, Brother Lindsay, and Sister Young is this: We are a chosen people, but only because we "stand on the shoulders of giants." Jesus Christ told Joseph Smith that the ministers of the time "draw near to me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me" (JS-H 1:19). We are "chosen" because latter-day revelation teaches us the process by which we may draw near with our hearts.

The main problems with Mormonism, I've come to believe, stem from the fact that too often, our hearts are—and my own heart is—still too far from the Lord.

That's my narrative.

Notes

1. Quoted in Tyler Cowen, "Shock Jock," *New York Sun*, October 3, 2007, <http://www.nysun.com/arts/shock-jock/63867> (accessed January 3, 2009).

2. Brad and Chris Morin, *Suddenly Strangers: Surrendering Gods and Heroes* (Chula Vista, Calif.: Aventine Press, 2004), 190–93.

3. Jeff Lindsay, "JeffLindsay.com—The Cracked Planet: Humor, Education, Mormons and Mormon Studies, Science, and Eclectic Items from Jeff Lindsay of Appleton, Wisconsin," <http://jefflindsay.com/index.html> (accessed December 15, 2008).

4. Blake T. Ostler, EXPLORING MORMON THOUGHT series (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books). Vol. 1: *Attributes of God* (2001); Vol. 2: *The Problems of Theism and the Love of God* (2006); Vol. 3: *Of God and Gods* (2008).

5. Eugene England, "The Weeping God of Mormonism," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 32, no. 1 (Spring 2002): <http://content.lib.utah.edu/u?/dialogue,28651> (accessed December 15, 2008).

6. Brad and Chris Morin, *Suddenly Strangers*, 168.

7. *Ibid.*, 59, 42.

8. Margaret Blair Young, "Essay for June 9, 1998," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 32, no. 1 (Spring 1999), <http://content.lib.utah.edu/u?/dialogue,9612> (accessed December 15, 2008).

9. Ibid.

10. Eugene England, "Good Literature for a Chosen People," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 32, no. 1 (Spring 1999), <http://content.lib.utah.edu/u?/dialogue,9578> (accessed December 15, 2008).

11. Elder D. Todd Christofferson, "Come to Zion," *Ensign*, November 2008, <http://lds.org/conference/talk/display/0,5232,23-1-947-13,00.html> (accessed December 15, 2008).

“A Climate Far and Fair”: Ecumenism and Abiding Faith

Thomas F. Rogers

Two analogies occurred to me as I developed this essay—first, that of a dialectical assertion with its thesis, antithesis, and subsequent synthesis. The second analogy, more visual, is of a triptych, with two opposing side panels and finally a central one—an attempt to integrate and reconcile the other two. Hence, the essay’s three divisions. It is less an argument than a plea. Its reconciliations depend upon the reader’s willingness to make the shifts in perspective necessary to see, in the same moment, the opposing panels and the emergent synthesis of the center.

I

We believe that man is eternal, in the image of God, with capacity for freedom, with responsibility for himself and others, that all men are brothers, and that they have the capacity to grow in the likeness of God, sharing increasingly in His creative work and glory, finding joy by fulfilling their human and divine natures. Believing this, I refuse to accept any interpretation of Scripture or of the Gospel which contradicts or impedes the free agency of man, his brotherhood with all men, or which bars his opportunity for self realization.—Lowell L. Bennion¹

This vision of Mormonism requires a robust ecumenism—that is, we must cultivate a sense that truth is a universal gift of God to His children. While we believe that, through the restored gospel, we have access to the fullest expression of fundamental, eternal postulates, nothing in Mormon doctrine suggests that we ought to be content with the truth that Mormons have recorded since Joseph Smith’s vision. Instead, we are repeatedly exhorted to be dili-

gent in seeking to “understand . . . things which have been, things which are, things which must shortly come to pass; things which are at home, things which are abroad: the wars and the perplexities of the nations, and the judgments which are on the land; and knowledge also of countries and of kingdoms” (D&C 88:78–79).

I was recently struck by the following words: “Settle for nothing less than moral and spiritual greatness. Don’t cheat yourself.” Teasingly, I asked a fellow priesthood bearer if he knew which of the Brethren was its source. He couldn’t recall but agreed that it was a fine utterance. Then I told him that its author was a Polish Catholic, Karol Jozef Wojtyla, the late Pope John Paul II. My friend’s immediate response was: “Yes, but he didn’t have the authority!”

I fear that, as a people, we are increasingly inclined to dismiss insights that do not come from officially approved sources. And yet, we are only too willing to grant authority to faddish notions and their popularizers. Of course, not all of the fads we follow are without merit: J.R.R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis have abundantly informed our sensibilities, while treatises by psychologist Scott Peck and psychiatrist-theologian John Sanford have in their time been equally popular items at the BYU Bookstore.² Hebrew scholar Jacob Neusner³ and the prodigious atheist literary scholar Harold Bloom⁴ have in turn been equally welcome to a number of Mormons who cite them approvingly because of the many fine things they say about our theology. Similarly, Margaret Barker’s arresting insights about temple traditions have brought that British Methodist preacher and biblical scholar to BYU as a forum speaker.⁵

While this trendy dabbling may seem ecumenical, it serves more to confirm our good opinion of our own religion than to truly broaden our theological understanding. We seize on such thinkers precisely because elements of their thought are familiar and comfortable. Real ecumenism requires a sustained engagement with the thought of “others” that stretches and challenges our familiar and comfortable certainties. Latter-day Saints have scriptural warrant and authoritative encouragement to diligently seek truth, wherever it is found.

The definition of “the best books” (D&C 109:7) has, especially in times past, been fairly wide-ranging. And why not? Does-

n't that wonderful elastic clause, the Thirteenth Article of Faith, imply that the sources of what is "virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy" are manifold and may crop up in various unexpected places? What of those intriguing Book of Mormon verses: "Know ye not that . . . I bring forth my word unto the children of men, yea, even upon all the nations of the earth?" (2 Ne. 29:7) and "For behold, the Lord doth grant unto all nations, of their own nation and tongue, to teach his word, yea, in wisdom, all that he seeth fit that they should have" (Alma 29:3)? The memorable First Presidency declaration of February 15, 1978, attesting to the inspiration and goodness in the major non-Christian world religions reiterates that same ecumenical principle: "The great religious leaders of the world such as Mohammed, Confucius, and the Reformers, as well as philosophers including Socrates, Plato, and others, received a portion of God's light."⁶

Tancred I. King's 1983 observation in *Dialogue* further elaborates the possibilities inherent in the First Presidency statement: "Christianity can gain from Islam a heightened awareness of the majesty, the grandeur, and the absoluteness of God. From Hinduism, Christianity can gain greater respect for meditation and reflection, from Buddhism, Christians can understand the impersonal side of ultimate truth. The Confucian emphasis on humanism, social order, and filial piety can enhance Christian life. From Taoism and Shinto, the Christian can more fully realize the sacredness of nature."⁷

As he so often did, Lowell Bennion put it pithily: "Latter-day Saints have no monopoly on truth. . . . Latter-day Saints have no monopoly on virtue or righteousness."⁸

In like manner, the words of others in the Christian tradition can deepen and hone our sense of how better to apply the gospel in our daily lives. Catholic Thomas Merton; Protestants Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Reinhold Niebuhr; the Russian Orthodox Aleksandr Yelchaninov, Dmitry Dudko, and Aleksandr Men⁹; and the Jewish devotee of Christ, Simone Weil, have been among my own spiritual mentors. Other instances, so keenly concerned with the consequences of our own recent government's social and moral default, might well include Sister Joan Chittister, a Benedictine, and Rabbi Michael Lerner.

But have we, as a people—particularly in a day when broad,

deep reading seems such an antique exercise—kept pace at all with the spirit of inquiry we associate with the School of the Prophets? Were we as a people to read more discerningly, concerning ourselves with social issues in the light of fundamental Christian ethics, we would not, I'm persuaded, so monolithically settle for jingoist piety. We could not easily believe that so many U.S. military incursions, past and present, are mandated by God. We might also realize that indifference to the socially and economically disadvantaged is a grave sin, and we would not so easily borrow the social and political agenda of Evangelical Christians, who appreciate our work in behalf of their political aims but otherwise deride us as non-Christian. Surely, such discerning study would remind us that thoughtful and fair-minded moral and spiritual concern is as vital and applies as much to the broadest societal level as in our private lives.

As for the world's heritage in the fine arts and great literature, to what extent do we contemporary Mormons tap into that vast and richly augmenting source of self-insight and perennial wisdom? I have, for instance, long contended, not so facetiously, that each fifth year of the Sunday School curriculum cycle we ought to read Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* as a cautionary manual in courtship and marriage. The list of morally important literary works, ignorance of which among North American Latter-day Saints rivals that of their electronic media-saturated fellow citizens, is long and discouraging. In our earnest striving to be "not of the world" (John 17:16), we risk insulating ourselves from much that is "virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy" and thereby disqualify ourselves as participants in the grand human conversation.

We are also, to a great extent, ignorant of our age's most viable and influential medium—film. I remain indelibly impacted by the sense of sacred, even eternal, family ties that emerged in several remarkable films in the 1950s. In almost the same year appeared the films of Carl Theodor Dreyer, Kenji Mizoguchi, and Satyaj Ray—the latter two non-Christian—then later those of the Soviet auteur Andrei Tarkovsky. Uncannily, each of their representative masterpieces (Dreyer's *The Word*, Mizoguchi's *Shansho the Bailiff*, Ray's *The Apu Trilogy*) and Tarkovsky's spiritually compelling triad (*Andrey Rublev*, *Stalker*, and *Sacrifice*) indelibly de-

picts the turning of a child's heart to "the fathers." The stunning coda of American Robert Benton's subsequent star-studded *Places in the Heart*, in fact, brings a family both literally and figuratively into holy and eternal communion. As for Mormonism's own modest cinematic efforts, nothing strikes me as more refreshingly and wonderfully ecumenical than Richard Dutcher's *States of Grace*, with its street preacher and universally welcoming crèche.¹⁰

By sensitizing us in their own distinct way, serious art and the humanities afford a moderating hedge, a brake, a buffer that can keep our devotion from lapsing into fanaticism, our good intentions from ossifying into smug, even cruel self-righteousness, whether in the Middle East or on the Wasatch Front.

Another possible avenue for ecumenical engagement is our missionaries' worldwide exposure to a variety of other peoples and cultures. Returned missionaries could do much more to cultivate a continuing engagement with the cultures in which they have served. With the present-day's simplified and heavily prescriptive manuals of instruction and the classroom habit of assigning quotations rather than encouraging spontaneous views, even our doctrinal discourse has, I'm afraid, become extremely limited and superficial. Perhaps the approach of the new missionary manual, *Preach My Gospel: A Guide to Missionary Service* (Salt Lake City: Intellectual Reserve, 2004), which emphasizes personal witness, stems from the recognition that greater authenticity and persuasive impact arise from a posture of openness to one's own distinctive, spontaneous, individual encounter with the Divine. We would also, I believe, benefit from emulating the Jewish tradition of more earnest, freewheeling discussion, not to mention more self-confident, self-directed good humor.

It goes without saying that, in the Church itself, we ought to graciously fellowship those who possess what strike us as dissident views. I believe that we must respect whatever another person genuinely believes simply because what she believes is an intrinsic part of her very identity and being. But the need for such respect cuts in both directions. We must remember that total objectivity eludes each of us. Though we may have strong reasons for our disagreement or dissent, they are our own reasons, while others have their own strong reasons for believing quite otherwise.

Paul made eloquently clear in his epistle to the Ephesians that one of the Church's primary institutional purposes is "for the perfection of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ. Till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph. 4:12-13). In the process, we only stand to gain when we are allowed, even in conversation and engagement with our friends of different faiths, to "discover" saving truths on our own, rather than always having them pressed upon us by didactic dictum. Credibility increases, moreover, as we openly admit to ourselves and to others just how fallible—how very like everyone else—we, deep down, really are.

II

Our Father, who art in Heaven. Deliver us in this terrible time . . . [Deliver] all those who do not believe in Thee because they are blind. Those who haven't given Thee a thought simply because they haven't yet been truly miserable. All those who in this hour have lost their hope, their future, their lives and the opportunity to surrender to Thy will. —Andrey Tarkovsky¹¹

The posture of openness should extend, not just to those of other faiths, but also to the points of Mormonism that may seem intellectually troublesome. I am frankly saddened whenever another of our leading lights disavows his or her belief in the historicity of the restored gospel's faith claims. This all-too-common stance among Mormon intellectuals, many of whom I otherwise admire, is often cavalierly dismissive of the very first principle upon which all viable religious commitment is necessarily grounded. Struggle as we all variously do while we peer "through a glass, darkly" (1 Cor. 13:12), if we so categorically repudiate fundamental creedal postulates, then how can they efficaciously serve us? How, when put to the test, can we possibly respect sacred covenants? Just how inclined are we then to turn to the Spirit for enlightenment and direction beyond our own understanding? Such total repudiation of fundamental faith involves a failure to recognize the necessary deference to higher, transcendent insight

that attends all genuine reverence and religiosity. Paul forcefully put what I call the epistemology of faith:

For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God.

Which things also we speak not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth; but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.

But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. (1 Cor. 2:11–14)

To which we might add Sister Joan Chittister's wry formulation: "Beware the ability to reason. It enables us to be the only part of nature that behaves unnaturally."¹² Rabbi Michael Lerner likewise cautions that scientism

has become the religion of secular consciousness. Why do I say it's a religion? Because it is a belief system that has no more scientific foundation than any other belief system. The view that that which is real and knowable is that which can be empirically verified or measured is a view that itself cannot be empirically measured or verified and thus by its own criterion is unreal or unknowable. . . . The intense skepticism about religion and spirituality on the left makes [many liberals] reluctant to talk in a language that could be seen as inherently religious or spiritual. In this, they are reflecting a long history of indoctrination into the scientistic assumptions of the dominant secular society, assumptions that have shaped our educational system . . . and been internalized as "sophisticated thinking" by the self-appointed . . . arbitrators of culture.¹³

We should sooner heed and emulate the appeal voiced by the father of a possessed son: "Lord, I believe; help thou my unbelief"—about which, after healing the son, the Lord declared, "This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting" (Mark 9:24–29). If, as New Testament and other scriptural sources consistently remind us, our access to divine intervention and our very understanding of "things not seen" (Heb. 11:1) evade mere reason, then perhaps we should feel reassured that—whether by Lou Dobbs, Jon Krakauer, Larry McMurtry, James Wood, Tom Hanks, or the producers of HBO's *Big Love*—the LDS Church is still uni-

versally viewed both by those outside it and by its own severe critics as weirdly preposterous, even malevolent. Mormonism's theology is inscrutable, even incredible, in an age which prizes skepticism and ironic detachment.

The Savior understood that this would be so, asking non-believers, "Perceive ye not yet, neither understand? have ye your heart yet hardened? Having eyes, see ye not? and having ears, hear ye not? and do ye not remember?" (Mark 8: 17-18). Here he clearly warns that his gospel's seeming opacity—like his parables' unintelligibility for many listeners—somehow protects what is most sacred. The onus is thus shifted from the mouthpiece of authoritative truth to his hearers. The peculiar challenge for Saints educated in the critical methods of modernity is to consider the deficiency of our individual faith before finding fault with the evidence, to be self-critical enough to recover the stance that gives us eyes to see and ears to hear. While remaining open to the truly ecumenical—that is, while congenially engaging all of God's children and the wisdom of their traditions—can't we still assent to the demands of faith so readily dismissed by modern skeptics?

Walking that perennial razor's edge between remaining one's unique, individual self and subordinating one's will to acknowledged authority and conforming to group expectations—well, that, too, makes life anything but dull and unchallenging. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, for instance, has observed in his arresting manual of discipline for a Christian fellowship, *Life Together*: "Every act of self-control of the Christian is also a service to the fellowship. On the other hand, there is no sin in thought, word, or deed, no matter how personal or secret, that does not inflict injury upon the whole fellowship. . . . It must be a decisive rule of every Christian fellowship that each individual is prohibited from saying much that occurs to him."¹⁴

Three prominent truth claims underlie Mormon understanding and belief: Christ's atonement, the restoration of His Church and gospel in their fulness, and from then to the present, a succession of divinely appointed leaders with a legitimate claim to revelation. These fundamental tenets support the Church's singular claim to be the Lord's divinely authorized instrument for human betterment and eternal salvation. To believe otherwise is to relati-

vize its status and reduce it to merely one of many otherwise beneficial religious institutions.

Allow me here to acknowledge that an individual's faith in such postulates doubtless wanes and waxes from day to day, even one moment to the next. Despite our desire and fervor, we all entertain moments of doubt. We in fact pray, come together, and mutually testify to reinforce each other's certitude. Without doing so, our faith might easily dwindle. Moreover, as commonly attested to, it is the Spirit, the Holy Ghost, that ultimately informs and enables our belief and conviction. In his March 2009 First Presidency's message, President Thomas S. Monson again reminds us of the familiar and potent phrase from James 1:5—"faith, nothing wavering"—that prompted the Prophet Joseph's initial inquiry.¹⁵ James's injunction suggests that we, too, if so inclined, can confront and overcome doubt and reinforce its opposite.

We should also recognize that many who lack or even repudiate such faith are altruistic and high-minded persons who do much good—even more than many of the rest of us. This is true of many "cultural" Mormons who feel particularly at home with their fellow Saints and, without necessarily sharing their sense of certitude, also value the wholesome lives and charitable actions of other Church members.

Does sustaining Church leaders mean we must agree with every word that crosses the pulpit? Does it preclude our seeking a personal witness of what we are asked to do and consider? From time to time, we are, in fact, told that it does not. But trust in our leaders' special mandate to conduct the affairs of the Church, acceptance of their responsibility to impart counsel, and, when called on, a deferent willingness to contribute to the Church's work are, it strikes me, an absolutely essential bottom line. If, despite our differences, we depart too far from the common denominator of mutual acceptance, respect, and toleration, we cannot then enjoy one another's association enough and work well together. We lose our savor (Matt. 5:13). It's a truly bad sign if we derive greater pleasure and satisfaction from finding fault than from deferentially engaging our equally flawed counterparts and sometimes idiosyncratic leaders. Lest we forget, such distancing has, throughout the restored Church's relatively short history but

especially in its turbulent first fourteen years, often led to dissension and disunity—and all too frequently, to defection.

To varying degrees, our particular religious heritage and membership in the restored Church have involved us all in a great experiment in sociability and mutual assistance—a practical effort to realize, once more, that humanistic ideal of the human family, the brotherhood and sisterhood of humankind. Is there elsewhere a more all-encompassing expression of divine purpose than the Church's statement of its threefold mission to preach the gospel, perfect the Saints, and redeem the dead? For these distinctive elements, we are truly indebted to the vision of the Prophet Joseph Smith and the transcendent influence that worked through him. There are no sweeter expressions of that desirable concord and affinity than in Alma's admonition to new converts to be willing "to bear one another's burdens, that they might be light; Yea, and are willing to mourn with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort" (Mosiah 18:8–9). Or in the charge and promise that conclude Doctrine and Covenants 121: "Let thy bowels also be full of charity toward all men, and in the household of faith, and let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly; then shall thy confidence wax strong in the presence of God; and the doctrine of the priesthood shall distil upon thee as the dews from heaven. The Holy Ghost shall be thy constant companion, and thy scepter an unchanging scepter of righteousness and truth; and thy dominion shall be an everlasting dominion, and without compulsory means it shall flow unto thee forever and ever" (D&C 121:45–46). Or in the greeting prescribed for teachers and their pupils in the Kirtland School of the Prophets: "Art thou a brother or brethren? I salute you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, in token or remembrance of the everlasting covenant, in which covenant I receive you to fellowship, in a determination that is fixed, immovable, and unchangeable, to be your friend and brother through the grace of God in the bonds of love, to walk in all the commandments of God blameless, in thanksgiving, for ever and ever. Amen" (D&C 88:132–33). But can we, or do we, in all instances nowadays so salute one another, speaking from our deepest conviction?

Another important component of Latter-day Saint fellowship

is sacrificial service, which tempers and smooths out our various personal kinks. In the process, paradoxically, both our authentic selves and a heightened sense of all we have in common come to the fore. In such full-blown interaction, we sooner or later expose our irritability, our pettiness, and our self-absorption. It then behooves us to continue interacting with increased graciousness in the important, but mundane, contexts in which we are called upon to take up the cross. One simple indicator of such graciousness might well be the degree of cordiality with which we receive those assigned to us as home or visiting teachers.

Such refinement occurs as we fulfill routine assignments, for which the need and opportunity are boundless. Robert A. Rees, while serving in what is now the Baltic States Mission, commented in his Christmas letter home one year: "When you're working in a primary way with the basic issues of the gospel and with people who are learning them for the first time and emphasizing them in their lives, there is no room or luxury for criticism or negativity." But as we nurture and further support our own offspring, sustain one another, and pass personally through recurring shadows of temptation and doubt, when do we ever really cease "working in a primary way with the basic issues of the gospel"? The fact that the Lord would entrust others' spiritual lives to comparably limited, fallible, and idiosyncratic leaders (other mortals) is no more astounding than the fact that He regularly consigns His spirit children to the total care and keeping of far-from-perfect and often truly inadequate parents. But that seems to be the way He audaciously works, trusting us to learn how to love others and further perfect ourselves by taking on such weighty stewardships. That also strikes me as what is ultimately so ingenious and right about the Lord's lay-led, restored Church.

Meanwhile, certitude in the postulates I have mentioned can help us more diligently adhere to the difficult and challenging personal standards the Lord's Church holds before us. Over the long haul, surely, those with such convictions are more inclined to weather the inevitable disappointments, misunderstandings, and rebuffs they periodically encounter as they endeavor to accommodate differences and get along in such a close-knit fellowship. As so well explained in the *Lectures on Faith*, published during the Kirtland period:

Unless they [the Saints] have an actual knowledge that the course they are pursuing is according to the will of God they will grow weary in their minds, and faint; for such has been, and always will be, the opposition in the hearts of unbelievers and those that know not God against the pure and unadulterated religion of heaven . . . that they will persecute to the uttermost all that worship God according to his revelations, receive the truth in the love of it, and submit themselves to be guided and directed by his will; and drive them to such extremities that nothing short of an actual knowledge of their being the favorites of heaven, and of their having embraced the order of things which God has established for the redemption of man, will enable them to exercise that confidence in him, necessary for them to overcome the world, and obtain that crown of glory which is laid up for them that fear God. . . .

A religion that does not require the sacrifice of all things never has power sufficient to produce the faith necessary unto life and salvation. . . . When a man has offered in sacrifice all that he has for the truth's sake, not even withholding his life, and believing before God that he has been called to make this sacrifice because he seeks to do his will, he does know, most assuredly, that God does and will accept his sacrifice and offering, and that he has not, nor will not seek his face in vain. Under these circumstances, then, he can obtain the faith necessary for him to lay hold on eternal life.¹⁶

Abiding faith must focus on Jesus Christ. Such faith is as rationally challenging as faith in the Restoration or in continuing revelation: externally, the historical reality of the resurrection and the theological claims of Christ's salvific role are no better authenticated than distinctive LDS truth claims. But should we question the Savior himself, then we remove ourselves far away from qualifying as His faithful and believing disciples. Some of His commandments are impossible to keep without at least a desire to believe. And how often do we pray to confirm or question our own dissident opinions?

III

Love for our neighbor, being made of creative attention is analogous to genius. . . . Instead of speaking about love of truth it would be better to speak about a spirit of truth in love.—Simone Weil¹⁷

I am aware that among us are more than a few whose personal experience with other members and with authority has been less

fortunate than my own. I do not presume to judge how fairly or unfairly they've been dealt with. I empathize with their pain. I'm not sure that, in their shoes, I would see things any differently. If their experience has led them down a more skeptical path, then that is between them and their Maker. But the possibility that in the process they have confused what are ultimately accidentals with what is fundamental must be explored because getting the fundamentals right is existentially important.

Clearly, the Church's encouragement to members in 2007 to petition lawmakers regarding the definition of marriage and its persistent encouragement to members to counter efforts for same-sex marriage (most recently in California's Proposition 8 campaign in 2008) is a burning case in point. In our time, traditional marriage and, with it, the stability of family life and the optimum welfare of children are diversely and multiply challenged—as much by fashionable indifference to marital bonding and by ubiquitous divorce as by fundamentalist polygamy, spotlighted by scandal. The devastating social consequences are everywhere before us. Keeping pace with nature's perpetual life-and-death cycle and in accord with its cosmic mission, the LDS Church focuses its human and material resources on spiritually nurturing each successive generation. It decidedly emphasizes what adults can contribute to the young. In their mutual involvement, each generation enhances and strengthens the other. The more private and solitary relationship of separate individuals to God, while not displaced, is only part of a much larger, socially oriented endeavor for which heterosexual marriage has historically afforded the most secure and stable nexus. This rationale, tentatively offered, will, I realize, not satisfy everyone.

In our pluralistic society, should consenting adult citizens who opt for same-sex unions be accorded equal rights and privileges with all others? I think so. Will all citizens and Church members who hold the more traditional construction as their ideal be charitable enough to accord homosexuals those same rights and privileges? We can be sure they will not—at least at present. Here, our lack of ecumenism is sadly apparent.

It seems to be an innate human tendency to discount and at times demonize those who noticeably differ from one's self: If I am white but you are black . . . If I am a man but you are a woman

. . . If I am a Christian but you are a Jew or Muslim . . . If I am a Mormon but you are a Jehovah's Witness . . . If I am a Republican but you are a Democrat . . . If I am blue or yellowed white collar but you are an intellectual (despite your own yellowed white collar or frayed T-shirt) . . . If I am heterosexual but you are gay . . . If I am a Utah Mormon in 1857 and you are from Missouri . . . or if I am rich and you are homeless, unemployed, uninsured, and poorly instructed . . .

Dismissal, mistrust, and disparagement of the "other" may be natural to all species. It certainly fits what scripture identifies as the carnal, prideful, selfish "natural man" (Mosiah 3:19) whom we are meant to overcome by seriously embracing Christ and His gospel. But how many of His otherwise earnest disciples consciously enough, with sufficient goodwill and without exception, apply the gospel's criteria to such "others"?

Many Wasatch Front Mormons took an ugly, public stand by buying a full page ad that ran on February 15 in both the *Deseret News* and the *Salt Lake Tribune* with the headline "Shame on Governor Huntsman for Joining, and Adding to This Public Shame . . ." Huntsman had expressed appropriate support for extending some civil rights to domestic partnerships. Far beyond addressing the definition of marriage, the signers' visceral antipathy and unwillingness to afford fundamental civil rights to all citizens betray a sad disconnect between our espoused Christlike ideals and our actual behavior. The question of how to treat our gay sisters and brothers, both in the Church and in public policy, is a test of our ability to paradoxically hold fast to the particulars of our own faith, while allowing "all [people] the same privilege" (Eleventh Article of Faith). Our abiding faith in the precepts and ideals of Christ's restored gospel commits us above all to the ecumenical conviction that all human beings—even, or especially, those "others" whose difference from ourselves arouses the antipathy of the natural man in us—are also children of our Heavenly Father. Remembering this, we may begin to recognize that failure to put off that natural man and esteem all our brothers and sisters as ourselves constitutes a grave transgression of the second of the two commandments on which "hang all the law and the prophets" (Matt. 22:40).

Reading John Donald Gustav-Wrathall's deeply poignant "A Gay Mormon's Testimony" in the April 2006 issue of *Sunstone*, I was immediately reminded of Dostoevsky's great novel, *The Brothers Karamozov*. Dmitry is accused of and condemned for a most heinous crime, patricide. Until his psychopathic half-brother Smerdyakov is revealed as their father's real killer, Dmitry considers himself to be the perpetrator and suffers accordingly. Smerdyakov's eventual suicide and the resulting dementia of a third brother, Ivan, stemming from his own subconscious complicity, amplify the agony Dmitry undergoes, both publicly and privately. Tellingly, it is expressly the unruly and unconventional Dmitry before whom the holy abbot Zosima mysteriously bows. Critics understand this gesture as the abbot's intuitive recognition of the inordinate suffering that Dmitry must shortly undergo—suffering that is particularly sacred and saintly, considering Dmitry's innocence. At this point in time, we all need to bow before our John Donald Gustav-Wrathalls, as I do before my former students and those missionaries I served with whose hormonally and neurologically defined path was much the same.

And yet, as Gustav-Wrathall seems to recognize and as the artist John Hughes has so memorably put it: "In art, the literal gives meaning to the abstract, . . . [while] the abstract gives beauty to the literal; together the two transcend what could not be accomplished alone."¹⁸ In the same way, the interplay of doctrinal fundamentals and real life have or can have, I believe, a similar effect. Though personal contexts may vary, is not such engagement—as in Gustav-Wrathall's case and for each of us—an ultimate test? As Joseph Smith himself both experienced and expounded, "By proving contraries, truth is made manifest."¹⁹ We must not fail to appreciate the extent to which the all-too-human can be fraught and imbued with holiness, both in ourselves and in all others. Matter is also spirit.²⁰ What comes to our minds can also be by way of revelation.

I conclude with a kind of reverse ecumenical gesture: a reverent evocation of universal love from May Swenson, raised in a Mormon family. Since "God is love" (1 John 4:8), we need only substitute one or two synonyms from our religious vocabulary to

sense how deeply Swenson responds to the spiritually transcendent and ultimately ineffable:

like? Is it a particle, beyond the microscope and the length of hope? Is that we shall never dare color, and its alchemy? can it be dug? Or it be bought? Can it be a shy beast to be caught? a clap of sound. Love is nests within each cell, is a ray, a seed, a note, our air and blood. It is our very skin, a sheath	. . . What does love look a star, invisible entirely Palomar? A dimension past it a climate far and fair, discover? What is its Is it a jewel in the earth, dredged from the sea? Can sown and harvested? Is it Death is a cloud—immense little and not loud. It and it cannot be split. It a word, a secret motion of not alien—it is near— to keep us pure of fear. ²¹
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Notes

1. Lowell L. Bennion, "The Logic of the Gospel," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 6, nos. 3-4 (Fall-Winter 1971): 162.

2. See M. Scott Peck, *The Road Less Traveled: A New Psychology of Love, Traditional Values, and Spiritual Growth* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002); John A. Sanford, *The Kingdom Within: The Inner Meaning of Jesus' Sayings* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), and other titles.

3. Jacob Neusner, *The Glory of God Is Intelligence* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1978), Vol. 3 in the BYU Religious Studies Center's monograph series. Neusner also contributed separate articles to *By Study and Also by Faith*, a two-volume festschrift honoring Hugh Nibley (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1990).

4. Harold Bloom, in *The American Religion: The Emergence of the Post-Christian Nation* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), devotes three chapters to the Mormon religion, lavishly extolling Joseph Smith as a "religious genius." In Helen Whitney's 2007 two-hour PBS documentary, *The Mormons*, he is also given the final word, averring that, if he could believe it, he would be a Mormon.

5. On May 6, 2003, Margaret Barker delivered a BYU forum address, "What Did King Josiah Reform?" Particularly influential is her *Temple Theology: An Introduction* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, Holy Trinity Church, 2004).

6. "Statement of the First Presidency Regarding God's Guidance to All Mankind," February 15, 1978, in Gary James Bergera, comp., *Statements of the LDS First Presidency: A Topical Compendium* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2007), 370–71.

7. Tancred I. King, "Missiology and Mormon Missions," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 16, no. 4 (Winter 1983): 48.

8. Lowell L. Bennion, *An Introduction to the Gospel* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Union Sunday School Board, 1955), 315, 316.

9. Upon emigrating to Paris after the Revolution, Yelchaninov became a priest and eventually presided over its Orthodox congregation; his widow, Tamara, gathered and posthumously published his penetrating aphorisms. See Alexander Elchaninov, *The Diary of a Russian Priest* (London: Faber and Faber, 1967). Arrested more than once during the Cold War, Father Dudko fervently defended Christianity, baiting KGB hecklers in his Moscow church. Another Orthodox priest and Jew, Men, was a popular spiritual icon in the late Soviet era and is thought to have been murdered by the KGB.

10. Dutcher's unfortunate subsequent disaffection from the Church in no way diminishes his stellar and so far unprecedented contribution to LDS film art. See "Dutcher's *Falling* Explores Darker Territory," *Sunstone*, No. 150 (July 2008): 77, in which he states: "The doctrines of Mormonism . . . demand that an artist grow as much as he can . . . but the culture certainly doesn't." See also Dallas Robbins, "Marrow: A Review of Dutcher's Mormon Films," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 42, no. 2 (Summer 2009): 169–79, which provides an overview and analysis of Dutcher's films with particular concentration on the fourth, *Falling*. Dutcher's advice to his fellow Mormon cinematographers after the third film was: "Stop trying to make movies that you think General Authorities would like" (174). Richard Dutcher, "'Parting Words' on Mormon Movies," *Daily Herald* (Provo, Utah), April 12, 2007, <http://www.heraldextra.com/content/view/217694> (accessed December 23, 2008).

11. This prayer is uttered by Tarkovsky's protagonist Alexander, a Christ figure whose prayer prevents the destruction of the world but who, much like his predecessor in Dostoevsky's novel *The Idiot*, is hospitalized as insane. Andrey Tarkovsky, *The Sacrifice*, (N.p.: Svenskafilm-institutet, 1986) film, English subtitles translated from Swedish, unattributed.

12. Joan Chittister, *Becoming Fully Human: The Greatest Glory of God* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), 47.

13. Michael Lerner, "Bringing God into It," *The Nation*, April 24, 2006, 21.

14. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, translated by John W. Doberstein (London: SCM Press, 1954), 67, 70.

15. Thomas S. Monson, "Come unto Him in Prayer and Faith," *Ensign*, March 2009, 6–7.

16. "Lecture Sixth," in *Lectures on Faith*, compiled by N. B. Lundwall (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, n.d.), 57–60.

17. First sentence: Simone Weil, *Waiting for God*, translated by Emma Craufurd (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1951), 149; second sentence: Richard Rees, *Simone Weil: A Sketch for a Portrait*, no translator identified (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1966), 152.

18. John Hughes is a professional landscape painter and adjunct instructor of art at Salt Lake Community College from whom I took an adult education class in about 2006. He made this statement on one of his class handouts.

19. Joseph Smith Jr. et al., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, edited by B. H. Roberts, 2d ed. rev. (6 vols., 1902–12, Vol. 7, 1932; rpt., Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1951 printing), 6:426.

20. See D&C 131:7: "There is no such thing as immaterial matter. All spirit is matter, but it is more fine or pure, and can only be discerned by purer eyes." I also find related concepts in the description of the earth's creation as occurring spiritually before it occurred physically (Abr. 5:5) and also the promise that the earth itself shall "receive its paradisiacal glory" (Tenth Article of Faith).

21. May Swenson, "The Shape of Death," in her *New and Selected Things Taking Place* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1954), 100. My thanks to Paul Swenson, May's brother, for confirming the form of the poem.

“Let the Truth Heal”: The Making of *Nobody Knows: The Untold Story of Black Mormons*

Note: Gregory A. Prince, a member of *Dialogue*’s board of directors, conducted this interview with Darius Aidan Gray and Margaret Blair Young at the Prince home in Potomac, Maryland, on January 30, 2009.

Greg: How did you get started with your documentary, *Nobody Knows: The Untold Story of Black Mormons*?

Margaret: We didn’t. Two young men got started with it. They had a good start, and then their lives took off and they went in different directions. I agreed to script it, and brought Richard Dutcher aboard, originally to direct, but eventually he became the executive producer instead.

Greg: Who were the two who started it, and why did they start it?

Margaret: Robert Foster and Wayne Lee, both African American young men. Rob is from North Carolina and a returned missionary. He was the first black student body president at BYU; and he understood that, if you joined the Church as a black person, the black community considers you an Uncle Tom. He wanted to do some bridge-building and explain things to his own circle and have it be, not a missionary tool, but something that would examine the significant issues. He has really wonderful ideals. And then Wayne was a filmmaker.

Greg: Also at BYU?

Darius: No, at the University of Utah. I was at his graduation; he graduated in film studies. They were young men with a great



*Darius A.
Gray and
Margaret
Blair Young*

idea and some energy, and yet, as Margaret said, “Life happened.” Wayne was already married, and Rob became married. Both of them graduated; Rob went on to graduate school in Pennsylvania—in optometry, if I remember. Wayne tried to bring about his feature film career and wasn’t having the success he hoped for. Ultimately, because he had been in ROTC, one of the better ways of going right then was to be on active duty, and so he went that direction. He married and fathered many children. So both young men encountered life.

Greg: When Rob and Wayne ceased to work on the documentary, at what stage of production was it?

Margaret: Richard Dutcher had filmed all of the stuff with you, Martin Luther King III, those main interviews that we had done at Sunstone [Salt Lake Symposium], and with Darius. And at that point, I wrote a grant proposal. We needed Bob Nelson at the University of Utah to come on board and represent us. Bob became the assistant producer. With his help, we got the grant for \$10,000, which funded a whole lot of filming.

Darius: I had come on board simply as an interview subject, and that was as close as I wanted to be to it.

Greg: Was that before Margaret got involved?

Darius: No. She was in it from the beginning. I was just going

to be an interview subject; but with the departure of the two young men, Margaret picked up the ball. She wasn't going to let it drop, and I'm proud of her for that. She picked up the ball and was running with it.

Margaret: When Richard realized his other obligations wouldn't really allow him to direct, he stated his preference. He really wanted Darius to direct. He said, "That's your director. That's the one who is really capable."

Greg: So up until that time, Darius, you were an interviewee, but not an interviewer yet?

Darius: Correct. My background and my formal education were in broadcast journalism. I worked as a broadcast journalist. I worked doing documentaries for KSL, and I quite enjoyed that. So I had a background, but that was not my role initially in this project. Again, I was just going to be an interview subject. I really can't say why, but I was trying to be at arm's length from it. When everyone was doing their thing, when it was Rob and Wayne, and then Margaret, I was still trying to be distant.

So it was at that point—after Rob and Wayne left and Richard Dutcher became the executive producer, and then another director who worked briefly on the project left—that was when my role changed. I agreed to come in and to work with Margaret to help bring this about, just because of my background in it. But so much of this is Margaret's vision. I find it remarkable—and I'm not buttering her bread here—that because of her skills, well developed, in writing, being able to structure the story; what we had was what we used to call tins of film, the film canisters. We had tons of footage, but the story wasn't there. It was Margaret who developed the story, trying to give it the balance to be honest and faithful to these people, telling their stories, these Latter-day Saints and these scholars telling their stories; and then weaving it together to have a coherent sense. That is Margaret's skill.

Greg: Margaret, was there a script when the project began? How did you develop it?

Margaret: No. There wasn't a script until I saw the footage, until I actually had it in front of me. I transcribed all of the tapes, because we did this without money. As I transcribed, I had a sense of what we had and where we would use it. The story developed as I heard what was on the tapes.

Greg: That's exactly the way I did McKay. I did all the research first, and then said, "Okay, what's the story?"

Margaret: Yes.

Greg: If you do it that way, you get the right story.

Margaret: That's exactly right.

Darius: You don't go out with our agenda, "What it is I'm going to do."

Greg: Are you there with this film? Are you satisfied that what it is now is what it should be, and not just your overlay of what you may have thought previously? I guess another way of saying it is: Did it take on a life of its own, and did you let it do that?

Darius: My answer would be yes, in that there are scripted portions—the part that the narrator reads—which is a small portion of the film overall. But we didn't write the script until after the stories had been told. So the story led us, rather than our leading the story. In some ways for me, it has been very problematic, because it is not the way I have done documentaries before, when I was the shooter on everything, when I was the editor on everything. Or, when I was working at KSL, when I did a documentary with Ted Capener, and he scripted it. But to have to work with the footage that someone else has shot and work with the questions that someone else has posed to the interview subject, that was problematic. Lighting and technical things were very difficult for me. I tend to be very particular and could get upset at a lighting situation or sound.

I was very pleased with your interview, Greg. The lighting was good; the sound was good. Bob Rees¹ was very good. It was well done. But some of the other interviews, I just cringed at having to have to work with what someone else did.

But all of that is also saying that it wasn't imposed upon by us. We were working with what the story was that came to us. So yes, you impose some of your eye-of-the-beholder on it; but basically, we can't impose what isn't there. Do you decide to take a slant going one direction only, or are you trying to give the whole of the picture? So I would say that our imposition has been to give it the whole of the picture.

Margaret: The truth is that it is not like a Helen Whitney piece, where you have several million dollars to work with, and you can

bring in the sound technicians and the lighting people. Shall we admit what we made this for?

Darius: Sure.

Greg: That was going to be my next question.

Margaret: We've done this with less than \$60,000.

Greg: Going all the way back to Rob?

Margaret: Yes.

Greg: Each of you put money in the pot. How did you raise the rest?

Darius: There was a grant of \$10,000 from the University of Utah's Documentary Studies program.

Margaret: And then fund-raisers.

Darius: Asking friends and supporters for funding, and piecing it together. It has been piecemeal.

Margaret: We had to stop periodically, when we ran out of money. As we had money, we would move forward.

Darius: I was at a little shopping center in Salt Lake City, close to my home. I had gone into the grocery store. I came out and was driving through the parking lot, and there was a fellow crossing in front of me. He looked at me as I waved him by, and he said, "Wait." He came to the window—a white guy. I didn't know him from anybody. "Aren't you Darius Gray?" "Yes." I was wondering what this was about. He started talking about the film. I can't remember if he had seen it or read about it. He said, "You're raising money for it?" "Yes." "I want to support it." "Thank you. There is a website." He said, "No," and he reached in his pocket and gave me a \$100 bill. I said, "Wait a minute. I need to get your particulars, because I want to give you a receipt." "No, that's not necessary." "How do you know I'm going to use it for the film?" "I trust you." But I made him write down his name and phone number so I could contact him. A hundred dollars from a guy you'd never met, just crossing in front of your car in the parking lot. That is also a measure of how this film was done. There were those who had \$50 or \$100, or larger amounts, who helped to make this a reality. It's a part of the story.

Margaret: Yes. Darius and I have both put in money from our private bank accounts. Right now, we have exactly \$514 in our New York account, but it is already spoken for to cover master rights for one of the songs. So we are out of money. But \$60,000 is

what you would usually pay to stage a college production. When Sterling Van Wagoner looked at it—he is with KBYU—he was very sweet. He said, “If KBYU can’t air this, I still want to help you get this on the air.” But as he was looking at it, he said, “Where did you get this footage? This is amazing.” Then I told him what we had done it for, and he said, “You are kidding me!”

So it is a patchwork of different people and different skill levels. Some of the interviews, when we have Mamarene and Tamu, sound like they are in a tunnel. They weren’t adequately miked. Some of the lighting—we would have loved to have everything be of the quality of Richard Dutcher’s filming. His are the best. He knew how to set up an interview and have the lighting work well. He came fully equipped.

We talk about it as a labor of love, but probably that is actually the operative word throughout the whole thing. Even as we are quoting Orson Hyde—I talked to Eric Samuelson, who did the voice of Orson Hyde. It’s such an appalling quote: “There were those who chose neither one side nor the other. They were forced to come into the accursed lineage of Cain, and hence the negro or African race.” I talked to Eric and said, “This is going to be hard for you to read.” He said, “But it’s true. Let’s tell the truth.” And he read the words into the microphone. This has been a passion for him as well. Eric is a dear friend; we have known each other since childhood. Everybody who came into this, with maybe one exception, set their personal agenda aside. Love is all the way through it, even in the hard sections. We have to have the hard sections for the love to be at its fullest.

Darius: So is it all that we might have wanted? Has it done all that we might hope that it would do or could do? The story is still to be told, and the effect is still to be known. Would we have done things differently if we had had more funding? Would Helen Whitney have done things differently if she had had final say on the last cut rather than WGBH? You always have those composite elements that make it difficult one way or another. We are proud of this piece, notwithstanding the “Gee, I wish we had gotten this interview,” or “I wish the lighting had been better there.”

We are proud of this piece. We are proud to be able to present these stories and to let people tell their own stories. Presenting a

piece of the American tapestry that has not been known, whether LDS or not, black or white, presenting a piece of that tapestry—it is our history. It is our story, not just historically, but the contemporary story. So yes, we are proud of it.

Margaret: A black woman, LDS convert, approached me after an early fund-raiser, which raised some money but probably would have raised more if the right balance had been there. The trailer we showed at that fund-raiser came across to her and others in the audience as too negative. She said, “Remember that we, as black Latter-day Saints, have to explain it to our families. This won’t help us.” That became the voice in my head, that we would retain the balance, but we *had* to honor the stories. This was not ex-Mormon blacks telling why they left the Church. It was the untold story of black Mormons.

Darius: The positive and the negative.

Margaret: So my touchstone concept was bridge-building. We wanted to build bridges from the black community to the white, from the white community to the black, and within families. We have people who have strong connections to other religions. Keith Hamilton’s grandfather was a very popular Baptist minister. Tamu’s uncle is a Pentecostal bishop of the Church of God in Christ. That is huge, like an Area Authority.

Darius: He covers several states.

Margaret: So our goal was not to have people say, “I want to join the Mormons now,” but to understand why a Tamu Smith would have chosen to leave that particular tradition and take up a new one, whether or not they agree or respect it. That became really, really important to me.

Darius: For those of us black Latter-day Saints who have been and are yet in the Church, we wanted to tell our story, both positive and negative, because that has been our experience. If it had been all positive, I think we might all have been translated by now; and if it had been all negative, we would be out of the Church. We didn’t want that co-opted and have someone else decide that there was no joy, there was nothing positive, there can only be the negative, and the Church needs to be damned and hanged and drawn and quartered. That’s not our story.

We are here. We have been here. And we are remaining in the Church because we have a testimony of it. Yes, we have had nega-

tive experiences, some more and others less; but we are remaining here because we find something positive. We wanted that side of the story told.

Margaret: So, with that goal, the task was then for me to bring Darius on as co-producer and co-director.

Greg: Did you have your script by then?

Margaret: No. I had a proto-script, as I was transcribing and as we were editing.

Greg: What was the game plan? Just cast a broad net?

Margaret: Yes. The interviews were done by this time.

Greg: But you hadn't done all the interviews.

Margaret: No. We had the Dutcher interviews, and we had the Bickerton footage.

Greg: Explain about the Bickerton footage.

Margaret: Darius and I weren't co-producers/co-directors at this time; Darius was an interview subject, but still very much involved with what we were doing. This was when Rob and Wayne and Richard Dutcher were in charge. Richard Bickerton contacted Rob Foster and said that, way back in 1968, BYU had asked him to film sort of a defense. It was in the midst of all the protests, and they wanted to say, "There is another side to this story. Black Latter-day Saints like this church, and BYU is a good place to be, so quit your protesting." So they hired Richard Bickerton, and he's a good filmmaker. He interviewed black Latter-day Saints, including Darius, and Alan Cherry and Paul Gill, and someone whom we don't know, because the film was not finished, so the names were never put on there. He found, I think, as many black Latter-day Saints as he could, which was five!

Darius: We were poised to take over the world!

Margaret: Sadly, there was a man named John Lamb, who played with Duke Ellington and who had his story in the *Improvement Era*. We tried to find him, and finally did. But he responded, "I think you're looking for another John Lamb." But I sent the picture to Paul Gill, and Paul said, "No this is him. This is the man who was in the Church and who had such an impact on me." But that is so much of the legacy: Whom have we held onto?

BYU had ordered the film made; and then when they saw it,

they said, "Destroy it immediately, and don't tell anybody that you have made it!"

Greg: Why?

Darius: Because Bickerton hadn't just done the "happy Negro" thing. He had also talked to blacks who were opposed to the Church, who were just expressing their views.

Greg: Non-Mormon blacks?

Darius: Non-Mormon blacks.

Greg: Did he get any Mormon blacks who were also opposed?

Margaret: No.

Darius: I think it was because there was an intent to balance, from his standpoint as a filmmaker, that it caused the feathers to be ruffled at BYU and the Church. So he was instructed to destroy the copy, but he asked if he could keep a black-and-white print of it, and that was granted. So we never saw the color version of it, because it was gone. What Bickerton did was approach Rob Foster and say, "I have something that might be of interest to you," and it was this black-and-white copy.

Greg: How did he know that Rob was doing this?

Margaret: This probably happened with you, too, on your McKay biography. All through the writing of our books, we just really feel that we are at a "truth and reconciliation" point, and there are stories that have to be told and are begging to be told, and periodically there is just a fist slamming through the veil and saying, "This one needs to be in there." That's what this was. We refer to it as manna from heaven. For ten years, I have been getting calls from Darius, or he from me, saying, "I've got more manna." We, honestly, just got used to it, and we still are. As of two days ago, we continue getting manna. This isn't finished. So that's what it was.

Darius: So where did Bickerton come from? He was manna. So we met and screened the film.

Greg: You must have been aware that there had been a film, because you were interviewed at one point.

Darius: Yes, but I never knew what happened to it. We met with Bickerton probably five years ago, and the interview was done in 1968. I had no idea what had happened to that footage. As I watched my portion, what struck me was that I was being very

guarded. That brings about some feelings—I didn’t know whom to trust I didn’t know whose agenda was what.

Greg: How long had you been in the Church by that time?

Darius: Four years. I didn’t know whom to trust. I was up at the University of Utah, and Dr. Sterling McMurrin had me into his office and wanted to talk. I didn’t know who he was and which way he was headed. So I found myself always hedging my bet in what I would say. I didn’t know if someone was friend or foe. I met with John J. Stewart of Morningside Elementary School, who wrote the book, *Mormonism and the Negro* (1960; 2d ed., Bountiful, Utah: Horizon Publishers, 1978). He was so involved in writing letters to the editor of the *Salt Lake Tribune*. I felt that some folks had an agenda, and they wanted me to help them with their agenda, but I didn’t know who they were and whether I should be involved or not. And that’s the way it was with the Bickerton thing. So when I watched myself there, I realized that I was standing there, not knowing who this guy was and what he was going to do with this. So I was guarded.

Greg: When did that feeling start to wane, or do you still carry some of it?

Darius: There are a couple of answers to that. Yes, I still carry part of that, because I still don’t know—and maybe none of us fully knows—if someone we meet and associate with is friend or foe. So I still carry part of that, but to a far lesser degree. And the reason for that is age. It’s a whole lot different being in your seventh decade than being in your second or third decade, knowing who you are and being secure both in who you are and not really giving a damn about who someone else might be.

Greg: And knowing the limits of what they could do to you, anyway.

Darius: Yes, what are they going to do to me? Like the guy said, “They can kill you, but they ain’t going to eat you.”

Margaret: With the Bickerton stuff, we met in the Wilkinson Center. We had the large film, but didn’t have a take-up reel.

Greg: This was 16 millimeter?

Darius: Yes, 16 millimeter black-and-white, with optical sound.

Margaret: I ran over to audiovisual to see if I could get a take-up reel, and they had no idea what that was. They finally gave

me what you would play on a tape recorder. Anyway, we finally managed to make it work. But the film hadn't been finished, and none of the names were there. We were going through it, and I identified Ben Lewis, a BYU vice president who had been my stake president, and Bob Thomas.² It was interesting to see them in this new context. I remembered them from 1968.

Greg: When you say it wasn't finished, were these just interviews, back-to-back, or had there been some editing done?

Margaret: There had been some editing done, but the names had not been put on. Unless you knew the people yourself, there was nothing to indicate who they were.

So I saw Bob Thomas, who was in my ward; I grew up with his kids. I was identifying everyone I knew. Darius knew most of the others, but there was one black LDS man we never identified. We didn't use any footage of him, because we couldn't identify him. He was handsome, really well spoken, but we don't know who he is.

Darius was a little surprised to see himself. He didn't realize that he would be in the movie. As I listened to Bob Rees's interview, he talked about Bob Thomas telling him that the Brethren did not want him to publish the Lester Bush article in *Dialogue*, and Bob Rees saying, "I'm sure they'll forgive me if I do this." Bob Thomas said, "Bob, they won't," and Bob Rees thought, "I could really have serious consequences for this." I grew up hearing Bob Thomas bear his testimony, and, as I mentioned, I grew up with his kids. It was interesting to have this new view of what also was going on during my childhood. I was aware of the protests against BYU, but I was a kid. I was aware of the priesthood restriction, and it did become personal to me, because I had a very racist seminary teacher, and I had what we could call an allergic reaction to it, and actually dropped out of seminary over the racism. So back there, at age fourteen, it was hitting me, even though I was in an all-white community.

Darius: Seeing this young man, Paul Gill, struggling was one of the things that impressed me with his interview from 1968. He had just been a member of the Church for a short period of time and was trying to rationalize, justify, understand the priesthood restriction and his role in this church. "Am I cursed?" he struggles to say. "Did I do something where God cursed me?" He was trying

to find himself in that footage. We wondered if he was alive. We got his name, but that was all we had.

Margaret: We learned his name because the person in the film said, "We have a young Negro named Paul Gill." But that was all we had.

Darius: I think he was wearing some old army fatigues with "Gill" on the label.

Greg: You never knew him at that time?

Darius: No. From the footage and something that was said, I had the impression that he was in Seattle. So the question that we raised was, Is he still alive? Is he still in the Church? Can we find this guy? With the impression that he was in Seattle, I called my sister, who was living in Portland and Seattle. I asked, "Do you know this guy?" She said, "I know of a Gill family in Portland. They are up-and-comers with a business background." I said, "Will you check and see if Paul Gill is one of their relatives?"

At the same time, I remembered meeting a fellow when I was doing a presentation for a Church audience in Seattle; and he seemed well connected and seemed to know everyone. If I could remember that guy's name, I was sure he would be able to tell me if Paul Gill was there in Seattle. So I was going through my computer address book, not remembering the fellow's name, but knowing that I would recognize it if I read it. I was just going through the names, one by one, and I came across the name of Paul Gill, the very guy we were looking for.

In the notes area I had made a comment, and seeing Paul's name brought it all to mind. I had presented at a family history and genealogy conference in northern California, and there was this man in the audience who sat at the back of the chapel; and when we were doing the questions-and-answers portion, he was very actively engaged in asking questions. He was wearing this funny hat—Paul always wears a hat; it's his trademark. Following the conference, he came up to me and introduced himself. We exchanged information, and it was after that that he sent me a manila envelope with a bunch of material in it, and it was this same Paul Gill. So I had him in my address book, and I didn't even know it. I made a phone call, but he wasn't in. I left a message, and then he returned the call.

Margaret: And, oh, he was excited!

Greg: Was he still active?

Margaret: Still active, with two sons on missions. Bruce and I just took the third son to Genesis³ in January. He had just returned from the Rochester New York mission, and is now at Utah Valley University, waiting to go to BYU. Paul has eleven kids. We flew him out to Utah to interview, so we have the 2007 interview juxtaposed with the 1968 interview.

Back in 1968 we have him saying, “Am I cursed? Was it something wrong I did in the preexistence?” In 2007, he says, “It didn’t take but a moment for me to come across some of the things that were written—I won’t mention any names—by the prolific writers.” And then he talks about the word “neutral.” He says, “That is an ugly word. I didn’t really understand what it meant. Nobody should have used the word ‘neutral.’ It means you don’t take a side.” He has some kids who didn’t stay in the Church, but the Gills are a Latter-day Saint family. And now, he is ready to talk about some of the issues he dealt with, coming up. And he’s also trying to get a group like Genesis set up in Indiana, called Bethesda. It’s pretty stop-and-start. One of his things was to observe Genesis. He was our speaker the month we flew him out—April 2007—and it was a wonderful Genesis meeting. We had the footage from the Bickerton film. We had Darius Gray in his twenties; and when we put him on screen, the Genesis people broke into catcalls!

Darius: Life has not been kind!

Margaret: They mostly just commented on how seriously tempted Darius must have been, with those kinds of looks. And then we showed Paul Gill, who was our speaker, and Alan Cherry. Alan was also there at the meeting, and he said, “We’re the preemies. We are the ones who came in before the priesthood revelation, and there weren’t many of us. But it’s quite something to be here with two other preemies.”

Darius: I did the Paul Gill interview.

Margaret: We had hired a young man who we thought would be the director; we were not planning on directing it ourselves. We had hoped that this young man might be able to do it; but the truth is that he wanted to be an actor; and so when acting jobs came up, they would take priority. Darius and I finally realized

that he had a family to support, and we were only able to supply him work as we had money coming in. It was not fair to him, and we couldn't just quit when he had an acting job.

But in the meantime, he did a senior project where he decided he would do the Jane Manning James story. We used documentary funds to pay the actors, and I arranged to use authentic cabins in Pioneer Village in Provo. So that footage belonged to us. We used it in two places: to tell Jane's story, and in B-roll stuff that was mostly narrative.

Then, we requested archival footage from the Church. We kind of knew what was out there. We knew times when the Church had filmed different things involving blacks. I had a recording, though not good quality, of President Kimball in South Africa talking about the priesthood revelation. I was willing to use that cassette recording but I hoped we could find something better. When I went to the archives and told them what I wanted, they gave me this whole DVD of the Kimball years—which included those words he spoke in South Africa, beautifully recorded. So we had that, and a lot of other archival stuff that we then would need to talk to Public Affairs about. We actually did not negotiate with the archivists; we negotiated with Public Affairs.

Darius: Yes. The project was and is an independent project, and yet we weren't trying to hide anything from the Church. There was an interview that had been conducted with Pastor Cecil ("Chip") Murray. Pastor Murray, from the African Methodist Episcopal Church in Los Angeles, is as well known in the AME Church as President Hinckley is known in the LDS Church. So here is this noted, respected, senior member of the faith being interviewed for our film. In the course of the interview, Pastor Murray says that President Hinckley apologized for the role that the Church had played in discrimination and for the Church's role in slavery. That was obviously of note—that President Hinckley would apologize. So an email was sent to Elder Dallin Oaks, saying, "We have footage in this interview saying this," and asking if the Church would like to respond. But there was no response at that time.

So here we are, fast-forward, seventeen months later. All of a sudden the light has come on, because some of the folks in Public

Affairs have seen portions of the film. Again, we weren't trying to hide the pea. The thing that grabbed their attention was that President Hinckley supposedly apologized for *anything*. "What would this church have to apologize for?" So here we are, having been given the footage by archives, access to this material with the expectation that it would be used.

But at this point, months later, the Church, through its representatives in Public Affairs, was saying, "We don't believe President Hinckley would have said that."

So to make a long, long story short, we had Marvin Perkins in California talk to Cecil Murray using open-ended probes—not trying to direct it—say, "You did an interview. You met with President Hinckley. What was that about? Was there anything significant that came from that?" Pastor Murray repeated the story. I had asked Marvin to take quick notes immediately after that meeting and forward those notes to me from that meeting. So Murray repeated and verified that the interview had taken place and that during it President Hinckley had made the comments that Pastor Murray had earlier said he said. I related that to Public Affairs so they could relate that information to those of the Brethren who were ill at ease. Then the question that we posed was, "Have you asked President Hinckley? If you're saying that it wasn't said, ask the other person who was a part of the conversation. The conversation was between Pastor Chip Murray and President Gordon Hinckley. Murray is remembering it; have you asked President Hinckley?" But they were reluctant to ask him. They didn't want to go that route. They did everything except to buy bread on Sunday to keep from asking President Hinckley, who obviously was still alive at the time, though he died while we were still in some phase of negotiation.

Margaret: The way we got Pastor Murray was that, when he met with President Hinckley in Salt Lake, they had also brought him to BYU and asked me if I could help host him. He has a presence that fills the room. It was the kind of thing where, when I walked into the room to meet him, I immediately teared up. The love that he has—I'm sure you've had that experience, where you just sense the emanation of love from somebody. I fell in love with him, just sweet, platonic love at first sight. We connected.

We had the lunch, and then he took me aside and said, "Mar-

garet, could you take me to the kitchen so I can thank the people who prepared this?" So I took him back for him to thank them. He pronounced blessings on people's heads, and then they had to lead him away. He hadn't pronounced a blessing on my head, but he had given me contact information.

I was having serious problems with a son. I felt like I could talk to Pastor Murray about it, and I sort of poured my heart out in an email. And then I said, "You didn't give me a blessing. You blessed everybody else, but they took you away so quickly that I didn't get mine." He wrote the sweetest email and blessed me in the email.

He said, "To your oldest son, dear daughter, if you find a quiet moment with him, and gain his permission to speak while he listens, promising to then listen while he speaks, committing not to interrupt—My dear son, I want to take this opportunity to ask your forgiveness. Forgive me for whatever things I have done or failed to do that caused you such anger and anguish of spirit."

So I did as Pastor Murray had instructed, and reported back to him. And it resulted in wonderful things with my son. Pastor Murray became somebody whom I just loved. His emails would call me "Queen Margaret" and one was "Yo, Sister Margaret!" That was how I knew Pastor Murray, and so I was able to suggest that he be an interview subject. In my own email, I also have Pastor Murray's account of the apology. This is the text, dated in my emails as having been received on April 7, 2006:

Margaret, dear daughter:

President Hinckley is a true messenger of our Lord.

The Church had endorsed a teaching that the curse of Canaan was the curse afflicting black people in America.

In the Air Force I first encountered this teaching when stationed for one year at Thule, Greenland, and being in the same military facility lodging with two Mormons. They reminded me of this teaching constantly.

Two years ago, I was invited to Salt Lake City by the LDS Church, and President Hinckley took his personal time to sit with our small group that was touring the many ministries and apologized to me in front of the group. He had heard via Keith Atkinson (serving now in Chile) that I had communicated to Keith this understanding, and was aware that the Church had changed its position in 1978.

That was amazing!!

Now the Church pushes Blacks to learn their lineage via the Church.⁴

That will open eyes and doors that will open new avenues of life.

Thank you for sharing with me.

Thank you for endorsing my ministry.

Thank you for being my friend.

Rev. Cecil L. "Chip" Murray

So we've got several records, and Pastor Murray has never denied that that interview and apology happened, and to various sources.

Darius: So here we are, asking, "Have you asked President Hinckley about this?" and no one wanted to do it. So basically they said, "We may not be able to give you permission to use any of this material." So Margaret and I talked—and I'm sure we had our share of prayers—and drafted a letter that basically said, "Thank you very much, but we won't withdraw that. We've talked to Pastor Murray twice, and Margaret has the email. So if you are going to withhold those materials, we will then find what is available in public domain, and we will proceed with this film."

I think it took two days, and there was another phone call. "May we meet?" We met in my home: Margaret, myself, and two representatives from the Church.

Greg: From where?

Margaret: Public Affairs.

Darius: They had asked for a copy of the film, to show it to the Brethren. We had declined that. We said, "We will be happy to show it, but we will go with it, and not have it done in a vacuum without comment and dialogue."

Darius: We also had shown it to whomever they wished at a screening there in the Joseph Smith Memorial Building. There was a full house of Public Affairs folks there. We weren't hiding the pea from anyone, but we weren't going to do it in a vacuum, and to have them make a determination one way or another without at least our being able to argue if there was a question. So they had seen it, and we said, "We are going to proceed, even if we have to go with material from the public domain."

We tried to find an accommodation. We weren't willing to take Pastor Murray's words out, but we tried to see what else we might do.

Margaret: The reason we had Pastor Murray with the Mormon

connection was not just the apology. The first AME in Los Angeles was founded by a former slave of Mormon pioneers, Biddy Smith Mason. So there was that link, and that was actually what had initiated the apology. President Hinckley had been given the summary of who Pastor Murray was and that his church was founded by a slave of Mormon pioneers, so he knew all of that.

Greg: Had the slave been LDS?

Margaret: We have no record of her ever having been LDS.

Greg: But owned by Mormons?

Margaret: Right. When the Public Affairs people said, "We have no memory of any apology," we said, "Do you remember a conversation about the founding of the first AME by Biddy Smith Mason?" "Yes, we remember that." So we went back to the interview. I had the transcriptions with me, and I said, "What if we add this portion where we talk about who Biddy Smith Mason was?" Anyway, we reached an accommodation where we would add the material that would make it clear that this was not an over-the-pulpit "I, representing the Church, wish to make a formal apology," but that this was "senior pastor to senior pastor" talking about the founding of the first AME, with that history leading into President Hinckley giving an apology.

Darius: It allowed a context in which the apology was for the Church's role in slavery, and not dealing with the priesthood issue. That was the fear. But it was for the Church's role in slavery, which it cannot deny, since Brigham Young went to the territorial legislature in 1852 and Utah became a slave territory. But the apology was also for the Church's role in discrimination, broadly speaking. So by making additions, rather than subtracting the fact that there had been an apology, the accommodation was made. Then, they could feel, appropriately, that, "No, President Hinckley did not, and was not apologizing for the priesthood restriction." That was the fear, that there was any linkage there, that the Church would have to admit or suggest that there had been any wrongdoing.

Margaret: We spent the next day with our editor, Jim Hughes, trying to fit in the whole Biddy Smith Mason story. Finally, we said, "No, it's not going to fit. It takes us off track." So we just plugged in the picture of Biddy Smith Mason, and put in a little

extra footage of Pastor Murray saying that President Hinckley said, "I have learned something of the beginnings of your church and the founding of your church," and then we just type, "Biddy Smith Mason, founder of the first AME Church, former slave of Mormon pioneers." That's the accommodation ground, just adding that little bit. And they were fine with it. We had permission, then, to use the footage of President Hinckley giving that remarkable statement in April general conference of 2006.

Greg: So did they hold back anything?

Margaret: Nothing. We have everything that we asked for.

Greg: Was that the only time that the Church tried to lean on the content?

Darius: Yes.

Margaret: Darius is pretty strong-willed, and I come a close second. We understood what we had. We were never treated condescendingly.

Darius: These representatives from Public Affairs, I consider friends. One of them, I consider far more than a friend. They treated us gently, and they were on an errand. They understood our position, but they were on an errand. And they did treat us as well as they could.

Greg: Did the people who sent them on the errand view you with respect, or fear?

Darius: Probably both. You have to say probably, because you don't know. Again, we had offered to show the film to any of the senior Brethren at their request. We asked, "Who are these individuals who are asking the questions and expressing the concern?" Of course, that information was withheld. So we don't know who the individuals were. Ultimately, there were some requests from good brethren among the leadership of the Church, and we have done three or so screenings for various General Authorities. The film has always met with very positive comments and heartfelt emotion.

One time a member of the Seventy wanted to see the film, and so we had a screening with him and some other General Authorities—

Margaret: And the secretary brought popcorn!

Darius: I said in advance, "Okay, we'll bring the film, but who is providing the popcorn?" When we showed up, she had the pop-

corn! So here we are in the office, and I intentionally sat in the rear, because I wanted to gauge the head bobs. I kept watching, and they were being moved.

Greg: All of them?

Darius: Yes.

Margaret: The General Authority who had invited us certainly knew the story. With other General Authorities and Public Affairs people, the big comment afterwards was, "I learned things I didn't know."

Darius: I think it moved those brethren to a point where they had not been before.

Greg: And not just emotionally.

Darius: No—who blacks were, the history, some of which they did not know. As Margaret says, so often we hear, "I didn't know that." Whether it's from a General Authority or a lay member of the Church, it provides information that previously was unknown.

So with the various screenings, I would say yes, it has moved people, to have an appreciation and an understanding that prior to its viewing they did not have.

Greg: Do you see them wince at certain points?

Darius: Yes.

Margaret: Yes.

Darius: Absolutely.

Margaret: In fact, we can predict it.

Greg: I watched when you screened it here, and the whole room jumped.

Margaret: We anticipate a little bit of a gasp when Armand Mauss is telling the story of the kid he grew up with, Richard. The B-roll has the picture of a group of black and white children, and Armand is saying, "All of us were given the priesthood except this one boy, and we couldn't understand why that would be. Then, the bishop explained that they had done their genealogy and found out that he had a distant black relative."

Our editor made this choice to do the shift of expectations. You're focused on this kid who is clearly African American, and then Armand says, "We had a hard time understanding this, since he had blond hair and blue eyes." And then the camera shifts to

that one blond kid, and we get an immediate gasp from the audience.

Darius: So I think it has moved people, including General Authorities. Again, what is the purpose of the story if it doesn't bring about some good? We are storytellers and we are allowing people to tell their own story, but what's the purpose of hearing their story if it doesn't bring about some good?

Greg: To move them to where they need to be, you've got to dislodge them from where they were. There is a little bit of tugging that is necessary.

Margaret: I've loved the film format to do that. There are a lot of people who need to have this understanding. We've got to get to a new place in the Church. The folklore is still with us.

We know that books can be intimidating, and the fact that our books are Mormon fiction⁵ is going to put off some people, even though by the time we are in the third novel, we are out of fiction and we are doing what you did, in that when we have people talk, we have usually pulled it from something that they really did say. But in a film, you just sit down. It's there for you to take in. A lot of our good friends haven't read the books, but the movie takes seventy-two minutes to watch. And if you do the movie and special features, by the time you get through special features—because we hit the Brazil thing, and Nigeria, and all seven of the 1847 black priesthood holders—by the time you get through the three hours and twelve minutes, you really will have an understanding of the history of all of this. But also, we made a decision to have that last few minutes be black Latter-day Saints—and you've heard their stories and their struggles—say why they are still in this church. That is our final bridge, and that's probably that woman's voice which is still in my head: "We have to explain our Mormonism to our families, and this isn't helping."

Greg: What do you want this film to accomplish? You've hinted a little bit here and there.

Darius: One of the Brethren asked that very question. I said, "We want it to help heal." He was surprised at that answer. He thought it would be something else. We want to help facilitate the healing that needs to take place in this body of Christ, the Church. We want to facilitate the healing that needs to take place between the black and white communities in the Church.

Greg: But those are different sores, aren't they?

Darius: No. It's the same story. When we have screened the film to non-LDS audiences, black and white, but let's focus on the black, it has met with great approval, because blacks recognize that story. It is a reflection of the larger American story, where "those people" have been denied. We are "those people," whether we are Mormons, or Methodists who then had to become AME because in the Methodist Church they wouldn't allow us to pray at the same time whites were praying. It is the same story, and it is the same healing, whether it is in the Church or outside the Church. It is a healing between blacks and whites.

Greg: What I am trying to say is that the aggressor has a different sore than the victim. Granted, both need to be healed. How do you address that?

Darius: My answer would be that we present the truth—the reality of these lives—and let that truth heal. There are few surprises, I would contend, for blacks, whether members or non-members, when they hear some of the painful stories of other blacks. It's what we have known. We have lived it. It is our existence—not that we're suffering every single moment—but we realize and recognize that, and yet we can embrace the story because it is our existence.

For those who were the inflictors of pain, they wince. They are surprised by some of the stories, but still they are hearing the truth of it, not told in an angry way. There is no edge in that film. Yes, there are hard stories and truths that might be difficult for some, but there is no one with a sharpened axe. There is no one trying to chop down anyone or to make whites or blacks feel less than who they are, a son and daughter of God, and a brother or sister to whomever it is they are looking at. So, whether you are the aggressor or the victim, however the story hits you, if it causes you to wince or to affirm that which you know, it lets you know that we are in one family and we are speaking truth.

Margaret: And we are not going to heal everybody. We have certainly had people immediately say, "You're far too critical of the Church." I have a letter on file that reiterates the idea that blacks were cursed and also that Jews were cursed because they crucified Jesus.

Greg: But if you're not getting objections from both ends of the bell curve, it means you haven't done your job right.

Margaret: We would love for Church leaders to be able to see this film, especially if they have any of African lineage in their wards or stakes, and have a recognition moment of: "I have hurt you, and my church has hurt you." It shouldn't just be, "That was too bad." And it definitely shouldn't be, "Let's cover it up really quickly." It should actually be the shedding of tears, and full recognition and embrace of "How could I have done that to you?" Ultimately, it should lead us to the Atonement. We will all be healed in the same way—through the Atonement—and that's where I go. That has to be how we deal with it, and it has to conquer the fear.

Greg: So this is your hope for the documentary. Was it the hope of Rob and Wayne when they started it?

Darius: No. I think their hope was to inform, to do an information piece.

Margaret: Sometimes, taking Darius back in the memory of things was really painful. When we were writing the books, sometimes we would disagree. I remember one time storming out of his house when we were disagreeing about how we were going to portray him finding out about the priesthood restriction. I had letters from the missionaries who had taught him that had a slightly different version from Darius's. When I was trying to incorporate what they had said were their memories, it became quite volatile. There was a point—it wasn't over that one—it could have just been over word choice, because we are both strong willed—where I think both of us said or thought, "To hell with it! I don't want to do this anymore." I think the words Darius used were, "I feel like I'm in a hostile environment."

I called Bruce [my husband] once and said, "That's it! We can't do this. It's just not going to work. I'll finish writing the books, and that's it." Bruce said, "I have a testimony of a few things, and one is that you are supposed to do this with Darius. It would look very bad for a white Latter-day Saint woman and a black Latter-day Saint man to say, 'Sorry, we couldn't get along well enough to finish this project.' So you figure out what you need to do, and mend this. You are supposed to be working with him." I said, "Okay. Watch the kids. I'll drive up to Darius's house."

Now, I am directionally challenged. I don't get anywhere with-

out getting lost. It's a joke. When we took the cast of *I Am Jane*⁶ to Chicago and I kept getting lost, Keith Hamilton finally said, "We are going to have one rule from now on: Margaret doesn't drive. If you see Margaret in a car, you pull her over and put someone else in the driver's seat." So I went to Darius's house, and he wasn't there. I knew where he was; I just knew he was at Green Flake's gravestone. I drove there, without any hitch, drove there, and pulled up. You tell the rest.

Darius: We were very angry with each other. We had both vowed, "No, I'm not going to work with him/her anymore." I was out doing some running around, driving here and there. I had this prayer; it was just me in the car, and I'm talking my prayer out to God. "God, I'm sick of this woman." But it was like I was still being twisted by the Spirit. So I basically challenged God. I was on 20th East, between 70th South and 90th South. I said, "Okay, if I'm supposed to work with this woman, I'm going to turn here on Creek Road and go down to the Union Cemetery, where Green and Martha Flake are buried. If Margaret is there, or if she shows up in a few minutes, then I'll work with her. But otherwise, God, to hell with this woman! Her and her horse, the one she rode in on."

So I went to the cemetery and parked the car. She wasn't there. I thought, "Okay, Lord." I was out sitting on the little bench that they had there. "I'm going to give you five minutes, and then I'm good. I won't have to work with this woman anymore." And who the hell shows up?

Margaret: I remember just walking over to where he was sitting, and he said, "You don't have to say it. I already know." So we are absolutely committed to our mission.

Darius: For that confluence of events to take place, God had to start her out an hour ahead of time to drive from Provo, and then not to find me at home and to be led, spiritually, to "I know where he is. He is over at Green Flake's grave." Why in the heck would she think I was over at the cemetery? But that's where she was spiritually led. And she had to have a head start, with God maneuvering this at least an hour ahead of time, with her conversation with Bruce. I'm out doing whatever I'm doing, madder than a hornet, and I can't get it out of my mind. Then, to challenge God

in that prayer. "Okay, I'm going to turn left here, and go down Creek Road. Blah, blah, blah."

Margaret: Some of our working together has been my letting myself be initiated into the pain of what his life was—the pain and the joy. I have never met his mother, but I feel that she is a part of my life. He gave me music to listen to that he had listened to as a child.

Darius: The gospel songs.

Margaret: So, back to the conflict over how we would portray the night Darius learned about the priesthood restriction. I didn't insist, "No, the missionaries said it was this way, so this is the way we are going to do it. This is the white way." Which it was. It was imposing a particular paradigm over his memory. But opening up to the experience and to the gifts of Darius's family and culture brought me an enormous endowment, beyond the stories we were telling. It was the whole culture of his parents, his sister whom I love and who is a dear friend, the music, those stories of his uncle who chose to pass as white. It opened black literature to me. Those are the books I am now drawn to. All of that is a whole world. And that—to me—to create a lesson out of that—if we can quit deciding that we are going to tell it our way, and impose our particular structure over the story, and quit presiding at the meeting but have it be fully participatory, where everybody is telling their story, and we sometimes weep with them, that we were a part of that—if we can get there, then we can start talking about Zion.

Notes

1. Robert A. Rees is a poet, essayist, commentator on Mormon studies, and a former editor of *Dialogue*.

2. Robert K. Thomas was a longtime member of BYU's English Department and served in its administration, including as the university's academic vice president.

3. The LDS Genesis Group was organized under the direction of Joseph Fielding Smith in 1971 to support Latter-day Saints of African descent. It was originally headed by Ruffin Bridgeforth, Darius Gray, and Eugene Orr.

4. The Freedman Bank genealogical record project was spearheaded by Marie Taylor and Darius Gray. Over a period of eleven years, inmates at the Utah State Penitentiary extracted and digitized names from the Freedman Bank records to make them computer-accessible.

5. Margaret Blair Young and Darius A. Gray co-authored the STANDING ON THE PROMISES trilogy, published by Bookcraft in Salt Lake City: *One More River to Cross* (2000), *Bound for Canaan* (2002), and *The Last Mile of the Way* (2003).

6. Margaret Young's *I Am Jane* has been performed at various venues throughout the nation since she wrote it in 2002. It tells the story of Jane Manning James, perhaps the most famous black Mormon pioneer.

Nobody Knows

The Untold Story Of Black Mormons

"All are alike unto God, black and white; male and female..."
(Book of Mormon)



They came west with the Mormons, enslaved and freeborn.
They could not enter the temples they had helped build.
The Church they loved called them cursed. Now, the
Church invites them to be Mormon pioneers once again,
with a new Zion in sight. HOW WILL THEY ANSWER?

Cover of the DVD of Nobody Knows: The Untold Story of Black Mormons. Family group: Descendants of Edward ("Ned") and Susan Leggroan and their children, who joined the Church in Salt Lake City. Seated woman: Jane Manning James. Couple: Amanda Leggroan Chambers and Samuel Chambers.

Nobody Knows: The Untold Story of Black Mormons— Script

Note: This script, with punctuation, capitalization, and formatting standardized, is published here by permission of Darius Aiden Gray and Margaret Blair Young.

Opening Sequence

Joshua Aker: People can think you're an idiot, and they don't make any apologies about telling you so. "You're black and you're a Mormon? Do you realize what you believe in? Do you realize what you come from? Do you realize what that Church has done?"

Tamu Smith: I don't feel like I have to choose between being Mormon and being black. I will always be black. I don't mind defending the Church to black people. I do mind defending my blackness to members of the Church.

Martin Luther King III: The perception is that it really is not open, that it's a closed kind of community that really does not want others to be part of that tradition, and that's the perception—which hinges on exclusion.

Natalie Sheppard: I was angry for a very long time, but I switched that anger into a determination to be a pioneer for black members of this Church.

Darius Gray: I'm a proud black man. I am the son of black parents who were proud of their ethnicity, proud of the accomplishments of our race. And yet I embraced the gospel of Jesus Christ, and I've stayed in that faith for thirty-nine years. That should say something. I hope it does. I'm not stupid. I'm not a fool. And I'm not an Uncle Tom. This gospel is for all people.

Beginnings

Narrator: It was called the Second Great Awakening. Religious revivals, many of them camp meetings in leafy groves, sprang up everywhere during the early nineteenth century.

Joseph Smith, founder of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, claimed to receive a vision and further claimed that he was called to restore the Church of Christ.

(Photo of stained glass: First Vision)

Narrator: With the new religion came new scriptures, called the Book of Mormon. Converts were soon referred to as Mormons.

(Printing press photos of Book of Mormon pages)

Narrator: Mormon doctrine included a belief in life before birth. In a “preexistence,” spirit children of God had claimed the privilege of mortality. There was then a war in heaven. Spirits who followed the devil were cast out, never to experience mortal birth.

(Pictures of universe)

Paul Gill: Where did I come from? Who am I? These were important questions. Where did I come from? What is my purpose in life? Where am I going? I certainly didn’t believe in POOF!—that we come from nothing to the planet. But he said that we come from a premortal life and the light came on.

(Picture of Darius with newborn son)

Narrator: Church doctrine declared that mankind would be punished for individual sins, not for the fall of Adam and Eve. It even suggested that the fall was a vital element in human progress. Without it, mortals could not experience the refining power of sorrow.

Keith Hamilton: I believe I chose to come to earth as a black man. I don’t believe God forced my spirit into a black body. I chose to. I recognized what it was going to mean to me and my family and I chose my mission. Jesus was treated the way He was on earth because of His mission. Right? He was born the way He was born, under the circumstances He was born under, and He

died the way He died because of His mission, because that's the way it had to be.

(B-roll:¹ Pictures from Keith's childhood)

Narrator: Joseph Smith and those who headed the Church after him were considered modern prophets by Mormon converts. Though Smith insisted he was far from perfect, his followers revered him and his successors.

Marvin Perkins: You have prophets and apostles all through the scriptures showing their human side.

Joshua Aker: I can reconcile that a man can be a prophet and be imperfect. The prophets made mistakes and did things that God didn't command them to do. But that doesn't mean that they were completely errant and that we shouldn't follow them therefore.

Robert A. Rees: Any church or organization you belong to will have its imperfections, and you have to make the decision whether you're going to abandon those imperfections and depart from them, or whether you're going to be one of those people that tries to change it.

Narrator: On April 6, 1830, six members of the new Church of Christ met in a farmhouse to organize the religion. Soon, Mormon missionaries began proselytizing. (Picture of the farmhouse at Fayette)

Narrator: In 1832, Elijah Abel, a man of African descent, was baptized. He would soon be a missionary himself. His full fellowship within the early church suggested a precedent. There was no apparent segregation in this new faith. But would it remain so?

Newell Bringhurst: Elijah Abel is one of the more interesting and in some ways one of the more tragic figures in Latter-day Saint history. I guess tragic but also courageous, I'd say he was very courageous—I guess a complex individual. He was one of the earliest members of the Church, becoming a member during the 1830s and, during that same decade of the 1830s, being ordained first [an] elder and then following that, a Seventy. He was ordained by Joseph Smith.

(Bill of sale showing Elijah Abel's "X", Elijah's monument,
Elijah's patriarchal blessing)

Narrator: Besides being ordained into the LDS priesthood, Elijah Abel was given a patriarchal blessing.

Margaret Young: A patriarchal blessing in the LDS Church is very similar to what you see in the Old Testament when you have the patriarchs—Abraham, Jacob, Isaac—giving blessings to their sons, birthright blessings, blessings telling them what their assignments will be, what their possibilities will be, that their posterity can be as the sands of the sea. The first patriarch in the LDS Church was the father of the founder. It was Father Smith—we just refer to him as Father Smith. And it was he who gave Elijah Abel his patriarchal blessing, which contained these words: “Thou hast been ordained an elder and shall be protected against the power of the destroyer.” “Thou hast been ordained an elder . . .” That made it very clear that he was indeed ordained into the priesthood, because that had come into question.

Narrator: Abel was one of the first undertakers in the Mormon settlement of Nauvoo, Illinois.

(Photo: Nauvoo)

Narrator: He left Nauvoo two years before the arrival of Jane Manning and her family, though Jane and Elijah would later meet.

(Footage: Nauvoo)

Jane Manning James

(Photo: Jane Manning James, dignified)

Louis Duffy: Now when Jane was a young girl, she met some missionaries. She convinced her family to go to Nauvoo, Illinois. So they all packed up. They got as far as Buffalo, New York, as the story goes.

(Photo of Jane in foliage)

Voice-over reading Jane Manning James’s journal: They insisted on having the money at Buffalo and would not take us farther. So we left the boat and started on foot to travel a distance of over eight hundred miles.

(Footage: Mannings on foot)

(Footage: Nauvoo by the lake, daytime. Colors dim to black and white as Mansion House appears.)

Louis: They were welcomed by the founder, Joseph Smith, and his wife Emma and they were invited into their home to stay with them and live in their house.

(Photo: Mansion House, black and white)

Voice-over (Jane): Soon after, they broke up the mansion. It was during this time that the Prophet Joseph and his brother Hyrum were martyred.

(Picture: Martyrdom)

I went to live in the family of Brother Brigham Young. I stayed there until he was ready to immigrate to this valley.

(Footage: Pioneers)

Narrator: One event in Jane's life is known only through the journal of a white pioneer, Eliza Partridge Lyman.

(Painting of Jane James and Eliza Lyman)

Voice-over from Eliza's journal: April 8, 1849: we baked the last of our flour today, and have no prospect of getting more till after harvest.

(B-roll: Eliza seeing that there is no flour)

April 13th: Brother Lyman started on a mission to California with O. P. Rockwell and others. May the Lord bless and prosper them and return them in safety. He left us without anything to make bread, it not being in his power to get any.

(Jane preparing her gift of flour)

(Eliza on her knees)

April 25: Jane James, the colored woman, brought me two pounds of flour, it being about half she had.

(B-roll: Jane getting flour, presenting it at the door, the scene becomes the monument as Tamu Smith speaks.)

Tamu Smith: Here you have this black woman who was a pio-

neer, who walked across the plains just like everyone else, who didn't have the same opportunity to go through the temple just like everyone else did, whose testimony was signed and sealed with her own blood and the blood of Christ in this gospel. She had gifts—beyond giving the flour. The flour is not the gift. Her charity is the gift. We have gifts to offer also.

(Monument close-up)

Slavery

Narrator: The issue of slavery was a fiery one in 1844. Not long before his death, Joseph Smith challenged the nation to “break off the shackles from the poor black man.”

(Photos of slaves)

(Photo: Young Brigham Young)

Narrator: Brigham Young, the man whom most Latter-day Saints followed west after Smith's death, had once indicated an acceptance of black Church members, even the ordination of blacks into the priesthood.

(Another picture of Brigham Young)

Voice-over, Brigham Young, 1847: It's nothing to do with the blood, for of one blood has God made all flesh. . . . We have one of the best Elders, an African, in Lowell, Massachusetts.

Narrator: But he soon faced a dilemma. Many Southerners brought their slaves with them on the Mormon migration.

(Photo of John Brown)

(Brown's journal, focusing on “African servant girl” offered as tithing)

(Photo of Betsy Flewellen—the “African servant girl”)

Narrator: These slaves represented Southern wealth and brought strong bodies to the trek—but not always strong enough.

(Journal: John Brown)

Voice-over of John Brown, January 1847: It finally turned cold and we had the severest kind of time. It was too severe for the Ne-

groes. My boy whose name was Henry took cold and finally the winter fever, which caused his death.

Narrator: As territorial governor in Utah, Young had weighty questions before him. How would Utah respond to slavery? How would the Mormons, now isolated from the rest of the nation, regard those of African descent?

Armand Mauss: As territorial governor, Brigham Young opens the legislative session and kind of lays out the agenda for the session and addresses the question of slavery. He was advocating that slavery be permitted for those who were already in Utah or came to Utah with slaves of their own.

Ronald Coleman: Young is perhaps more pronounced than others, in that he accepted the so-called biblical rationale that was employed by Southern defenders of slavery, that is—black bondage was based on sin and disobedience, as Noah had placed a curse on one of his sons. And also there was the Cain and Abel bit. These were not unique to the LDS denial of blacks' full participation in the priesthood; it was also used to justify slavery.

Voice-over, Reverend Samuel Seabury, 1861, New York: For justly was the burden of servitude laid upon the back of transgression. . . . Noah laid it as a curse upon his offending son.

(Photo: title page of Seabury's book)

Voice-over, Reverend Benjamin Morgan Palmer, 1863: I teach mankind that the allotment of God, in the original distribution of destinies to the sons of Noah, must continue.

(Photo of Benjamin Morgan Palmer]

Voice-over, Brigham Young, 1852: The seed of Canaan will inevitably carry the curse which was placed upon them.

(Another photo of Brigham Young)

Armand Mauss: Brigham Young made the first known official statement about the role of black people in the Church as part of his discussion about the role of black people in the state, and his statement in 1852 was that the descendants of Cain were not permitted to hold the priesthood, and he added that he was basically saying this on his own lights. He said, "If no other prophet said it

before now, I say it. The seed of Cain are not entitled to the blessings of the priesthood."

Narrator: Most denominations stated that children were born in sin, condemned because of the fall of Adam and Eve. Mormon doctrine, however, proclaimed that all children were born innocent.

(Reenactment B-roll footage of Eliza Lyman with baby)

Narrator: How could Mormons view blacks as cursed because of Cain or Canaan, and yet believe that humans were born sinless? How could Mormons condemn a man for his lineage and yet believe that mortals would be punished for their own sins, not for Adam's transgression?

(B-roll footage of Jane with Syl)

Narrator: Many tried to fit their old view of blacks into their new faith. Since Mormons believed in a pre-mortal war, a few speculated that some spirits had been "less valiant" in that war than others. Perhaps they had even been neutral. Fence-sitters.

(Picture of Orson Hyde)

Voice-over Apostle Orson Hyde, 1845: At the time the devil was cast out of heaven, there were some spirits who did not take a very active part on either side. They were required to come into the world and take bodies in the accursed lineage of Canaan; and hence the Negro or African race.

Marguerite Driessen: How can you have the second article of Faith—"We believe that man [sic] will be punished for their own sins and not for Adam's transgression"—and then believe that black people can't have the priesthood because they're all being cursed for the sins of Cain? And that clearly wasn't satisfactory to a lot of people, which is why somebody had to invent "fence-sitters in the preexistence."

(Pictures of slaves)

Paul Gill (1968): When I first joined the Church, this cat said to me, "Paul, you can't hold the priesthood because you're cursed." And bam, I get this thing—I can't hold the priesthood because I'm cursed.

Paul Gill (2007): When I first joined the Church, for the sake of argument and convenience, I went along with the theory that maybe it was something bad that I did in the pre-existence.

Newell Bringham: When I first became aware of the priesthood proscription, and it was the traditional explanations—that they were less valiant in the preexistence, that they were marked with the curse of Cain or the curse of Canaan, and because of that, they couldn't hold the priesthood. And when I got a little bit older, there was reference to the scriptural proof-texts. And so I became increasingly bothered by what the LDS Church was doing, especially as I became aware that there wasn't this same type of priesthood proscription in other white-dominated churches. And it contributed, ultimately—I'll be honest with you—it contributed ultimately to my alienation from the Church. There were other factors. I can't say it was all because of the black issue. When I went into the army, my disaffection was so deep, that—when I went through, they always ask you a bunch of personal questions, including your religious preference. It was a black NCO who was asking me this and he says, "What's your religious preference?" I impulsively burst out, "No preference. I have no preference." I was too embarrassed and too ashamed to tell him that I belonged to a church that discriminated against his members of his race.

Pastor Cecil Murray: And in my barracks were two Mormons, white, young adult males, and they were telling me how blacks are under a curse, the curse of Canaan. That is a part of the dogma of their faith. I, of course, would never accept that.

Narrator: There were few blacks in the Mormon settlements, and the nation already accommodated segregation. Given the way America regarded its black citizens, it is no surprise that the LDS priesthood restriction was a non-issue for over a century—though it affected not only men but women of African lineage. None were permitted to enter the Mormon temples to receive the most sacred ordinances of the faith. Jane Manning James requested these ordinances repeatedly, but she was denied. Her first request was made to Church President John Taylor. She visited him on Christmas day, 1884—the day Elijah Abel died. On the day of Abel's funeral, she dictated a letter to President Taylor.

Voice-over: Dear Brother: I called on your house last Thursday to have conversation with you concerning my future salvation. I realize my race and color and can't expect my endowments as others who are white. Yet God promised Abraham that in his seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed. Is there no blessing for me?

Your sister in the gospel, Jane E. James

Divisions

Narrator: Since race has been a divisive issue in most religions, nobody paid much attention to the Mormons.

Martin Luther King III: One of the things my father often stated was that the most segregated hour in America was the hour where we got our religious orientation, which was on Sunday morning at 11:00.

Ted Wheters: Racism is not new. Obviously, it existed in the Church, but every other church that I knew of—I mentioned the AME Church earlier. The AME Church was born out of the fact that blacks were at St. George's Episcopal Church in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. At prayer time—in the AME Church, you go to the altar and kneel down to pray. Blacks went to the altar and knelt to pray and they were literally dragged physically on their knees from the altar and told, "You have to wait until the white people pray. Then you can pray." Out of that came the AME Church by Richard Allen and some other people who just said, "We won't deal with this."

Pastor Murray: So to find a religious organization that does not have a dark corner when it comes to diversity is indeed to find a very unusual one, because our challenge is to have diversity without adversity.

Narrator: Before long, no Latter-day Saint recalled a time when the priesthood restriction *hadn't* been in place. Given the Mormons' lay ministry, every twelve-year-old boy was ordained into the LDS priesthood—unless he had African ancestry.

Armand Mauss: A family moved into our ward who had a boy about my age and an older sister. And when all of us [boys] reached age twelve, we all were given the priesthood except that boy. His name was Richard. We never could understand why that was. The bishop explained to us that it was, well, that he had some

taint from the seed of Cain. Of course, I had no idea what that meant. As we got into it further, we got more of an explanation that this boy's family had been converted to the Church a few years ago and through their genealogical research had discovered they had a remote black ancestor, so nobody in that family could hold the priesthood or go to the temple. Since this boy had blond hair and blue eyes, we found it difficult to understand how this could be.

Narrator: Since Latter-day Saints believed in a modern prophet, most assumed that God had established the priesthood ban from the Church's beginnings. But there were questions. What about Polynesians? Filipino Negritos? Was the priesthood restriction a policy or a doctrine? The ninth president of the Church, David O. McKay, faced the issue early in his ministry.

Gregory A. Prince: It was not an issue at all to him by his own account for fifteen years after he became a member of the Quorum of the Twelve. He went on this trip around the globe and one of the first stops was in Hawaii. He reported later at a missionary conference in South Africa in 1954 that, on this trip in Hawaii, he met a Polynesian woman, an active, faithful member of the Church, whose husband, also an active, faithful member, was part African ancestry. And it was at that time that he really became aware of the fact that there was a policy that did not allow this man to be ordained to the priesthood—which is really an astounding admission on his part that [since] he's been an apostle for fifteen years. It tells you that this was not a front-burner issue restriction. He wrote to Heber J. Grant, then the president of the Church, asking if an exception could be made to that rule, because this was such an exceptional man. The response was that President Grant also wished that an exception could be made but that the policy—and he did call it a policy and not a doctrine—would have to stay in place until a revelation changed it.

(Photos of David O. McKay: (1) in Hawaii, (2) archival footage of President McKay reading papers)

Narrator: By mid-century, with the missionary effort so widespread, leaders had to address the restriction directly. They often relied on old speculation. They almost always assumed that God had put the priesthood ban into place.

(Footage of President McKay, Swiss Temple)

Stan Watts (1968): Church doctrine cannot be changed by man. It comes from God through revelation, which most people do not understand. They think because of pressures that we can change it overnight.

(Footage of Darius Gray)

Darius Gray: The year was 1964 when I finally started meeting with the missionaries. We met at our home—at Mom’s home—and after the missionaries had been there once or twice, I think only once, Mom called me into her room and said, “I don’t want those two young men back here. They’re not welcome in my home.” I pressed her for an answer as to why, and finally she told me a story. Years before we kids had been born, two young men came to the door, wanted to know if they could talk to her about their religion, and she said yes and invited them in. And they had been talking for just a brief period when one of them said, “Excuse me, Mrs. Gray, are you Negro or do you have Negroid blood?” Mom said, “Yes, of course.” But when she said, “Yes, of course,” those two men got up and made a hasty exit—the object being that they were members of the LDS Church—full-time missionaries. Mom did not want me involved with what she considered a racist church.

(Photos of his family)

I was starting to develop what we call a testimony about the gospel being restored, and I wanted to know more. It was the day before my scheduled baptism. It was on Christmas night, and I was having my exit interview with the missionaries at their apartment; and after they had asked their questions, they said, “Well, Brother Gray, do you have any questions?” And there was one. I had asked it earlier and they had said, “We’ll get to that later.” Well, this night, “later” arrived, because I asked it again. That is, in the Book of Mormon, there are a number of groups, but primarily two—the Nephites and the Lamanites. Oftentimes, the Lamanites are darker skinned and out of favor with God, while the Nephites are portrayed as being white and the good guys. And I wanted to know how, if in any way, that related to me. One

of the missionaries got up and went to the corner, leaving his companion there to respond, and he said, "Well, Brother Gray, the primary implication is that you won't be able to hold the priesthood" and went on to explain that it was because of my race.

And I just thought how foolish I had been, how my mother's warning should have been heeded, and here were two young men—supposedly representatives of God and of the Savior, serving missions, and yet they were telling me that I could not be equal to other men because of my skin, my race. I thought, "These are two of the biggest hypocrites on God's green earth." So I made up my mind at that point—they didn't know it—but there was no way in hell that I was going to be baptized the next day. I was really troubled with it, and I had my nightly prayers and I entered into prayer a second time. And that night, I received personal revelation instructing me that this was the restored gospel and I was to join. There was no mention of the priesthood restriction, whether it was just or unjust, whether it was of God or of man, simply, "This is the restored gospel and you are to join."

Narrator: Like many Mormon converts in America, Darius Gray came to Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah.

Margaret Young: You have to understand that I was in all-white Provo. At that time, I suspect that the only black families were Nigerian families who were studying at BYU, and we periodically would see them doing janitorial service.

(Footage of janitor)

Darius: I was accepted into the university, arrived in Provo in June of 1965. There was a lot of tension in this country; and as I walked down the street, I noticed that people were stopping and staring at something, and I thought it was in back of me, because they were staring in my direction. Had to be behind me, so I kept turning around to see what it was. There was nothing there. And finally I realized that they were staring at me. I checked to make sure I was zipped up, and finally it struck me: I was the darkest thing going down the street. For the first time in my life, I started consciously looking for another dark face. I looked down the street and saw a car with two black people in it. I ran out to the car, knocked on the window (they hadn't seen me coming up)—and startled them. The woman was on the passenger side where I was,

and I motioned to roll the window down, and I said, "I'm sorry, I've been in town for"—however long it had been—"and geez, you're the first black people I've seen and it's so good to see you!" She looked at me, then looked at her husband, and they said, "We're just passing through."

The Movement

(Music: "Woke Up This Morning with my
Mind Set on Freedom")

Narrator: As the civil rights movement forced the nation to confront its ugliest secrets, the LDS priesthood restriction was no longer ignored. The Mormon Church and Brigham Young University came under scrutiny, and then under fiery condemnation.

Newell Brighurst: The Church seemed clearly out of step with where the larger American society was moving as far as black rights and empowerment of African Americans and people of color.

Protestor: Go on and do your thing in Utah. Go on and do your thing wherever it suits you. But don't expect me to endorse it, cooperate with it, or be a part of it.

Protestor: We simply can no longer endorse any kind of discrimination whether it comes from a Church or a state, and so no matter where we find prejudice and discrimination, we have to fight it.

Protestor: The issue of BYU and the Mormon Church is such an important issue to black students, that Len, myself, and other black students risked our education to prevent Brigham Young from wrestling here—that's how strong we felt about it.

Protestor: The gripe is, the Church, which sits back in its position and does not admit blacks to the priesthood, does not marry blacks—and you can go down the line on things that people can't do simply because they're black.

Darius Gray (1968): The official position is that we have right now a temporary restriction, a restriction not allowing us to hold the priesthood.

Protestor: It's not just one little church with one little set of beliefs. It is a representative of a general psychological condition. Now, in your case, you say you believe. You have a set of revelatory beliefs to support you. The black doesn't know that. But even if he

did know it, the fact of the matter is that your beliefs, from his objective point of view, contribute to his condition.

Protestor: It's all aspects of the black community that condemn the Mormon position.

Darius Gray: I couldn't speak to the priesthood restriction, but I could say that there were black LDS and there had been black LDS and that I was a proud black man; I was proud of my race and I was proud of my faith, and there was no conflict between the two.

Narrator: For Church president David O. McKay, the race issue became more and more difficult.

Gregory Prince: Marion D. Hanks had been the Church's military representative in Vietnam. He told me that, when he visited President McKay prior to one of his trips, he recounted to him an incident that had occurred the prior trip, where he was at a field hospital, and some soldiers were medivaced in from a firefight. One of them was a black soldier who was LDS, who'd had part of his leg blown off. He said, "I was trying to comfort him at his bedside as they were preparing him for surgery." He said, "As I told President McKay this story, tears started to come down his cheeks. President McKay said, 'I have prayed and prayed over this issue, but there has been no reply.'"

(Photos of Marion D. Hanks in Vietnam)

Hints of Change

Narrator: Yet even when the policy seemed set in stone, many Mormons had a sense that change was coming.

Joshua Aker: My father is not a normal person. Not a lot of black people could have come into the Church under those circumstances. That requires tremendous faith, maybe foresight. However, I know my father didn't think he'd see it in his lifetime. However, my mother—who also was baptized before the proclamation, I remember hearing her speak at my missionary farewell—said that when she was baptized, she had the faith that someday blacks would receive the blessings of the priesthood.

Joan Aker: Even before blacks could hold the priesthood—Josh was just a little kid then—it was not anything I ever worried about,

that someday he wouldn't be able to hold the priesthood. I knew that some day it would happen. I just knew.

Genesis Group

Narrator: President David Oman McKay died in 1970 and was succeeded by ninety-four-year-old Joseph Fielding Smith. In the spring of 1971, three black Mormon converts met to talk about their past and their future. They knew there had been black pioneers. Where were these pioneers' descendants?

Louis Duffy: We have six generations. Jane has six generations. None of them are Mormon.

Tamu Smith: I think about Jane Manning James and I think about her children, and I think about Green Flake and his posterity, and this is what's hard for me—is when I think about families and legacies which have been left is that some of the black people who stayed so strong and so true to this—it came at such a high cost to them.

Narrator: Black Mormons had personal concerns. How could their families stay in the LDS faith with the priesthood restriction and its supporting folklore intact?

Darius Gray: Three black male converts to the LDS Church—Eugene Orr, Ruffin Bridgeforth, and myself—met to talk about what can we do to hold on to the limited number of blacks in the Church? There were few, and some were falling away and others had already fallen away. As we met at the University of Utah in the Marriott Library—I remember the room—we knelt in prayer. That might not seem like much to most people. But to have three black, male converts there asking God for guidance was a major step, a major day. We felt led to approach the senior brethren of the Church requesting a meeting, and ultimately that happened.

Eugene Orr: These were negotiating meetings. Yes, we did have an agenda that we had concocted together. The president and prophet of the Church at the time was Joseph Fielding Smith. He was from the old school and had himself said some harsh and unkind things about people of color. But he assigned three young apostles to work with us three black converts: Gordon B. Hinckley, President [Thomas S.] Monson, and President [Boyd K.] Packer. So we met over a period of time to talk about the issues. What can we do? One of our members, Gene Orr, was really

pressing hard for the priesthood being made available to blacks. Gene was the young firebrand.

Eugene Orr: Yes, we did ask for the priesthood. We asked for it then, to be among the brethren. And then that was going back and forth. And we were trying to see how we were going to structure this fellowshiping group without it seeming like we were being segregated from the white congregation.

Darius Gray: As we met with the apostles, they said that, after prayer and consideration, the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve had been led to establish an organization to support black Latter-day Saints and that we three had been called to serve in its presidency.

Narrator: When Joseph Fielding Smith died, Harold B. Lee, relatively young at age seventy-three, became the Church president. Only eighteen months later, he suddenly died. Next in seniority was seventy-eight-year-old Spencer Woolley Kimball, a short, humble man from Thatcher, Arizona. President Kimball had already made bold statements against racism.

(B-roll footage of Spencer Kimball in 1950s)

Voice-over: When the Lord has made of all flesh equal, when he finds no difference between them, who are we to find a difference and to exclude? What a monster is prejudice!

Narrator: In the years between his call as an apostle and his ascension to the presidency, Spencer Kimball had undergone life-threatening illnesses. Surgery for throat cancer had removed one and one-half of his vocal cords, leaving his voice distinctively raw and deep. It was this voice which responded to the inevitable question: Would there be a change in policy?

President Kimball: I anticipate no major changes in the immediate future.

Narrator: The vast majority of the black pioneers' descendants had joined other churches. In the 1960s there were very few black Mormons in Utah, and no more than three or four hundred worldwide. Those few faced hard questions.

Paul Gill (1968): Is this thing all right? Is it okay not to have the priesthood? Are these white folks denying me the right to the priesthood because black is evil, because I'm inferior to them?

Narrator: Nobody knew how earnestly Spencer Kimball was

wrestling with the questions which weighed so heavy on the Church: Could those of African descent be ordained into the priesthood? Could blacks participate in temple rituals?

(Footage of black family, 1968)

Voice-over of President Kimball: I remember very vividly the day after day that I had gone to the temple after everybody had gone out of the temple. I knelt and prayed, and I prayed with such fervency, I tell you. I knew that something was before us that was extremely important to many of the children of God.

Paul Gill: If I had any hopes or aspirations—natural—in coming into the Church—because I didn't have the priesthood, those hopes, dreams were sort of muted. If my role in the Church was limited to being a prospective elder for ten years—from 1968 to 1978, to maybe a teacher, Boy Scouts, limited callings. So it puts a damper on your hopes and aspirations. But once the revelation on priesthood came, then the ability to broaden your dreams becomes a hundredfold.

Revelation

Narrator: June 8th, 1978, is known to Mormons as “the long promised day”—the day when the priesthood restriction was lifted.

(Archival footage of President Kimball and footage photos of newspaper headlines from around the world)

President Kimball: And with great solemnity and seriousness, alone in the upper rooms of the temple, and there I offered my soul, and offered our efforts to go forward with the program and as we talked about it to Him, we said, “Lord, we want only what is right. We're not making any plans to be spectacularly moving. We want what thou dost want and we want it when you want it and not until.” And finally, we had the feeling, the impressions, from the Lord—who made them very clear to us—that this is the thing to do, to make the gospel universal to all worthy people.

Ruffin Bridgforth: It's going to change my life. I'm going to try to be a better person.

Mary Sturlogsen: The news about the priesthood being given

to my people—it's a feeling that I don't think I'll ever be able to express to people.

Darius Gray: It was great news. It was something totally unexpected. It did not come as a result of political pressure, because there was none in 1978.

Ron Coleman: The impact was important for men and women of African descent who were members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. But it also was important for the Church of Jesus Christ of LDS as a whole. I think it took a heavy weight off the Church. No longer could those who wanted to maintain the narrowness of race bigotry hide behind membership in the Church.

Darius Gray: A woman from the credit department, Dixie Baker, worked outside my office. She was a credit assistant. Dixie was very straightforward, not a shy retiring type. She stuck her head into my office. "Hey, Darius, they're going to give Negroes the priesthood." It wasn't something to be joked about, and I thought it was in poor taste for her to say that, and I said, "Get out of here, Dixie. That's not funny." She continued: "No, I think they're going to give Negroes the priesthood." This time I swore. "Damn it, Dixie, that's not funny. Get the hell out." She told me she had been on the phone to the Church Office Building. The rumor was going around that that was going to occur. So I turned on the television and radio in my office. Nothing was on the media yet. So I did the only logical thing. I picked up the phone and called President Kimball. He wasn't there, but his secretary knew me, and I identified myself and I was told yes, it is true. It was a marvelous day.

Challenges Remain

Narrator: The priesthood revelation did extend priesthood but did nothing to repudiate the racist folklore—the idea of a curse, and the concept that blacks had been less valiant than others in a pre-mortal life.

Marguerite Driessen: The fact of the matter is, it's still in print, and a whole generation of new people can pick that up and read it as if it were truth—as if it were Mormon doctrine, instead of just a person's opinion of what this is. The Church doesn't sponsor the book, in fact I think there's now a disclaimer that these are the

views of Bruce R. McConkie and that it is not actually Mormon doctrine, but heck, that's the title. I would think that the disclaimer could be a lot stronger and should be prefaced with his big disclaimer in 1978.

Marvin Perkins: Elder McConkie said: "Forget everything I said or what Brigham Young said or what George Q. Cannon or whoever else has said that is contrary to today's revelation. We spoke with a limited understanding and without the light and knowledge which has now come into the world. We get our light and knowledge line upon line, precept upon precept, and there has now been added a flood of light and intelligence on this issue—that's key—that erases all the darkness and the views of the past."

Martin Luther King III: This reading material is still being embraced. So even though people may say, "Well, we can have a black priest," there's something different, something unique about black people. Really, when it comes to black people, there's something about black people that's so different that they have a curse. There are problems. There are issues.

Marguerite Dreissen: Realize that there are these ideas out there, that there are these ideas among people in the Church about curses, about different races. Acknowledge it first, and don't sweep it under the rug. Then having acknowledged it, acknowledge that it's not right. God is no respecter of persons. God wants you to love everyone like He does, and so you have to get over it. So how do we help people get over it? You give them correct information. There is no such thing as, say, fence-sitters in the preexistence. Or we've not found some curse that came upon these people so that their lineage would be this, or that everybody would be denied the priesthood. Teach correct information. Debunk the myths and just say flat out, "This isn't true."

Narrator: Nor did the change of policy swoop away any discomfort with diversity.

Tamu Smith: The first time I was ever called a nigger was in the Salt Lake Temple. People come up to me, and they think they're being nice and generous, but it's really offensive, because they'll say things like, "You're so sweet, but I don't know how I'm going to recognize you in the celestial kingdom, because I just can't visual-

ize you white, but I just don't see that. So you'll recognize me. So you'll have to come find me."

Mamarine Clark: There's this huge philosophy of: "When we die, we'll be the same. Everything will be the same." I had a friend who said that all the men will look like Jesus. I don't know what all the women will look like, but all the men will look like Jesus."

Tamu Smith: You should've said, "All the women will look like me!"

Mamarene Clark: Yes!

Robert A. Rees: Toby Pingree put together a Sunstone panel of former African mission presidents to talk about the Church in Africa. I was very touched by one of these men who said, "The Church called me to go to Africa, and I was not spiritually prepared to do that. I did not want to go minister to blacks. I did not see them as people who were equal. And I had to go home and get down on my knees and ask the Lord to forgive me and to change my heart so that I could go to Africa and minister to his children. And I did and it was one of the greatest things of my life."

Ron Coleman: I think the Church itself—not just in Utah—has the ability to impact dramatically bringing the people in the state of Utah, the majority of whom are members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—some of them kicking and screaming and not really fully embracing it—but into the twenty-first century in a way which is truly inclusive, and they're not threatened by living in and being part of a multi-cultural world.

Narrator: Even as the Mormon Church moves forward as one of the fastest-growing religions in the world, it is still tainted by a reputation for being racist. Retention of African American converts is difficult.

Marvin Perkins: Every African American—I didn't say black, I meant African American, because those in Africa aren't dealing with the same situation—but every African American is going to have to deal with that black issue at some point: why blacks couldn't hold the priesthood. Is this a racist church? Is it true? Can the Church be racist and true?

James Sheppard: I came to Utah and I decided, Well, I'd better learn about these people. Before I got here, I did hear a lot of rumors about the Mormon Church—some good and some bad, but

mostly bad. And a lot of the rumors I heard was from people that actually had been members of the Church and for some reason or another was no longer members of the Church. That's where I heard most of my bad rumors.

Paul Gill: If you go to any black Baptist Church, anywhere in the world, they're going to welcome you with open arms, extend the right hand of fellowship. They're going to make you feel welcome. You're going to get a warm fuzzy. Not so in all the stakes of Zion. You don't get a warm fuzzy. It's pitiful—if this scenario exists, if I'm bringing a black investigator to my ward; and I have to say, "I forewarn you that you can expect this."

James Sheppard: I'd walk in there and it was like, "Man, is this church? Is it a funeral or what?" 'Cause everyone's—when they're singing, it's just dead. When they're talking, somebody's up front and everybody's just dead. I was used to church when you clap your hands, you stomp your feet, you say amen to the preacher, the preacher's preaching, and everyone's having a joyous time. I walk in here and I think, Oh man, this is different.

Keith Hamilton: It's difficult to remain faithful as a black member because there's not a lot to keep you coming back—and I mean that sincerely. I've often posed the question: If things were reversed and the Lord had come to a religion out of Africa and the true gospel took on African cultural connotations and there were drums and the charismatic preacher—how many Mormons could make that same adjustment if the same doctrines were true? Once people see it from that perspective, they start to understand what the black experience in the Church is about.

Alan Cherry: Culture is like a coat. It keeps you warm. It keeps you comfortable. It becomes your friend. You may become enamored of it, but it is not who you are. It is indeed an earthly coat. It is not the heart of who you are that God relates to and talks to. So even the people who may be the most difficult to enjoy—the blatant bigot—was someone I could welcome and embrace, even if he wouldn't embrace me, but I could think, "Your problem is not my problem, but I can understand it as a problem."

Truth and Reconciliation

Narrator: From the time Elijah Abel became the first Mormon missionary of African descent, the stage was set for future mission-

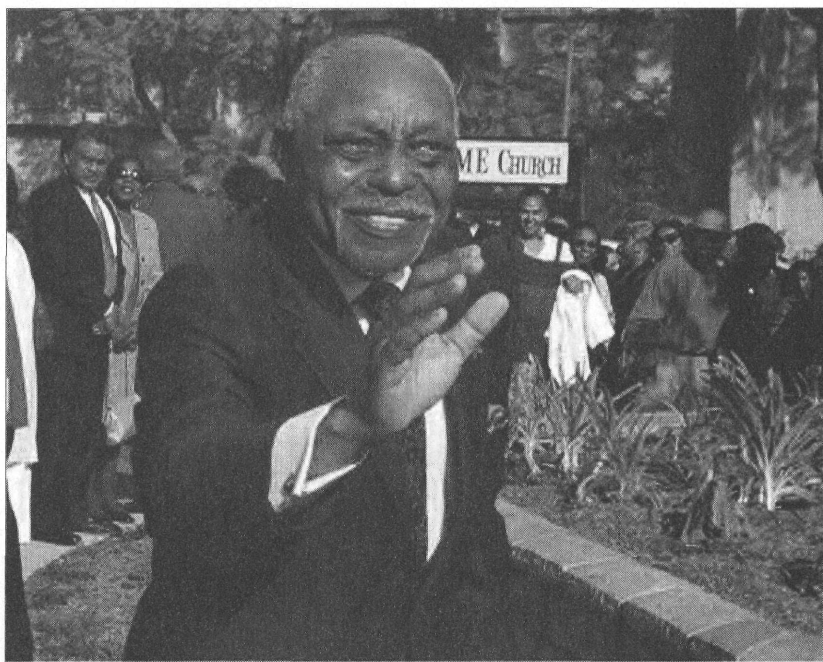
aries—of any lineage. Just as every twelve-year-old Mormon boy is generally ordained to the priesthood, every nineteen-year-old man—and many women—are expected to become missionaries. It is not the privilege of a few, but the duty of the majority.

Ted Whitters: I saw young, white missionaries from Utah, from Idaho, and a few from California come into that ward. At that particular time, we had three sets of elders, two sets of sisters. This was an inner-city ward near the airport. People who come to Atlanta to do business, they'll come to that ward. But when I saw these youngsters coming shift after shift, going into neighborhoods that I felt uncomfortable going in, it certified in my mind again: Here's the truthfulness of the gospel—for these young people to take two years out of their lives and put their lives in jeopardy—and some of them were robbed or mugged at gunpoint and at knifepoint, and yet they kept coming. I was blessed. I was retired, I didn't have a job, and I had a good-running automobile, and I put a lot of miles on that automobile with the missionaries. I had some of the best times of my life, going into the ghetto, where the winos hung out, the drunks, the pimps and the prostitutes hung out. Before the missionaries came, I wouldn't have gone. I would have been scared to death. But when I saw them go, I had to go. That entrenched me into the Church; and by the grace of God, nothing can take me out of the Church because of their commitment.

Armand Mauss: Whatever lineage—ostensible or real—a certain people might have, if they're accepting of the gospel, then they're with us, and we want missionaries to go there and bring them into the fold. Lineage differences, in the bigger picture, make no difference. If we accept the gospel as the Apostle Paul told us, we all become the children of Abraham, no matter our lineage. That's the gift of the world's people to the LDS Church.

Narrator: Mormons believe that God still reveals truth and will yet reveal more. Hence, Mormons believe in the possibility—even the inevitability—of change. This creates a space for growth, and for repentance.

Ted Whitters: It would be good if the Church could do something in a repentance sense to say that "Yes, the issue did exist." I think the Church is doing a wonderful job in terms of welcoming people of all races and color and creed. The Church is doing a



Pastor Cecil ("Chip") Murray, African Methodist Episcopalian Church in Los Angeles.

wonderful job in Africa and down in the Caribbean. I meet a lot in the Atlanta Temple. I'm sure that the Brethren have it in their mind that they will do something at the appropriate time to propel us forward towards being the kind of Church our Savior would be pleased with.

Footage of President Hinckley, April 2006: I remind you that no man who makes disparaging remarks concerning those of another race can consider himself a true disciple of Christ, nor can he consider himself to be in harmony with the teachings of Christ.

How can any man holding the Melchizedek Priesthood arrogantly assume that he is eligible for the priesthood whereas another who lives a righteous life but whose skin is of a different color is ineligible?

Pastor Cecil Murray: I was in Salt Lake City, a guest of the Mor-

mon Church. I met the president and all. As we sat around the conference table, he apologized for the role the Church had played in participating in slavery. He says, "I have learned of the background of your church and the founding of your church, and I want to apologize for whatever role the Mormon Church has played—not only there—but has played in racism in America." I said, "I thank you very much for making that statement. It is certainly true that the Mormon Church has been a factor in discrimination, but you've done so much good—and now to hear these words—I would certainly say that your hearts are right."

Let Us Break Bread Together

(Photos of Denise Cutliff and Tamu Smith portraying Jane Manning James)

Narrator: As the LDS Church moves into a new century, its converts of color pioneer forward, adding their many stories and voices to those of the earlier pioneers.

Tamu Smith: When I was eleven, my family joined the Church. We were very strong Pentecostal. I grew up knowing that God existed. I grew up knowing that I had a Savior. Being Pentecostal, you're going to heaven or you're going to hell—period. The whole concept of heaven and hell never set well with me. I knew that there had to be something more. I knew that I didn't want to go to hell, because I knew that hell was hot and eternity was long. I knew that from church. In my prayer, I would say, "Heavenly Father, if you really love me, then why do I have to go to hell?" Because I was bad, and I knew I was going to hell.

The missionaries tracted our family out. My grandmother invited them in. She said, "We don't have to listen to what they're saying, but it's hot outside and they have on those hot suits. Let's invite them in and give them something cold to drink and pretend like we're listening." I don't really know if I paid attention, but I do know that the first time we went to the LDS Church, I felt like the Savior was standing in the doorway. When I walked in—I knew to recognize the Spirit—and it felt like I was at home, where I belonged. I felt the Spirit so clearly that it testified that I was where I needed to be.

Paul Gill: I didn't join the Church because of what you said.

You didn't join because of what I said and so on. Each person has to find out for himself, doing the same formula, getting on your knees, asking God.

Darius Gray: It's the crux of who I am. It defines what I do, and maybe more importantly, what I don't do. And that's been a key in life, and I'm grateful for that. It's affected everything in my life path. Everything.

Renee Olsen: So I attended my own ward twice. One happened to be a testimony Sunday, and it was the week before I got baptized. I gave my testimony and said, "I'm not a member yet, but I will be next week. I'm getting baptized next Sunday. I'm a former Anti. I was certified in Mormonism." Everyone showed up at my baptism. I didn't have a clue who these people were. But all of these people wanted to see the former anti hit the water.

Keith Hamilton: I was the one chosen—and I really believe I was chosen—to be in a position where, when the missionaries came, I would accept it so I could bring the blessings to my posterity and to my ancestors. It's real to me. I've had personal experiences where I've had deceased ancestors communicate that to me—that I'm the link and that I have to remain strong during my periods of doubt, because there are people who haven't even come down to earth, and there are people who have come here and left that are dependent on me to continue to be that link, because right now, I'm the only link; and if I fall away--game over!

Renee Olsen: I like to think that we were God's chosen people of the latter days. Of all the races on the face of the Earth, He entrusted that honor to us, not to white people. He entrusted that honor of purging His Church to us. Our people were tried, proven. We've come through slavery, whips, masters, beatings, the selling of our children—and we persevered. Taken from our homeland—and we're still here, still strong. Faith in God has always preserved the black race.

Tamu Smith: I know who I am; and because I know what the gospel is about, I have a responsibility as a member of this Church to find out what is true for me. People are mean and ignorant, and they say mean and ignorant things. However, because the Spirit testified to me of the truthfulness of the gospel, I could not go and look my Savior in his eyes and say, "I couldn't do it because people were mean. They said mean things."

Natalie Sheppard: What we want to instill in our children is a sense of pride in who they are—being a child of God, but being a black child of God in a beautiful garden, where if He had wanted to make everyone the same, He would have done that. But instead, He made us all different for a reason, and part of that reason is so we could teach each other.

Ted Whitters: The ward that I joined—probably four or five hundred attendance on Sunday. I'm a former pastor. I pastored in the Baptist Church and then in the AME Church. But I had never felt more at home in this congregation—an extreme minority. It was just one of the most genuine feelings, maybe it was southern hospitality, I don't know. In the book of Revelation, it talks about twelve tribes. It talks twelve thousand from each tribe [Rev. 7:4]. This is after the resurrection. After he talks about the 144,000, he says, "I saw another number that nobody could number. They were all races, all creeds, and all colors."² I think the Mormon Church is implementing this.

I think it'll come about in our Church, that all races will be embraced. I think they'll be in all positions from the very top of the Church down to the very lowest—if there is such a thing as a low position in the Church. I think of the words of David in the Psalms. David says, "I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness" [Ps. 84:10]. That paints a picture in my mind, that everything in the Church of Jesus Christ is important. When I clean the chandeliers in the temple during cleaning time, that's important work. I feel special. That's the house of my God, and I know the spirit of my Savior is there, so it's a special time.

Darius Gray to Paul Gill: If you had the power to do any one thing, to make one change, what would that one change be?

Paul Gill: I've thought about this a lot. I admire Paul the apostle and his ability to convince others that the gospel is true. If I could have that ability to speak to someone and have them understand the way I feel and why I feel the way I feel, and have that ability to convince others of the power of Christ, the message he brought—his broad yet simple message—if I had that ability and could change the world in that aspect, I would be a happy camper.

That's all I can say about that. (*Weeping—takes a tissue from his pocket*)

Darius Gray: Here, I'll give you a fresh one.

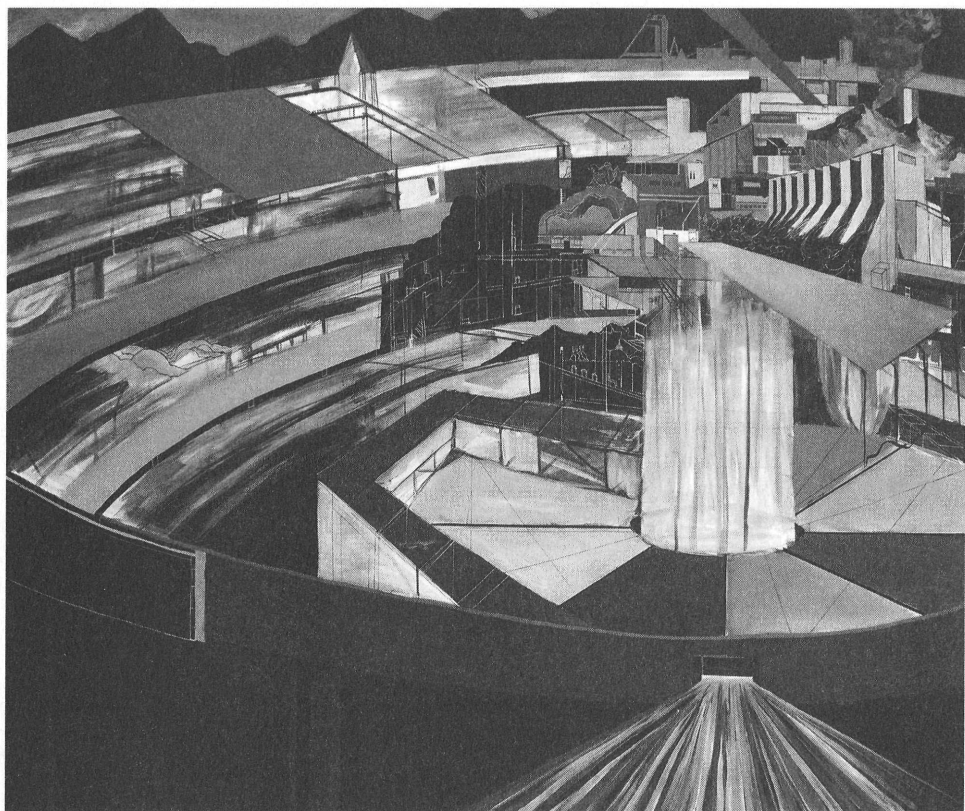
Paul Gill: I'm sorry.

Darius Gray: And then I'm going to give you a hug. Wipe that face off first. Love you, Brother.

Paul: Love you. Thank you.

Notes

1. B-roll refers to footage or photos which run under the “talking heads” to add interest or dimension.
2. “After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands” (Rev. 7:9).



Ricky Allman, *Apocalyzer*,
acrylic, ink on canvas, 60"x 72",
2006.

On Losing My Cell Phone

Linda Jefferies

I'm wearing jeans I chose for comfort
held low on my hips by a belt
when from a too-shallow pocket
my cell phone slips out.

I retrace my steps.

I will not panic.

Shield, please, Lord,
my phone from lawn sprinklers
and the crush of car tires
while it waits for me,
lub-dubbing unheard like a heart.

Clutter and debris shine metallic and phone-like
in the sunshine. I'm dizzy:
the hassle, the expense, the lost memory.
If people can't reach me, over time, will they forget me?
I imagine my ring-tone sounding desperate.

God breaks down for this pleading widow
and gives me what I want so blessedly often.
Grimy guilt can dim my taste for hope.
Taste a fresh peach just after licking a cherry snow cone.
There was no hope in my first marriage.
My second husband died. I live
for God's loving pat; to be
picked up, brushed off, and
set on course again.
The easy metaphor: when I call
I know I can rely on an answer.
I don't use a cell phone.

There it is: nested, camouflaged,
upright like a miniature tablet of commandments,
waiting in stiff prairie grass,
its shape as simple as a tombstone.

Etching

Randy Astle

Writing on the subway feels like etching
an intaglio on horseback. The train
writhes and bucks beneath me, making

a miniature jackhammer of my pen, a seismographic
stylus registering the imprecision of my jolting hand.
Fingertips blanch as I bear down trying to carve

testimony into a fifty-cent notebook. Letters shake
into ciphers instead of words, a cuneiform landscape, unknown—
hidden, perhaps, by the Lord, to be revealed in His time.

At home I open my PowerBook and set about the task
of translation. In quiet revision, I bury my head in my hat
and strain to distill the spirit behind these scratchings.

On the train, we are all translators. Every few minutes we
study out gargled declarations: *168th Street, Columbia*
Presbyterian Hospital, transfer here for the Number One

train on the lower level. I turn to the notebook,
intent on recording something worthy of posterity or
my beloved brethren, on bestowing some small degree

of knowledge concerning us. We would write more
if it were not for the difficulty we have in engraving.

Abba: The Name of God

Anita Tanner

Like a wine taster swirling a thin glass stem, I want
to hold the name of God on my tongue, color

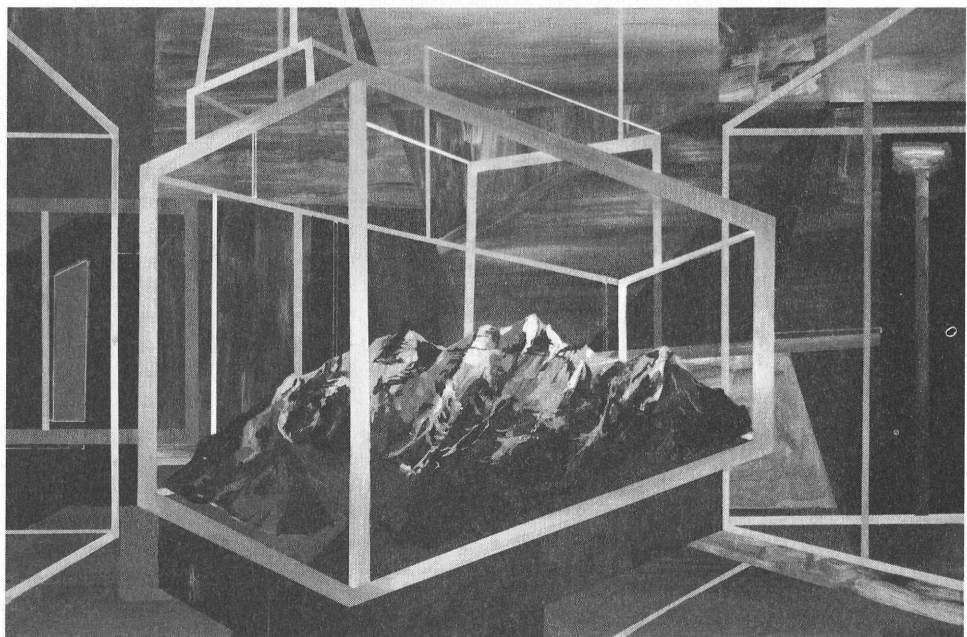
my mouth wine-bibber red, let the heat run
down deep past heart and lungs. I want

to read backward and forward the life-
force of this palindrome, Abba, write it

over doorways, on walls and ceilings of
every bodyhome, upon frontlets, the name

of God before every convoluted brain, like
water through breaking dams, these lovely

vowels flaring all our arid nostrils and lungs.



Ricky Allman, *False Memory*,
acrylic, ink on panel, 16"x 24",
2008.

Gentle Persuasions

William Morris

I

I often went with my father on home teaching visits when I was ten and eleven. I don't remember why his companions were never around. I suppose they were inactive. Back then, inactivity wasn't a concept I really understood. In our small southern Utah town, everybody was Mormon except those few odd (but nice, they were always described as nice) families who were Catholic or some vague Protestant denomination. There was that one J-dub family; but for some reason, no one ever really thought about them.

The family we were visiting that Sunday evening lived only a couple of blocks away. We had never visited them before, but I knew who they were. They had a daughter my age as well as several other younger and older children. That there were older children was important, as I recall, because I remember feeling that I needed to be impressive. I needed to project a certain solemnity combined with the appearance that I understood what was being discussed—that I was a proto-priesthood holder and not just a tagalong because my mother wanted to get me out from underfoot.

As we walked along the hard-packed red dirt that edged the blacktop, I noticed that my father was quieter than usual. Normally he'd be using this walk as a teaching moment, prepping me for the visit, giving me a rundown of each member of the family and outlining the proper conduct and forms for the visit. I interpreted his silence as a certain awe and reverence about the errand we were on and followed suit.

The family welcomed us in, the father warily, the mother nervously.

My father was a lawyer with a solo practice. As one of the few

professionals in town with a graduate degree, he was respected. But he was also the son of a boy who had left and the grandson of an interloper, a northerner who had married a local girl; and as his practice was young and struggling, he didn't have the added credibility of wealth, so the respect was mingled with resentment and distrust. I suppose I understood all this in the same way that any small-town kid absorbs thousands of adult social interactions and derives from them the opinions he believes he is expected to have.

We were seated on the couch, the family fanned out in front of us on various chairs and benches, the youngest ones on the floor. I tried to pay attention to the pleasantries and small talk, but I found myself not knowing where to look. There was no angle or plane without a face. In particular, I didn't want to look at my classmate. I liked the girl, or so I believe; unlike my major crushes, she has faded to a blur in my memory. The only adjectives that come to mind are "coltish" and "skittish." And I do seem to recall a long braid of reddish brown hair. But I may have added that detail during my teenage years, an artifact born out of stereotype mixed with a supposed throwing off of my small-town roots to embrace Utah Valley cosmopolitanism.

What I do still vividly recall, though, is my boyish-verging-on-adolescent appraisal: Her family was poor and uneducated and proud. Therefore, in the cruel calculus of small-town sexual politics, she was someone not to be encouraged romantically because the proper thing for someone of my status—the smart, shy kid who had the slightest hint of big city sophistication—was to admire from afar the unapproachable rich girls who were smart but not bookish, the ones who wore jeans and skirts instead of home-made dresses, who wore their hair feathered and with bangs.

My mind wandered until, all of a sudden, all the voices dropped away except for the two adult males. And suddenly it didn't seem as if they were talking about the gospel anymore. And then it became clear that my father was trying to convince this man to pay his taxes.

My father's first appeal was to a vague sense of doing what's right, but he was countered by the logic of refusing to support a corrupt government that funded such abominations as abortion clinics, deviant artists, and welfare moms.

My father then quoted the Twelfth Article of Faith, the famil-

iar refrain of being “subject to kings, presidents, rulers, and magistrates.” As a child who had fervently embraced the celebrations of 1976, whose twin heroes were George Washington and Huckleberry Finn, I loved that particular Article of Faith, although I wasn’t sure what “magistrates” were. But it was a cool word—almost as cool as “principalities.” My family read the scriptures together regularly, and I had very much embraced the faux-King James language of the Restoration. Still do.

The response was a bit difficult to follow, but it seemed to have something to do with Captain Moroni and the Title of Liberty and the Spirit ceasing to strive with a land when its inhabitants become too wicked. More than a decade later, I’d hear the same rhetoric from the lips of Bo Gritz and wonder if this brother (I don’t remember the family’s name) had become an acolyte.

All of a sudden, my father’s voice changed. Gone was the fine net of argument he had been constructing. I recognized the new tone of voice and syntax from our bedtime negotiations. My father was deploying the blunt power of consequences.

Looking back now, I can’t figure out how this could be the case. Perhaps I misheard or misunderstood. Perhaps my father was counting on the ignorance of his combatant. But I swear he said that if they didn’t pay taxes, the kids would be kicked out of school. This seeming calamity was easily shrugged off. The government was intruding too much anyway, what with the teaching of evolution as fact and such. They would home school (although the mother didn’t look as if she relished this particular thought). This worried me. I began to appraise my classmate again, even stole an obvious glance at her.

My father moved on to the threat of losing city services, including those of the volunteer fire department. I was astounded. It wasn’t like my dad to be quite this forceful. I had never seen him try to scare people before. In every situation—at church, at work, at home, out in public—he was always the voice of calm and reason, of civility and dignity.

The father’s response got rather dramatic—something about watching the house burn to the ground. And with that rhetorical flourish, they both seemed tired out, even though they continued to talk for several minutes. Suddenly I got this sense that the real

confrontation had already taken place prior to our visit—that somehow my father already knew the likely results and was just here to go through the motions.

I'm not sure what I said in the obligatory closing prayer. I was in a state of befuddlement. This good brother's worldview seemed very foreign from mine, where education, reason, acts of kindness, family, church, scripture, history, and government were all part of one eternal round. I was an American Mormon of good lineage. This man seemed to want his family to be neither American nor Mormon, or to be some eccentric, foolish version of both.

The walk home was even more silent than the walk there had been. I wanted to ask my dad several questions, but none seemed to form themselves into a complete thought.

I wonder if my father wondered what I thought about the whole experience. I haven't brought it up since. But as I recall, I was surprised to see him fail to persuade. I felt sorry for him for lowering himself to such a coarse confrontation—for sullyng his integrity by enacting this argument in front of his son and in front of this man's family.

And I still wonder: Was he really fighting for this man's soul? Did he go in expecting to win, or was this a predetermined piece of theater that someone else had forced him to go through? Because now that I look back at it, I'm not even so sure that this family was one he had been assigned to home teach.

II

Samuel had just finished his homework when his mother called down the stairs. "Sammy. Phone."

He sighed, rolled his eyes at the sing-song syllables and childhood nickname, and trudged up to the kitchen.

"It's Brother Hamblin."

He took the phone and croaked out a greeting.

"Thanks for taking my call," Brother Hamblin said, as if Samuel had a choice in the matter. "I'm sorry it's such short notice, but I was wondering if you might be available to go with me to visit the Nielsons."

"Sure," he said. Brother Hamblin had standing times and days of the month for all their home teaching visits so Samuel knew

something was going on. He couldn't guess what it might be, especially since he was too young to help give a blessing.

"Great. Why don't you throw on a shirt and tie, and I'll be right over to pick you up."

Samuel had difficulty choosing a tie. He wasn't sure whether to tailor his wardrobe to the parents or the kids. The Nielsons had a son and daughter who rode the same bus as him. The daughter, a freshman named Katy, was about as punk as a Provo Mormon teenager gets. She was protective and maybe a little ashamed of her older brother, who was two years older but only a sophomore. He seemed like a geek but didn't hang out with the other geeks. He didn't hang out with anyone except his sister and her wild friends. Or at least that's how it appeared to Samuel since he didn't really know either of them that well.

He went with the conservative choice—eschewing his skinny ties for a muted, standard-width paisley. Brother Hamblin was waiting when Samuel went out the front door. He sat in his silver Plymouth Reliant though the Nielsons only lived a couple of blocks away.

Samuel opened the door and slid into the front seat. Brother Hamblin had his hand stuck out and delivered a firm handshake.

"Thanks for coming, Sam," he said. "I know it's late and a school night, but the Nielsons are in need of the presence of the priesthood right now." He paused for a minute, his breath streaming out into the crisp fall night. "It appears that Katy has run away. They don't know where she is."

Samuel nodded.

"I wasn't going to drag you into this," Brother Hamblin said. "But you are my companion and a good young man. And you were going to find out soon enough anyway. I know you probably don't know anything, but they specifically asked if you would be coming with me. Do you mind if I say a prayer before we make the visit?"

Samuel shook his head.

Brother Hamblin's prayer was short, sincere, and expressed with a rough, simple eloquence. He was semi-retired from Geneva Steel and made fine furniture in his garage. Samuel admired him but had found it difficult to connect with him in the six months they had been home teaching companions. Brother Hamblin

lacked that streak of lingering adolescence found in most of the priesthood holders Samuel interacted with, including his dad. The one that led to talk of (or, even better, experiments with) cars, sports, movies, guns, computers, firecrackers and other small explosives, hunting, fishing, and camping as well as all things odd, unusual, creepy, or scary.

The Nielsons lived in the upper half of an older duplex. Brother Nielson answered the door. Samuel felt a strange sense of vertigo climbing the steep stairs, as if they should be descending instead of ascending up into the living room, with its orange shag carpet, dingy, yellowed lighting, brown furniture, and tan accents.

Samuel's family was not rich. In fact, they lived a rather shabby, genteel lifestyle. Most of their furniture and furnishing were second-hand or homemade—faded Japanese prints, an ancient but nicely polished upright piano, pine bookshelves that his father had crafted and his mother had stained to mimic a dark hardwood—and the overall effect was one of comfort and understated taste. But the Nielsons' home made him uncomfortable. They were the shabby without the genteel. Yes, their decor was a decade out of date, but it wasn't just that. They had a worn-down roughness to them, as if they were still pioneers hard-scrabbling their way through a joyless existence. Katy was the only one in the family who seemed to know how to smile.

All talk was quiet and very matter-of-fact. Katy hadn't been home for two nights. She hadn't been in school since her brother had eaten lunch with her the day she had disappeared. She hadn't called. She hadn't left a note.

Mostly Brother Hamblin ran down all the possible steps of action, Brother Nielson responded to the two or three they had already taken, and the two made plans for the remaining items. It seemed to Samuel as if Brother Hamblin was going to be doing all the difficult, time-consuming ones.

Samuel answered their few questions for him. No, he hadn't seen her at school after her brother had. No, he didn't really know who her friends were or how to contact them. No, he didn't have any idea where she might be.

Even after his part was over, Sister Nielson kept staring at him. He tried to keep his eyes active and focused on the people in the room, especially his home teaching companion. He didn't want to

spend the rest of the visit staring at the carpet. This was serious stuff, and he was not going to play the part of the useless, tuned-out, young man. Eventually he had to give in because she wouldn't stop looking at him. Her weak blue eyes projected needy, unnerving greed. He knew what she wanted. She wanted him to entangle himself with her children, but he couldn't do it. Didn't even know how to do it. Besides, his social position was insecure as it was. Sure, unlike many of the other youth in the ward, he would actually interact with them. He also admitted to himself a bit of a fascination with Katy—with her short, bleached, asymmetric haircut and funky outfits. Maybe a crush, even, but only a small one. The least of many.

At some point the room broke into a mix of worry and sorrow. All that was left was a night of waiting and, if nothing had changed by the next morning, a set of unpleasant tasks. Brother Hamblin would contact the cops, then he and Brother Nielson would hit the streets. Sister Nielson would call Provo High and see if her teachers had any suggestions.

Samuel thought that the gravity of the situation would exempt him from offering a closing prayer, but Brother Nielson asked him to pray. Somehow he found the words, cautious yet generically hopeful. But the whole time he could feel Sister Nielson's eyes on his face, could almost see them through the orange-red of his closed lids.

The next day at school, Katy's absence wasn't mentioned by anyone. Brother Hamblin hadn't said that the information was confidential, but Samuel decided it wouldn't be a good idea for him to bring it up.

That evening, Brother Hamblin called to say that Katy had been found squatting with some of her friends in an abandoned home off West Center Street. "Trying to set up house" was how Brother Hamblin had put it.

Although Samuel didn't see her on the bus the next morning, Katy showed up for geography class. She smiled at him as she came in and sat a couple of desks away. He smiled back. It was strange. His slight crush and hormonal awareness of her was still there, but it was joined by an almost brotherly fondness, a deep concern for her well-being and for, well, her soul. Her salvation.

In some complex yet elemental way, she belonged to him. Not the macho, jock-like ownership of sisters, girlfriends, and cousins displayed by arrogant young men in the halls and classrooms of Provo High, but the stewardship of a shepherd, for she was a sheep of his fold. And Samuel felt joy over her return.

During class, he noticed her looking his way several times. Every time he looked up, she looked away. Finally, near the end of the period, he glanced in her direction and caught her gaze. She held it long enough for him to realize that she was looking at him with her mother's eyes.

III

His wife had been the first to notice the change in Brother Johnson's home teaching visits. Although he still showed up at their doorstep with *Ensign* in hand, he seemed to use it more as a prop than a resource. He would read two or three sentences and then go off on lengthy sermons about the importance of being open to personal revelation, the faithfulness of the early members of the Church, the vitality of Joseph Smith, or the gifts of the Spirit.

At first he had welcomed the change. He enjoyed not hearing the First Presidency message, which he had usually already read (or at least skimmed), and the fact that the visits went beyond the pro forma appealed to him. Brother Johnson came prepared.

Early on, Brother Johnson's visits had left him with a fuzzy feeling of "yeah, that's something to think about." But lately they had become strident, and this month's visit had taken things to a new level.

Brother Johnson had started off by discussing the importance of a marriage based on covenants.

"Celestial marriage is the highest form of the priesthood," he had said. "Without it, there is no eternal increase. Without it, even if one is fit for the celestial kingdom, one is only a servant of those who have entered the higher covenant and lived the higher law."

There followed a tangent about the importance of not being of the world and the principle of the harvest and the danger of spiritual plateaus, and then suddenly he was quoting D&C 132 and talking about the looming cleansing of the world and how there will be fewer people saved at the last day than most Church members realize. Some line about empty vessels and rancid oil.

And then he was asking them if they had the courage to live the higher law and take their temple covenants seriously.

Their response had been solidly noncommittal. Brother Johnson had ignored his wife and, looking him straight in the eye, told him that, if he was interested in these ideas, a group of members held a discussion group the second Friday of the month at his house.

Brother Johnson never seemed to have an active companion, so he asked his wife to say the closing prayer. Neither his wife nor Brother Johnson had seemed thrilled with the idea. The prayer had been short, the good-byes hurried.

Now as he lay in bed next to his sleeping wife, he pondered the question she had asked after they had finished their personal prayers, the one he had answered with a shrug: "Who are you going to talk to about this?"

As he weighed the various official and unofficial channels, he also began to wonder how a man such as Brother Johnson had become caught up in a splinter group. Because he was sure that that was what was going on. The Manti group stuff had become public recently. It wouldn't have surprised him to discover similar activities up here in Idaho—to find that it had awakened some dormant tendencies in certain individuals.

Why would someone do something like that? Cause themselves and their families such social and spiritual harm? And yet, when he stopped to think past his knee-jerk prejudices, he found that he had a certain sympathy for these newer-mode splinter groups. They seemed much more interesting than the old-school, inbred polygs or the Strangites or the RLDS because the break was fresher and more dangerous. And at least this sort of thing had a Mormon form and energy to it—not like the watered-down New Age "embraced by the light" and "Jesus is my friend and brother" crap. Still, lame. And annoying. It put him in a difficult position. Brother Johnson had never come out and started naming his wives, but he had also left no doubt about what he had been hinting at.

And because he couldn't quite decide who he *was* going to talk to about this, he found himself instead trying to figure out how you recruited additional wives. He figured the standard

BYU/Ricks dating techniques that he knew well (though never quite mastered) probably didn't apply. Hey, want to be one of my "Three Musketeers"? Together we could "Skor" a spot in the celestial kingdom. "Peppermint Patty" is already on board. He struggled for another minute trying to come up with other candy bar names, maybe something about searching for "Mrs. Goodbars." He hoped he'd remember all this enough to tell it to his wife in the morning. She'd probably see the humor of it.

His thoughts turned to her. Her loveliness. Her strength. Her sometimes fragility.

The weird energy from the visit finally started to dissipate. He felt sleep creeping in.

And then, suddenly, just as he was letting the whole thing go, he had a flash of insight. He felt the vitality and excitement that could come from encircling your family in the tight, secure grip of zealotry and paranoia. The illusion of control over a shrunken sphere. His thoughts turned to the very early days of the Church. What would it have been like to have been a Pratt, a Smith, a Knight, a Whitmer? And he discovered that part of him yearned to not have to battle so much with a world whose rewards could be sweet but which were usually small and infrequent and often left a bitter aftertaste. The fatigue of trying to balance work, family, church, service, and himself—to not let the tensions slacken—pooled within him.

He halted his mind. It's not that he was afraid of the train of thought—that he wanted to avoid reaching some insight about his weaknesses. He already knew them. He also wasn't afraid that he would chip away at his testimony. Yet he still checked. And yes, beneath the swirling clouds of doctrine, doubts, duties, history, troubling things, things put on a shelf, things amalgamated with the theories of the world, the core gently hummed, quiet with power.

He concentrated on his wife's breathing—the slow, soft, familiar rhythm—and drew it around him like a blanket.

IV

David nervously fingered the slip of paper in the right pocket of his flight jacket while President Jim Barnes exchanged the normal pleasantries and explained the details of their relationship.

"David is one of the best Scouters I've ever known," he said.

"We must have done two or three trips to Philmont with the regional council in the '60s and '70s, isn't that right?"

David nodded and took his hand from his pocket. He wasn't happy about this visit. But he had an obligation to discharge, and he had avoided it for much too long, until one of the executives he flew for needed to quickly get to Fresno from L.A., and once he had called and told his old buddy Jim Barnes about the whole thing, Jim, with that sense of mission and unfailing energy that served him so well in his calling as stake president, had sprung into action. He made David feel old and tired. Not an easy thing to do to a pilot who was past his prime but still firmly in the saddle. The truth was, it was lucky for him that all the pieces had been there to make entry into this family's home much easier than it had any right to be. It made David feel a little guilty, in fact.

"Anyway, I just wanted to let you know a little bit about David before he tells you why he is here." Jim paused and cleared his throat. "Why don't you go ahead and tell Brother Leith the reason for our visit now, David?"

Brother Leith betrayed not even a hint of curiosity. David wondered if he had sensed what this was going to be about. His wife wasn't in the room. Brother Leith had been rather vague when Jim had asked about her earlier.

"Thanks, Jim, uh, President Barnes," he said. "And thanks for taking the time to meet with me, Brother Leith. I know that this is a bit out of the ordinary, but . . ." David trailed off, put his right hand in his jacket pocket again, cleared his throat.

"So I, uh, had to spend a couple of weeks in the hospital a while back," he said. "There was one nurse—a male nurse named Bruce—who was very good. Very gentle and patient. And also very funny. He was definitely one of the few bright spots of my stay . . ." David stopped speaking.

Brother Leith didn't blink.

David swallowed nervously, one part of his mind angry at the situation, another part full of sorrow.

"Well, I figure you know where this is going. Come to find out Bruce was your son, and we talked a little about the Church and the difficulties the two of you have had."

His fingers itched. He felt as if any minute his fingers would ignite the slip of paper.

"Anyway. Before I left I promised that I'd let you know he was doing okay. I happened to be in Fresno this weekend, and called up President Barnes, and that's why we're here."

David wished he had had time to change into church clothes. He was wearing the wrong kind of uniform for this situation.

Brother Leith was silent for awhile. Then he said, "Well, thanks for letting us know."

He stood up. So did David. Jim—President Barnes—remained seated.

David felt like he ought to say something else though he didn't know what. He sensed that President Barnes wanted him to sit back down, so he did.

"I'm not sure what else to say, Brother Leith," David said. "I know that your boy's decisions must have been very difficult for you. I have a son who is a bit of a black sheep himself. I don't know what has passed between you two. All I know is that Bruce wants to reach out to you but is afraid to."

"He has made his choice," said Brother Leith. "He knew the consequences."

"Now, Craig," said President Barnes, "I don't condone the boy's actions by any means. But you know the Brethren have begun to soften their stance a bit on this. Not, of course, on living as an active homosexual, which I understand is one of the main problems you have with your son, but it's a bit more complicated about how this all happens, and they've asked us to have sympathy for and reach out to those with same-sex attraction. I know it's not an easy thing to do. And I'm not judging you. Heaven knows what I'd do in the same situation. But just think about giving Bruce a call. You never know. You should never lose faith. The Brethren have promised us that if we don't give up hope, that if we continue to love our wayward children, that they will eventually return to us. I know it's hard to believe that that could happen in this particular situation . . ."

President Barnes trailed off a bit, licked his lips, and then, as his eyes winced a bit as if he was sorry that he had to continue, he said, "And besides, I'd hate to see you repeat the same mistake your father made when you joined the Church."

Brother Leith's face stiffened. "That was different. I was turning towards righteousness. He turned away from it."

"Absolutely," President Barnes said. "You're right. I shouldn't have made the comparison. And I'm not here to make excuses for him. Neither is David."

David nodded slowly. He imagined the paper never leaving his pocket, yellowing then disintegrating.

Brother Leith seemed to suddenly recognize that a stranger and the stake president were in his home. The intensity faded from his face.

"If he wants to be a prodigal son, fine. I'd welcome him back," he said. "He knows I would. He knows that the door is always open. But if he's going to persist in his sin, I will not be a party to it."

President Barnes moved to speak, but David motioned for him to be quiet. He stood back up. "We don't want to keep you," he said. "Thanks for letting us drop by."

The other two men stood up. David wondered if a flash of movement in the next room was the mother. Brother Leith led them out onto the front porch. David stepped forward and let President Barnes make the conciliatory good-byes.

As President Barnes turned to walk down the steps, David pulled the slip of paper from his jacket and turned back and handed it to Brother Leith. He was surprised that the father took it without hesitation. He had expected a struggle.

"Just call him," David said, his voice almost a whisper. "Can't hurt to call." He stepped quickly to President Barnes's side, and they proceeded in silence to the car.

As they drove away, David looked back. Brother Leith was still as they had left him, staring down at the crinkled piece of paper in his hand.

V

So here's the deal: For the first time in my life, I was in a presidency. After several years of post-marriage, yeoman work in the nursery, I had been called as first counselor to a very gung-ho elders' quorum president who worked as an assistant DA in Elk Grove. It was kind of fun. I liked teaching (every so often) and planning activities and even created this killer spreadsheet to organize home teaching. But there was this one other thing: Ben,

the EQ president, was a big believer in reactivation through personal, unannounced visits.

So it was that we found ourselves knocking on doors in the hot Sacramento sun. I was having flashbacks to my mission. It turns out that a few more years of maturity had not cured me of the waves of awkwardness and dread that came as we approached every address.

I was totally cool with every silent door we hit. Although, of course, Ben wasn't content to simply ring the door bell. If no one answered, and so far this evening no one had, he moved on to loud knocking, and then, finally, to peeking in a window. The dude wasn't willing to cross names off the list either, if it seemed like there was any possibility that the address wasn't a dud. These were lost souls to be reclaimed. He wanted sure knowledge. Like I mentioned, he was one intense guy.

I was smart enough to not let myself get irritated. I deployed my mission defense mechanism: Be cool and don't escalate the tension and the other guy ends up doing most of the work. No harm, no foul, and maybe you'll have some fun along the way.

In between doors, we cruised the streets of West Sacramento in Ben's beat-up, old-school Jetta (complete with intermittent air conditioning), and I regaled him with stories from my past. He seemed to enjoy the conversation; but as the evening wore on, I could tell he wasn't content to let our efforts be a wash. With every unanswered door, his energy spiraled up another level. He was winding himself pretty freakin' tight and not reacting much as I launched into yet another humorous mission-related story, this one involving a dog, a Frisbee, and a drunk guy. So I dialed things down a bit. Offered some words of encouragement.

Then, without warning, a vague wisp of faith broke through the heat and sweat and frustration, and I caught a bit of his vision. Started to actually care about reaching somebody. Started praying silently for some contact. And not just so Ben would relax, either. There was some hope involved. And the aforementioned faith.

Look. I know how this sounds. I'm at heart and in practice actually rather orthodox. It's just this one thing: I have a hard time going after the lost sheep. In my experience, there's a reason they've left the fold, and they usually don't want to be chased.

Finally someone answered. The door had been mine, but the

sound of an actual human voice startled me into silence. Ben, of course, was quick to come to the rescue. Before long, we found ourselves sitting on a couch talking to a young, hip Latino named Jorge in his air-conditioned townhouse.

In the beginning, the conversation was easy. Like Ben, Jorge worked for the government (as a graphic designer for some obscure state agency) and like me, he had graduated from UC Davis. In fact, Jorge shared that he had been baptized as a teenager down in SoCal, but had gone inactive shortly after starting college. We let that fact rest for a bit as we discovered that all three of us were passionate about technology, design, gaming, and indie rock. I dominated the conversation, a torrent of words flowing from my mouth. Once I get in the door and past the awkwardness, I'm golden. And I figured it this way: What this kid needed is to understand that there are active, believing Mormons who are just as cool, just as up on stuff as he is.

But then Ben began to steer the conversation back around to the gospel. "Well, Jorge, it's great talking to you," he said. "It seems like life is going pretty well for you right now. But do you ever feel like something is missing?"

Jorge thought for awhile. "Sometimes I do," he said. "I do still pray sometimes, and I've thought about reading the Bible again."

Something inside me rebelled at the directness of the approach. I figured Jorge knew why we were there, and I was reluctant to push into dangerous territory. The dude had answered the door. We had had a good conversation. Let's leave it at the BROT¹ stage. There was plenty of time to coax things further. Start out with some basic social networking invites: Facebook or MySpace, maybe LinkedIn, and Last.fm, for sure. Then an invite to an EQ activity. Get him to meet a few more of the quorum members and feel comfortable with them. Maybe pass him off to the Singles Ward and get him to a dance or Young Adult activity.

But Ben was going straight for the jugular. Or the brass ring. Or the big close. Or whatever the most appropriate euphemism is for reactivation efforts.

"I'm happy to hear that," he said. "I think your instincts are right on. And we're here to invite you to take things a step further. I know that it can be difficult to come back to church after you've

been gone for awhile, but I think you should come this Sunday. Just see how it feels to be there again. In fact, I could even pick you up. I live pretty close to here.”

Well, crap. I had to admire Ben’s audacity. I could only nod and smile and try to look solemn. But I knew that there was no way my face could look as bright and holy as Ben’s. My faith had scarcely been glimmering going into this; his had been burning brightly all evening.

I anticipated Jorge’s retreat, watched for him to close off parts of himself. But I read him totally wrong.

“You know,” he said, “I’m not sure why I stopped going. I just got so busy, you know? I’m still pretty busy, but you guys seem cool, and I have thought about going back to church. Get back on track, you know? I may get married and have kids some day. It’d be good to already be firm in the faith. I don’t want to be a hypocrite, you know? My dad was always pretending to be holy, and then he’d turn around and cheat on my mom or go out and get high and come back angry and break stuff. I don’t want to be like that.”

“You won’t be,” said Ben. “Even if you don’t come back to church, you won’t be. But I promise you that if you return to church, if you get back on track, you will be blessed with all your righteous desires. Of course, we will help you. We will help you prepare to receive the Melchizedek Priesthood and then go to the temple. That’s what we’re here for.”

Jorge’s eyes lit up at the word “temple.” Something seemed to click there, but part of me felt a little sick. So many times on my mission I had seen the inactive who answers the door and has one moment of fire, acts like he’s going to get it all together, makes it to church once, and is never heard from again. It had happened several times, twice with people I had baptized earlier in my mission. The curse of being sent back to your greenie area.

“Yeah, I saw that they are building one up in Rancho Cordova,” he said. “It would be neat to be able go there and go inside. Have you been to the one in L.A.?” We both shook our heads. “It’s really cool. I did baptisms there once.”

I could feel the presence of the Spirit and knew that the other two were feeling it also. The warmth enveloped me—a gentle wash of warmth, a strange and welcome contrast to the blast furnace we had been out in earlier. But my initial reluctance was still wrig-

gling around inside me. What was wrong with me? I admired Ben's boldness. I really did. But perhaps I had bought too much into California *laissez faire*. The libertarian lite that was such a strong part of my school and work milieu. Thing is, it was a comfortable zone to be in. We all let our individual beliefs and practices stay inside the family and find common ground in pop culture and politics. It's what you do when you have co-workers who are hardcore into S&M or Jewish mysticism or veganism or tats or gay circuit partying. Or Mormonism.

So I sat on Jorge's Ikea couch, and we were edified and rejoiced together. And I felt the Spirit about as strong as I ever do and yet held part of myself back. I just couldn't quite let it be what it was. The echoes of all the loud knocks on all those silent doors. That squirmy sense of not wanting to bother people, of wanting to let people be, remained.

I half expected Ben to do a HOFRS.² He didn't.

Ben and Jorge continued to talk for a couple of minutes, but I think we all realized that the visit was about over. The exact arrangements for next Sunday were made. Like all good third wheels, I offered the closing prayer.

The night air was still warm as we walked to the car. Ben was exultant, radiant. I shared his joy and mourned my inability to share it fully.

Notes

1. BROT = Building Relationships of Trust.

2. HOFRS = Helping Others Feel and Recognize the Spirit. These are the first two steps of the commitment pattern (essentially a sales technique) which was taught to LDS missionaries in the 1980s and 1990s.

A Visit for Tregan

Jack Harrell

Tregan Weaver was driving home from Madison High in his little black CRX on the first warm day of spring in Rexburg, Idaho. The trees along Main Street were in blossom, the lawns were turning green, and Tregan had the car windows down and Godsmack on the CD player. He stopped at the light on Second East and punched in Matt Daniels' number on his cell phone. He put in the earphone and tucked his long hair behind his ear. Tregan's hair was fine and straight, and it reached halfway down his back. He kept it clean and combed and dyed jet black, with a few strands of red and blond showing through. Tregan was just a few weeks from finishing high school, and he planned on going to Boise State in the fall. His Grandpa Law had offered to pay for his college, and his brother's too, if the boys would cut their hair and join the Mormon Church and go on missions. Tregan's older brother, Trenton, would also have to get his GED and get off probation, but he was only twenty-one, and Grandpa Law said it wasn't too late—it was never too late.

Grandpa Law—his first name was Buster—was a tall, thin man who shaved his head and wore round-toed cowboy boots, dark Wrangler jeans, and a bolo tie everywhere he went—except on Sunday, when he traded the jeans for a brown, Western-cut suit. Buster Law was a successful construction contractor who had served on the Mormon high council and in two bishoprics. He drove a big hulking pickup and carried extra copies of the Book of Mormon in Spanish and English to pass out to new employees. He was a good man, and Tregan loved him. But as far as Tregan could see, most of the people in Rexburg were good people anyway. He didn't see a connection between being Mormon and being good, and he certainly wasn't going to join the Church, any

church, just to pay for college. If he had to, he'd just work and take out loans to pay for school.

Then yesterday, Mrs. Asbury told Tregan he was one of five finalists for the Madison Education Association Scholarship, a full-ride scholarship for students attending Idaho schools. There would be a luncheon, Mrs. Asbury said, and the five finalists would be asked to stand in front of the MEA board and speak. Tregan had talked to a couple of kids who were nervous about the luncheon, but he already knew what he would say: He was going to Boise State as an anthropology major with an emphasis in urban American culture. He wasn't worried about what they wanted to hear or what they expected him to look like. He was just going to be himself.

When the light turned green, Tregan sped through the intersection while Matt's number rang for the fourth time. He was about to switch off the phone when Matt got on the line. "Hey," he said, "when are we heading out?"

"I can't go," Matt said.

"What do you mean you can't go?" Tregan asked. "We already bought tickets."

Tregan and Matt and Carlton Oakeson had been planning for two weeks to go to the Megadeth concert in Idaho Falls. Megadeth was an old-school metal band long since out of vogue, but still one of Tregan's favorites. Back in the '90s they'd been second only to Metallica; now they played in places like the Idaho Falls Civic Auditorium, a little hall with a capacity of eighteen hundred. Tregan mostly listened to new bands like Trivium and Avenged Sevenfold, but he liked a lot of musical styles. Jazz, rap, '70s punk, blues, '90s speed metal—he loved anything that was good, anything that was real. Turning down Birch Street, Tregan said to Matt, "We've been planning this for two weeks. You have to go."

"My dad says I have to drive the seed potato truck," Matt said. "I don't think he wants me to go see a band called Megadeth."

"But they're like Zeppelin or Elvis. It's rock and roll history."

"My dad's not interested in rock and roll history," Matt said.

"Can't Jake drive the potato truck?" Tregan asked.

"He's got to go to the Rexburg City Council meeting," Matt answered. "He has to get his Eagle project approved. He's building duck boxes at the nature park."

"I thought he was going to put up that plaque at Smith Park."

"The city didn't go for it," Matt said. "They said it sent the wrong message."

"The wrong message?" Tregan asked. "What message?" One of Matt's ancestors, who had helped found the city, had been a Mormon polygamist with six wives and twenty-three children. Jake had wanted to put up a plaque about him next to the walking trail at Smith Park. "I thought he was a great pioneer or something," Tregan said.

"My dad said with all these Mormon fundamentalists in the news and that one guy being put on the FBI's Most Wanted list, the city didn't want to put up a plaque about a polygamist. They said it didn't serve the community as a whole."

"And duck boxes will?" Tregan asked.

"I guess so," Matt answered.

Rexburg had originally been named Ricksburg, after Thomas E. Ricks, one of the city's Mormon founders. As the story goes, Brother Ricks had been too humble to allow a town to be named after him, so the name was changed to Rexburg, *Rex* being Latin for "king." Some said that the king the Mormon pioneers had in mind was Jesus Christ, who had visited Joseph Smith and told him to establish a new church. But times had changed. Now there was a billboard on Highway 20 that simply read "Rexburg, America's City." The people of Rexburg still believed in Jesus; they taught their children about visitations from God and angels. As far as Tregan saw it, that kind of divine visitation was a thing of the past. No one was looking for Jesus to come to Rexburg, no matter what its name had become.

Pulling into his driveway, Tregan asked Matt, "Did you talk to Carlton? I didn't see him in fifth hour."

"Didn't you hear?" Matt said. "Carlton got hit with a baseball in P.E."

"Are you kidding me? Is he okay?"

"He's got a concussion, but he's okay, I guess."

Tregan shut off his engine and sat for a minute. He looked up at the empty house. His dad wouldn't be home for another hour, and it was anybody's guess when Trenton would be home. Tregan let out a sigh. "So I'm the only one going to this concert?" he finally asked.

"Sorry, dude," Matt said, "I'm just not into these guys enough to take on my dad. I gotta choose my battles."

"I know," Tregan said. "It's cool. I am gonna see these guys, though, no matter what. I mean, how often do living legends come through southeastern Idaho?"

"Listen," Matt said, "I want the whole rundown tomorrow, okay?"

"Yeah," Tregan said, "I'll talk to you in Asbury's class."

* * *

The next morning, Tregan was already in his seat in first-hour English when Matt walked in. Tregan had his textbook open to the first page of *Hamlet*. He was looking at the page but not reading it. He was full of something new, something too big to say. Mrs. Asbury was passing handouts down the rows and talking to Amber Newsome. "That's the question," she was saying to Amber. "Did Hamlet really see a ghost, or was that just what he wanted to see?"

Amber Newsome answered, "Hamlet thought it was real, and that's all that matters."

Matt sat down behind Tregan and spoke over his shoulder. "Dude," he said, "what's your deal? I messaged you like five times last night and you didn't answer. Was it awesome?"

Tregan looked back at the floor behind him. "Yeah," he whispered out of the side of his mouth, "it was great. It was amazing." He turned back around. He didn't know what else to say.

"So you went by yourself?" Matt asked.

Tregan glanced back. "Not exactly," he said. "I can't talk right now."

"Dude," Matt said, "it was Megadeth—rock and roll history. You have to talk."

The handouts came down the row to Tregan. He took one and turned around, handing the stack to Matt. "Listen," he said, "it was a different kind of night, okay? I can't talk about it right now."

After class, Tregan headed straight for the restroom. He didn't hang back to walk with Matt to ceramics. He was afraid that if he did, he'd burst into words he'd never said before. In the bathroom, he splashed water on his face and grabbed a paper towel.

He wiped his face; and when he opened his eyes, Matt was standing beside him.

"You look different," Matt said. "What happened last night?"

"Nothing," Tregan said. "It was just a great night. I'm sorry I shut you down in class."

"Something happened," Matt said. "What happened?"

"It was a great concert. It was just a little different."

"Different how?" Matt asked.

Tregan looked around. Two other guys were in the bathroom. Blake Davis was standing at the urinal. Alan Reynolds was washing his hands. Tregan waited for Alan to leave, but then Anthony Kimber came through the door and went to one of the urinals. Anthony was president of the Seminary Council. Tregan looked at Matt for a moment. Then he spoke softly. "I picked up a hitchhiker on the way to the concert."

"That was dumb," Matt said. "Who was it?"

Tregan leaned in and whispered. "You can't tell anyone," he said. "I mean no one." He glanced over to where Anthony Kimber was standing.

"I won't tell anybody," Matt said. "Who was it?"

"It was Jesus," Tregan whispered.

"Jesus Christ?" Matt asked. Blake and Anthony both turned around and looked. Then Anthony flushed and zipped up. He went to the sink, giving Tregan and Matt a disapproving look.

"Dude," Matt said in a forced, small voice. He waited for Anthony and Blake to leave. "You're telling me that Jesus went with you to the Megadeth concert?"

"That's what I'm telling you," Tregan said.

Matt said, "You mean this guy looked like Jesus, right?"

"He did," Tregan said. "He looked like him. I mean, he wasn't like in the pictures. He had his hair in a ponytail, and he was wearing jeans and a T-shirt. But it was him. I know it was him."

"Dude, it couldn't have been him. That's just too weird."

"I know it's weird. It's freaking amazing!"

"Are you sure you didn't try something at that concert?"

Tregan looked at Matt earnestly. "You know how I feel about that stuff, with everything that's happened to Trenton."

"But maybe this guy slipped you something and you didn't notice it?"

"No," Tregan said, "I mean, it was *him*. I saw *him*. He knew things, about me, and about the band. He was with me the whole night. I dropped him off at midnight."

"You dropped him off where?"

"By a cattle field on Yellowstone Highway."

"Are you kidding me? Dude, why are you saying this? You don't even believe in Jesus."

"How do you know?" Tregan said defensively. "You don't know what I believe."

"Well, it's not like you're up there blessing the sacrament every Sunday," Matt said. "I just don't get why you're doing this." He went for the door and opened it. "It's not funny, if that's what you're going for."

Tregan stopped Matt at the doorway. "Hey," he said, "I don't get why you're mad. This is pretty weird for me, too."

Matt turned on him, almost angry. "Okay," he said, "listen." He took a moment to compose himself. "What you're saying—it's just too weird. If that's how you want to believe in Jesus, then don't believe in him at all." He put his hands on Tregan's shoulders and looked him in the eye. "I'm being your friend here, okay?" he said. "People in this town don't get you as it is. I know you're a good guy, but Jesus doesn't go to Megadeth concerts. If you went to church, you'd know that."

Matt headed off to his ceramics class, leaving Tregan bewildered at his response. Tregan already knew Jesus didn't go to Megadeth concerts—at least he wasn't supposed to. But then, Tregan didn't know much at all about what Jesus did in his free time. Maybe he would have learned if he had gone to church like his Grandpa Law wanted him to. Tregan had only been to church a few times in his whole life, usually when a friend invited him to Mutual. And his dad hadn't gone since his mom left them, right after Tregan was born. Tregan's mom had been a beautiful girl, and Buster Law and the Mormon faith combined couldn't stop her from getting pregnant and married outside the temple at sixteen. After that, Tregan's dad couldn't stop her from leaving them to work for a modeling agency in Denver. When she left, people didn't think Tregan's dad should raise the boys alone, but he didn't care what they thought. He worked hard and loved the boys

the best he could. He didn't remarry, and he didn't take any hand-outs from Buster Law. When Buster didn't like the way things were done, Tregan's father would remind him who it was that left.

Some of the Mormon mothers in the neighborhood didn't like the length of the boys' hair. They didn't like hearing about the boys skateboarding down Main Street at midnight. Then when Trenton started getting in trouble with the law, they felt vindicated. By the time Tregan became one of Madison High School's best students, they had stopped paying attention.

But there was something none of them knew about Tregan Weaver. Matt didn't know it, Grandpa Law didn't know it, not even Tregan's father knew. God himself was the only one who knew that Tregan Weaver liked to pray. He prayed every morning and night, locking his door and kneeling by his bed, making an account of his day. Throughout the day Tregan prayed silently to a God that he imagined as an all-knowing, understanding Father—like his dad, only perfect. He'd prayed that night before going to the concert. "Dear God," he had said, kneeling down before his father came home from work, "I really don't want to go to this concert alone, but I want to see these guys. They're really good, and this might be my only chance. Please be with me, God," he had prayed that night before the concert. "Go with me and help me be safe."

Now, after talking to Matt, Tregan wondered if saying that prayer hadn't been a mistake.

* * *

Matt Daniels told only two other people what Tregan had said. He said he was worried about Tregan, and he made them swear not to tell anybody. By the end of the day, everyone at Madison High had heard the news. Walking to his car after the last bell, Tregan crossed paths with a stream of students coming out of the seminary building. Dennis Gatlin, who was on the football team, was coming straight toward him. Tregan had been trying to ignore Gatlin since junior high, when Gatlin shoved him into a gym locker. Gatlin spoke loud enough that everyone could hear. "Hey, Weaver," he said, "you should have been in Seminary today. We talked about false prophets."

The next evening, Tregan was at the kitchen stove making

Hamburger Helper when his dad came home from work. His dad was wearing his usual Levis and slate-colored City of Rexburg work shirt. His hands and arms were spotted with white flecks from painting crosswalks all day, and there were flecks of white in his short blond hair and goatee. "Hey, Son," he said. He put his lunch pail on the counter and opened it. Tregan was stirring the noodles in the pan. He didn't look up. "They were talking about you down at the city building today," his dad said. He took his thermos out of the lunch pail, poured out the old coffee, and rinsed it. "The story I heard is that you've been talking to God," he said, looking at Tregan.

"Yeah," Tregan said, stirring the noodles, "that's the story."

"Garth Ricks came into the break room this afternoon. He walks in and says, 'I thought your boy wanted that scholarship.' I said, 'He does.' Then he says, 'He must not want it anymore—not if he's telling people he goes to satanic rock concerts with God.'" He wiped out his lunch pail and threw a candy bar wrapper in the garbage. "I think you'd better tell me what's going on," he said.

"I told one person," Tregan said. "I told Matt Daniels. I didn't think he'd tell the whole school."

"News like that travels fast," Tregan's dad said. "People take their religion pretty seriously." He sat down at the table and began unlacing his work boots. "Why would you tell a story like that in the first place?"

Tregan put a lid on the pan and turned off the stove. He went to the table and sat down. Out the window, he could see Sid Ward, their next-door neighbor, trying to start his lawn mower. Sid was pulling the cord again and again. "Something weird happened the other night, Dad," Tregan began, "when I went to that concert."

"Was it a satanic band?"

"No, it was just a rock band."

"Well, then, what happened?"

Tregan explained how he'd learned at the last minute that Matt and Carlton weren't able to go, so he decided to grab something to eat and take old Yellowstone Highway to Idaho Falls. "I just decided to take my time," he said to his dad. "I didn't feel like rushing around and dealing with the traffic on Highway 20."

The day had turned to evening, and it was just starting to get

dark as he passed the golf course and drove on toward the LaBelle intersection, where he saw a hitchhiker on the side of the road. He was just standing there, looking like he was expecting someone. Tregan had never picked up a hitchhiker before, but he slowed down for this one, and then stopped.

"What did this guy look like?" his dad asked.

"He was older," Tregan said. "Thirty or forty, maybe. He had long hair and a beard. He was wearing a white T-shirt and jeans and leather sandals. He had his hair tied back in a loose ponytail."

"So he was just some hippie?"

"That's what he looked like," Tregan said.

But Tregan knew who it was. He knew the minute he saw him. Tregan looked at the road ahead, and then in the rearview mirror. There wasn't another car in sight.

The hitchhiker opened the door on the passenger side. "Going to the concert?" he asked.

Tregan nodded.

"Mind if I come along?" the man asked as he got in.

"Maybe it was just some hippie," his dad said.

"When I woke up the next morning," Tregan said, "I felt so good, like something amazing had happened. Then I started thinking maybe I dreamed it all. I talked to Matt, and he freaked out. Pretty soon the whole town was upset."

"Maybe you did dream it all," his dad said.

"It was real, Dad," Tregan said. "It was Jesus I saw on the side of that road."

Tregan's father looked at him for a long time. Then he said, "The people I know, when they say they talk to God, what they really mean is they think they can talk *for* God. And pretty soon they're talking you into things you don't want to do."

"I'm not trying to talk anyone into anything," Tregan said.

His father looked at him, raising an eyebrow.

"I promise," Tregan said.

"Can you promise you'll never see him again?" he asked.

Tregan wasn't able to answer.

* * *

The phone rang at 7:30 the next morning. It was Kelly Mitchell from News Channel 12 in Idaho Falls. She was coming to the

Rexburg studios that day, having heard about Tregan's *visitation*—that was the word she used. Kelly Mitchell was a broadcasting graduate from Michigan State who had come to Idaho Falls hoping to move to a larger market. She was looking for a story that would get her some attention. She told Tregan she wanted to include him in a series of interviews she was doing on religious conflicts. She told him about an LDS chapel in Pocatello that had been vandalized by fire. She had already interviewed a Catholic woman in Salmon who had seen the Virgin Mary in a rainbow and a truck driver in Ashton who was in trouble with the city for building a thirty-foot cross made of car hubcaps in his front yard. Tregan hung up the phone.

That afternoon the MEA scholarship luncheon was being held in a conference room of the Rexburg Cottonwood Inn. The five students nominated for the scholarship were invited to attend with their parents and meet the scholarship committee. Tregan put on a light-green, button-up shirt, black slacks, dress shoes, and the only tie he owned. His dad wore his best Levis and a new flannel shirt. When Tregan and his father walked into the conference room, Kelly Mitchell was already there with a News Channel 12 cameraman. When she saw Tregan, she turned to the cameraman and said something that made him look up. Tregan's grandfather, Buster Law, was there, too, in his round-toed cowboy boots and his brown suit and bolo tie. He was one of the members of the scholarship committee. Grandpa Law met them at their table. "It looks like this is going to be quite a to-do," he said to Tregan. "We've never had the TV news cover this event before. At least you wore a tie."

While Grandpa Law talked to Tregan, Melissa Burgess and her parents sat down at the table, followed by Nathan Aldridge and his mother. Nathan was in a suit with a white shirt and tie, and Melissa, whose cheeks seemed to be in a constant blush, was in a modest lavender dress with a small-print pattern. The members of the committee were coming around to each table, shaking hands with the nominees, congratulating parents. Most of the adults knew each other through work or church. Buster Law shook hands with Melissa and Nathan and their parents. He had once served with Melissa's father in a bishopric, and he knew Nathan and his mother because he'd been the contractor on their house.

"How's that new place working for you?" Buster was saying to Mrs. Aldridge as Kelly Mitchell came toward the table. Mitchell was attractive and professional looking in her navy blue skirt and suit jacket. Buster didn't listen for Mrs. Aldridge's response to his question.

"Good afternoon," Ms. Mitchell said, shaking Buster's hand.

"Welcome," Buster Law said. "It's good to see the local news take an interest in education."

"Thank you," Ms. Mitchell said. She glanced at Tregan, and then his grandfather. "Have we met?"

"I'm Buster Law. I'm one of the members of the scholarship committee."

"Ah, good," she said, looking at Tregan once more. "Then perhaps you can tell us how Mr. Weaver came to be chosen as a nominee. You are Tregan Weaver?" she asked, offering to shake hands.

Tregan stood for a moment and shook her hand. "Yes, I'm Tregan," he said.

"You weren't hard to recognize," Ms. Mitchell said. "I love your hair. You don't see a lot of hairstyles like that in this part of Idaho. It would look great on camera. That's my cameraman, Ray," she said, pointing. "I'd still like to get that interview. It would only take a few minutes."

Buster Law spoke up. "We're proud of all five of our nominees. Tregan and the others were nominated by their teachers. A sharp group of kids."

"I talked to your bishop," Ms. Mitchell said to Tregan. "I asked him if he'd care to comment about your experience."

Buster Law said, "Bishops have nothing to do with the committee. This is a strictly non-religious affair. I suppose we do have two bishops on the committee, but they keep their spiritual judgments out of the selection process."

"I don't want to do an interview," Tregan said.

"You don't have to decide right now," Ms. Mitchell said. "Here's my card. We'll hang around. We can get some footage here," she said, looking around, "and if you change your mind, then we can talk."

Tregan took the card. He looked at it and handed it to his dad.

"Mr. Law," Ms. Mitchell said, "I'd love to talk to you about the

scholarship, if you don't mind. Could you come over to where my cameraman is set up?"

Buster Law caught the attention of one of the other committee members and pointed at the cameraman. "I'll be right over," he said to Ms. Mitchell.

"Don't forget about us," Ms. Mitchell said to Tregan before she walked away.

Buster Law squatted down next to Tregan. "Don't think I don't know the real reason she's here," he said, irritated. "Everyone in town knows by now."

"I don't get it," Tregan said. "If no one believes me, why is it such a big deal?"

Buster Law gave him an exasperated look. "When I saw your name on that list, I told the committee I'd have to exclude myself from the voting. The men on this committee, I've got to do business with them every day. They know me as a sensible, respectable man. But Tregan," he said, "the minute they see you up there in that hairdo, they're going to have doubts. Now add to that these stories about seeing Jesus—I don't know where you came up with that one—and bringing a reporter here? It's too much. I know these men, Tregan. They like to keep to the middle of the road. Give your speech, and don't embarrass us. It doesn't matter anyway," he said. "I could pay for your education if you'd let me."

"I know, Grandpa," Tregan said, "but I don't want you to pay for my education."

"I can see that," Buster Law said, standing up. "Just keep it short, okay? Nothing radical. Get yourself a free lunch and go home."

As Buster Law walked toward Kelly Mitchell and her cameraman, Tregan said to his dad, "What does he think I'm going to do? Do they think I'm going to start my own church?"

"I don't know," his dad said, "but this town has enough churches."

* * *

When it was Tregan's turn to speak, he said exactly what he'd planned all along—Boise State . . . anthropology major . . . emphasis in urban culture. He talked a little about what that meant, and then he sat down. As soon as the meeting was over, before Kelly Mitchell

had a chance to reach them, Tregan and his father slipped out through a back hallway that exited into the parking lot.

Riding in Tregan's CRX a few minutes later, Tregan's father started laughing.

"What's so funny?" Tregan asked.

"Besides your grandpa and that news lady, you mean?"

Tregan smiled. "Sure," he said.

"You stood up there, and I swear you could have heard a pin drop. I don't know what people expected you to say, but you sure had their attention." He laughed again. "Those other kids," he said, "they barely spit out their speeches. That one girl didn't even know what she wanted to major in. Then you started talking about your studies. You sounded like you'd already been to college. If you don't get that scholarship, everyone in that room will know why. And that camera guy got it all on tape."

Tregan didn't understand it. No one had paid any attention to him before, and now that they were, he didn't like it. He kept going over the night of the concert in his mind. It was so vivid he could close his eyes and see the hitchhiker standing there looking like Jesus in all the pictures he'd ever seen in his life, except he was in jeans and a T-shirt, his hair in a ponytail. When Jesus got in the car, Tregan didn't say anything. He just started driving. He glanced over a couple of times, but Jesus was just sitting there contentedly, his hands on his knees, watching the road.

Finally Jesus said, "I haven't seen these guys in a long time. I bet it's been ten years, at least."

"You've seen them before?" Tregan asked.

"I think it was the Symphony of Destruction tour in Boston. That was way before Dave stopped drinking, before he almost died." Dave Mustaine, Megadeth's front man, had once been in Metallica, but the band had fired him because of his alcohol abuse. "You know you've got a drinking problem when you get kicked out of Metallica for drinking too much," Jesus said. "I mean, back in the '90s, people called those guys Alcoholic!"

Tregan nodded, barely able to believe what he was seeing, what he was hearing.

"But I hear Dave's cleaned up a lot," Jesus said, "which is good. He really is a talented person."

Tregan said, "Why are you here?"

Jesus looked at him. "You said you didn't want to go alone. I hadn't seen these guys in a long time, so I thought I'd come along. You don't mind, do you?"

"No," Tregan said, "I don't mind. I'm glad, really. It's just a little strange, that's all."

"Well, it's a strange universe," Jesus said. "Full of surprises, you know?"

"Even for you?" Tregan asked.

"Especially for me."

* * *

On the evening after the scholarship luncheon, Tregan put in a full shift at the telephone survey center where he worked as a supervisor. After work, he got in his CRX and headed home. It was nearly midnight; but even in the middle of Rexburg, the stars were visible overhead. A Nine Inch Nails song was playing on the mix CD. Tregan pressed the skip button. The next song was "Suicide Messiah" by Black Label Society. Tregan pressed the button that ejected the CD. He turned down Third South and headed up the hill.

He was on Cornell, just a few blocks from his house, when a strange sound started coming from the car. The engine sputtered and jerked a bit before stopping altogether. He coasted to the side of the road, got out, and opened the hood. A little light came on, illuminating the engine. Tregan stood there for a moment. He didn't know anything about cars. Standing in the headlight beams, he looked up the street. He shut the hood, ready to walk home. Then there were headlights on the street. Dennis Gatlin's pickup pulled up slowly. Dennis was driving, and two other guys on the football team were with him, Lonnie Chaplin and Jake Rice.

"Look who it is," Gatlin said. "It's Mr. Goth-to-God." He threw the gear shifter into park and came around the truck while the other two boys got out on the passenger side. Tregan backed up a pace. "We were talking about you tonight," Gatlin said, "over at Jake's house. His dad says all these stories you've been telling are blasphemy."

"I need to get home," Tregan said, trying to walk past them.

Jake Rice stood aside, but Chaplin stood his ground and

Gatlin stepped into Tregan's way. "I told Jake's dad it was mocking the prophets," Gatlin said.

"Let's go," Rice said. "Leave him alone."

"Don't you get it?" Gatlin said. "This guy never did belong in this town."

"Gatlin," Rice said, "haven't you ever heard of 'Do unto others'?"

"I remember in the fourth grade," Chaplin said, "when he wore those same skateboard pants for a month straight, and he smelled like it, too. Remember that, Weaver?" Chaplin said. He pushed Tregan on one shoulder. "Didn't your dad ever wash your clothes?" he asked, poking Tregan in the chest. "Weaver, Weaver, stinky beaver," he said.

"Let's get out of here," Rice said.

Tregan brushed past Chaplin. He went past Gatlin and was almost clear of them when Gatlin grabbed him by his long hair and jerked him back. "Gonna go wash your pretty hair?" Gatlin said.

Tregan spun around instinctively, knocking Gatlin's hand off so fast that he hit him sharply across the mouth.

"Ooh, look out!" Chaplin said as he and Rice stepped back. They both looked at Gatlin, waiting for his reaction. Gatlin touched his mouth for a moment.

"I think that was on purpose," Chaplin said.

Without a word, Gatlin stepped forward and shoved Tregan against his car. "You know what, Weaver?" he said, his voice almost a hiss. "I don't care what you saw. I never liked your long-haired, gothic ass in the first place." With that, he landed a punch in Tregan's gut, bringing Tregan to his knees. Rice stood back, but Chaplin joined in, throwing punches and kicks until Tregan was curled up by the left front tire of the car. Then a spotlight flashed across all of them.

"Crap, you guys," Rice said, "it's the cops."

Gatlin and Chaplin looked up. "Let's go," Gatlin said.

As his truck sped off, Tregan heard a quick blast of the police car's siren and saw the flashing lights.

The police car stopped next to Tregan, its big engine idling loudly. An officer got out. "What's the matter, Bud?" he asked, kneeling beside Tregan in the street.

"I'm fine," Tregan said. He was waving his arm awkwardly in the direction where Gatlin had sped off.

"They were laying into you pretty good," the officer said. "What did you do to make them so mad?"

"It was Gatlin, Dennis Gatlin," Tregan said.

"I know who it was," the officer said. "I talked to them on Main Street a few minutes ago. I know their parents, too. They're not going anywhere." He took Tregan's hand as Tregan got to his feet. He shone his flashlight in Tregan's face. "That eye looks pretty nasty," he said. "Maybe we'd better run you to the emergency room."

The police car's siren had awakened the neighbors, and the red and blue lights were flashing on all the houses up and down the street. By the time Tregan was on his feet, several porchlights had come on. Tregan saw silhouettes and flashes of familiar faces on the steps and in the windows as the officer helped him into the police car. The faces watched, unmoved, until the police car drove off with Tregan inside.

* * *

On the night of the concert, just before the show started, Tregan and Jesus were sitting in the Idaho Falls Civic Auditorium talking about what was wrong with the music business. No one around seemed to notice anything unusual. They looked like a couple of average Idaho Megadeth fans: one an old fan remembering the band's glory days, the other a goth kid getting to know one of heavy metal's major taproots.

"But that's a problem with the music scene," Jesus was saying. He was sitting back in his seat, relaxed, his head cocked, talking to Tregan. "Most of the guys in the bands have good hearts," he said. "They love the music, and that's what got them started. But it's the money that corrupts them—that and all the excess, the drugs and sex. The whole system is rotten, really," he said. "It's too bad. It doesn't have to be that way." Just then, Jesus looked Tregan in the eye for a moment, and Tregan held his gaze there. Tregan felt himself coming alive in that gaze. He wanted to cry, and he wanted to burst into wild and holy laughter. He wanted to sit in silence, and he wanted to shout. He breathed in that look until he couldn't stand it any more, until the rush inside of him became so

intense that he simply had to turn away. He sat back, euphoric, looking blankly at the empty stage and the people filling the hall. It was too much to look too long.

Seeing Tregan's reaction, Jesus smiled knowingly. "Life's a big thing," he said.

"It's a good thing," Tregan said, inspired.

Then the house lights went down. "Here we go," Jesus said, clapping. "Are you ready?"

Tregan watched the darkened stage, full of anticipation, ready to take in everything and let it wash him through.

A booming voice came over the loudspeakers: "All right, southeastern Idaho, please welcome the metal monsters, Megadeth!" Everything went black. The only sound was the hushed murmur of the crowd. For an instant, Tregan thought it all might be a dream. For a split second, he thought he might suddenly awake to something that was not this moment.

Then the opening chords of "Holy Wars" blasted out of the sound system, flooding the hall with a massive wave of harmonic distortion. A blinding flash of white light appeared, followed by a warm glow of colors that illuminated the entire stage—reds, greens, purples. And there was Dave at the center of it all, his black and white Charvel Jackson Flying V hanging stylishly below his waist. He was leaning back, his mane of blond hair passing over his shoulders, his fingers shredding through a dozen power chords at breakneck speed.

Tregan called out, "Whoa!" and burst into laughter. In a moment, the whole crowd was on its feet, waving fists, punching the air in unison to the driving beat, the whole hall one with the sound itself.

Dave Mustaine was in jeans, an unbuttoned flannel shirt over a Grateful Dead T-shirt, and big white basketball shoes. At stage right, Chris, the band's new lead guitarist, was playing his seven-string Ibanez, shadowing Dave's chords and throwing in a few extra licks to boot. He was in a glittering black shirt that was unbuttoned halfway down the chest in classic rock and roll style. James, in jeans and a plain black T-shirt, and Shawn, wearing only a pair of basketball shorts, were pounding out a solid backbeat of bass and drums, holding together what would have otherwise been complete chaos.

Tregan looked over at Jesus. He was standing there, arms folded casually over his chest, nodding slightly to the beat, a modest head-banger. Tregan looked back at the stage and began to see it all anew. The four musicians were there, masters in their field, their instruments shining, perfect tools; the lights were swirling and flashing in unison with the music; and then there was that wall of flawlessly balanced sound, chaotic and symphonic at once. It was like nothing Tregan had ever known.

Later in the concert, the band launched into "A Tout le Monde," a song about a man saying goodbye to the world at the end of his life. Jesus leaned over to Tregan and shouted over the sound of the music. "Dave wrote this song during a really bad time in his life. I think playing the guitar was the only thing that got him through."

Then, inspired, Tregan touched the sleeve of Jesus's T-shirt. Looking at the stage, at the audience, at the building around him, Tregan sensed the pain of the world, more hurtful than anything he'd ever known, as it mingled with a joy that was almost too great to bear.

* * *

After taking Tregan to the emergency room, the policeman called his dad, who brought him home. The next morning, his dad came into his room, waking him up. "Hey," he said, shaking him, "there's someone out here to see you." A few minutes later, Tregan came out of his room in baggy shorts and a T-shirt. He had a black eye and a bandage on his forehead. Bishop Grant was sitting on the couch talking to his father about the city's plan for repaving the streets. Chuck Grant was a tall, soft-spoken man in his fifties with a thinning head of reddish-brown hair. Tregan and his dad had known the bishop for five years, since before he was called. They spoke in the grocery store or on the street, but the bishop was good to not make a nuisance of himself. When he saw Tregan, he stood to shake his hand. "Looks like you got kinda banged up," he said with a deadpan expression. He sat down, regarding Tregan for a moment. "Brother Sylvester, the officer who picked you up last night, he gave me a call. I'll have a talk to the bishops of the other boys, too. That TV newswoman calls me ev-

ery day, and she's already called this morning. Somehow she heard about this little scuffle. She said it's very newsworthy."

"She called here twice," Tregan's father said. "I unplugged the phone." Then, turning to the bishop, he said, "You know what I think? If Tregan says he saw something, I believe him."

The bishop looked at Tregan. "Your dad believes you," he said. "My dad's a good guy," Tregan said.

The bishop nodded. Then he said, "You told people you saw the Savior?"

"I told one person," Tregan said. At that moment, he remembered something about that night, something he should have remembered before he talked to Matt.

"And all this hubbub started from that?"

Tregan nodded.

"And you told him that the Savior went with you to . . ."

"To the Megadeth concert in Idaho Falls."

"And they're a rock band?"

"Yeah," Tregan said.

The bishop nodded, taking it in. "Anything else? Any other visitations or revelations?"

"That's it," Tregan said.

The bishop nodded again, slowly, thinking it through. Then he said, "I'd like for you and me to do something. I'd like for us to call this TV newswoman so we can put this whole thing to rest."

Tregan had no particular reason to agree. He had no particular reason to disagree, either. But there was something about the bishop that reminded Tregan of Jesus. It was a hint of divinity he had not seen in anyone before the night of the concert. Now he was seeing it in everyone.

That afternoon Tregan was at the News Channel 12 studios in Rexburg. The bishop had explained that the Church's public relations policy forbade him to go on-camera without permission from Salt Lake. He said the rule was designed to protect the Church from bishops who might want to go off half-cocked.

Ms. Mitchell told Tregan she was sorry he had gotten hurt but that it often took that sort of thing to raise public awareness. She asked Tregan to sit with her at a small round table with a big News Channel 12 logo behind them. She was in a teal suit dress with big white buttons down the front, and Tregan was in the same slacks

and tie he had worn to the scholarship luncheon. Ms. Mitchell asked Ray, the cameraman, to get a good shot of the length of Tregan's hair during the interview.

The bishop and Tregan's father were standing behind the cameraman. Tregan's grandfather was there, too. Ms. Mitchell had invited him to represent the scholarship committee. Ray silently counted down from three and pointed to Ms. Mitchell.

Looking at the camera, she said, "With Mormon fundamentalists on the national news, churches being burned, and religious freedom challenged all over the world, we in southeastern Idaho may not be aware that persecution can happen right here in our own backyards. Today I'm talking with Tregan Weaver, a Rexburg youth with a very interesting story to tell. Tregan," she said, turning to him, "could you tell us what happened last night and why it happened?"

The cameraman turned to Tregan. "I got beat up," Tregan said.

"Yes," Ms. Mitchell said, "and why were you beaten up?"

"Because of a story that spread around town."

"What story was that?"

"About something that happened at a concert."

"What happened?" Ms. Mitchell asked, glancing at her note cards.

Tregan looked at the bishop. Then he said, "Nothing. I mean, nothing unusual."

"I see, and . . ." Ms. Mitchell stopped. She looked up from her cards. "What's that?" she asked.

"Nothing unusual happened at the concert."

"Mr. Weaver," Kelly Mitchell said, "you reported to your friends that you had a supernatural visitation that night."

"That didn't happen," Tregan said. "I made it up."

Ms. Mitchell looked at Tregan and furrowed her brow. "I've interviewed three high school students," she said, "who say you gave them a detailed account of seeing a supernatural being beside the road."

"It didn't really happen," Tregan said. "I'm sorry."

Kelly Mitchell waved vaguely at Ray. "Okay, hold it, Ray," she said. "Cut the camera." Turning on Tregan, she said, "A dozen

people told me you saw Jesus, and he went to the Megadeth concert with you!”

“I’m sorry,” Tregan said.

“But you did get beaten up, didn’t you?” she asked. “Because of the story?”

Tregan nodded.

“Okay, then,” Ms. Mitchell said, “we’ll go back to that.” She looked at Tregan, and then the men behind the camera. “Something’s going on here,” she said. “If there’s a conspiracy between the city and the Church, I’ll uncover it. Ray, roll the camera.”

When Ray gave the cue, she said, “Good afternoon. I’m here in Rexburg with Tregan Weaver, a young man with a very interesting story to tell. Tregan, some reports have indicated that you were visited by a supernatural being. Is that true?”

“No, that’s not true,” Tregan said.

“How do you suppose these stories get started?” Ms. Mitchell asked.

“I guess people make them up,” Tregan said.

“And did this alleged story result in an attack on you personally?”

“I got beat up. I didn’t see who it was.”

“So,” Ms. Mitchell said, “with all the stories we’re hearing about radicalism and intolerance, do you have any advice for those who might want to hurt others for what they believe?”

“People should try to understand each other,” Tregan said, “before someone gets hurt.”

Ms. Mitchell turned to the camera. “There you have it. Good advice. People should try to understand before they try to hurt. Kelly Mitchell, reporting in Rexburg, for News Channel 12.”

The thing Tregan remembered about the night of the concert was something that had happened on the way home. When Tregan had dropped off Jesus, Jesus had gotten out of the car and leaned in through the window. “It was a good night,” he said. “Thanks for inviting me.” Then he said, “One thing, though, don’t tell anyone about this, okay? It’ll just cause trouble, you know?”

Tregan nodded, and Jesus walked toward the cattle pasture. In the dim light, Tregan saw the cattle in the field slowly lope toward Jesus as he came to the fence.

* * *

That night Tregan and his grandfather were both on the TV news. Tregan said the story of seeing Jesus was a lie, and Buster Law said that Rexburg didn't have a problem with radicalism and intolerance. Since Tregan decided not to press charges, Gatlin, Rice, and Chaplin weren't on the news that night. The next morning, the Madison Education Association notified Tregan that he'd won the scholarship. They told him they were disappointed that he'd briefly cast Rexburg in a bad light, but he was the most qualified candidate, and they hoped he'd learned his lesson.

A few nights later, Tregan drove out to Yellowstone Highway, just west of Rigby. He drove to the spot where he'd dropped off Jesus, and Jesus was there, waiting for him, walking toward him down the middle of the road. He was in the same clothes—jeans, a white T-shirt, and sandals. His hair was down, and he looked just like he did in all the pictures. Standing there now in the middle of the road, Jesus waited in the headlights for Tregan to bring the CRX to a stop. The highway was deserted, and the stars overhead were bright. Tregan killed the engine, and Jesus came to the window and squatted down, one hand on the car door.

Jesus looked at Tregan, smiling for a moment before he spoke. "How are you holding up?" he asked.

"Good enough, I guess," Tregan said. "I got roughed up by a couple of dorks."

"It happens too much," Jesus said. Then he said, "I told you not to tell anyone."

"Bishop Grant said he believed me," Tregan said. "It was his idea, you know, about me lying to that lady on TV."

"It's okay," Jesus said. "What do they call that, a *noble* lie? I never really liked that expression."

"I don't care," Tregan said. "They can all think what they want. And what the heck, I got the scholarship, right?"

"This is why I can't go out," Jesus said. "Bad things happen to the people I care about."

"If you come again," Tregan said, "I'll keep it to myself."

Jesus nodded, looking at the empty highway before him. Then he said, "Would you like me to come again?"

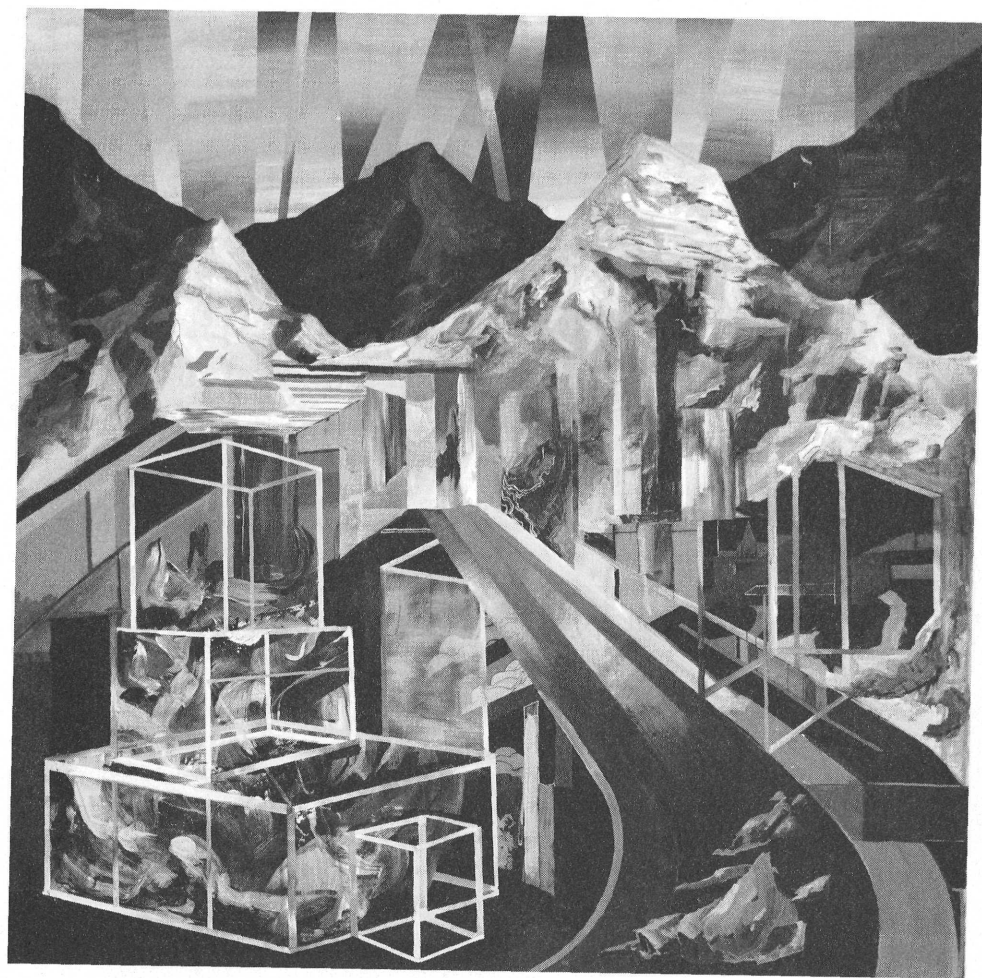
Tregan thought about it for a long time. Somehow he knew Je-

sus wouldn't mind whether he answered yes or no. He knew he'd understand either way. Then he said, "Give me a little while, and yeah, that would be great."

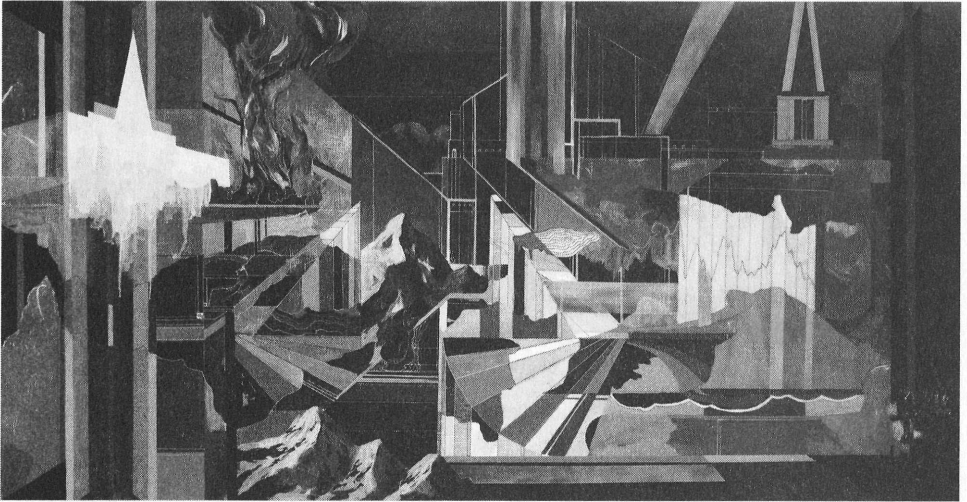
"I'll do what I can," Jesus said. "Who knows? I might need a friend sometime."

"That would be good," Tregan said. "Let me know."

Jesus reached out to shake hands. Tregan took his hand and shook it. A feeling came over him, as big and joyful and painful as every Megadeth song combined—even more. Tregan held Jesus's hand there under the stars for as long as he could stand it, knowing that from this moment, nothing would ever be the same.



Ricky Allman,
This Will Lower Your Standards,
acrylic on canvas, 36" x 36",
2009.



Ricky Allman, *Feeler Redux*,
acrylic, ink on panel, 24"x 48",
2008.

REVIEWS

Mormonism in Daniel Walker Howe's *What Hath God Wrought*

Daniel Walker Howe. *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815–1848*. In THE OXFORD HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES series. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2007. 928 pp. Cloth: \$35; ISBN 13: 978-0-19-507894-7

Reviewed by David W. Grua

Recently, six major American historians reviewed Daniel Walker Howe's Pulitzer Prize-winning *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815–1848* on the H-Net discussion group for historians of the Early Republic, each examining the book from his or her respective specialties, including economics, politics, communications, women and gender, Indians, slavery and race, and religion and reform. Although some of the reviewers criticized Howe for his interpretations, all agreed that Howe had succeeded in crafting a narrative that is inclusive, pays attention to detail, and reflects a solid understanding of the questions historians are asking in their subfields.

Mormon historians would likely agree that Howe's treatment of Mormonism fit these criteria as well.¹ Unlike previous synthetic works, Howe not only features Mormonism prominently within his narrative, but he also gets the details correct and generally relies on the best of recent scholarship. Mormonism appears prominently in Chapter 8 ("Pursuing the Millennium") with other millenarian groups in the Early Republic and in Chapter 18 ("Westward the Star of Empire"), which includes Nauvoo and the trek west within the wider contexts of Manifest Destiny, California, Oregon, and the Mexican-American War. There are also a handful of other scattered references throughout the text.

Chapter 8's section on Mormonism covers the 1820s through the 1838–39 Missouri expulsion and reflects Howe's broader assumptions concerning the place of religion within American society. Howe's previous work on American cultural, intellectual, and religious history leads him to see religion, not as the cynical product of market forces and class, but rather as a vibrant element of

culture that shapes how people see the world. While Charles Sellers in *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815–1846* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991) posited that Mormonism was a prime example of the farming and working classes' opposition to market changes in contrast to the merchant classes' embrace of evangelicalism, Howe sees the millenarianism of American religion as primary. He sets Mormonism alongside William Miller's movement, utopian experiments, Catholicism, and Nat Turner's slave uprising as exemplifying the driving urge toward *improvement* in American culture during the period. On this reading, millennial strains within these disparate groups are a salient and unifying feature of Chapter 8, as each group sought improved social, economic, and cultural landscapes in America.

In his bibliographical essay, Howe distinguishes between believing and non-believing historians of Mormonism, a contrast he explores further in Chapter 8. For example, Howe refers readers to the "Mormon accounts" found in Terryl Givens's *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture That Launched a New World Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) and Richard L. Bushman's *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), likely an implied contrast with John L. Brooke's Bancroft Prize-winning *The Refiner's Fire: The Making of a Mormon Cosmology, 1644–1844* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1994) "non-Mormon" account (314 note 72). Howe likewise notes that "to the Latter-day Saint, this [the Book of Mormon] is scripture, a supplement to the Old and New Testaments. To the unbeliever, it is a fantastic tale invented by the imaginative Joseph Smith" (314).

Howe's treatment of the Book of Mormon narrative reveals Bushman's impact on mainstream historical discourse on Mormonism, especially Bushman's argument that the Book of Mormon is an intricate work of American literature. Howe states: "True or not, the Book of Mormon is a powerful epic written on a grand scale with a host of characters, a narrative of human struggle and conflict, of divine intervention, heroic good and atrocious evil, of prophecy, morality, and law. Its narrative structure is complex" (314). Howe's reliance on Bushman is further apparent when he (Howe) admits that, although the Book of Mormon reflects some elements of nineteenth-century culture (like anti-Ma-

sonry), the book's primary themes are biblical, prophetic, and patriarchal, not democratic or optimistic. Howe concludes: "The Book of Mormon should rank among the great achievements of American literature, but it has never been accorded the status it deserves, since Mormons deny Joseph Smith's authorship, and non-Mormons, dismissing the work as a fraud, have been more likely to ridicule than read it" (314). Howe acknowledges his debt to Bushman: "The leading Mormon historian Richard Bushman, if I understand him correctly, credits the prophet's literary skills as well as his divine inspiration" (314 note 73). The fact that Howe relies on Bushman's arguments almost uncritically is noteworthy.

Another striking feature of Howe's description of the Book of Mormon narrative is his decision not to ascribe to the book itself the racializations later attributed to it by Latter-day Saints in regard to Native Americans. Again, Bushman's hand is apparent here. Rather, Howe waits until later in the chapter, when Smith sends missionaries to Indian Territory in the winter of 1830–31, to discuss Mormon applications of a Lamanite identity to American Indians: "The Book of Mormon never explicitly asserts that the Native Americans of modern times are descended from the Lamanites; however, readers of the book invariably drew that conclusion, and Joseph Smith himself evidently shared it" (317). Howe then contextualizes early Mormon racial discourses within the then-prevalent Lost Tribes-as-Indians theories and argues that many Mormons believed that, "when the Lamanites converted en masse, [as] the Book of Mormon promised, they would once again become a 'white and delightsome people' as their Hebrew ancestors had been" (317). Howe (like Bushman) therefore separates the text of the Book of Mormon from the interpretations later ascribed to it and from the genetic, geographical, and racial issues associated with those interpretations.

Chapter 8 also wades into controversial historiographical debates on the socio-economic makeup of early Mormon converts.² Howe notes general class characteristics, like the fact that many Mormon converts were small farmers and workers, while many of Charles Grandison Finney's followers were middle class. Howe then moves beyond economic determinism to discuss culture:

Although it is tempting to try to fit them [early Mormons] into theo-

ries about premillennialism appealing to the disinherited of this world, the first generation of Mormons were actually defined more by their culture than by socioeconomic attributes. They tended to be people of New England birth or heritage, carrying the cultural baggage of folk Puritanism (as distinguished from Calvinist theology): communalism, chiliasm, identification with ancient Israel, and the practice of magic. Often they had been involved in other Christian restorationist movements, but no particular denominational background predominated. The prophet and his followers perpetuated traditions of a culture, Richard Bushman explains, “in which the sacred and the profane intermingled and the Saints enjoyed supernatural gifts and powers as the frequent blessings of an interested God.” Many people shared this culture, among them some jealous neighbors who tried to steal Smith’s golden plates. Seeking to build a new Zion, Mormon missionaries claimed to be “looking for the blood of Israel”: They assumed their converts would be descended from one of the tribes of Israel. They meant it literally, but one may also see “the blood of Israel” as a graphic, physical metaphor for the inherited biblical cosmology that predisposed converts to accept the Mormon gospel. (315–16)

Howe also argues that Smith appealed beyond this culture, relying on Marvin Hill to contend that like Smith, many converts were young, male, and mobile.³ Unchurched Seekers comprised many early followers, looking for religious authority in a culture that doubted its existence. Howe, likely following his former student Grant Underwood, also contends that Mormonism not only appealed to the working people of the United States, but also those in Britain and Scandinavia (316). Howe is smart to include both class and culture as reasons for conversion to Mormonism, as a common tendency is to deny one while highlighting the other, when it is apparent that both were influential.

In contextualizing Mormon history within the western migration in Chapter 18, Howe again shows careful attention to detail. He omits crucial texts from his footnotes—for example, Glen M. Leonard’s *Nauvoo: A Place of Peace, a People of Promise* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book/Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2002) and Richard E. Bennett’s *We’ll Find the Place: The Mormon Exodus: 1846–1848* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997). Still, Howe’s treatment of this period remains nuanced and balanced. For example, in his discussion of Nauvoo’s founding, Howe states that the name is “a word that he [Smith] (correctly) informed his

people meant 'a beautiful place' in Hebrew," a conclusion that Howe reached by consulting a Hebrew dictionary as well as a rabbi (723 note 49). In another place, Howe refers to Smith as "Joseph," explaining in a note that "Mormons usually refer to the prophets Joseph Smith and Brigham Young by their first names, and historians also often follow this practice" (725 note 58). Although Howe's discussion of groups that did not follow Young west is brief, he mentions Joseph Smith III and notes that "the Reorganized LDS Church changed its name to the Community of Christ. They no longer call themselves Mormons" (727 note 61; the name change became official on April 6, 2001).

Howe also gives special attention to Mormon women in Chapter 18. He quotes an Eliza R. Snow poem to describe the Saints' reaction to the murders of Joseph and Hyrum Smith and provides a short biography of Snow (726). He later notes that, during the exodus, "the women cooked, washed, and gathered buffalo dung for fuel" (728). Although Howe neglects Kathryn Daynes's *More Wives Than One: Transformation of the Mormon Marriage System, 1840–1910* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), in his discussion of polygamy, he does rely on Todd Compton's *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2001), Lawrence Foster's *Women, Family, and Utopia: Communal Experiments of the Shakers, the Oneida Community, and the Mormons* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1991), and Claudia L. Bushman, ed., *Mormon Sisters: Women in Early Utah* (1976; rpt., Logan: Utah State University, 1997). He concludes:

Evidence of dissatisfaction with their situation among plural wives is less widespread than we might expect. Some women enjoyed their independence when their husband was living with his other families; others resented having to rear their children largely by themselves. Some felt jealous of the other wives, but sisterly affection was also common. Plural wives could divorce their husbands more readily than their husbands could divorce them; Ann Eliza Webb divorced Brigham Young. (731)

Rather than sensationalize polygamy, Howe chooses to portray the institution with nuance and complexity.

Howe concludes the Mormon section of Chapter 18 by noting the irony of Mormon history: "The Mormons who sought to escape from the United States ended up playing a role in extending

the United States. Their way of life, originally a millenarian critique of the larger society and a collectivist, authoritarian dissent from American individualistic pluralism, now impresses observers as 'the most American' of all. How that transformation came about, however, is another story" (731).

My primary dissatisfaction with Howe's treatment of Mormonism is the lack of attention given to race and gender, a confusing omission since Howe essentially characterizes Jacksonian democracy as the efforts of white males to consolidate power. Perhaps the paucity of quality monographs on these topics in Mormon studies is partially to blame, but I think it may reflect a tendency on Howe's part to be perhaps over-sensitive toward religious people. While most Mormon readers (myself included) are no doubt grateful for this sympathy, it obscures crucial ways that Mormons interacted and intersected with the dominant culture. As noted, Howe comments on race in the Book of Mormon but does not connect Mormon Indianism with the development of white Mormon identity. Although black and Native converts to Mormonism prior to 1848 were few, their stories deserve to be told, if only to illuminate how early Mormonism was born in a milieu of whiteness. Of course, white women comprised perhaps 50 percent of early Mormon converts, and I suspect that historians of Mormon women would have appreciated a more critical analysis of the gendered structure of early Mormonism.

These complaints aside, Howe's *What Hath God Wrought* is a remarkable analysis of Jacksonian America, and the place of Mormons in it. Students of Mormon history would do well to become familiar with the work.

Notes

1. See, for example, John C. Thomas's review of Howe in the *Journal of Mormon History* 35, no. 1 (Winter 2009): 208–13.

2. For a summary and critique of this literature, see Stephen J. Fleming, "'Congenial to Almost Every Shade of Radicalism': The Delaware Valley and the Success of Early Mormonism," *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 17, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 129–64.

3. For a recent critique of this view, see Stephen J. Fleming, "The Religious Heritage of the British Northwest and the Rise of Mormonism," *Church History: Studies in Christianity and Culture* 77, no. 1 (March 2008): 73–104, esp. 76–77.

In the Nephite Courtroom

John W. Welch. *The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon*. Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press and the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2008. 496 pp. Cloth: \$34.95: ISBN: 9-7808-4252-712-5

Reviewed by Ronan James Head

John W. Welch's CV is enough to trigger fatigue in even the most prolific of scholars. As founding director of the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS), Welch introduced a new generation of Mormon readers to the work of Hugh Nibley and kick-started a renewed vigor in "faithful scholarship." He serves as editor in chief of *BYU Studies* and has joined with others to oversee various projects from the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* to the Library of Congress conference on Joseph Smith. His publications include work on topics as diverse as the art of Minerva Teichert and biblical law. Welch is particularly famous in Mormon apologetic circles for his discovery of chiasmus in the Book of Mormon. All of these activities run parallel to his day job as Robert K. Thomas Professor of Law at BYU.

Welch's long-standing and passionate advocacy for the historical plausibility of the Book of Mormon has made him one of the godfathers of modern Mormon apologetics. He has been actively engaged with the academy beyond Provo, serving, for example, on the executive committee of the Biblical Law Section of the Society of Biblical Literature. As someone who shares some of Welch's colleagues in the field of ancient law, I can vouch for the high regard in which he is held as both a gentleman and a scholar. His careful work on New Testament law in particular has earned him the respect which might otherwise have been difficult for a "Mormon apologist" to acquire in a field which is hardly likely to accept the ancient origins of the Book of Mormon any time soon. It is precisely this tension between rationality and faith—so far ably overcome by Welch during his career—which makes *The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon* such an interesting and curious work.

Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon is the Mormon culmination of Welch's training in law and biblical studies. In this volume, Welch

aims “to examine the literary and historical backgrounds of the legal narratives in the Book of Mormon” and “to compare the laws in the Nephite world with those in the Hebrew Bible and the ancient world in general” (17). This is an ambitious project, requiring a familiarity with the Book of Mormon sophisticated enough to draw out its legal history and an understanding of the ancient law with which it is to be compared. Welch is ably equipped to take on this project, the fruits of which run to nearly 500 pages.

Before describing the book in more detail, it will be necessary to briefly consider the book’s audience. *Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon* reads much like any other legal history, particularly those that elucidate biblical law. This seems to be a deliberate strategy on Welch’s behalf, and the book seems to have been written with a secular audience at least half in mind. If the book were a study of, say, Deuteronomic law, it would no doubt find a place on the shelves of Bible studies libraries across the world. As it is, *Legal Cases*, despite its erudition, will likely remain in-house.

The reason is obvious. The study of Hebrew law allows at least some room for a range of approaches, from the “conservative” to the “liberal.” Scholars might argue over when to date the Mosaic laws, but no one doubts that they are genuinely ancient. Not so with Book of Mormon law. Welch affirms his belief that “Lehi, Nephi, Benjamin, and Alma were real people who lived in a real world.” This conviction, he insists, is strengthened when one sees how Book of Mormon legal history fits “understandably into an ancient legal setting” (55), thus affirming “the historical core of the records that stand behind Mormon’s abridgement and the English translation of the Book of Mormon” (54). Welch is studying what he considers to be a genuine ancient source, but for non-believers who read his work, this assumption is an impediment that will likely be impossible to overcome. The result is what probably makes *Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon* seem so curious to outsiders: The scholarship is good, but the core methodology—treating the Book of Mormon as an ancient source—will likely be a perceived weakness too huge to ignore.

Skeptical students of the Book of Mormon could reasonably mine the text for evidences of nineteenth-century American law, an approach Welch anticipates and roundly rejects. He notes that certain terms in the Book of Mormon (e.g., *contend* and *robber*) cor-

respond more accurately to their Hebrew uses than any American use (388). Welch insists that Book of Mormon law is demonstrably Hebrew (specifically pre-exilic owing to Lehi's departure from Jerusalem prior to the Babylonian captivity), arguing that a modern author of the Book of Mormon would have needed "a level of comprehension and familiarity with biblical law that exceeded the articulated knowledge of biblical scholars in the nineteenth century, let alone the comprehension of the young Joseph Smith" (55). A critic of the Book of Mormon would probably question the extent to which Welch began with an assumption of historicity and worked backwards from there, but believing Mormon readers will no doubt share Welch's view.

After sketching his personal involvement in Book of Mormon and legal studies ("Foreword and Personal Acknowledgements," xi-xxv), Welch offers an essay on the historiography of ancient law ("Entering the Legal World," 3-18). The dust jacket carries an endorsement of this essay by Raymond Westbrook, professor of Near Eastern studies at Johns Hopkins and one of the foremost scholars of ancient law in America: "I heartily endorse the general comments on the legal approach to ancient scripture." In this chapter, Welch reminds his reader of some of the problems associated with the study of ancient law and, by doing so, demonstrates the kind of careful scholarship already mentioned above.

"Queries and Prospects" (19-56) sets out the aims of the study and some of the specific problems offered by the Book of Mormon; "The Ideal of Righteous Judgment" (57-76) discusses what Welch believes to have been the "ultimate values" (57) of Nephite civilization; "Judicial Procedures in Biblical Times" (77-103) serves as a theoretical introduction to the specific cases that follow.

As the Book of Mormon provides no evidence of a Nephite legal code as such (a common lacuna in ancient law), Nephite law must be deduced from the Book of Mormon's seven legal narratives: the case of Sherem, the trial of Abinadi, the trial of Nehor, the trial of Alma and Amulek, the trial of Korihor, the case of Paanchi, and the trial of Seantum. In two separate chapters, Welch compares the Sherem, Nehor, and Korihor cases (301-9) and discusses Nephite judicial punishments (335-81). Welch makes a brief concluding statement (383-89). Two appendices quote the texts of legal proceedings in the Old Testament and the

Book of Mormon. He also includes a bibliography and two indices: citation and subject.

The trial of Seantum gives the flavor of *Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon*. After a period in the ministry, Nephi, son of Helaman, returns to Zarahemla and finds the city afflicted by corrupt practices. The citizens' sins are given in a "bill of particulars" (Welch's legal description of Helaman 7:4–5) which Welch compares to the apodictic commandments in Exodus 22–23. Nephi warns that if the people will not repent, they will "become meat for dogs and wild beasts" (v. 19), an allusion to a similar curse in Jeremiah 26:23. The judges are furious with Nephi and encourage the people to bring an action against him (Hel. 8:1); they themselves lack that authority. Nephi and his supporters prevail, he prophesies the murder of the chief judge, the murder is confirmed, and the suspects are brought to trial. Without the two witnesses required by Deuteronomy 17:6, each suspect would be required to swear an oath of innocence, which is exactly what Helaman 9:15 describes. Nephi is then urged to confess to the "fault" (not a "crime" in a Hebrew context) of being a "confederate" to murder (Hel. 9:20). Instead, Nephi names the murderer, Seantum, by revelation (vv. 34–36), a method of conviction permitted under Hebrew law (e.g., Achan in Joshua 7). Seantum confesses and is executed, the legality of which is further discussed by Welch.

In reading *Legal Cases*, I paid particular attention to Welch's use of sources from my own area of expertise, viz., legal texts from ancient Mesopotamia. In all cases, Welch draws on current scholarship and ably deals with the cuneiform sources, although one might have hoped for greater justification of how third millennium B.C. Sumerian laws can illuminate both Israelite and Book of Mormon law, beyond the brief discussion on pp. 30–31. He is right to stress the "fair degree of consistency among the ancient Near Eastern laws" (30), but his own warning is important: The "further one moves in either direction from 600 BC, however, the less probative the earlier or later materials become for Book of Mormon purposes" (30). A real sense of the varied weight Welch puts on the disparate chronological sources of ancient Near Eastern law vis-à-vis the Nephite system is not always acknowledged in the text.

One other meta-criticism: in discussing the trial of Abinadi, Welch interrogates the authorship of Mosiah 11–17. A critical view of the text offers the reader a fairly complicated source history: Abinadi's own spoken words are interwoven with an account of the trial written by Alma the Elder (Mosiah 17:4) who himself did not apparently witness the entire case first-hand and so would have relied on other sources. Someone then composed the book of Mosiah which was then abridged, centuries later, by Mormon. Welch offers here a cautionary view of the accuracy of the text; but even if we assume an ancient origin, he seems to underplay the final layer—namely, that the record was then transmitted to Joseph Smith to be rendered into English. Further discussion of these source layers—particularly in light of such views as Ostler's "expansion theory"¹—would be useful, perhaps vital in appraising the accuracy of this legal information as it has arrived in our hands. Based on the findings of the Book of Mormon Critical Text Project at BYU, Welch expresses confidence that the English represents a "precise translation" (51), but I am not sure the case has closed as he suggests.

Overall, *Legal Cases* is an excellent book in the Nibley tradition. Indeed, we might call Welch one of the founders of "neo-Nibleyism" in Mormonism: exhaustive, faithful scholarship, lacking Hugh's acerbic and witty style, but with more care for methodology. (One feels that if Nibley were writing such a work, he would not have confined his comparisons to biblical and Near Eastern law.) If non-Mormon readers can set aside their skepticism (doubtful, I fear), they will see a demonstration of the kind of erudition that can be brought to bear on the Book of Mormon, for which Mormon scholars such as Terryl Givens have been clamoring.² For believers, Welch has provided a rich, sophisticated study of a sacred text which rewards careful and patient reading. I hope *Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon* will serve more than just an apologetic purpose. It can, of course, be used to further the cause of Book of Mormon historicity, but if it is to offer any form of religious value, perhaps Welch's own words on the last page (389) should carry some weight: "Rules for judging righteously are legally exemplified in the Bible and the Book of Mormon. These books extend to the world vivid and poignant invitations to 'judge righteously between every man and his brother, and the stranger

that is with him' (Deuteronomy 1:16); to be 'merciful into your brethren'; and to 'deal justly, judge righteously, and do good continually' (Alma 41:14)" (389).

Notes

1. According to Blake Ostler's "expansion theory," Joseph Smith began with an authentic ancient source but made certain modern elaborations and expansions. Ostler thus proposes a mode of translation that represented "creative co-participation" between Joseph and divine revelation. Blake T. Ostler, "The Book of Mormon as a Modern Expansion of an Ancient Source," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 20, no. 1 (Spring 1987): 109. Similarly, noted non-Mormon biblical scholar James Charlesworth reminded students of the Book of Mormon that, even if the core text is authentic, it was redacted at least twice from the time of its primary material, once by Mormon and then later by Joseph Smith. James Charlesworth, "Messianism in the Pseudepigrapha and the Book of Mormon," in *Reflections on Mormonism: Judaean-Christian Parallels*, edited by Truman G. Madsen (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1978), 125. Consider the influence of other writers and redactors, both named and unnamed, and one might perhaps have less confidence in the reliability of the English text of the Book of Mormon as a source for ancient history, language, or law. As noted above, however, Welch largely rejects this concern.

2. See, for example, Terryl L. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture That Launched a World Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 6.

Between Silver Linings and Clouds

Abel Keogh. *Room for Two*. Springville, Utah: Cedar Fort, 2008. 215 pp. Paper: \$14.99; ISBN 978-1-59955-062-6

Reviewed by Laura Hilton Craner

Why is it that so many Mormon books seem to focus on the silver lining and ignore the cloud? Mormon books—especially memoirs and biographies—would benefit from a little more time in the rumblings of the rain cloud. So many stories, characters, and ideas are shortchanged because writers or publishers, who often claim that they are simply giving the market what they want, are too quick to jump to the happy ending. Considering the narrative

price that is exacted, it's surprising that so many readers, writers, and publishers are so intent on playing Pollyanna.

Abel Keogh's memoir, *Room for Two*, which tells the story of how the author found love again after the suicide of his first wife, who was seven months pregnant with their first child, is a good example of the silver-lining dilemma. The first sentence grabs the reader by the heartstrings. "I don't remember the last thing I said to Krista that Saturday afternoon, but I know it was not, 'I love you'" (1). The narrative moves swiftly through Krista's tragic suicide. The sound of the gunshot, the smell of the gun smoke, the sight and the "sound of the blood hitting the boxes" behind her (2), the blur of police officers and EMTs, the confusion of talking with a detective, the delivery of his premature baby, whom Keogh names Hope, and the child's death, barrage the reader with their visceral detail.

As the back jacket points out, "This is Abel's story in his own words." This is the true story, the real thing. It is powerful. The lifeless blue eyes staring up from a pool of blood and a dead infant laid out in an impossibly small casket are not merely symbols or conventions of a postmodern tale. Reading about Krista's death and Hope's abbreviated life is a frighteningly soulful task that strikes at the atoning heart of LDS doctrine. They are real people, and their deaths are more than just physical losses. They represent spiritual losses and the implications of that spiritual pain are searing.

Room for Two is an important mark on the spectrum of LDS literature. Keogh makes a brave and laudable choice in telling his story. He risks a lot by associating himself with a troubled marriage and admitting the possibility that his actions played a role in his wife's suicide. The details he chooses to share do not always put him in a positive light, which suggests that he is more interested in imparting truth than making himself look good. The fact that his memoir was published by a Mormon publisher is also momentous. The subject of suicide within the context of eternal marriage is one that has probably never been broached in memoir. Cedar Fort made a brave choice in publishing a story that was not necessarily appealing to the Mormon audience.

But in some ways the book shies away from the very difficulties it raises. The memoir begins like a true crime story but quickly devolves into something more like a romance novel. It moves from the

dark cloud of his wife's suicide to the silver lining of a new, more functional marriage too briskly. The story refuses to explore the unavoidable pain of Krista's death. There is no discussion of her funeral or the mental illness that probably caused her death—and throughout the book, Keogh is never comfortable calling Krista mentally ill. When looking at a picture of Krista shortly before her death, he says, "I see a woman who's tired of life. She's sad in a way I don't think any of us can understand. But I don't see the ravages of schizophrenia or any other mental illness" (57). In an email exchange with me, Keogh said that he omitted a fuller discussion in an earlier draft about Krista's depression because it "slowed down the pace of the story and detracted from the story I was trying to tell—one of putting a shattered life back together. I have no regrets about cutting that material."

As another example, Keogh admits that he received but ignored three promptings before Krista's suicide: to remove the gun, to return to the apartment before Krista, and to enter the apartment quietly (61–62). Instead, he moves on with the description of how he forgave himself. About nine months after Krista's death, Keogh, at his girlfriend's urging, chooses to visit Krista's grave and says, "I still felt guilty about my inaction and wondered how different life would have been had I only listened to those quiet warnings when I had the chance. I needed a way to share my feelings with Krista and know that she had forgiven me. . . . Somehow I would have to find a way to do it without an apology. . . . I bowed my head and told Krista about the mistakes I had made the day she died" (182–83). Keogh obviously struggled with his choices, but the details of those struggles are glossed over

In short, this book was in a hurry to get to the happy ending. The emphasis is not on the process of grief but on the triumph of love and the possibility of finding happiness no matter what happens in this life—an inspirational, important, and frustratingly oversimplified message.

In the last fifteen years, during which the LDS/Mormon market has seen major growth, countless novels have been published and sold with the same implicit message. Many readers and writers lay the blame on Deseret Book's desk but other publishers, like Cedar Fort, fall prey to the same problem. No matter what

happens in life, if a character is righteous enough he or she will get a happy ending and will *be* happy—both now and forever.

This message is understandable, considering that happiness is an important LDS doctrine. Mormon readers grow up on “wickedness never was happiness” (Alma 41:2); the eternal fruit of Nephi’s tree that is “desirable to make one happy” (1 Ne. 8:10); and Lehi’s epigram: “Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy” (2 Ne. 2:25). The entire plan of salvation—the plan of happiness—was put in place so that the sons and daughters of God could be happy. It is tempting to think that, if happiness is the purpose of life, it should be the purpose of our literature.

Unfortunately, happiness is seldom as simple in real life as it is in popular literature. For while it is clear what happiness isn’t (wickedness and worldliness) and it is clear what happiness is (righteousness and godliness), it is not clear how we spiritual beings having our human experiences are to exist in both spheres at once. After all, the plan of happiness itself is not simple. It is built on obstacles. “For it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things. If not so . . . righteousness could not be brought to pass, neither wickedness, [neither] happiness nor misery, neither sense nor insensibility” (2 Ne. 2:11). Happiness is something to work toward, not something to stumble upon. And sometimes, perhaps for people like Krista, no matter how hard she works, happiness remains elusive until it is awarded in the next life.

The works that endure in Mormon literature thrive on the tension between what brings happiness now and what will bring happiness in the eternities. Book of Mormon stories like that of Alma the Younger or the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi; hymns like “A Poor Wayfaring Man of Grief” and “If You Could Hie to Kolob” (*Hymns*, 29, 284); and classic Mormon novels like Virginia Sorensen’s *A Little Lower than the Angels* (1942; rpt., Salt Lake City Signature Books, 1997) employ different literary techniques and call on different genres, but each one derives its narrative tension from the existential opposition of joy and pain that propels Latter-day Saints forward and holds them back.

Keogh’s story wavers between telling the truth about his pain and making his story palatable to an audience hyper-focused on happiness. The book ends on the one-year anniversary of Krista’s death. Keogh and his soon-to-be fiancée, Julianna, decided to stay

at Keogh's home, instead of spending the day with his family. When Julianna questions this decision, Keogh replies, "The month after Krista died, I had a lot of support from friends and family . . . but they haven't made the same progress I have. . . . I feel that being with them would take me back instead of forward" (211). As the hour nears when Keogh heard the fatal gunshot, his memories overcome him and he weeps. Then he and Julianna visit the cemetery, after which Keogh reflects, "Krista and Hope would always be a part of me. Memories of them would forever linger somewhere in the back of my mind. But if I wanted this relationship with Julianna to work, I needed to look forward to the future without regrets or memories of the past holding me back. All of my energy needed to be directed toward making a new life and new memories with Julianna" (214).

While recognizing the power of the clouds in his past for himself and other widowers like him, Keogh also knows the necessity of the silver lining—both for his second wife and for his book. He focuses on maximizing it. When I questioned Keogh about the silver lining dilemma, he expressed surprise that "you thought I should focus on the storm clouds more. The feedback I generally receive from LDS readers is that the book was too dark, heavy, and depressing for them. Non-LDS readers generally feel the book strikes a good balance." Keogh's audience wants a story of hope and happiness, and that want supersedes the importance of Krista's story, one that has never been told and, if publishers continue on their current path, never will be. Her story is too sad.

That is why the silver lining dilemma matters. Stories—powerful stories—are being lost and forgotten. Mormon culture and Mormon letters are being narrowed. When a publisher decides that something is "too hard" to be worth reading or when a writer decides that a story is "too sad" to be written—especially when that story is a true story—it implicitly limits the Mormon experience. Shying away from some of the sad truths that surround Mormon publishers, writers, and readers implies that it is not okay to be sad, that it is not okay to struggle, that sadness and struggle are inherently un-Mormon.

But it is through the struggle that progress is made. It is a well-known tenet of LDS doctrine that suffering and struggling

can be instructive, but only if the process is attended to. Elder Neal A. Maxwell said, "The sharp, side-by-side contrast of the sweet and the bitter is essential until the very end of this brief, mortal experience. Anne Morrow Lindbergh wisely cautioned: 'I do not believe that sheer suffering teaches. If suffering alone taught, all the world would be wise, since everyone suffers. To suffering must be added mourning, understanding, patience, love, openness, and the willingness to remain vulnerable.' Certain forms of suffering, endured well, can actually be ennobling."¹ It is the process of grief and the partnership with Jesus Christ that suffering engenders that teach eternal truths. Without the process, those priceless truths become cheap truisms.

It is interesting that Keogh's book contains no "come unto Christ" moments. The book contains no narrative of any struggle Keogh may have had with anger at God. He works through anger at Krista but not at the being who created her—faults and all. Keogh said this was an intentional choice because of his large non-LDS radio audience: "I didn't think I could get my message of rebuilding a life and moving forward across if I continually brought up a lot of LDS doctrines and beliefs." He also told me, "As far as reconciling everything with God—I don't know if I really ever did. My conclusion at the end of the book was that there are some things that happen to us that we'll never have the answer to in this life. However, a lack of answers as to why bad things happen is NO excuse to wallow in sadness and self-pity. We still have an obligation to ourselves and our family to move forward." There is little talk of testimony or how Keogh's experiences brought him closer to Christ. Keogh relates an emotional story but doesn't necessarily relate a spiritual one, making the book feel incomplete in light of the eternal ramifications of Krista's death.

Mormon stories at their hearts are not about romance or murder or history or any other plot device. At their hearts, Mormon stories are about LDS doctrine. They are about how what is learned on Sundays interacts with what happens in real life; about how the promises of the eternal conflict with the realities of the temporal; about how happiness in this life relates to happiness in the next and how Christ makes the leap possible. To be powerful, our stories must encompass our doctrine. There can be no eternal

happiness without the struggle for salvation; there can be no silver linings without the clouds.

Note

1. Neal A. Maxwell, "Enduring Well," *Liahona*, April 1999, 10, quoting Anne Morrow Lindbergh, in "Lindbergh Nightmare," *Time*, February 5, 1973, 35.

Time Tabled by Mormon History

Christopher Kimball Bigelow. *The Timeline History of Mormonism from Premortality to the Present*. San Diego, Calif.: Thunder Bay Press, 2008. 64 pp. Cloth: \$19.95; ISBN: 978-1-59223-962-7

Reviewed by Karen D. Austin

Christopher Kimball Bigelow's *The Timeline History of Mormonism: From Premortality to the Present* has the appearance of a coffee table book: It's too large to fit in a standard bookcase, it's brimming with eye-catching visuals, and it has multiple points of entry for dinner guests who find a few minutes to skim through its pages. However, its contents really lend themselves most readily to the classroom. Upon closer inspection, it's a reference book that had to adopt an oversize format with fold-out pages in order to convey a vast amount of information in an accessible manner. However, much of the material is presented well below a 10-point font, so I suggest keeping your eyeglass prescriptions current if you are going to pick up a copy. Because *The Timeline History of Mormonism* is so information rich, it would be best employed by those who want to learn more about the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I can imagine a variety of readers, ranging from seminary students to investigators to those curious about how a small American church has transformed itself into an international religion of 13 million members in less than two centuries.

Bigelow's title implies that the book is primarily a timeline. The first third of the book lives up to the title by presenting a list of events in three "streams" of information with world events listed on the top stream, events from the Book of Mormon in the middle

stream, and events from the Old and then New Testament on the bottom stream. Several pages of the timeline fold out to reveal maps or portraits pertinent to that era. I thought perhaps the timeline would continue by cross-listing events to specific sections of the Doctrine and Covenants. However, that nineteenth-century scriptural text does not serve as an anchor in the same way the Bible and Book of Mormon served in the earlier pages of the timeline. Instead, events from LDS Church history are presented without Doctrine and Covenants references, probably because Church events are listed into the twentieth century, well beyond D&C time (with the exception of one section and one official declaration).

After the timeline concludes, the book's next two thirds contain entries that parallel material found in encyclopedias or almanacs: doctrine, Church leaders, Church growth, and notable LDS personalities in politics, science, business, sports, and entertainment. These lists are in no way exhaustive, but they show readers that Mormons are achievement oriented and have become more a part of the mainstream, in contrast to, for instance, the 1838 Haun's Mill Massacre in Missouri or B. H. Roberts's being denied his seat in the House of Representatives in Washington, D.C., after his 1898 election. The book also points readers to additional sources of information: publications, websites, museums, pageants, and historical sites.

The thousands of disparate facts presented in this book are interesting. However, their organization and presentation interest me more because they make an indirect argument about the relationship between the Mormon faith and the history of the world. The view of time presented in this book subsumes all time—past, present, and future—into the LDS narrative. New students of the Mormon faith might expect to find Joseph Smith's birthday listed as the first event in the Church's history. Not so. The timeline reaches back to Adam and Eve. In a later section on key LDS doctrines, time actually starts with premortal events that determined the relationship among the Godhead and the human race. After Joseph Smith and the restoration of the primitive church, the timeline narrows to focus on events within the Mormon Church's development and expansion.

The events read more like a funnel that is very expansive in list-

ing events in the past but which narrows with Joseph Smith's appearance and, from that point on, presents only those events that can be funneled into the Mormon experience. World events before Joseph Smith contain a number of references to world religions, especially to Christianity (for example, various Bible translations, the Reformation, etc.). However, after Joseph Smith and the organization of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, no other religious events appear on the world timeline, not even Vatican II in the 1960s. The only possible exception might be: "The nation of Israel is founded [1948] as the world's only Jewish state," which can be viewed as a fulfillment of prophecy and hence as an aspect of LDS doctrine (21). Many world events listed on the timeline for the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are related to innovations in science and technology, particularly those technologies—such as the development of the telephone, the computer, and the internet—that have assisted the LDS Church in its expansion. So while events in the history of other world religions disappear in Bigelow's rendering of the last two centuries, the book emphasizes the LDS Church's association with these scientific and technological icons of human progress.

The book concludes with a fold-out family tree that allows the reader to record six generations of family history. I see this chart as an invitation for the readers to become part of the all-encompassing history presented on the timelines, charts, maps, and summaries of doctrine. Not only does the influence of the LDS Church reach far into the past and far into the future, it reaches as far as 13 million people worldwide and as near as the individual holding this book in his or her hands.

The Long-Distance Mormon

R. A. Christmas. *The Kingdom of God or Nothing!* Durham, N.C.: Lula Press, 2008. 60 pp. \$11.00

Reviewed by Paul Swenson

With his poem, "The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Mormon," R. A. (Robert Allen) Christmas, among the most flickeringly idio-

syncretic lights in the Mormon literary cosmos, may have (purposely or unconsciously) described himself as a living exemplar of the poem's evocative title. The poem's protagonist, however, is a high priests' quorum instructor named Melvin, who was married for fifty years to a Mormon woman before he joined the Church and took his wife to the temple—but only after realizing he was too old to continue playing tennis on Sunday.

Christmas, converted to Mormonism in 1957 by his high school sweetheart, has since set his work apart as an exotic growth—less lush than pointed and prickly, less lyrical than prosaic. In such anthologies as *Greening Wheat*, *Harvest*, and *Tending the Garden*,¹ he distinguishes himself as a tough, resilient vine that wraps its tendrils around our shared cultural eccentricities and won't let go. In contrast to the more aesthetically pleasing, but sometimes less adventurous growths in the garden, Christmas's poems insinuate themselves with frankness and a satiric, serpentine humor.

In "Loneliness of the Long-Distance Mormon," Melvin's priesthood lesson on eternal marriage provokes meditation by a thrice-temple-married quorum member who "can't imagine his wives / (past or present) expressing / a Melvin-like satisfaction / with him—or he with them / so he says nothing (as usual) / during the discussion. / It bears scant resemblance to the life he's led. / Tennis on Sunday mornings. / Doubles say, with some friends. From where he sits (left, rear) / it doesn't sound half bad" (32)

The Kingdom of God or Nothing! reveals the poet's fascination with (even pride in) the peculiarities of a peculiar people. He identifies with the naiveté of a long-time temple goer in "Temple Film Ruminations," who "thought he was hip, but it was / years before he realized all those / shoulder-high hedges and holding / of lambs and flowers against / chests were meant to indicate / that Adam and Eve were naked" (14).

Someone unfamiliar with Mormon culture might find this scene amusing (if not totally comprehensible), while other references might provoke, puzzle, or absorb the outsider, including such titles as "Savior on Mt. Disneyland," "The Matriarchal Grip," and "Beard Card." Thematically, Christmas is nothing if not eclectic, writing breezily yet probingly about polygamy, polyandry,

high school football, strategies for staying in the LDS Church, and the tendency of Latter-day Saints to claim a patent on the family.

Capable of an innocent yet brazen wit, Christmas can catch you off guard. Consider the delicious metaphor of “Soft Taco.” The poem’s first stanza reads:

It’s a lousy Latinate euphemism
that sounds like something wrong with
a snake—or like a defect in a kid’s
construction set. Erectile—you gotta be
kidding!—is politically comic—but
not when it’s your serpent, or your
tower that’s always collapsing. (34)

The cover of *The Kingdom of God or Nothing!* is a photograph from the 1880s of Mormon polygamists, including Apostle George Q. Cannon, wearing the traditional striped garb of prisoners while incarcerated at the Utah Territorial Penitentiary, then located in Salt Lake City’s Sugarhouse neighborhood. The phrase itself, of course, comes from Church President John Taylor’s self-proclaimed motto.²

A curious aspect of the book is that Christmas devotes more than 5,000 words of the slim volume’s sixty pages to prose—a faux history of LDS polygamy, attributed to a fictional Associated Press reporter named Scott Holiday. The story reports the U.S. government’s return in 2025 of the Salt Lake Temple (plus temples in Logan, Manti, and St. George) to the LDS Church after 125 years in federal control. Christmas wants us to meditate on how the Mormon story might have taken an entirely different twist had the federal government decided to pursue violations of the Edmunds-Tucker Act (1887) when it discovered that polygamous temple unions were performed after the Church’s 1890 Manifesto had purportedly ended the practice of plural marriage. In this counter-history, most Mormons made another great migration in 1900 to settle in Mexico, where the Church became headquartered. How willingly, he appears to be asking, would we and our ancestors have given up everything one more time?

Having stuck in there himself as an active Mormon for more than half a century (including two full-time missions with his

wife), Christmas feels comfortable enough to ponder in print the mysteries of sacred underwear, wondering

to what General Authority or
Authority's wife), did he owe thanks
for his two-piece garments?"
The old "one-piecers" had beaten a
retreat from wrist to upper-arm, and from
ankle to knee—but now, here came

this slice—across the middle.
God was behind it—but why? All he
knew was his wife loved them.

He remembered shopping for garments
in 1964 in Pocatello, Idaho,
when you could buy them at Penney's.

In one of the aisles a portable hi-fi
was playing The Beatles first album: "Roll-
over, Beethoven"—stuff like that.

It was the first time he'd heard them,
and he was enchanted. He prolonged his
purchase, because there was something

in the air. (It was radical change;
but he didn't see it coming, and had
no inkling it would go so far.) (7)

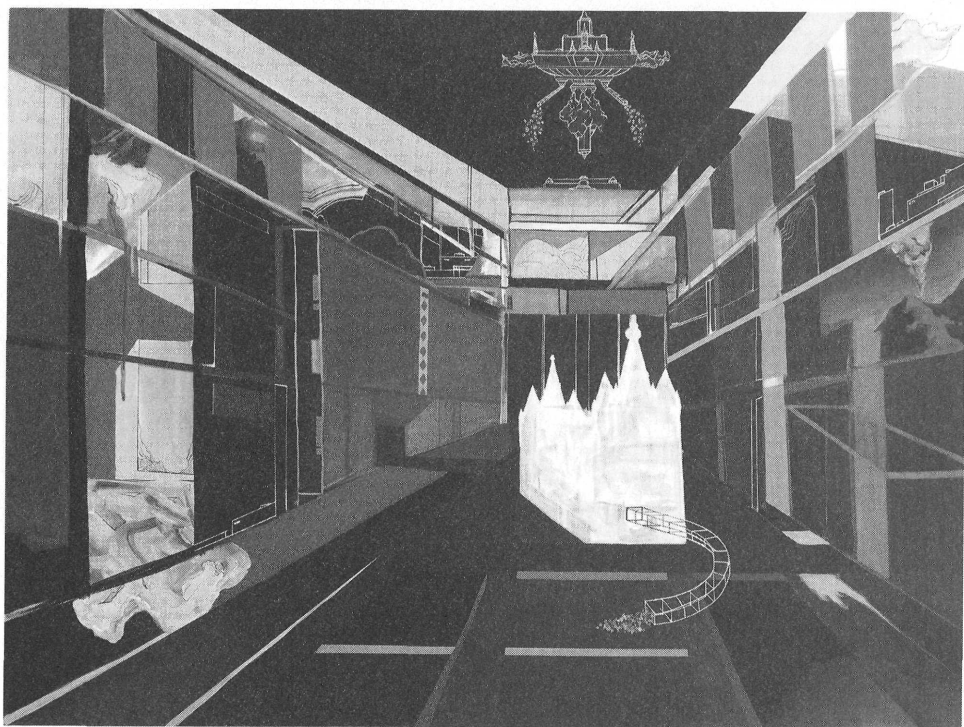
Some readers may judge R. A. Christmas for his seeming irreverence; others will bless this book for its invitation to take a good, long look in the mirror and laugh.

Notes

1. Levi S. Peterson, ed., *Greening Wheat* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1983); Eugene England and Dennis Clark, eds., *Harvest* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989); Eugene England and Lavina Fielding

Anderson, eds., *Tending the Garden: Essays on Mormon Literature* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996).

2. This motto inspired the title of his biography by grandson Samuel W. Taylor: *The Kingdom or Nothing: The Life of John Taylor, Militant Mormon* (New York: Macmillan, 1976; rpt. as *The Last Pioneer: John Taylor, a Mormon Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998).



Ricky Allman, *The Nerve Center*,
acrylic, ink on panel, 36"x 48",
2006.

Thanksgiving Turkeys, Paradox, and Godhood

Laura Summerhays

Note: This sermon was delivered in the Inwood Third Ward of the New York New York Stake on November 26, 2006.

On Thursday, I hosted my first Thanksgiving dinner. My brother, my sister-in-law, and my four nephews—ages twelve, nine, seven, and twenty-two months—squeezed into the little studio that I share with two cats; and we sat around my table and ate some traditional holiday fare. I had made most of the meal, but my sister-in-law brought the turkey to cook at my apartment. My brother and sister-in-law are a bit chaotic. Because I know this about them and know how much chaos is compounded when four children are involved, I knew not to believe my sister-in-law when she told me that they would arrive at my apartment at 6:00 or 7:00 A.M. to start cooking the turkey. I just went on with my cooking and finished everything I was making before they arrived about four hours late. Since they were expected at a friend's cabin that night, we had to flash-cook the turkey so they could eat dinner and leave before it got too late.

I have never cooked a turkey before, so I don't know much about it. I just know that we cooked this turkey in less than an hour and a half when you normally cook turkeys for about three hours. We cranked up the temperature and hoped for the best. What resulted was definitely moist and tasty, but I could not bring myself to eat more than one piece of it because it was rather pink. But I did eat that one piece and didn't say a word to my sister-in-law about how I thought it was a bit underdone. Everyone else seemed to like it, so I let it go.

My nephews did not share my diplomatic, tolerant disposition

that day. Though I believe they ate at least some turkey, they shunned my mashed potatoes, turned up their noses at my stuffing, and made retching sounds at my green beans. Because I love my nephews, I was not as appalled as an outsider might have been, but the kids were truly being horrid. Not only were they very rude about the food, they also made unappetizing jokes at various times throughout the day, broke my slinky, and lost my remote control (though that may have been my brother).

I kept my cool all day; but after they left, I called my sister in Utah and realized how annoyed I had been as I complained and complained and complained about how ill-behaved the kids were and how I could not believe our sister-in-law had not left me the brie and crackers, though it is true I should not have such temptations in my house anyway. I felt a little better after I talked to my sister, but then I felt worse because I hadn't mentioned how my sister-in-law had done most of the dishes and how my brother had brought me a beautiful autumnal centerpiece and a Christmas wreath. I also hadn't mentioned how cute their two-year-old was as he walked around calling for my cats, who wisely stayed in hiding all day. I had been too concerned with how many improprieties had been perpetrated against me. So I felt I was justly punished later that night when I spilled hot turkey stock on my thigh and ended up first with the paramedics at my house and later in the emergency room.

Somehow this all fits into the general conference talk by Elder Anthony D. Perkins that I'm supposed to speak about today.¹ Elder Perkins speaks of the dichotomy of children's and adults' experiences with God. He begins his talk: "Children in pure faith proclaim, 'We believe in God, the Eternal Father, and in His Son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost.' But sometimes youth and adults do not feel the power of this simple declaration. Satan is the 'enemy to all righteousness'; thus he plants doubts about the nature of the Godhead and our relationship with Them." Though the remainder of his talk is not exclusively about our skewed ideas about the Godhead or about the opposition between childhood and adulthood, I want to focus on those concepts. Both of these ideas can be explored through the lengthy anecdote I just related. I want to focus mainly on the second point about childhood, but

first I want to make a quick point regarding our ideas about and relations with God.

Though I joke about the turkey stock spilled on my thigh being divine retribution for my attitude toward my family, I know that this belief about my God's relationship with me is no joke. I know that I have long struggled with a belief that God is out to get me, though I suppose I have made some headway in this regard in the last few years. I won't belabor this point, because Elder Perkins does a great job of outlining a lot of what he calls the "snares of false inadequacy, exaggerated imperfection, and needless guilt."²

The second point, to which I will devote most of the rest of my talk, is the notion of becoming childlike. Gospel discourse often refers to the need to become childlike, but it also encourages progression toward godhood. In 3 Nephi 11:38, Christ says "Ye must . . . become as a little child, or ye can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God." This statement seems paradoxical if one considers inheriting a kingdom to be an act involving power that a child would not have. To add to the seeming contradiction, there is Brigham Young's declaration and injunction that "Gods exist, and we had better strive to be prepared to be one with them."³ This statement is thematically linked to the description in Doctrine and Covenants 132:20 about those who enter into the new and everlasting covenant of marriage: "Then shall they be above all, because all things are subject unto them. Then shall they be gods, because they have all power." These three passages appear to be at odds. The first one seems to be suggesting that we should humbly regress to our childhood days, the other two that we should be pressing forward in power to our eventual godhood.

Over the last few years, I have become increasingly interested in paradoxes and contradictions within the gospel. There are many: Don't let your right hand know what your left is doing (Matt. 6:3), but also let your light shine before men (Matt. 5:16). Be still and know that I am God (Ps. 46:10; D&C 101:16), but also work out your salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12; Mormon 9:27). And of course, this idea of becoming childlike but simultaneously becoming Godlike. I am convinced that these paradoxes are in God's communications with us to seduce us into really thinking about and grappling with some of the most impor-

tant things we have to learn in this life. *A Handbook to Literature*, a book I acquired in my days as an English major, says paradox “teases the mind and tests the limits of language; it can be a potent device.”⁴ I fully agree with this statement and believe that God uses this potent device to teach us his most invaluable lessons. These lessons are in the form of paradox, I believe, so that we have to work through them and, through this work, become familiar with the concepts and come to have ownership over them. God knows the syntheses of these paradoxes and wants us to know them, too. In fact, he seems rather eager to share knowledge with those who revere and serve him. He says in Doctrine and Covenants 76:7 that it is these people to whom he will “reveal all mysteries.”

So let’s look at this paradox of childhood and progression toward godhood. This is a very tricky paradox because it is difficult to define what childlike even means. I’m sure we’ve all heard that we need to be childlike, not childish. Usually, this means that we should behave like those nice, subdued children we know rather than the bratty ones.

I think it has to be more than this. The childlike/childish opposition is too easily deconstructed. It focuses on behavior instead of essence; and as we all know and can see by my Thanksgiving example, children are certainly not always well behaved. So what is the essence of childhood? What do children have in common with each other that adults do not have? The only indisputable thing I can think of is that they have lived for fewer years than adults. First, it means that they are less schooled in what is considered appropriate in whatever culture they are being raised in. Also, it means that, because they have had fewer experiences, they cannot make many predictions about what will happen next in their lives. Adults make a lot of predictions and have expectations based on past experience. Because we have seen how the world works, we close off our minds to different options. So I guess what children have that we no longer have is minds that are open to more possibilities. They place fewer limits on their actions and imaginings. Perhaps this is why they behave in ways we might term inappropriate.

In my story, my nephews acted very inappropriately. But they were also just being honest. They did not like the food set before them and didn’t see a reason to grit their teeth and just eat,

whereas I, an adult, have learned this art and therefore ate the pink meat my sister-in-law put on my plate regardless of its potentially bad consequences for my digestive and other systems. Luckily, nothing has happened to me from eating that turkey, but that's not the point. The point is that, in the name of behaving "appropriately," I disregarded my safety. I think this sort of conditioning is a possible explanation for the behavior of those in Nephi's prophecy who, in their carnal security, would say "All is well in Zion" (2 Ne. 28:21) when it was actually the opposite. Perhaps these people just didn't want to ruffle any feathers, step on any toes, rock any boats, or steady any arks. They did not want to be inappropriate.

I think God the Father Himself fits into descriptions we may use for children: expansive, imaginative, and possibly inappropriate. God transcends limits that we place on ourselves and on Him, be they logical limits or cultural limits. I remember once I was having a very hard time accepting the Atonement because I thought it was vastly unfair. Why should Christ have to suffer for something that I did? It seemed completely irresponsible for me to "cast [my] burden on the Lord" (Ps. 55:22). I guess I felt this way because I had lived in the world long enough to believe that you have to deal with the consequences of your actions. I was not willing to accept that, given my repentance, I really did not have to feel the full brunt of my actions' consequences because Christ was going to take that suffering from me. This picture did not match my expectations and "knowledge" of how the world works. In most earthly situations, casting responsibility for one's actions onto someone else is definitely inappropriate and even ghastly. But God is not beholden to the way the world works. (Remember he says in Isaiah 55:8 that "my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways.") In that instant, that moment when we give our sins to Christ, we must embrace impropriety; by earthly standards, the Atonement is inappropriate.

Yesterday I was dismayed that I had to give this talk today. I felt utterly not up to it. I suppose it was because I have been feeling so strange about my relationship with God and Christ lately, and I was afraid I would get up and say something inappropriate. And maybe I have. But I think it's good to move beyond caring about that so much. If I'm afraid of talking about inadequacies and

struggles because it may seem inappropriate in a setting that really ought to be exactly where we *do* talk about inadequacies and struggles, there is something wrong. Could it be that if more of us were willing to buck propriety and tradition we would be further along in becoming childlike and even godlike? I have reason to believe so.

We find our example, our proof, in Christ: he is the perfect melding of child and God. He is the synthesis of all paradox. Like a child and like an incipient God, He behaved inappropriately for the culture in which he was raised: He said he was God's Son, He did things you weren't "supposed" to do on the Sabbath, and He spent time with those people despised in His society. For these and many other things, He is now revered, because we can see that these acts showed what is appropriate in the heavenly culture for which we were made. Like a child and like a God, He had an expansive, accepting mind. He saw how God's plan would work because He didn't allow His earthly experiences to cloud His eternal imagination and faith.

What if we follow Christ in this transcendence of earthly boundaries? What if we work to understand how to combine the childhood we have experienced with the godhood we perhaps hesitantly allow ourselves to think about? I believe we will find freedom, knowledge, creativity, and charity we can scarcely imagine in our tradition-bound minds.

Notes

1. Anthony D. Perkins, "The Great and Wonderful Love," <http://lds.org/conference/talk/display/0,5232,23-1-646-28,00.html> (accessed November 25, 2006).

2. Ibid.

3. John A. Widtsoe, ed., *Discourses of Brigham Young* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1998), 227.

4. William Harmon and C. Hugh Holman, *A Handbook to Literature*, 7th ed. (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1996), 372.

DAVID SJODAHL KING: A TRIBUTE

On May 5, 2009, David S. King passed away at his home in Kensington, Maryland. He would have been ninety-two in June. David's life was extraordinary because of his exceptional career in public service and his lifelong career in Church service. He was raised in Washington, D.C., where his father, William Henry King, served four terms as U.S. Senator from Utah (1916–40). Both were ardent, lifelong Democrats. David was a 1942 graduate of Georgetown University College of Law. His public service included three terms in the House of Representatives (1958–62, 1964–66), an appointment as Ambassador to the Malagasy Republic (1967–69) and later as an alternate deputy director for the World Bank. His lengthy Church service included a mission to Great Britain (1937–39), service as second assistant general superintendent of the Young Men's Mutual Improvement Association (1949–58), bishop of the Kensington Maryland Ward, Washington D.C. Stake (1970–78), president of the Haiti Port-au-Prince Mission (1986–89), president of the Washington DC Temple (1990–93) and patriarch of the Washington DC Stake from 1994 until his death. Some of his achievements in his chosen fields of public and Church service, along with some of his most dearly held values, are captured in "An Interview with David Sjodahl King" by Val G. Hemming, published in *Dialogue*, 37, no. 4 (Winter 2004): 130–67.

He married Rosalie Lehner on March 10, 1948, and together they raised eight children. King loved politics, gospel study, and good conversation. A fluent French speaker, he enjoyed French culture, cuisine, literature, and politics. Later in life, he taught himself sufficient Greek to study the New Testament in the vernacular. David was a thoughtful scholar of American politics, a love of good books, a wise counselor, and great friend to all who were fortunate enough to know him. He is survived by his wife of sixty-one years and six of his children.

—Val Hemming

CONTRIBUTORS

RANDY ASTLE {randy@randyastle.com} is a New York City-based filmmaker, screenwriter, and author. He received his M.A. from the London Film School and is currently working as a writer on several children's television shows. His website is <http://www.randyastle.com> and he blogs about children's media at <http://balloonred.blogspot.com>.

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LAURA HILTON CRANER {laurahcraner@gmail.com} is a stay-at-home mother and freelance writer. Her current projects include her personal blog, Depressed (But Not Unhappy) Mormon Mommy (www.butnotunhappy.blogspot.com), and a book about Deaf Holocaust survivors. She is also a contributor at *A Motley Vision* (www.motleyvision.org).

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Lake City: *One More River to Cross* (2000), *Bound for Canaan* (2002), and *The Last Mile of the Way* (2003).

DAVID W. GRUA {davidgrua@gmail.com} is a Ph.D. student in American history at Texas Christian University in Fort Worth. He received an M.A. in American history from Brigham Young University in 2008. His publications have appeared in *BYU Studies* and *Mormon Historical Studies*, and he is a regular contributor to *The Juvenile Instructor*, a Mormon history blog, where an earlier version of this review first appeared.

JACK HARRELL teaches English and creative writing at BYU-Idaho in Rexburg, where he lives with his wife, Cindy. His novel *Vernal Promises*, published by Signature Books in 2003, won the Marilyn Brown Novel Award. His short story "Calling and Election" won the 2007 Irreantum Fiction Contest. In 1994 Jack saw Megadeth live. He attended the concert alone.

RONAN JAMES HEAD {ronan.head@gmail.com} teaches religion and philosophy at a private boys school in England. He holds degrees from the University of Birmingham and the University of Oxford and is currently completing a Ph.D. in Near Eastern Studies at the Johns Hopkins University. He writes for the Mormon weblog *By Common Consent* and helps convene the European Mormon Studies Association.

LINDA M. JEFFERIES {lindamjefferies@digis.net} of Lehi, Utah, currently serves as a temple worker in the Mount Timp-anogos Temple and as her ward's Young Women's secretary. She enjoys seventeen grandchildren, yoga, and skiing. Widowed in 2006 by the death of her husband, Robert, she is preparing for publication a collection of her poems, "Beyond Grief Lies Belief."

WILLIAM MORRIS {william@motleyvision.org} lives in Minnesota with his wife Angela and their five-year-old daughter. He works in higher education public relations and is the founder of the Mormon arts and culture group blog *A Motley Vision*. Liner notes for "Gentle Persuasions" can be found at www.motleyvision.org/william.

MARK J. NIELSEN {markn@uidaho.edu} is professor of mathematics and associate dean of the College of Science at the University of Idaho. He serves as bishop of the Moscow University Second Ward but aspires to some day return to his former calling as Primary pianist. He and his wife, Barbara Dunn Nielsen, first met in a BYU Honors Program course taught in part by *Dialogue* founder Eugene England, who will always be a role model to both of them. Their four children (Jonathan Mark, Christopher Joel, Rebekah Marie, and Hannah Elisabeth) range in age from twenty-two to nine.

GREGORY A. PRINCE {gprince@erols.com} is a scientist, co-founder and CEO of Virion Systems, Inc., a biotechnology company, chair of the *Dialogue*'s board of directors, and author with Wm. Robert Wright of *David O. McKay and the Rise of Modern Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2005).

MAURO PROPERZI {mapropi@yahoo.com} is currently completing a doctoral dissertation on "Emotions in LDS Canonical Texts at Durham University (United Kingdom) under the supervision of Professor Douglas Davies. He has taught as adjunct faculty at both Brigham Young University and Utah Valley University, and his main academic interest focuses on the interaction between psychology and religion. A native of Italy, he and his wife, Larissa, have a daughter, Isabella.

THOMAS F. ROGERS taught Russian literature at Brigham Young University and earlier at Howard University and the University of Utah. He has published monographs on the writings of dissident Russian writers during the Soviet era. Cited by Eugene England as "undoubtedly the father of modern Mormon drama," he is the recipient of lifetime achievement and membership awards from the Mormon Arts Festival and the Association for Mormon Letters. He was a missionary in Germany in the 1950s and, with his wife, Merriam, has served missions in Russia and Sweden and taught English at Pekin University in Beijing, China. They have seven children and thirty-seven grandchildren.

LAURA SUMMERHAYS {summerhays.laura@gmail.com} lives

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PAUL SWENSON {paulswenson@comcast.net} is a poet and journalist. His first collection of poems was *Iced at the Ward/Burned at the Stake and Other Poems* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2003). His collection, *In Sleep, and Other Poems*, is forthcoming from Dream Garden Press.

ANITA TANNER {anitataner@earthlink.net} was raised on a Wyoming dairy farm, attended Brigham Young University, raised six children in Utah and Colorado, and lost her husband to cancer. She now lives in Boise, Idaho, where she serves as ward Relief Society president, reads and writes, meditates with her Buddhist friend, and still seeks for the meaning of it all.

MARGARET BLAIR YOUNG {Margaret_Young@byu.edu} is a teacher of creative writing at Brigham Young University and currently specializes in African American history with attention to blacks in the West. She is the author of eight works of fiction, including the *STANDING ON THE PROMISES* trilogy, co-authored with Darius A. Gray and published by Bookcraft in Salt Lake City: *One More River to Cross* (2000), *Bound for Canaan* (2002), and *The Last Mile of the Way* (2003).

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Ricky Allman

Ricky Allman was born in Provo, Utah, and studied art at Utah Valley University, Massachusetts College of Art, Brown University and Rhode Island School of Design. He now teaches painting and drawing at the University of Missouri-Kansas City.

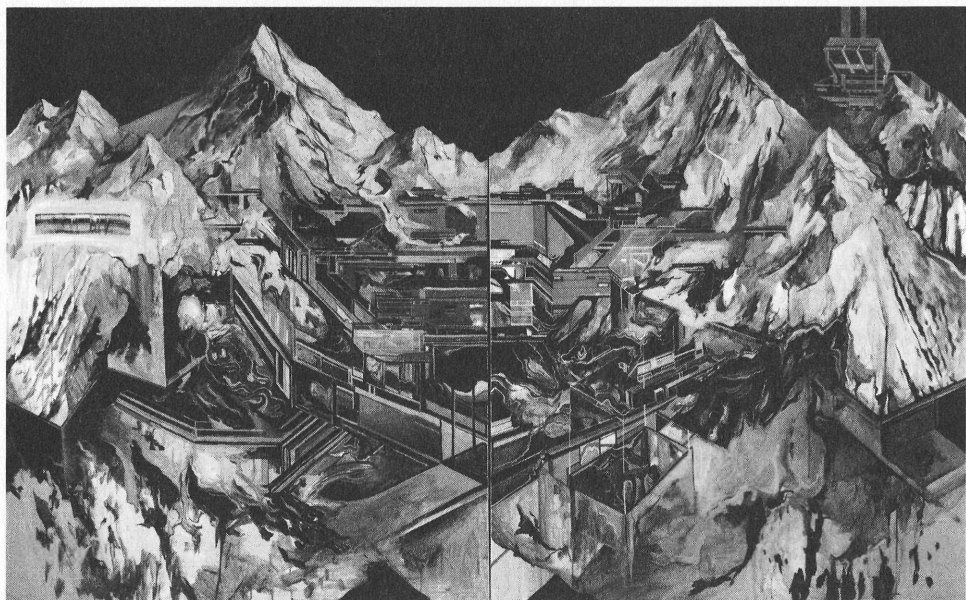
He has written the following statement about his work:

I didn't realize how big an impact Jon Krakauer's *Under the Banner of Heaven* had on me when I read it four years ago. Having been born and raised in Utah, I was curious about extreme Mormon fundamentalists. I didn't realize that Mormon murderers like Dan Lafferty and Ervil Lebaron were so close to me, both doctrinally and socially. I had dated two of Lafferty's nieces and one of Lebaron's nephews was a friend in high school. This realization caused me to question fundamentalist tendencies in myself and consider how extreme my own beliefs were. Having been raised to fear and prepare for the apocalypse, I was intrigued and appalled by these men who were doing everything in their power to fulfill their own prophecies about the end of the world.

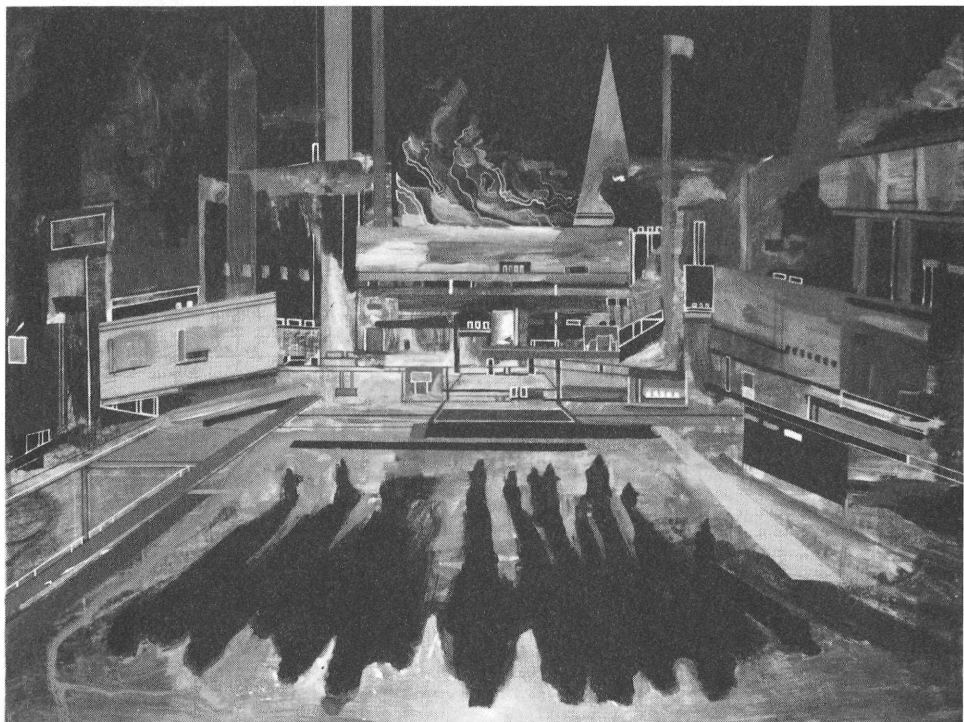
Religious fundamentalism is fascinating to me on many levels. The majority of religious people are fairly moderate in their beliefs. Extremist groups like the Fundamentalist Latter-Day Saints or even the Westboro Baptist Church have the same faith core as millions of Americans but take their logic to a much further and more frightening conclusion. Two people can read the same passage of scripture and come to completely contradictory viewpoints on its interpretation. I felt that the scriptures encouraged a more fundamentalist attitude rather than a more moderate stance. Thankfully the Mormon Church as a whole has become much more moderate than in the days of Brigham Young, but studying the lives of extremists gave me reason and motivation to seek a much more liberal and less literal interpretation of my childhood faith.

In my work I am contrasting opposing elements such as the

natural and the man-made, the organic and the geometric, the sacred and the profane, the ethereal and the material, the colorful and the dull. I enjoy seeing what happens if I can get these elements to work together. I often use the Rocky Mountain landscape of Utah, LDS temples, futuristic, bleak urban-scapes and big, bright colorful bursts of optimism. They begin to inform each other in new and unexpected ways, like people with opposing viewpoints who come to new conclusions. Sometimes it's a disaster. At other times it can be beautiful. My work is a reflection of our world of religious and political extremes and also, on a personal level, the negotiations I've had with my own spirituality and belief system.



Ricky Allman,
*This Is the Best Mine in the World
Because It's Made Out of Paint*,
acrylic, ink on panel, 60"x 96",
diptych,
2006.



Ricky Allman,
We Will Never Feel the Same Again,
acrylic, ink on panel, 12"x 16",
2008.

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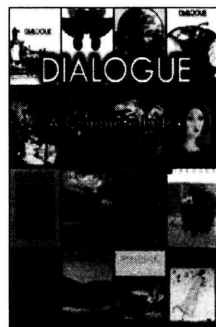
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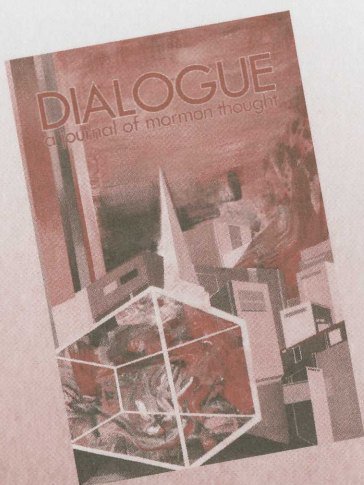
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