

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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Crawling Out of the Primordial Soup: A Step toward the Emergence of an LDS Theology Compatible with Organic Evolution

Steven L. Peck

Wesley J. Wildman, a liberal evangelical Christian, contributed this issue's sermon as part of the ongoing "From the Pulpit" series. Provocatively titled "Narnia's Aslan, Earth's Darwin, and Heaven's God" (see pp. 210–17), it details some of the waste and brutality of natural selection that are inevitable accompaniments of evolution. "Surely such a loving, personal Deity would have created in another way," he queries, "a way that involved less trial and error, fewer false starts, fewer mindless species extinctions, fewer pointless cruelties, and less reliance on predation to sort out the fit from the unfit" (214). In conclusion, he poses the far-from-rhetorical question: "What sort of God could, would, and did create the world through evolution?" (217). He shows that evolution has striking implications for theology—including LDS theology, I would add.

And in fact, what might it mean that God "used" evolution to create life's diversity? Was this a choice for God among other alternatives? Do Wildman's pessimistic conclusions hold for Mormonism? Does evolution imply a noninterventionist Deity? Are there more optimistic views possible, some of which may actually suggest that evolution enhances and expands our view of God? Are adjustments necessary to our key doctrines of the Creation, Fall, and Atonement to accommodate an evolutionary perspective? And why should we make this accommodation? What is lost

and what is gained if our faith community fully and without compromise embraces evolution? There *are* deep and unavoidable theological implications for incorporating into our theology the belief that natural selection structured the way life evolved on our planet.

I would like to sketch some of these implications. By “sketch,” I mean that I intend to rough out some of the potential problems and perplexities that will need to be sorted through in embracing a fully compatible perspective between evolution through natural selection and our faith. In this conspectus, I hope to gesture to possible solutions to the perplexities that merging evolution and theology may bring to LDS thought. There are many sticking points, and I mean only to make a beginning and to seed conversation. I make no claims that the results are either complete or thorough, but I hope that making such a start will be useful.

Another potential difficulty is that some of the proposed solutions to the identified problems cannot be sorted out except through further revelation. Since we Mormons fully believe that further light and knowledge await bestowal, its current incompleteness should neither surprise nor disturb us. Ruminations such as these might serve as a catalyst for the kinds of questions that must be asked before revelation can be given. In scriptural and LDS history, questions are well known to have opened every major revelation from the First Vision to the 1978 revelation on priesthood ordination for worthy black men. Questions such as those orbiting a reconciliation of evolution and our faith are difficult and will sometimes remain without answers, yet that does not mean we should not ask them. Elie Wiesel captures this need nicely in a conversation with a friend:

“Man comes closer to God through the questions he asks Him, he liked to say. Therein lies true dialogue. Man asks and God replies. But we don’t understand His replies. We cannot understand them. Because they dwell in the depths of our souls and remain there until we die. The real answers, Eliezer, you will find only within yourself.”

“And why do you pray, Moishe?” I asked him.

“I pray to the God within me for the strength to ask Him the real questions.”¹

For the purposes of this paper I will assume that evolution through natural selection is a true description of how life arose on this

planet and that life on Earth has emerged through a completely Darwinian process; furthermore, throughout this paper, by “Darwinian,” I mean evolution through natural selection. Much has been written on the nature of the evidence supporting these claims, including the evidence found in the fossil record, comparative anatomy, geological stratigraphic analysis, DNA molecular studies, the physics of radiometric data, etc., and I will not here debate the nature of the evidence nor the conclusions drawn from inferences made from that evidence. Here, I accept them as accurate according to the current understandings in contemporary evolutionary science. The LDS tradition also has a rich history of attempts at legitimizing and reconciling evolutionary science to the faith and tracing views of evolution within Mormonism, historically and contemporaneously.² This project is different in that I assume from the outset that evolution through natural selection has been established as true (and I use that word very deliberately) and that there is a legitimate, faithful response both to doctrine and to our best understanding of how life on Earth unfolds.

Because evolution through natural selection is thought to be a universal principle³ or physical algorithm⁴ let me briefly give the necessary ingredients for its operation and tease apart why natural selection creates tension for LDS theology.

Evolution by natural selection requires three elements: (1) variation in traits, including a source of novel variation; (2) selection on trait differences based on the environment in which relevant entities are embedded, and (3) offspring able to inherit trait differences from their parents. Often a fourth, embedded in the above conditions, is made explicit: (4) time.

If these conditions are in place, natural selection will enhance how well the object fits local environmental circumstances. This adaptation will occur whether those entities are chemicals, organisms, or digital computer programs. Within the philosophy of biology, this phenomenon is referred to as an *a priori* principle, rather than a cause. The task, then, of the empirical scientist is to show that a particular kind of entity is just the sort of thing to which these four principles apply. I will focus on the evolution of organisms on Earth because it is our best and clearest example.

These principles have theological implications. First, note

that this process is competitive. Some of those organisms are selected at the expense of others. There are winners and losers. Second, the variation is random with respect to what will be successful and unsuccessful. The organisms are confronted with both the requirements for survival and the local environment in which they find themselves. These factors create a direction in selection: toward better fit with that environment. Evolution is then determined by which traits succeed in a given local environment and which do not. There is no grand overall direction toward which it moves, no master plan which it fulfills. The evolutionary process is blind variation in traits being chosen at a specific location and time that results in some organisms being more successful than others in the local environment in which they are reproducing.

Third, these competitive bouts are played out in units of energy. Over time, these energy exchanges create a positive feedback loop. The organisms that are able to capture the most energy and employ it for successful survival are most likely to replace other entities in the next generation by entities with traits like their own. Two basic strategies have been especially useful in survival: (1) using chemical changes induced by the energy of sunlight or heat to create energy in more usable forms to maintain the organism's structure and function, and (2) stealing this energy from those who create it or from others who have stolen it. Most plants are good examples of the first strategy; cattle and puma are examples of the second.

Empirical observations on how evolution has played out to date on Earth depict a process that is enormously creative, patulous (spreading widely from a center), complex, and diverse. All of these characteristics increase through time as the history of life on Earth unfolds. This increase, scientists believe, occurs because, as organisms evolve, they tend to transform their environment; these modifications change the selective regime in which organisms are embedded; and these changes cause even more complexity. This pattern of increased environmental complexity is called niche construction in evolutionary biology.⁵ For example, when life forms moved from Earth's early oceans to land, plants opened new niches. These vegetative incursions created new habitats as plants competed for limited resources and diversified over time to capture those limited resources. Next, insects began exploiting these

plants, which further changed the environment, allowing a greater diversification of habitats. Amphibians then exploited both of these new feeding opportunities, followed in turn by reptiles, then birds, and then mammals. Each of these waves of diversity opened new niches and habitats, creating further occasions for exploitation in the competitive interactions of organisms and increasing habitat diversity, organism complexity, and the amount of creativity in the universe.

This narrative is the standard, empirically based, scientific explanation of every example of structured life on Earth. God enters this story (or fails to do so) with no necessary explanatory power. Wildman identifies this tension quite well, because God has long been used as an explanation for otherwise puzzling aspects of life on Earth and its abundant and obviously designed features. For example, Xenophon's Socrates pointed out in the fourth century B.C. that nature's numerous designed aspects suggest a designer: "Again, the incisors of all creatures are adapted for cutting, the molars for receiving food from them and grinding it. And again, the mouth through which the food they want goes in, is set near the eyes and nostrils; but since what goes out is unpleasant, the ducts through which it passes are turned away and removed as far as possible from the organs of sense. With such signs of forethought in these arrangements, can you doubt whether they are the works of chance or design?" Aristodemus, Socrates's interlocutor, answers: "No, of course not. When I regard them in this light they do look very like the handiwork of a wise and loving creator."⁶

The argument that design implies an outside designer runs very deep, from antiquity up into the modern period. William Paley developed its most carefully articulated expression in his *Natural Theology* (1802). In it, he famously argues that, were you to find a watch on the beach, you would never attempt to claim that it had been produced by natural processes. Its very existence implies a watchmaker.⁷ Darwin had read Paley thoroughly and understood that any explanation of the origin of life on Earth must include an explanation of design. Evolution by natural selection does so. Despite unscientific attempts to deny this achievement—for example, by the Discovery Institute's cleverly conceived "intel-

ligent design” movement⁸—most scientists agree that evolution provides a sufficient explanation of design. In fact, the Darwinian conclusion that design is *not* evidence of a designer has been one of evolution’s most threatening aspects.

What are the implications of design-without-a-designer for theology? More specifically, what are its implications for LDS thought and philosophy? To explore this question in detail, I want to draw on distinctions in theological outlooks made by Niels Gregersen, University of Copenhagen professor of theology.⁹ He identifies five theological responses to the idea of “emergence” that serve elegantly to partition the space of responses to evolution. “Emergence” is the idea that properties of a complex system may arise that are unpredictable or unanticipated from a reductive description of lower-level processes. Emergent properties are generally explainable by the lower-level processes but rely on complex, local interactions. A classic example is a snowflake, the existence of which would have been hard to predict just from the properties of freezing water, but which is explicable in terms of those properties.

I find these five responses useful for exploring evolution theologically because, in part, evolution and emergence are twin concepts that play in, about, and through each other in integrated ways and are part and parcel of the complexity that needs a theological response. These responses are equally useful in illuminating aspects of LDS theology.

Gregersen’s Five Theological Responses

The five perspectives or responses are: (1) flat religious naturalism, (2) evolving theistic naturalism, (3) atemporal theism, (4) temporal theism, and (5) eschatological theism. I will consider each perspective in turn; but interestingly, all are possible responses in LDS thought, although admittedly sometimes with a bit of twisting and hammering. Before beginning, however, a couple of clarifications are necessary to draw attention to certain aspects of LDS theology that will need special consideration as we assess the possibility of Darwin-compatible Mormon theism. Moreover, none of these models embraces a “cheap” fundamentalist creationism, by which I mean a view in which creation consists of sudden legerdemain-like wand-waving. All five perspec-

tives try to explain emergence in terms of the full complexity of the evolutionary story as detailed in the observable physical record and currently accepted as standard by scientists.

A difficulty that will make this project of bringing together evolution and LDS theology tough sloggng is that, within LDS thinking, what we mean by a “physical universe” is often muddled. Mormonism displays a kind of expansive physicalism suggesting that the universe *in toto* is a farrago of matter of one kind or another (D&C 131:7), that part of it (“spirit matter”) remains undetectable by our perceptual apparatuses and instrumentation, while we have phenomenological or manipulative access only to the less “fine” or less “pure” part. This materiality includes Gods, spirits, intelligences, etc., and may exist in extra-spatial and/or temporal dimensions but does, presumably, still follow laws of some kind. All matter is subject to God’s manipulation, thanks to His greater knowledge and influence. This theological description imposes a kind of dualism in which some aspects of the universe are available to us and others are not. Lacking reliable epistemic access to the “spirit matter” part of this world, it must remain outside our scientific theories and practices, even though it may play a role in a deeper physical reality.¹⁰

Second, in Mormon thought, God is embodied. It is not completely clear what this means,¹¹ but it implies that at least in some sense God has a biology. What such a biology might entail, however, is quite speculative, but at least two key doctrines are contingent on the concept: (1) the literal physical son-father relationship of Christ to God the Father, and (2) the human capacity for a bodily theosis, which recapitulates God’s developmental process, if not completely in scope, at least in such a way that it can be considered human beings’ movement toward becoming godlike.¹² I am clearly riding roughshod over some controversial ideas about which much ink has been spilled and in which more nuance and refinement could be considered; but among average Church members whom I know, the claim “As man is, God once was. As God is, man may become” would be considered neither surprising nor controversial.

Flat Religious Naturalism

In Gregersen’s partitioning of religious space by emergence,

the first category is flat religious naturalism. In this view, the natural world is all there is—nothing beyond the physical reality accessible to current and future science. This view, though denying anything supernatural, leaves open the possibility that other substances might be discovered. For example, dark matter would be fully acceptable in flat naturalism because it can be inferred through human observation at galactic scales. But the idea that God might use supernatural means or substances (including a soul or Descartes's *res cogitans*) to accomplish His goals or purposes is dismissed.

While this perspective might seem to be the basic grounding of a strict materialism, it still acknowledges the sacred nature of the universe.¹³ An encounter with God is therefore not one of personal relationship, transcendence, or eminence, but rather one of mystery. God in this view just *is* nature and its processes, and the proper response is awe. Nature is, in fact, divine. This view resonates well with certain forms of Buddhism and other forms of nontheistic religion.

While at first glance it seems unlikely that Mormonism could be situated along this axis, Mormonism does in some sense embrace a mystery about fundamental questions that have occupied post-Plotinian western religions. These questions focus on God's nature, attributes, and powers. For example, in this view, the laws that frame and structure the matter from which all things, including God, are constituted, are not created by God, but are self-existent with Him. Matter, intelligence, and the laws that govern their interaction would be self-existent and uncreated—with some resulting confusion in the way Mormons talk about God. For example, some speak as if God created the laws of the universe and buy into anthropic arguments about God's "fine-tuning" the universe as the law-giver, then fall into talking about God using natural, albeit possibly higher, laws to organize the universe from unorganized matter.¹⁴

Theologically, Mormonism offers the following intriguing revelation on matter:

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;

We cannot see it; but when our bodies are purified we shall see that it is all matter. (D&C 131:7–8)

Carrying this statement a little further, matter could be broadly conceived to include God, spirits, and intelligence as part of the “finer” or “purer” matter thought to make up the extended “universe.” In this context, flat religious naturalism might be conceivable in the LDS faith, as it has few answers to questions about why the universe exists as it does and embraces the idea that its constituent substances are eternal. This matter includes the intelligences that eventually became God by taking on His mantle. Therefore, mystery and awe at this scale may be the only appropriate response.

Evolving Theistic Naturalism

Evolving theistic naturalism is the perspective that God has emerged from the natural world and is a quality of nature itself. Nature has moved forward in increasing complexity, and part of this complexity is God. Just as consciousness emerges from neural complexity in materialist explanations of consciousness, God emerges from the complexity of the entire universe. Obviously, in this view God is not prior to the universe, nor does He act as its creator in the traditional sense.

Mormonism does not accommodate this view very well. Seeing God as *just* an emergent property of the natural universe does not seem to fit with LDS theologies of any ilk.

Atemporal Theism

This view is the classic post-Plotinian view of God that includes the divine attributes of omnipresence, omnipotence, and omniscience. According to this view, God exists outside of time, is the rational ground of all being, and has created the universe and its laws, fine-tuning it for human life. Atemporal theism assumes that God is “outside of” time and that, in some sense, the past, present, and future are all “present” before God. An implication of this view is that God cannot be affected by the world and emphasizes His transcendence. This view is compatible both with evolution and with creationism, which posits that the world was created suddenly in all its complexity. This view of God seems to impose a strict determinism on the final teleological goal of the creation (which, again from God’s perspective occurs as a simultaneous “now”). God, in this view, is unchangeable. Human free-

dom may be possible, but such assertions are often incoherent, since God does “know” what you will choose and sees your exact future resulting from those choices.

Mormon belief systems seem varied (or generally confused) on this point. Blake Ostler, in a theological study, makes the point that Joseph Smith’s doctrines, developed in Nauvoo (1839–44), do not allow this view of God, but it is not uncommon to find discourse that assumes this view.¹⁵ For example, Apostle Neal A. Maxwell said:

When the veil which now encloses us is no more, time will also be no more (see D&C 84:100). Even now, time is clearly not our natural dimension. Thus it is that we are never really at home in time. Alternately, we find ourselves impatiently wishing to hasten the passage of time or to hold back the dawn. We can do neither, of course. Whereas the bird is at home in the air, we are clearly not at home in time—because we belong to eternity! Time, as much as any one thing, whispers to us that we are strangers here. If time were natural to us, why is it that we have so many clocks and wear wristwatches?¹⁶

Yet because of the Plotineanization by conservative “Christianizing” influences, Mormonism has maintained a relationship with this view.

Temporal Theism

Taking the form of process theology, the theological possibilities of temporal theism have received a friendly reception among many Mormon thinkers.¹⁷ In this view, God has a core identity that makes him God but influences, and is influenced by, temporal changes. In addition, the future is open. While it may be possible that God understands and can “see” all logical possibilities, those potentialities are realized only in some actual futures. Furthermore, those futures’ realizations depend on the actions of free agents, which may include fundamental particles and their associations.

This viewpoint seems most open to theistic Darwinism by providing an opening for God to be part of the unfolding of the universe. This view continues to be the most promising way to harmonize the two fields and is the perspective largely embraced by Catholic scholars Teilhard de Chardin and John Haught (discussed below).

Eschatological Theism

The last model Gregersen explores is eschatological theism. In this perspective, emergent features in the world do not depend strictly on the past. The future is often determined by contingent events in the present that could have been otherwise had God not intervened. New futures hinge on small events that turn out to be major turning points. (Recall the proverb, “For want of a nail . . . the kingdom was lost”). Eschatological theism denies that future emergent events result exclusively from the operation of natural law; rather, God “pulls” the future into existence through such bifurcation and contingent points in history to achieve the ends that He is interested in bringing about. Thus, He exercises influence on these events. As this argument goes, the future cannot be strictly determined through an analysis of the present state of things, and a future state can be understood only retrospectively by looking into the past. It is eschatological in the sense that God’s purposes and aims can be understood only in retrospect: “The point here,” explains Gregersen, “is that potentialities do not simply reside in the past configurations of matter; they result from interplay between creaturely potencies and the coming into being of the divine possibilities offered to the world. Accordingly, the past and the present must be seen in light of the future, rather than the future being explained out of the past or the present.”¹⁸

This view is strongly interventionist. Contingent events in the past that were brought together were among the possibilities present at the time of the contingent event. This reading of the past, then, looks very similar to declaring that what happened was just God’s will. So in practical terms, it is not clear how this point of view offers any advantage over looking at things from the viewpoint of atemporal theism. In both, God is clearly teleologically drawing things toward a future that He has determined.

However, from the LDS viewpoint that prophecy is an important part of how the world works, eschatological theism may be useful in showing how the specific prophecies found in the scriptures are brought to pass by God’s intent—that they were pulled into the future by divine action.

All five of these viewpoints assume compatibility between theology and evolution. But Gregersen’s perspectives are very

general, and it will be useful to look at some specific responses from philosophers and theologians to problems of teleology and design.

Theological Responses to Evolution

Since the moment Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* appeared in 1859, theologians have responded with attempts at both dismissal and reconciliation.¹⁹ The latter have taken the form of everything from complete acceptance—simple variations on the theme of “That’s just the way God did it!”—to deeper, more nuanced attempts at bringing the two ways of knowing together.

To get a sense of how LDS thinking may respond to the introduction of evolution into its theological concepts, it is useful to look at how other Christian groups have responded to the challenge.²⁰ Most efforts by Catholic and Protestant theologians have focused on three aspects, all of which are also relevant to LDS responses to evolution: (1) teleology and divine purpose, with humans being an important goal toward which the universe is directed, (2) design and its implications about God’s attributes, and (3) the presence of natural evil. All three topics orbit the question of how and to what extent God acts in the world. I discuss the third topic, natural evil, separately from the first two as part of the section titled “Mormon Evolutionary Theology” below.

Teleology and Divine Purpose

One of the most troubling aspects in reconciling Darwinism with the idea of a personal God is its relentless lack of direction—its purposelessness on macroevolutionary scales.²¹ Laypersons often interpret this lack of a “goal” as the claim that evolution is a random process, but that is not quite right. Within a local environment by random variation, inheritable traits (traits that occur through the genetic code) are selected disproportionately in such a way that those traits that provide the organism with some advantage in that environment tend to survive at higher rates. These traits are passed on to the next generation more frequently. So while there is no final goal toward which evolution tends, it *is* driven by selection within local environments. Nonetheless, it is correct to say that, over long time periods, evolution is not aiming at any particular direction or purpose.

One of the first philosophers to explore how certain features found in living organisms could arise evolutionarily without teleology was French philosopher Henri Bergson (1859–1941). He saw evolution moving toward intelligence, instinct, and complexity. Bergson couched this form of evolution in terms of an *élan vital*, a life force that pushed life (and its precursor elements prior to life) forward in time, resulting in differentiation over a span of time in which the past is “gathered into a present.”²² Michael Vaughan, in presenting Bergson’s work, explains this process as “the organized being’s ability to organize the re-emergence of creative change through the structures that it creates.”²³ This force is not seen as something “extra”—such as the vitalism²⁴ that Enlightenment thinkers posited to explain life—but is an inherent property of matter and assemblages of matter. Evolutionary change is seen as inventive and creative. Vaughan adds:

The truth is that adaptation explains the sinuosities of the movement of evolution, but not its general directions, still less the movement itself. The road that leads to the town is obliged to follow the ups and downs of the hills; it adapts itself to the accidents of the ground; but the accidents of the ground are not the cause of the road, nor have they given it its direction. At every moment they furnish it with what is indispensable, namely, the soil on which it lies; but if we consider the whole of the road, instead of each of its parts, the accidents of the ground appear only as impediments or causes of delay, for the road aims simply at the town and would fain be a straight line. Just so as regards the evolution of life and the circumstances through which it passes—with this difference, that evolution does not mark out a solitary route, *that it takes directions without aiming at ends, and that it remains inventive even in its adaptations.*

But, if the evolution of life is something other than a series of adaptations to accidental circumstances, so also it is not the realization of a plan. A plan is given in advance. It is represented, or at least representable, before its realization. The complete execution of it may be put off to a distant future, or even indefinitely; but the idea is none the less formidable at the present time, in terms actually given. If, on the contrary, evolution is a creation unceasingly renewed, it creates, as it goes on, not only the forms of life, but the ideas that will enable the intellect to understand it, the terms which will serve to express it. That is to say that *its future overflows its present, and can not be sketched out therein in an idea.*²⁵

Bergson thus opens the door for a theological response (although

he was not a theist as such) that allows for direction in evolution without teleology, but which nonetheless moves to places of potential theological interest such as intelligence, complexity, and even consciousness.

Design and God's Implied Attributes

One of the first theologians to attempt to address these concerns was Jesuit paleontologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881–1955). His engagement with evolution was personally costly, since his church put considerable institutional pressure on him for his insistence on a theological engagement with evolution. He saw the universe as moving toward greater and greater “seeing” and described humans as the highest expression of this ability. Each human being stands as one who can “see” himself or herself in reflexive self-awareness. Therefore, the highest expression of life is found in this subjective experience. He breaks the history of the universe into “Pre-Life,” “Life,” and “Thought,” the last of which he calls the Noosphere. The emergence of consciousness characterizes the evolutionary stage of the Noosphere. It is important to keep in mind that this capacity for thought emerges from the universe through the progression of a flat ontology. Speaking of the universe, he says: “It is beginning to seem that there is definitely *more* in the molecule than the atom, *more* in the cell than in the molecule, *more* in the society than in the individual, and *more* in mathematical construction than in the calculations and theorems,” he writes. “We are now inclined to admit that at each further degree of combination *something* which is irreducible to isolated elements *emerges* in a new order.”²⁶

In Teilhard de Chardin’s view, design is inherent in the evolutionary processes, which tend inexorably toward greater and greater complexity until consciousness arrives and finds its highest expression in humans. He also embraces a strong eschatology, which he calls the Omega Point. At this point, which occurs at the end of time, the universe preserves all that has happened, including all persons and their consciousness. In the final end of the universe, a universal consciousness will emerge. This consciousness is not God, but rather the final intent and purpose of God’s creation. Teilhard de Chardin also recognizes the hard questions that arise through the brutality and wastefulness of the evolution-

ary process. He makes no effort or claims to understand these negative aspects but notes that such “evil” resembles “nothing so much as the way of the Cross.”²⁷

While his attempt to reconcile these disparate fields has not endured as a solution to the problem of an evolutionary theology, his efforts were significant in raising questions about how to fully embrace both evolution and theology in inventive and imaginative ways.

Since Teilhard de Chardin’s effort, many theological efforts by both Catholics and Protestants have been situated in temporal theism. An especially promising area seems to be the process theology movement.²⁸ In this panentheistic view, God is more than, but also present in, all matter. Current efforts to reconcile evolution and religion have found this a productive area of shared space.

Catholic theologian John Haught argues that, in this process theology view, God is present “deeply” in creation and influences evolutionary processes in ways that are not manipulations of matter in an interventionist sense. Rather, God is deeply present in the fabric of the universe in ways that are indistinguishable to science or other forms of human observation.²⁹ God’s purposes unfold because they are deeply present in the created world; they appear to emerge in the universe’s overall movements and processes, moving forward in creative and unexpected ways. Haught sees creation in terms of “promise” rather than “design.” He argues that science can fully study the universe’s ontology and that its observations will be valid and informative, but that God is working on a different level. His purposes will unfold as the universe unfolds, not only as an ordering and organizing influence but also as a source of novelty:

Theologically speaking, process theology suggests that we should logically foresee rather than be surprised, that God’s creation is not driven coercively, that it is widely experimental, and that it unfolds over the course of a considerable amount of time. To those who object that process theology is hereby illegitimately redefining the idea of God’s power in order to contrive a fit with neo-Darwinian theory, the reply is simply that no other conception of power is more consistent with the quite orthodox religious belief that God is infinite love.³⁰

Haught therefore sees creation, not as a one-time event, but as an

ongoing process in which God is continuously present. This unfolding is not interventionist. God is not prodding creation when it gets off-track. Rather His presence permeates all aspects of the universe.

Anglican theologian and scientist Arthur Peacocke writes similarly that his own naturalistic theology “is also based on an evolutionary perspective of the cosmological and biological sciences. This view entails an understanding of creation by God as a continuous activity, so that dynamic models and metaphors of divine creation and creativity become necessary. The work of God as Creator is regarded as manifest all the time in those very natural processes that are unveiled by the sciences in all their regularities.”³¹

It is important to point out that, although these views are “naturalistic” in that they do not accept miraculous interventions or divine guidance, they also embrace such basic Christian ideas and values as grace, incarnation, atonement, and resurrection, albeit with significant reinterpretations. For example, Karl Peters, professor emeritus of philosophy and religion at Rollins College, after describing a particularly meaningful interaction with his family, terms it a manifestation of grace in his life: “Reflecting on this event as a classical empiricist with a non-personal model of God as the creative process, I can see how the various elements that I have described—the family relationships, the beautiful weekend, the choir music, the setting of the service, the way it was conducted, my past experiences, my understanding of God as present when love is present—all came together serendipitously as an event of grace. I can think of the event as an example of serendipitous creativity—of God as the creative process—at work in my life.”³²

In addition to responses from process theologians, classic trinitarian Christians have also responded to developing formal Christologies that embrace evolution through natural selection as creation. Celia Deane-Drummond, chair of theology and the biological sciences at the University of Chester in Great Britain, describes the work of creation as a “theo-drama” in which the freedom of creation emerges through actor-agents. These “actors” interact freely with one another, expressing individual choices and responses. She sees God’s relationship with all of creation as an encounter. God, incarnated as Christ, enters the stage and becomes part of the play, an act that thereby affects the unfolding

drama for all creation. Atonement and redemption are universal in scope, and humans have the greatest freedom to participate with Christ in redemption through His atonement. Her perspective specifically incorporates ecological concerns into the drama, with humans being required to care for and assist with Christ with the redemption of all creation. Her work is a profound reconfiguring of Christ and His mission in a Darwinian framework that may have relevance to Mormons as well as her view of a universal atonement.³³ She describes her task thus: “This is also how I have sought to present the challenge of relating Christology and evolution: Namely, it is a challenge that insists on retaining hope for the future but also probes our own identity as evolved human persons living in an evolved world.”³⁴

Theologies continue to engage fruitfully and meaningfully with evolutionary biology. This ongoing conversation is important because evolution by natural selection continues to play an important role in understanding the development of life on Earth in ways that impinge directly on the idea of creation. The theologies of many religions play a role in this conversation. For example, in a 1996 statement on evolution to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, Pope John Paul II said: “New knowledge has led to the recognition of the theory of evolution as more than a hypothesis. It is indeed remarkable that this theory has been progressively accepted by researchers, following a series of discoveries in various fields of knowledge. The convergence, neither sought nor fabricated, of the results of work that was conducted independently is in itself a significant argument in favor of this theory.”³⁵

These examples show that evolution is being taken seriously as a subject for theological discourse outside Mormonism. All of these theological responses, however, usually assume classic Nicene conceptions of Deity. It is clear that process theology has been influential in framing a response to evolution. However, the LDS view of God is much different, and Catholic and process responses may not transfer adequately to Mormonism. For example, both Teilhard de Chardin and Haught assume God’s omnipresence within all that exists (and beyond). While LDS thinkers would agree that God’s influence is everywhere, His actual presence is constrained by His possession of a physical body. Also,

these theologians assume the trinitarian nature of God in a different way than Mormons do. Third, these responses differ from Mormon thought by their assumption that God is the author of the laws of the universe and that creation occurred *ex nihilo*. These differences have strong implications for the way that a Mormon theology of evolution must be constructed.

However, other aspects translate well from Catholic and process rapprochements between religion and evolution. The concept that God is affected by His creation and that agents have agency and thereby influence the direction in which the future unfolds are ideas that line up nicely (with some adaptation) into Mormon ideas, to which we now turn.

Mormon Evolutionary Theology

One of the first Mormons to argue for an evolutionary-inclusive LDS theology was W. H Chamberlin. Chamberlin was part of the 1911 controversy at Brigham Young University when several scholars were dismissed because they were promoting evolution and modern biblical criticism.³⁶ In evolution, Chamberlin saw evidence for God's eminence in the world. In a paper to BYU students published in its newspaper, *White and Blue*, on February 14, 1911, he argued that evolution can never conflict with religion because they deal with different planes of influence and interest.³⁷ He clarified the eminence that he saw in nature in a *Deseret News* article a month later on March 10:

Without penetrating beneath the surface of the vast ocean of life and experience science has been able to perform its well-known service for mankind. The mighty deep itself suggests the magnitude of the blessing for man that will come from the religious man's identification of the power in and through Nature, creating and sustaining it with the Spirit of God and in his successful efforts to discover and conform to the laws that condition life in harmony with the Divine nature and will.³⁸

However, Chamberlin's notion of eminence must be understood with reference to his approach to the material world. He embraced the idea of "spiritual realism"—a reaction to the naturalism of evolutionary thinker Herbert Spencer and the positivistic worldview embraced by the Vienna Circle and a growing number of European contemporaries.³⁹ Spiritual realism was a form of idealism that de-

scribed all of existence as flowing from “a society of minds.” In that sense, it was “spiritual” and dependent on mind. W. H. Chamberlin’s brother and biographer, Ralph Chamberlin, described it thus, “The Philosophy of Spiritual Realism holds that reality is spiritual. Mind is inherent in all Nature in the form of innumerable spiritual agents or selves, which are free causes.”⁴⁰ Chamberlin posited that all “efficient” (meaning, direct) causes reflected the reality of final causes arising in minds. He did not dispute the existence of an inorganic world prior to the appearance of life in the universe. However, the outflowing of existence from mind provides evidence for panpsychism (the idea that all matter has some kind of awareness). Ralph Chamberlin, explaining his brother’s thought, said, “Matter is not inanimate, in the sense of inert, ‘but an expression of activity,’” and continued, “The elements may be interpreted as uniform methods or expressions of an underlying activity and viewed as ‘analogous to the habits as we know them in ourselves.’”⁴¹

Ralph Chamberlin further argued that the evolution of the entire universe, even prior to the development of life, was very similar to the way that an embryo develops, with many processes moving simultaneously toward the final goal of an individual organism: “Just as the developing embryo of the sea-urchin, or of any section of it, varies as a whole, and can be understood only as a reciprocally related set of movements working toward an end, giving the impression of being guided by a hidden pattern, so inorganic nature, prior to the organic evolution, varied in such a way as strongly to suggest a similar control.”⁴² He commented that life on Earth, viewed retrospectively, seemed to have followed a similar route to the ends toward which the universe is heading that we see today in extant organisms. Quoting W. H., Ralph Chamberlin explained:

In relation to our interests or needs, minds are the sole support of our experience of any and all objects of Nature, of their temporal and spatial relations, and especially of the causal interconnections which we discover as maintaining among the objects of Nature, and which we describe as the laws or uniformities of Nature. The minds that form that phase of life called environment embrace *a priori*, as living premises embrace a conclusion, the matter and energy by this environment. What man calls Nature is a symbol of the presence of mind.⁴³

My reading of Chamberlin’s thought is that the conditions in which God and a society of minds find themselves as individuals

includes both ourselves and all of matter which is spiritual (this is backwards from the way that most Mormons would construct the nature of matter, i.e., spirit *is* matter, rather than the other way around). In Chamberlin's anti-materialist view, God is conceived as the highest entity, the most knowledgeable and powerful, in a society of minds. Like us, He is a "thou" who, through this society, brings into being the world we see around us. That world is conditioned completely by the society of minds and their goals. As Ralph Chamberlin describes it, "The world is an active, living whole, an organic system of a higher order, a product and expression of a society of minds."⁴⁴

Evolution here is seen as part of God's purposes being brought forth by this society of minds. Two aspects are important for my argument. First, this approach is deeply idealistic in the sense that there is no material world, only a spiritual world of mind. Second, it is deeply teleological. While it has echoes of Bergson's work with a universe unfolding in ways that are creative, Chamberlin appears to see God's work moving forward in a way reminiscent of Haught's evolution in which the evolutionary process is inextricably embedded in the universe, except that he explains this depth as "mind" moving the evolutionary process forward.

While Chamberlin's work is friendly to evolution and Darwinism, it is so at the expense of a physical world, an approach that creates problems from a modern scientific perspective. In addition, it is much too teleological for modern scientific views of how evolution proceeds, which have now moved away from teleological explanations. However, on the positive side, this perspective also moves away from the hermeneutic of suspicion in which early LDS thought held much of evolutionary theory.

John A. Widtsoe, a chemist and apostle, although sympathetic to ideas from biological evolution as he understood it, did not engage Darwinism directly. He merely noted in his *Rational Theology* that "the exact process whereby man was placed upon the Earth was not known with certainty, nor is it vital to a clear understanding of the plan of salvation."⁴⁵ B. H. Roberts, the most theologically minded member of the Council of the Seventy, was friendly to evolutionary ideas but discounted the contemporaneous scientific version of Darwinism in favor of *panspermia*, meaning that organisms of various "kinds" lived elsewhere and moved to Earth

by unspecified means. Through a vitalistic life force, they developed to their present state. After rejecting three types of evolution, which he calls materialistic, agonistic, and theistic, he says: “The development theory of this chapter and work recognizes and starts with the eternity of life—the life force; and the eternity of some life forms, and the possibilities of these forms, perhaps in embryonic status, or in their simplest forms (save as to man) are transplanted to newly created worlds there to be developed each to its highest possibilities, by propagation, and yet within and under the great law of life of Genesis 1, viz., each “after,” and within, “its kind” (Gen 1:11–12, 21, 24–25).”⁴⁶

The battle among Joseph Fielding Smith, James E. Talmage, and B. H. Roberts is well documented and need not be repeated here.⁴⁷ In short, when contemporary Christian creationism was introduced into Mormonism through Joseph Fielding Smith’s reading of Seventh-day Adventist writer and Ph.D. geologist George McCready Price’s work,⁴⁸ engagement between Mormon theology and evolutionary theory slowed to a standstill. Evolutionary theology has been slow to make headway in mainstream Mormon thought, in part, perhaps, because of the controversy that emerged from this encounter and Smith’s subsequent forceful (if not canonical) expression of his personal opinions, in books like *Man: His Origin and Destiny* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1954).

But it may be time to take some steps in this direction. Creationist responses to the theory of evolution, which may have been understandable in the first half of the twentieth century, are becoming less and less tenable. I feel that it is important to begin to articulate an informed LDS theology that is friendlier to our current understanding of biological evolution.

A couple of points should be kept in mind. These are not statements of my belief. Rather I offer them as “toy” models—ideas that we can play with to test their utility and durability. The problem of “unconceived alternatives” that has been articulated for science⁴⁹ carries even more weight in theological speculation, where a firm grasp of transcendental realities can be largely inaccessible or unavailable. This condition is especially true when both revelation and scriptures are underdetermined on the subject of how the Creation actually happened. Currently, evidence

from the natural world and its scientific interpretation are the only “revelation” we have for understanding that process. The scriptures can be read in literalistic ways that are unsympathetic to evolutionary views, for example, or sympathetically if read more metaphorically. Even so, we do have enough information on the three pillars of our faith (the Creation, Fall, and Atonement) to start working toward some coherence in appraising the evidence of the natural world, especially since their associated controversies have been articulated in rather unbalanced and scientifically uninformed ways.

What do we gain by taking Darwinian evolution seriously in LDS thought? First, we make available a conceptual space where, at a minimum, LDS theology does not oppose the most important theories of today’s science. I recognize the fluid status of scientific thought and its strengths and weaknesses, but it appears that evolution, at least, will continue to be extremely influential in understanding how life developed on Earth. It is very unlikely that anything will replace evolution through natural selection as broadly conceived in the foreseeable future.

Second, evolution adds an interesting and informative dimension to several key doctrines. I will offer some tentative steps on how evolution may inform and be made compatible with Mormon theology. I repeat that these explorations are pump-priming for more complete development. I also suggest where these ideas may be problematic or need further sorting out.

I want to speculate on reconciling the intersection between Mormon theology and Darwinian evolution in four areas: natural evil, design, embodiment, and teleology, then speculate (wildly) on how these can be reconciled.

Natural Evil

The first major theological question raised by evolution involves the existence of natural evil. Several authors have opined that LDS views have solved the classic “problem of evil.” Arguments for this assertion range from the naive stance that God is not culpable for the evils of the world because Adam and Eve chose to disobey to more nuanced views. One of them is David Paulsen’s contention that Joseph Smith rescues the theodicy problem. His theology suggests a God who is subject to certain

natural laws: “Elsewhere Joseph taught that there are also ‘laws of eternal and self-existent principles—normative structures of some kind, I take it, that constitute things as they (eternally) are. What are possible instances of such laws or principles?’”⁵⁰ He argues that Joseph Smith gives three conditions under which God does not or cannot prevent evils: (1) unpreventable absolutely, (2) preventable by God but not absolutely, and (3) not preventable without preventing some greater good or causing some greater evil.⁵¹

If God did use such a method as natural selection, it would make sense that this method was the natural law that Paulsen describes as necessary—necessary because natural selection is a horrifying process, as Wildman’s essay in this issue reminds us. It is hard to imagine that evolution by natural selection is a reasonable choice for creation if other methods were available. Phillip Kitcher, philosophy professor at Columbia University, writes of the problem that evolution poses to theology:

Many people have been troubled by human suffering, and that of other sentient creatures, and have wondered how those pains are compatible with the designs of an all-powerful and loving God. Darwin’s account of the history of life greatly enlarges the scale on which suffering takes place. Through millions of years, billions of animals experience vast amounts of pain, supposedly so that, after an enormous number of extinctions of entire species, on the tip of one twig of the evolutionary tree, there may emerge a species with the special properties that make us able to worship the Creator.⁵²

This level of suffering and cruelty is problematic for most kinds of natural theology. Kitcher therefore uses the presence of these kinds of natural evil and their extent to dismiss theological claims about a loving God. He adds:

Our conception of a providential Creator must suppose that He has constructed a shaggy-dog story, a history of life that consists of a three-billion-year curtain-raiser to the main event, in which millions of sentient beings suffer, often acutely, and that the suffering is not a by-product but constitutive of the script the Creator has chosen to write.

To contend that species have been individually created with the vestiges of their predecessors, with the junk that accumulates in the history of life is to suppose that Intelligence—or the Creator—operates by whimsy. The trouble is that the charge doesn’t go away when the action of the Creator is made more remote. For a history of life dominated by natural selection is extremely hard to understand in

providential terms. . . . There is nothing kindly or providential about any of this, and it seems breathtakingly wasteful and inefficient. Indeed, if we imagine a human observer presiding over a miniaturized version of the whole show, peering down on his “creation,” it is extremely hard to equip the face with a kindly expression.⁵³

If natural selection was a natural law necessary for the creation of a diverse and fully functioning universe, then Paulsen’s analysis of how LDS theology escapes the problem of evil would seem to make sense. In fact, if less cruel methods were available and God did not use them, then theologians must adduce (presumably very tricky) arguments about how this method can be reconciled with attributes of love and kindness.

Mormon doctrines of the Creation and the Fall may (with some adventuresome speculation) also provide a rescue for the deep problem that Kitcher identifies. Mormon theology contains an inherent dualism positing that a spiritual aspect of existence mediates the consciousness of humans, plants, animals, and, indeed, the Earth itself. We have very limited details about how these spirit and material worlds interface with one another; however, taking evolution as a given natural law offers some possibilities for making the unimaginable cruelty of life, the Creation, and the Fall at least coherent.

Biology has long since abandoned vitalism, and modern biologists see no necessary reason to view organisms as anything more than biological machines. However, one of the acknowledged “hard problems” in philosophy of mind is the idea of subjective consciousness. Such consciousness seems to extend beyond the usual kinds of explanatory gaps that science fills. Philosopher of science Colin McGinn believes that a biological explanation of consciousness is forever beyond the purview of science because, no matter how completely we understand the correlations made by science between brain states and consciousness, consciousness, with its qualitative feel, can be experienced and recognized only from within subjective experience.⁵⁴ Granted, we must be careful in claiming that science will never figure out such-and-such a problem, a claim that sets up a “God of the Gaps” dilemma, which scientific advances repeatedly yank the rug out from under. Still, providing scientific access to personal subjectivity does seem to be an inherently intractable problem. We can imagine a world unfolding

strictly according to the forces of natural selection in which organisms are nothing more than biological machines—Cartesian wet robots, if you will. A Mormon-type creation, then, would be the union of these creatures (including a human body) with spirit material that allows these machines to become sentient and experiential beings. Such a union would link a consciousness-bestowing element to the material aspects of the world.

Speculating even further afield, we could conceive of the Fall, less literally, as likewise a process of a spiritual and material coming together. This view smacks more of a kind of Gnosticism or Platonism, but even so may be worth exploring. Adam and Eve, in this view, would be the first of Heavenly Father's spirit children to be linked to one of these biological machines, with the traditional animating creation taking place as a union between spirit and evolved material. As a result of this union, all humans and all creatures participate in the Fall—as a fall into materiality. In some sense, perhaps the participants even choose their participation. Continuing this line of thought, Christ must then, as LDS thought commonly holds, redeem all creation.⁵⁵ Rather than causing a fall as a necessary imposition on all sentient creatures, Adam and Eve open the possibility of a participatory fall, during which conscious experience enters the world.

In this view, the natural evils of the living world did not begin until the Fall and form part of the price of experience, not only for humans, but for all creatures. Humans participate as God's children (as per LDS theology), but their role is more to act with Christ in bringing redemption to the world of experiencing beings. Christ's atonement becomes truly universal, opening the opportunity for both the resurrection and permanently bringing together of the spiritual and the material. This step joins experience and material existence. I argue that Mormonism, in this way, provides an answer that escapes natural theology and the deeper problem of evil, while making Christ's atonement truly universal. This approach also allows a reconciliation with traditional views of Adam and Eve as real living persons—the first instance of sentience and the literal spirit children of God (agreed, we don't know what that means exactly). This approach also provides

something vital to the world through the Fall since, in a very technical sense, there was no death before the Fall.

This kind of evolutionary-based view of the Fall also releases God from naive views that He is culpable for it. There is something inherently troubling about God's setting up Adam to fail and fall. By analogy, it is as if I blame a mouse killed in my mouse-trap for its desire for cheese rather than blaming myself for having baited and placed the trap.

However, this approach also has troubling aspects. If we remove God's consciousness-inducing spirit children from the biotic world, then, logically, we have to accept that beings like Neanderthals had no consciousness. Since it is well established that many early hominins had religious practices, created art, and made intricate tools, it is hard to argue that they had no vestiges of phenomenal consciousness. This idea is also highly dualistic but in very Mormon, rather than in Cartesian, ways.

Design in Mormon Theology

How important to our theology is the idea that God is the designer in creation? Natural theology, starting with Augustine, has made the design and complexity of the universe one of the evidences of God through creation. These early theologies even held that God's attributes could be read from the features of the natural world. As Xenophon's quotation underscores, this move to see design as evidence of Deity's involvement in creation obviously predates Christian theological speculation. Currently, we know that the natural law of evolution through natural selection⁵⁶ can fully explain the complexity of life on Earth (and presumably life elsewhere). Therefore, the question logically follows: Are the arguments for God from design necessary or important to a Mormon theology? Christian theologians and apologists have spilled significant quantities of ink over design, but why this question matters deserves some examination. For example, in relation to the embodiment of God, did He design His body?

It seems circular to make Paleyesque arguments from design that do not mesh well with some of Mormonism's foundational tenets, especially since arguments from design had become problematic long before Darwin. Scottish philosopher David Hume pointed out that design implies nothing about a designer and speculated

that the designer of the universe could have been anything from an evil demon to a largely incompetent committee.⁵⁷ (The many blunders and inefficiencies found among Earth's organisms were apparent even in Hume's time, the eighteenth century.) If God's embodiment implies some sort of biology, then the design comes from elsewhere. LDS thinkers have speculated since the time of Joseph Smith and Orson Pratt that God works within natural law. If this principle includes evolution through natural selection, it seems that attempts to distance ourselves theologically from evolution could be a grave error. Thus, if we interpret the theory of evolution in a Mormon framework, it constitutes a potentially helpful and perhaps even necessary explanation for an embodied God, rather than merely posing problems for natural theology.

Embodiment in Mormon Theology

We believe that, in some sense, we were created in the bodily image of God. We use scriptures like Ether 3:6 where the brother of Jared sees the Lord's finger, which "was as the finger of a man," to orient this belief. We also believe that "the Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man's; the Son also" (D&C 130:22). These scriptures present problems for a non-teleological process such as evolution by natural selection—but perhaps not as many problems as we might first think. Evolutionary biologist Simon Conway Morris argues that, given the vastness of the universe and the limited number of solutions to the biological engineering problems of surviving in a planetary ecosystem, humans or something like them, might be an inevitable evolutionary product.⁵⁸

For example, reptile ichthyosaurs, mammal dolphins, and fish all have evolved very similar shapes to solve the problem of moving gracefully in oceans. These evolutionary convergences can take on very specific biological forms. Sabertooth cat-like predators who fed on large grassland mammals evolved as *both* marsupials (mammals with a pouch, like kangaroos and wallabies) and as mammals with placentas (e.g., bats, horses, and lions). Both marsupial and placental sabertooths were very similar in shape, ecological niche, and size. Both evolved from small rat or small opossum-like precursors. The universe is unimaginably large. Why? Allowing evolution to flower into something human-like could be one of the reasons.

Philosopher James E. Faulconer asks an intriguing question about God's embodiment:

The bodies of flesh and bone with which I am familiar do not shine, have blood, cannot hover, can be wounded and die, must move through contiguous points of time-space. In short, they are not at all like the bodies of the Father and the Son. So what does it mean to say that the Father and the Son have bodies? In fact, does it mean anything at all? When I use the word "body" in any other context, I never refer to something that shines, can hover, is immortal, and moves through space seemingly without being troubled by walls and doors. Given the vast difference between what we mean by the word "body" in every other case and that to which the word refers in this case, one can legitimately ask whether the word "body" has the same meaning in this case that it has in the others.⁵⁹

One could also legitimately ask: Is God a *Homo sapiens*? Is God a mammal? Scientists have speculated on what a bipedal hominid evolved from avian precursors might look like. Would it have left-over structures like a pygostyle (a reduced fusion of vertebrae) instead of a tail? Slime molds can take very complex shapes in some of their life history stages. Can we imagine a human body that evolved from slime molds on another planet? It seems that many of our human features are part and parcel of our being mammals. Could being a mammal be a contingent feature of our evolution rather than an eternal part of our resurrected bodies? I don't have any answers to these questions, but they don't seem to be so problematic that they cannot be answered in ways that allow evolution as the mechanism of creation. These sorts of considerations significantly reduce problems of teleology, or God's presumed purpose for human beings.

Teleology in Mormon Thought

If God, of necessity, used evolution to achieve His purposes, what does that say about His being able to act in the world? I need to add a cautionary note here. When I say God "uses" evolution, I recognize that, in talking about a "Creator," it is possible that words like "allows" or "provides a space for" may be more appropriate. Nevertheless, if we embrace an evolutionary perspective, the idea of God's intervention, petitionary prayer, and divine action to bring about His purposes become thorny issues. A nice thing about the magical view of creation is that it is no problem at all to imag-

ine God intervening in the world. Why use evolution through natural selection in a non-teleological fashion if waving a magic wand was possible? In fact, if God can and sometimes does intervene, then why doesn't He do it all the time? Why *didn't* He do it during the Creation? This question opens an intriguing possibility: the necessary place of consciousness in divine interventions.

In Mormon thought getting a physical body is important. Obviously, a body means that we become part of the material world, as Faulconer speculates: "Our experience of the body, the only standard we have for understanding embodiment, suggests that to say that God has a body is to say that his omniscience and omnipotence must be understood in ways quite different from traditional Christianity because embodiment implies situated openness to a world. In other words, divine embodiment also implies that God is affected by the world and by persons in his world."⁶⁰

So there seems to be something deeply important about physicality and spirit coming together. Could it be that the physical world can be manipulated only through consciousness-mediated direct action? Or through this kind of body that unites spirit and physical matter? When I read the scriptures, I see a God who makes arrangements for irreplaceable records to be kept, preserved, and maintained through conscious effort. He implies that, if they are not, this knowledge will be lost and not brought back through His intervention. I see the Lamanites languishing in unbelief until the sons of Mosiah are inspired to go among them. Angels bear messages to other consciousnesses but do not seem to manipulate the world in interventionist ways. Almost all of the scriptures can be reinterpreted as acts of consciousness acting in the world. Christ's miracles, especially His resurrection, seem to be an exception, but much of how God works in the world seems to be that He communicates to and through conscious beings who then use their agency to act. Stories of people inspired to stop and help a widow take on new meaning if God cannot help the widow without us.

Speculative Conclusions

Evolution may bear on theology in other areas, and entire discourses could be developed on each of these topics. For example, "The Family: A Proclamation to the World" claims that gender is a condition of the preexistence.⁶¹ Evolutionary biology has long ex-

plored the meaning of gender and sex in organisms. Studies on motherhood from the animal kingdom are providing great insights into the nature of motherhood in human beings.⁶² The understanding of human sexuality and gender practices has strong relevance to Mormon doctrine, and insights from evolutionary biology may help explain challenges faced by individuals and families struggling with the gendered aspects of being human. Joan Roughgarden, a biologist at Stanford University, has carefully detailed the role that sex plays in the natural world.⁶³ Recently she has argued for a new model of evolution, based not on selfish genetic forces (Richard Dawkins's selfish gene model), but on models of cooperation among creatures in a gendered and sexual context.⁶⁴ Her ideas on cooperation are a nice model for the kinds of human and perhaps divine society that Mormon theology posits—free agent interaction as part of a society of gendered minds. This area is new biological research, but it seems more promising than the selfish-gene model. It seems more attuned to the kinds of societies that we see forming in the natural world and which Mormon conceptions of theosis also model and predict.

Evolutionary views of creation also steer us into a deeper engagement with the natural world, as we see ourselves quite literally connected to the creatures and ecologies around us. The idea that our world emerged from deep time through natural selection implies that the wonderful diversity we see around us is contingent, unique, and precious. They provide arguments for better stewardship of the natural environment, because its current state took an enormous length of time. The creatures of the Earth are not only there for us, but we are also there for them. A Darwinian theology argues that care for creation becomes an important aspect of God's grace to the natural world through us.

A melding of evolution and theology also introduces another area important in Mormon thought. Perhaps the LDS conception of theosis (and the path that leads to exaltation) suggests a Darwinian selection process in which elements of trial, testing, and proving are inherent parts of progression through the first and second estates of premortal and mortal existence. Could natural selection drive emergence forward in an eternal context as well? Are classically conceived intelligences the sorts of entities subject to natural selection? Abraham 3:21–25 describes intelligences as

varying in traits relevant for theosis such as intelligence, righteousness, obedience, etc. (Recall that variation is the first condition necessary for natural selection to function.) Thinking of Christ as God's son means that we know at least one case in which traits were in some senses inherited—and heritability is the second condition necessary for natural selection. But how broadly this principle applies is, obviously, speculative. Lastly, these traits get selected—the third condition necessary for natural selection. Evolution might not only be the principle behind the beauty, wonder, and diversity of life in the universe, but it may also drive the selection processes that help produce our eternal destiny.

To me, evolution is an empowering idea. Linking it to our theology provides answers to several perplexing questions. It suggests that there is something wonderfully important about embodiment and why physical access to the universe is so important. Our doctrines, informed by evolution, answer questions about why such a cruel and wasteful process was chosen for creation and resituate the problem of evil. I find easy adaptations to our most important and profound doctrines. I see no reason why Mormons cannot, fully and without apology, embrace Darwinian evolution. As Darwin concluded his magnificent *On the Origin of Species*: “There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed into a few forms or into one; and that, whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved.”⁶⁵

Notes

1. Elie Wiesel, *Night*, translated by Marion Wiesel (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006), 5.

2. See, for example, the following articles in *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*: Duane E. Jeffery, “Seers, Savants, and Evolution: The Uncomfortable Interface,” 8 (Autumn 1974): 41–75; Michael R. Ash, “The Mormon Myth of Evil Evolution,” 35 (Winter 2002): 19–38; David H. Bailey, “Mormonism and the New Creationism,” 35 (Winter 2002): 39–59; and David H. Bailey, “Scientific Foundations of Mormon Theology,” 21 (Summer 1988): 61–79. See also Trent D. Stephens and D. Jeffrey Meldrum with Forrest B. Peterson, *Evolution and Mormonism: A Quest for Understanding* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2001); William E. Evenson, “Evolution,” *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (New York: Mac-

millan Publishing, 1992), 2:478; Eldon J. Gardner, "Organic Evolution and the Bible," in *The Search for Harmony: Essays on Science and Mormonism*, edited by Gene A. Sessions and Craig J. Oberg (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1993); William E. Evenson and Duane E. Jeffery, *Mormonism and Evolution: The Authoritative LDS Statements* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2005).

3. Christian Illies, "Darwin's *a Priori* Insight," in *Darwin and Philosophy*, edited by Vittorio Hösle and Christian Illies (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 58–82.

4. Daniel C. Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meanings of Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

5. Kevin N. Laland, John Odling-Smee, Marcus W. Feldman, and Jeremy Kendal, "Conceptual Barriers to Progress within Evolutionary Biology," *Foundations of Science* 14, no. 3 (August 2009): 195–216.

6. Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, translated by E. C. Marchant, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1923), 57.

7. Interestingly, President Spencer W. Kimball, "Absolute Truth," *Ensign*, September 1978, 3, plays off this idea: "The watchmaker in Switzerland, with materials at hand, made the watch that was found in the sand in a California desert. The people who found the watch had never been to Switzerland, nor seen the watchmaker, nor seen the watch made. The watchmaker still existed, no matter the extent of their ignorance or experience. If the watch had a tongue, it might even lie and say, 'There is no watchmaker.' That would not alter the truth."

8. Barbara Forrest, "The Wedge at Work: How Intelligent Design Creationism Is Wedging Its Way into the Cultural and Academic Mainstream," in *Intelligent Design Creationism and Its Critics: Philosophical, Theological, and Scientific Perspectives*, edited by Robert T. Pennock (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2001), 5–53.

9. Niels Henrik Gregersen, "Emergence: What Is at Stake for Religious Reflection?" in *The Re-Emergence of Emergence*, edited by Philip Clayton and Paul Davies (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2006), 279–22.

10. Kent C. Condie, "Premortal Spirits: Implications for Cloning, Abortion, Evolution, and Extinction," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 39 (Spring 2006): 35–56.

11. James E. Faulconer, "Divine Embodiment and Transcendence: Propaedeutic Thoughts and Questions," *Element: A Journal of Mormon Philosophy and Theology* 1, no. 1 (Spring 2005), http://www.smp.org/docs/faulconer_element1-1.html (accessed on July 15, 2009).

12. President Gordon B. Hinckley appeared to distance himself

from the idea that God was once a man. When asked if Mormons believed that God was once a man, he responded: "I wouldn't say that. There was a couplet coined, 'As man is, God once was. As God is, man may become.' Now that's more of a couplet than anything else. That gets into some pretty deep theology that we don't know very much about." "Musings of the Main Mormon," Gordon B. Hinckley, interviewed by Don Lattin, *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 13, 1997, <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/chronicle/archive/1997/04/13/SC36289.DTL> (accessed on September 28, 2009).

13. Ursula Goodenough, "The Sacred Depths of Nature: Excerpts," *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* 35, no. 3 (2000): 567–86.

14. These ideas are found in Joseph Smith, "King Follett Discourse," <http://mldb.byu.edu/follett.htm> (accessed October 6, 2009).

15. Blake T. Ostler, *Exploring Mormon Thought: The Attributes of God* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2001), 359–60.

16. Neal A. Maxwell, "Patience," *Ensign*, October 1980, 28.

17. James McLachlan, "Fragments for a Process Theology of Mormonism," *Element: A Journal of Mormon Philosophy and Theology* 1, no. 2 (Fall 2005), <http://www.smpt.org/element.html>; Andrew Miles, "Toward a Mormon Metaphysics: Scripture, Process Theology, and the Mechanics of Faith," *Element: A Journal of Mormon Philosophy and Theology* 4, no. 1 (Spring 2008); Dan W. Wotherspoon, *Awakening Joseph Smith: Mormon Resources for a Postmodern Worldview* (Claremont, Calif.: Claremont Graduate University, 1996).

18. Gregersen, "Emergence," 299.

19. David N. Livingstone, "Evolution and Religion," in *Evolution: The First Four Billion Years*, edited by Michael Ruse and Joseph Travis (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), 348–69.

20. Many interesting responses to evolution from Jewish, Islamic, and Hindu sources posit a personal God who acts in the world. Buddhist responses are less troubled by evolution because of its inherent naturalism. I am not including them in my analysis because Christian responses make an interesting model for creating LDS-compatible theologies, which, like these, must include ideas of the Fall and the Atonement, which are not present in the same ways in non-Christian religions.

21. Creationists, including "intelligent design creationists," sometimes try to distinguish between micro and macro evolutionary processes that biologists do not recognize. Macroevolution refers to the timescale at which evolutionary change is considered and is not a different kind of evolution as is often implied by such groups. For example, it is not uncommon to find people who claim that they believe in microevolution

(meaning something like the changes that might be found among different breeds of dogs) but not macroevolution. To a biologist that is the equivalent of claiming "I believe in inches but not miles."

22. Gilles Deleuze, "Lecture Course on Chapter Three of *Bergson's Creative Evolution*," *SubStance: A Review of Theory and Literary Criticism* 36, no. 3 (2007): 72–90.

23. Michael Vaughan, "Introduction: Henri Bergson's *Creative Evolution*," *ibid.*, 7–24.

24. Vitalism was an idea with ancient roots but became prominent during the Enlightenment (seventeenth-eighteenth centuries). Life was made possible by a force not present in non-living things.

25. Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, translated by Arthur Mitchell (1907; New York: Barnes and Noble, 2005), 68; emphasis mine.

26. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, translated by Bernard Wall, introduction by Julian Huxley (New York: Harper & Row, 1959), 268; emphasis his.

27. *Ibid.*, 313.

28. See, for example, David R. Griffin, *Reenchantment without Supernaturalism: A Process Philosophy of Religion* (Cornell, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2000); Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality (Corrected Edition)* (New York: Free Press, 1978).

29. John F. Haught, *Deeper than Darwin: The Prospect for Religion in the Age of Evolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Westview Press, 2004).

30. John F. Haught, *God after Darwin: A Theology of Evolution* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2000), 42.

31. Arthur Peacocke, "A Naturalistic Christian Faith for the Twenty-First Century: An Essay in Interpretation," in *All That Is: A Naturalistic Faith for the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Philip Clayton (Minneapolis, Mich.: Fortress Press, 2007), 9.

32. Karl E. Peters, "Empirical Theology and a "Naturalistic Christian Faith,"" in *All That Is: A Naturalistic Faith for the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Philip Clayton (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2007), 102.

33. Celia Deane-Drummond, *Christ and Evolution: Wonder and Wisdom (Theology and the Sciences)* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2009).

34. *Ibid.*, 57.

35. Pope John Paul II, *Truth Cannot Contradict Truth*, Address to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, October 22, 1996, http://www.newadvent.org/library/docs_jp02tc.htm (accessed July 15, 2009).

36. Gary James Bergera, "The 1911 Evolution Controversy at Brigh-

am Young University," in *The Search for Harmony: Essays on Science and Mormonism*, edited by Gene A. Sessions and Craig J. Oberg (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1993), 23–42; James M. McLachlan, "W. H. Chamberlin and the Quest for a Mormon Theology," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 29 (Winter 1996): 151–67; James M. McLachlan, "The Modernism Controversy," in James M. McLachlan and Loyd Ericson, eds., *Discourses in Mormon Theology: Philosophical & Theological Possibilities* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 39–83.

37. William H. Chamberlin, "The Theory of Evolution as an Aid to Faith in God and in the Resurrection," *The White and Blue*, February 14, 1911, 4.

38. Ralph V. Chamberlin, *The Life and Philosophy of W. H. Chamberlin* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1925), 158.

39. McLachlan, "Modernism," 39–83.

40. W. H. Chamberlin, "The Life," 320.

41. *Ibid.*, 254. The embedded quotations are from an unpublished essay by W. H. Chamberlin, "Berkeley's Philosophy of Nature and Modern Theories of Evolution" mentioned in Chamberlin, "The Life," 250.

42. *Ibid.*, 254–55, quoting from an unpublished essay by W. H. Chamberlin, "Berkeley's Philosophy of Nature and Modern Theories of Evolution," mentioned in Chamberlin, "The Life," 250.

43. *Ibid.*, 255.

44. *Ibid.*, 322.

45. John A. Widtsoe, *Rational Theology* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997), 46–47.

46. B. H. Roberts, *The Truth, the Way, the Life* (Provo, Utah: BYU Studies, 1996), 240.

47. Richard Sherlock, "'We Can See No Advantage to a Continuation of the Discussion': The Roberts/Smith/Talmage Affair," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 13 (Fall 1980): 63–78; Jeffery, "Seers, Savants, and Evolution," 41–75.

48. Richard Sherlock, "A Turbulent Spectrum: Mormon Reactions to the Darwinist Legacy," in *The Search for Harmony: Essays on Science and Mormonism*, edited by Gene A. Sessions and Craig J. Oberg (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1993), 69.

49. P. Kyle Stanford, *Exceeding Our Grasp: Science, History, and the Problem of Unconceived Alternatives* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2006).

50. David L. Paulsen, "Joseph Smith and the Problem of Evil," *BYU Studies* 39, no. 1 (2000): 53–65. He is quoting Joseph Fielding Smith,

comp. and ed., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1974), 181.

51. *Ibid.*, 60.

52. Phillip Kitcher, *Living with Darwin: Evolution, Design, and the Future of Faith* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2007), 123.

53. *Ibid.*, 124.

54. Colin McGinn, *The Mysterious Flame: Conscious Minds in a Material World* (New York: Basic Books, 1999).

55. Sheila Taylor, "The Hope for a Universal Salvation," *Element: A Journal of Mormon Philosophy and Theology* 2, no. 2 (Fall 2006), <http://www.smpt.org/element.html> (accessed September 25, 2009).

56. Illies, "Darwin's *a Priori* Insight," 59, holds that evolution is in fact one of nature's principles and is *a priori* true.

57. David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover, 2006), 35–38.

58. Simon Conway Morris, *Life's Solution: Inevitable Humans in a Lonely Universe* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

59. Faulconer, "Divine Embodiment and Transcendence," 1.

60. *Ibid.*, 18.

61. The First Presidency and Council of the Twelve Apostles of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, "The Family: A Proclamation to the World" (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1995), http://www.lds.org/Static%20Files/PDF/Manuals/TheFamily_AProclamationToTheWorld_35538_eng.pdf (accessed September 25, 2009).

62. Sarah Blaffer Hrdy, *Mother Nature: Maternal Instincts and How They Shape the Human Species* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1999).

63. Joan Roughgarden, *Evolution's Rainbow: Diversity, Gender, and Sexuality in Nature and Humans* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

64. Joan Roughgarden, *The Genial Gene: Deconstructing Darwinian Selfishness* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

65. Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species: The Illustrated Edition* (New York: Sterling Publishing, 2008), 513.

A Price Far above Rubies versus Eight Cows: What's a Virtuous Woman Worth?

Holly Welker

Produced by Brigham Young University and presented by the Deseret Sunday School Union of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in 1969, the short film *Johnny Lingo* is among the best-known texts in the LDS Church, familiar even to people who never made it through more than a few pages of the Book of Mormon. It has been shown for decades in seminary, Institute, and Sunday School classrooms around the world. In fact, because the twenty-four-minute film makes no mention of Mormonism aside from its credits, its audience has not been limited in ways other Church-related texts might be; it was even shown occasionally in secular American classrooms during the 1970s, and missionaries also made use of it from time to time. Released on DVD in 2004 as a bonus feature of the 2003 feature version of the story, the film is currently included on a DVD marketed by Deseret Book of four short LDS films, making home-viewing easy.

Intro music as bouncy, buoyant, and energetic as any surf punk classic, outrageously bad wigs on a couple of actors, a few less-than-stellar performances, and certain memorable lines about the ugliness of the film's heroine—all contribute to an element of camp about the film that has grown more pronounced as it ages. Often the object of considerable nostalgia from people who first saw the film in their youth, the film is not merely an artifact of Mormon kitsch, however. It is also an explicitly didactic

work still used in Mormon classrooms.¹ Thus, it seems appropriate to ask: What is this film actually saying?

Even in the twenty-first century, *Johnny Lingo* is cited as a wise, compassionate story of male sensitivity to female identity, a positive demonstration of how to foster female self-worth. Set once upon a time on an unnamed, idyllic Pacific island, it is the tale of a charismatic young trader whose wealth and good looks make him the desire of every girl on the island. Renowned for his shrewdness in recognizing and driving a bargain, he shocks everyone by inexplicably offering the princely and unheard-of sum of eight cows as the purchase price for Mahana, a homely, cowering wretch no one else wants. But Johnny's true shrewdness is revealed when the notoriously ugly Mahana is transformed into a graceful, poised beauty by the knowledge that she commanded such an extravagant price, and *becomes* an "eight-cow woman."

The website LDSFilm.com provides a synopsis of the movie from a cover of the VHS version, which states: "Johnny Lingo bargains for a bride, paying an exorbitant amount and causing a sensation on the island. Being an expert trader, he knows the value of things—especially self-esteem. Unfortunately, Mahana's neighbors do not acknowledge her great worth until the couple returns to the island later, and the community sees that the marriage has blossomed into a partnership of equals."² That's what the copyright holder has wanted audiences to believe the film shows—but is it an interpretation borne out by a close reading of the film? A young woman interviewed in a documentary about the film praises its "good old-fashioned values."³ I agree that the film's values are old-fashioned, but are they truly *good*?

Viewers learn what other characters think of Mahana before encountering her themselves. Mr. Harris, the grizzled white shopkeeper who, by questioning and assessing the events of the narrative, functions as the audience's proxy, refers to Mahana as "the little shadow who comes in once in a while for a spool of thread."⁴ His assistant, Tulu, complains that Mahana "has a face like a stone and she looks as though she missed too many meals. She's not young, either. She's maybe 19, or even 20. [Mahana's father] Moki long ago gave up hope of finding a husband for her."⁵

Moki has little regard for his daughter, grumbling that she is "as foolish as she is ugly." His counselor, Meihai, warns him not to

say such things when his future son-in-law could arrive any minute to bargain over Mahana's purchase price; in the matter of wife-buying, Meihai points out, a man "must *think* he's getting a bargain."

Moki replies that Johnny Lingo "*will* get a bargain. He wants a woman to mend his roof and to fix his supper, and doesn't want to pay more than a three-legged cow for her. You do not know what it means to have an ugly daughter, Meihai. I am ready to *give* him a cow, just to have him take her off my hands. And I will count myself fortunate to be rid of her. She is no comfort, hugging the corners of the hut, speaking only in whispers, and never looking at me. This is what comes, Meihai, of buying a two-cow wife. Look at you: you paid four cows for your wife—"

"Five!" Meihai interjects, before Moki continues "—and she gave you beautiful daughters. Your investment has been doubled."

Let's consider that exchange in detail. It is acceptable in this culture to see a bride as two types of property. The first is essentially slave labor, a body to be purchased as cheaply as possible for a lifetime of hard work. It's perhaps not ideal, but it's acceptable. Preferable, however, is the view of a wife as the bearer and rearer of children, in which case it makes sense to pay for superior genes to pass on to the next generation. Thus, if a woman produces more than one beautiful daughter who can be sold at a similar or higher price than her mother's, the bride-buyer has made a wise investment. In other words, a superior way of viewing the purchase of a wife is to see her essentially as livestock.

Before proceeding, I want to justify my assertion that Mahana is property, and I want to do so not merely through the obvious fact that she is discussed as such—that, for instance, her father deems her inferior goods, a liability he would gladly pay to be rid of. In *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property*, cultural critic Lewis Hyde offers this definition: "Property, by one old definition, is a 'right to action.' To possess, to enjoy, to use, to destroy, to sell, to rent, to give or bequeath, to improve, to pollute—all of these are actions, and a thing (or a person) becomes 'property' whenever someone has 'in it' the right of any such action. There is no property without an actor, then, and in this sense property is an expression of the human will in things (and in other people)."⁶

Mahana is the property of someone else because of her limited right to action with regards either to her hand in marriage—or the larger entity that a woman’s “hand” is synecdoche for: her body. Mahana, evidently—and, one might reasonably assume, any bride-to-be in this society—has no say in the matter of her wedding. She cannot refuse the husband who has bought her on the grounds that she does not like him or that her labor and body have been sold too cheaply. Nor does she have the resources or the right to acquire cows on her own and buy her independence. Her life and body are always to be owned by another, and the bestowal of them is controlled by men.

Thus, it is no surprise that violence against women is something its perpetrators are unashamed of. In fact, when Mahana refuses to come down from the tree in which she is hiding, Moki threatens: “Shall I follow you up there with a stick? Do you want me to put bruises all over you so that Johnny Lingo will see what a disobedient daughter you are?” He would willingly display the results of his brutality to his future son-in-law—and they would be a comment on his daughter’s bad behavior, not on his own.

However, there is no time to beat Mahana because Johnny—and a good share of the villagers—shows up for the bargaining. With due gravity, Johnny Lingo announces his reason for coming: “I wish to take Mahana for my wife.”

In what seems meant to evoke a culturally scripted dialogue, Moki replies solemnly, “It is hard for a man to give his daughter to another.”

“I am prepared to pay,” Johnny Lingo states, equally solemn, “How many cows do you wish for Mahana?”

After consulting with his counselor, Moki announces his price: three cows. And everyone erupts into laughter at the audacity of the request.

Johnny Lingo holds up his hand to silence the crowd. He nods meaningfully. “Three cows,” he says, underscoring the sum’s significance with a pregnant pause, “is many. But not enough for Mahana. I will pay *eight* cows.”

The announcement renders the villagers slack-jawed and dumb. Moki, dazed by his good fortune, is scarcely able to reply to Johnny’s statements about delivery of the cows and subsequent arrangements.

Mr. Harris, who has not personally witnessed the bargaining, is confounded by the price Johnny offered for Mahana and comments, "Why, for two or three cows, you can buy quite a decent wife on this island. Four or five brings a superior one." Never mind that this market analysis calls into question Moki's assertion that buying a two-cow wife is a mistake. What really matters to Mr. Harris—and the audience he stands in for—is why someone as desirable and shrewd as Johnny Lingo would willfully and perversely insist on paying more for Mahana than her actual market value. The earlier speculation that he was buying Mahana as a wife because he could get her for nothing turns into suspicion that "either he is crazy, or he is blind."

But when Mr. Harris asks him about the matter, Johnny fairly glows with pride and satisfaction at this evidence that news of his offer for Mahana is already making the rounds. Grandly, he proclaims: "Always and forever, when they speak of marriage settlements, it will be remembered that Johnny Lingo paid eight cows for Mahana." Johnny's evident pleasure in stating that fact convinces Harris that Johnny is "neither crazy nor blind—he's just vain. Poor, vain fool."

The action then shifts back to Mahana and her father. Mahana, stung by the laughter that erupted when her father requested three cows for her, is certain that the entire business is an elaborate and cruel practical joke, that Johnny Lingo was mocking her and will humiliate her further by not delivering the cows, despite the fact that no man has ever reneged on a marriage agreement in all the history of the island. However, within moments, Johnny reappears, driving eight cows before him. Having been paid for his merchandise, Moki steps aside and directs Johnny to the hut where Mahana hides. Johnny calls her name and extends his hand. He is tender and kind. The audience sees Johnny's face as he calls to Mahana and reaches out to her. The audience sees Mahana place her hand in his, but we do not see her face. Although this is one of the most important moments in her life—the moment when she begins to accept that someone might actually value her—the film cuts away from her and back to Johnny's smiling face as she accepts his hand. We do not have a sense of Mahana's emotional reaction to this event, aside from

presumed relief that she is not, as anticipated, to be humiliated further—at least, not at that moment.

Instead, the next humiliation occurs at the wedding festival, when a group of boys recite some of the film’s most memorable lines:

Johnny Lingo had a cow,
trade it for an ugly wife.
Johnny Lingo’s married now.
He’ll be sorry all his life!

Johnny chases the hooligans away, but Mahana bursts into tears and wails, “It’s true!” Rather than subject his bride to more mockery, Johnny whisks her down to his canoe, out to sea, and off to “the honeymoon place,” as he calls it. And it is months, and months, and perhaps even additional months, before they return.

The fact that their absence is lengthy is substantiated by a couple of brief references in the film. The first is that, when Johnny orders a gift for Mahana, Mr. Harris tells him that it will take several months for the item to be shipped from the states. The second is that, by the time the newlyweds return to the island, the item has been “gathering dust on [Mr. Harris’s] shelf for months.” But the movie glosses over these months, erasing any suggestion that important events might have occurred during them. Certainly it wasn’t until I started thinking about this movie carefully that I began to wonder how Mahana might feel, arriving at a new island as the bride of a young, virile, wealthy, attractive, charming, and well-connected businessman. It’s logical to imagine that this association might bolster her self-esteem—provided she didn’t suffer too much from a sense of being unworthy of him. And what about sex? After all, they’re on a protracted honeymoon. One would hope that they’d managed to establish a mutually rewarding sex life. Could discovering her ability to give and receive sexual pleasure affect the way a woman sees herself? It seems reasonable to think so. Reasonable and logical as these inferences might be, however, the text itself rejects them, as we shall see.

The wedding gift Johnny ordered for Mahana is a lady’s hand mirror in an elaborately decorated gold setting, paid for with a shell that, to Mr. Harris’s surprise, turns out to be worth a small

fortune. The day after someone spies a candle burning in Johnny's long-empty hut, Mr. Harris decides to deliver the package that has sat so long in his store, happy to provide good service to a reliable and profitable business partner. When he arrives at the hut, only Johnny greets him—Mahana is out of sight in another room. After inspecting the mirror, Johnny enters that room alone to present the gift to her. Mr. Harris has only a partial view of Mahana's reaction. She exclaims that the mirror is the most beautiful thing she has ever seen, then tells her husband, "I wish I had a gift for you."

Johnny kisses Mahana on the forehead and tenderly tells her, "Your gift to me can be seen by all who look at you," a category that Mr. Harris and the audience are about to join.

Mahana, wishing to thank Mr. Harris for delivering the gift, enters the outer room of the hut. And what we see on screen is not a frightened, cowering creature with sallow skin and dull hair, but a vibrant young woman glowing with health and confidence, her sunny, sincere smile revealing teeth so white and straight they could land her a spot in a toothpaste ad.

Mr. Harris is essentially dumbstruck, barely able to utter Mahana's name twice and thank her for welcoming him to her home. Johnny then sends Mahana to fetch water, which allows Mr. Harris to say to him, "Johnny, I can't get over it. She's beautiful!"

"I have loved her ever since we were children," Johnny replies. "She was always beautiful. Tell me: do you think eight cows was too high a price for her?"

"Oh, no," Mr. Harris replies, his admiration for the young woman's beauty obvious.

Johnny Lingo says, "Neither does Moki. In fact, he was just here before you came, to accuse me of cheating him. Mahana, he says, is worth ten cows if she is worth a hoof!"

Mr. Harris laughs, but his humor soon dissolves into confusion: "I don't understand. What happened?"

"It was the cows," Johnny Lingo tells him earnestly. This statement requires explanation, so Johnny elaborates: "Think what it must mean to a woman: her future husband meeting with her father to discuss the lowest price for which he⁷ can be bought. And later, when the women of the village gather, they boast of what

their husbands paid for them: three cows, or five. How does she feel, the woman is sold for one, or two? This could not happen to my Mahana.”

Penitent, Mr. Harris confesses, “Johnny, I’ve misjudged you. I thought you were thinking only of how important you would look to your friends, giving eight cows for a wife. I didn’t know you wanted to make Mahana happy.”

“More than happy, Mr. Harris,” Johnny says. “I wanted her to *be* an eight-cow woman.”

Harris nods meaningfully, so Johnny continues his sermonizing: “Many things can happen to make a woman beautiful. The thing that matters most is what she thinks of herself.”

“I see,” Mr. Harris says. “In her father’s hut, Mahana believed she was worth nothing.”

Johnny gets the last word: “Yes. And now she knows she is worth more than any other woman on the island.”

At which point they all live happily ever after.

I won’t deny that there are things this movie does effectively. For starters, it’s one of the most efficient fairy tales I’ve ever encountered: Johnny Lingo is not only the handsome prince who lifts the poor abused serving wench out of her undeserved misery, elevating her to her rightful position as princess; he is also the fairy godmother who provides the magic that reveals the error of seeing this girl as nothing more than a lowly servant. He is even the magic mirror who reflects back true beauty and makes clear to all exactly who is the fairest in the land.

But make no mistake: this story *is* a fairy tale. In fact, as one female fan puts it, “*Johnny Lingo* definitely could be the ultimate fairy tale story for LDS women.”⁸ And fairy tales are often sanitized through repetition and familiarity, their cruelty and brutality seemingly erased by the arrival of an inevitable, eternal happy ending. Once Hansel and Gretel are reunited with their father, it’s not so important that he led them into the forest to starve or be devoured by wild beasts, or that a wicked witch connived to roast and eat them. Nonetheless, it is the cruelty and viciousness of other characters that propel the plot in the first place, so ignoring those elements of the story is to miss something profound about how the story functions and what it says about the culture that produced it.

So let's return to the scene where Mahana's transformation is hinted at, revealed, and finally explained, and see what's really happening in this story.

Mahana's reaction upon beholding the mirror that reveals to her how beautiful she has become is to say to Johnny, "I wish I had a gift for you."

Johnny, a kind and generous husband, kisses Mahana tenderly and says, "Your gift to me can be seen by all who look at you." He doesn't say, "Your gift to me can be seen by all who talk to you." Nor "by all who benefit from your sweet spirit." No. He says, "Your gift to me can be seen by all who look at you." In other words, Mahana's gift to Johnny is something about her physical appearance or presence. His gifts to her involve bestowing objects—eight cows to her father, a beautiful and costly mirror to her—but her gift to him is her embodiment; furthermore, it is a gift that others can recognize.

This situation is still a bit cryptic. Mahana is obviously much happier than she was as a scorned, ridiculous spinster; could it be that her happiness is a gift to Johnny? Well, that might be the case if Johnny said, "Your gift to me can be seen by all who observe the transformation you've gone through." But presumably during those many months away from the island, Mahana encountered people who didn't know she had once been the ugliest of ugly ducklings, with little hope of becoming a swan. And these people could nonetheless see, Johnny asserts, Mahana's gift to him.

What people know is that Mahana is Johnny's wife. They share a home and a bed. Mahana's gift to Johnny, visible to all, is that she provides him with an extremely attractive and desirable mate. In other words, Mahana's gift to Johnny is the gift of herself—which he technically already owns. So more precisely, Mahana's gift to Johnny is the pleasure and desire she creates—in him and in others who recognize her as his sexual partner.

This reading is borne out by Mr. Harris's reaction when Mahana parts the strands of beads separating the rooms and greets him. He is struck by her beauty, by her physical presence. Mahana may possess every last trait that makes a woman a good wife in this culture, but we don't know that. Perhaps she makes the best mango milkshake, the finest coconut cream pie, the most de-

licious banana bread, anyone has ever tasted—perhaps she even invented the recipes. Maybe she loves babies and is a competent and caring mother. Maybe she knots the best fishnets. The audience doesn't know, and neither does Mr. Harris. All he knows is that she's pretty, has a nice smile, and can utter basic social pleasantries with appropriate decorum. It is on the basis of seeing her for literally thirty seconds—Mahana enters the room at twenty minutes, twenty-nine seconds into the film, and exits it at twenty minutes, fifty-nine seconds—that he makes a definitive assessment of her worth, agreeing wholeheartedly that eight cows is not too high a price for a wife so lovely.

Johnny's claim that "it was the cows" that caused Mahana's transformation must also be examined. "Think what it must mean to a woman: her future husband meeting with her father to discuss the lowest price for which he [sic] can be bought. And later, when the women of the village gather, they boast of what their husbands paid for them: three cows, or five. How does she feel, the woman is sold for one, or two?" The fact that women are bought and sold in this culture, their thorough objectification, is not open to scrutiny, only the damaging effects of being sold cheaply.

Johnny asserts: "Many things can happen to make a woman beautiful. The thing that matters most is what she thinks of herself." While self-esteem can certainly be an important element of beauty and poise, I'm not sure it's the most important. One might argue that a few basic gifts from nature such as reasonably clear skin or facial features free from major disfigurement might also play a role in helping a woman feel and appear beautiful. Furthermore, if you read celebrity biographies, you'll learn that some of the most glamorous, talented, and admired women in Hollywood suffered horribly from poor self-esteem—Rita Hayworth and Judy Garland, for instance—and were nonetheless considered beautiful.

Still, I admit that there is something magical and affirming about being loved. We have all experienced—at least, I hope we have—the thrilling, enchanting enhancement of our vision of ourselves when we are reflected in the gaze of someone who loves us and values our finest qualities. This is what Maria is getting at in *West Side Story* when she sings about feeling "pretty" and charming and wanting to dance for joy because she's loved "by a pretty won-

derful boy.” The sensation is not unique but that doesn’t make it any less valuable or special.

So I must wonder why Johnny, who claims to have loved Mahana since they were children, waits until she is a despised, scorned spinster before demonstrating his regard for her. What if, when she was seven, Johnny had told her, “I like you, Mahana. You’re special. Others might not see it, but I do”? What if he had found ways, such as giving her gifts she could show her materialistic father, of letting those around her see how he valued her? Could she have become an “eight-cow woman” long before reaching age “nineteen or maybe even twenty”? Given that, as Mr. Harris notes, “In her father’s hut, Mahana believed she was worth nothing,” why would a man who had loved her all along not do what he could to spare her years and years of misery and suffering?

One answer is that the movie doesn’t acknowledge that very real part of a human being’s sense of self. According to Johnny Lingo, Mahana turns into a graceful, self-assured beauty not because someone loves her, or because she loves someone, or because she is treated with respect and kindness, but because she knows she is the most expensive commodity on the island.

Another answer is: This film is not about female empowerment and worth; it’s about male identity and power—the power to assess and determine female worth, the power to claim or create a desirable mate, the power to see what others do not, the power to manipulate less insightful people around one, the power to acquire what one truly desires. Remember, when Johnny analyzes the meaning of a bargaining session for Mr. Harris, he says, “Think what it must mean to a woman: her future husband meeting with her father to discuss the lowest price for which *he* can be bought.” A bridal bargaining is really a contest of wills between two men; female self-esteem here is contingent on the quality of male relationships.

Furthermore, the film is called *Johnny Lingo*—it is not called *Mahana*. This is not a minor detail. How would our sense of the story of “Cinderella” be different if the tale were actually called “Prince Charming”? *Johnny Lingo* is not about its passive heroine; it is the story of its active and powerful hero. Furthermore, of the six characters important enough to have both names and speaking

roles, five are male: Harris, the shopkeeper; Tulu, his assistant; Moki, Mahana's father; Meihai, Moki's counselor; and Johnny Lingo himself. The lone female, outnumbered five to one, is Mahana. There are other bit parts, both male and female, with minor lines, and Mr. Harris and Tulu discuss a certain Lani, an unseen woman who has waited months for a few bolts of poplin. But the interactions that truly matter occur between Johnny and other men: bargaining with Moki, ordering the mirror from Mr. Harris, and explaining to Harris how Mahana was transformed into an eight-cow woman. Johnny's interactions with Mahana get very little screen time, to the point that they seem unimportant. As for Mahana's interactions with women—well, we know what they will be: boasting and gossip about who was the most expensive bride.

As I developed this analysis, I tried to think of other stories in which women are transformed by men; one that came to mind is George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*. Particularly relevant is the scene in which Alfred Doolittle bargains with Henry Higgins for Higgins's access to Doolittle's daughter, Eliza:

DOOLITTLE: Well, the truth is, I've taken sort of a fancy to you, Governor; and if you want the girl, I'm not so set on having her back home again but what I might be open to an arrangement. Regarded in the light of a young woman, she's a fine handsome girl. As a daughter she's not worth her keep; and so I tell you straight. All I ask is my rights as a father; and you're the last man alive to expect me to let her go for nothing; for I can see you're one of the straight sort, Governor. Well, what's a five pound note to you? And what's Eliza to me? (*He returns to his chair and sits down judicially*).

PICKERING: I think you ought to know, Doolittle, that Mr. Higgins's intentions are entirely honorable.

DOOLITTLE: Course they are, Governor. If I thought they wasn't, I'd ask fifty.

HIGGINS (*revolted*): Do you mean to say, you callous rascal, that you would sell your daughter for fifty pounds?

DOOLITTLE: Not in a general way I wouldn't; but to oblige a gentleman like you I'd do a good deal, I assure you.

PICKERING: Have you no morals, man?

DOOLITTLE (*unabashed*): Can't afford them, Governor. Neither could you if you was as poor as me. Not that I mean any harm, you know. But if Liza is going to have a bit out of this, why not me too?

HIGGINS (*troubled*): I don't know what to do, Pickering. There can be no question that as a matter of morals it's a positive crime to

give this chap a farthing. And yet I feel a sort of rough justice in his claim.⁹

In this scene, Doolittle violates one of *our* society's rules regarding transfer of the rights to women: A "father may be able to give [a daughter] away, but he may not sell her."¹⁰ Although initially revolted by Doolittle's demand that he be given five pounds in exchange for his claims on his daughter, Higgins is eventually so amused by Doolittle's idiosyncratic and contingent morality that he tries to persuade Doolittle to accept ten pounds for Eliza—in other words, just like Johnny Lingo, he offers a father more than his asking price in the sale of access to his daughter. Doolittle, however, unlike Moki, refuses to take more than the price he himself named, on the grounds that "ten pounds is a lot of money: it makes a man feel prudent like; and then goodbye to happiness," whereas five pounds is a sum that may be easily and cheerfully squandered.¹¹

After becoming acquainted with a modern bathroom and receiving a new wardrobe, and after months of training with regards to speech and behavior, Eliza is transformed from a foul-smelling, grimy, rude, crude, flower-selling guttersnipe into a cultured, elegant woman whose speech and manners are so refined that she can pass for a duchess. However, Eliza understands something important about this transformation: it has made her unfit to take care of herself; it has made her so refined that she can no longer earn a living through her work. Instead, she must earn a living through her self and person; her best course of action, as Higgins points out, is to marry. The following exchange then ensues:

ELIZA: We were above that at the corner of Tottenham Court Road.

HIGGINS (*waking up*): What do you mean?

ELIZA: I sold flowers. I didn't sell myself. Now that you've made a lady of me I'm not fit to sell anything else. I wish you'd left me where you found me.

HIGGINS (*slinging the core of the apple decisively into the grate*): Tosh, Eliza. Don't you insult human relations by dragging all this cant about buying and selling into it. You needn't marry the fellow if you don't like him.¹²

Higgins is offended when Eliza "[insults] human relations by dragging all this cant about buying and selling into it," but don't

forget that Higgins *did* buy Eliza, a fact he asserts when her father appears and gloomily acknowledges that he has become wealthy enough to provide for her: “Nonsense! [Her father] can’t provide for her. He shan’t provide for her. She doesn’t belong to him. I paid him five pounds for her.”¹³

And although Higgins has suggested that Eliza marry, he is indignant at her plans to wed the genteel but poor and unambitious Freddy Eynsford Hill, responding, “Rubbish! You shall marry an ambassador. You shall marry the Governor-General of India or the Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland, or somebody who wants a deputy-queen. I’m not going to have my masterpiece thrown away on Freddy.”¹⁴

In other words, part of what Shaw points out in his play is that, while it is unseemly in our culture for men to buy and sell women, it nonetheless occurs. Something society finds more unseemly is women’s recognition and criticism of this fact. But what society finds most unseemly of all is women who market themselves, as it should be up to men to determine a woman’s value and see that she is properly bestowed. In the world of Johnny Lingo and Henry Higgins, women’s self-esteem is dependent on their value as a commodity in exchanges between men. The more highly a woman is prized as a commodity, the greater her corresponding self-respect and dignity. Without external valuation by men, she has no worth. And any worth she has must not be something that she herself arranges to benefit from financially, or she is a “bad” woman.

A woman who traffics on her beauty and desirability to secure an advantageous marriage is a gold digger, which is at least a step up from a whore, or a woman who sells access to her body outside marriage. Now, if Mormon culture is really going to embrace and approve *Johnny Lingo* as a narrative of a woman’s self-worth enhanced by her position as the most expensive commodity in a community, we must consider carefully our response to the actions of one Natalie Dylan, a pseudonymous twenty-two-year-old who arranged to auction off her virginity online. As of January 23, 2009, the highest bid she had received was \$3.8 million—though, it should be said, the winner of the auction would be decided not merely by the amount of the bid but by Dylan’s assessment of the overall offer and likability of the bidder. Is this act objectionable or admirable?

Before you answer, let me present a passage from Dylan explaining her decision:

Like most little girls, I was raised to believe that virginity is a sacred gift a woman should reserve for just the right man. But college taught me that this concept is just a tool to keep the status quo intact. Deflowering is historically oppressive—early European marriages began with a dowry, in which a father would sell his virginal daughter to the man whose family could offer the most agricultural wealth. Dads were basically their daughters' pimps.

When I learned this, it became apparent to me that idealized virginity is just a tool to keep women in their place. But then I realized something else: if virginity is considered that valuable, what's to stop me from benefiting from that? It is mine, after all. And the value of my chastity is one level on which men cannot compete with me. I decided to flip the equation, and turn my virginity into something that allows me to gain power and opportunity from men. I took the ancient notion that a woman's virginity is priceless and used it as a vehicle for capitalism.¹⁵

If Mormons teach their youth that it's admirable to boost a woman's opinion of herself by buying and selling her for exorbitant amounts, then we can object to Dylan's auctioning of her virginity only in those aspects where the transaction differs from the one between Johnny Lingo and Moki. One is that sex outside marriage will occur. Second, limited access to a woman, rather than the woman herself, is for sale; this seems to me a positive distinction. In sales like the one in *Johnny Lingo*, buying and selling control of a woman's sexuality is fine as long as that control lasts a really long time; in Dylan's auction, a single act or episode of sex, rather than a lifetime of it, is for sale—a third difference and one which seems a way to minimize spousal abuse. Fourth, the woman is not obligated to labor henceforth for the man, "to mend his roof and fix his supper" as he commands, which also doesn't seem so bad. Fifth, the transaction acknowledges the importance of a particular sexual act, the deflowering of a virgin, which goes politely unmentioned in tales like *Johnny Lingo*, though you can be sure that a girl who is not sexually pure—the proverbial "damaged goods"—would not command so high a price on the marriage market. Sixth, the virgin herself controls the transaction, and seventh, she is the primary financial beneficiary of the transaction.¹⁶

As sex outside of marriage is generally objectionable to Mor-

mons, let's consider an alternate scenario. Let's say that Dylan agrees to marry the man who will pay to deflower her. Let's say she agrees to donate the price to charity. There will be no sex outside of marriage, there is the potential for a lifetime of sexual congress, and Dylan will benefit from the transaction only insofar as she becomes the wife of a man with enough spare cash to buy a bride. This is essentially Mahana's situation, and auctioning off the right to a virgin's sexuality online is merely a more high-tech, modern version of what Moki does on mats outside his hut. The biggest difference is that Dylan controls the transaction, whereas Mahana cannot. Should knowing that she can command the price of \$3.8 million for access to her person bolster Dylan's self-esteem in the same way those eight cows paid for Mahana bolstered hers?

Let's return to Johnny and Mahana and imagine their future. Let's say that, after ten years of marriage, Johnny dies, leaving Mahana a wealthy and attractive widow. Suppose someone else wishes to marry her. The man who "owned" her is gone. Moki, her father, has been paid for his interest in her already. Who then could sell the right to Mahana's hand in marriage? Can she demand that a suitor provide her with eight cows before she agrees to marry him? Will her value have appreciated or declined? Can she demand ten cows, the amount her father claims, after seeing the new and improved Mahana, that she is really worth? Suppose she has several daughters as lovely as she. How will she determine their worth? If the girls have no father, can their mother sell them? Or must ownership pass to another man: a grandfather, uncle, brother, or stepfather?

Questions like these regarding the legal rights of a piece of property—a woman—to own or control property (including herself), have actually required answers in western societies, but they have been sidestepped by societies who refuse to see women as objects that can be bought or sold. In a chapter titled "A Female Property," Lewis Hyde discusses the Uduk Tribe of Ethiopia, which had marriages more unstable than those of certain other tribes in its area, as anyone in an unhappy marriage could leave it. To make marriage contracts inviolable, therefore, in 1963 the government of Ethiopia introduced "a system of bridewealth payments. . . . In consultation with tribal elders, the government de-

cided upon a cash sum to be given by a man to his wife's kin at the time of their marriage."¹⁷

Problems sprang up immediately. As [Hyde demonstrated when he] first introduced the Uduk, any property transferred from one clan to another among these people must be treated as a gift. All transactions between clans are therefore accompanied by the need to clarify their nature and to make sure that the received wealth is consumed as a gift, not converted into capital. But bridewealth confounded the Uduk, and for the obvious reason: their brides are not in fact given. Therefore, the conundrum: if the bridewealth was a gift, then it was one that had not been reciprocated—and yet the name itself implied that it *had*. And if it was *not* a gift, then the bride had apparently been purchased, an even more onerous interpretation.

Some of the Uduk treated the bridewealth as a gift, inventing newfangled gift institutions to deal with the moral complexities that it raised. But most settled on the other side, deciding that bridewealth was really cash purchase, and refusing to pay it. They spoke of it in the language of the marketplace, says [researcher Wendy] James, using “the ordinary word for buying and selling, an action which has no moral content and which only takes place between unrelated people.” Bridewealth payments did nothing to change the underlying structure of the Uduk kinship and by that structure women are not gifts. When asked why they refused to pay bridewealth, the standard cry became, “Are we to sell our girl as if she were a goat or something?”¹⁸

The view of gifts and their role in marriages has been very different in Uganda, however. Traditionally, marriages there have been recognized and formalized partly through a system of “bride gifts,” which functioned “to bring two families together, to unite them through the love of two young people following a long courtship.” But recently these gifts have been replaced with flat-out “bride prices,” and the results have been devastating for Ugandan women. Bartering over brides is now “fiercely negotiated” and has

reduced young women to commodities and has made families see their daughters as a source of income. Today bride price isn't a bag of potatoes, it's a list of demands for money, animals or clothing made by fathers and older brothers, who might want to throw in requests for new shoes or school fees. The mother gets nothing because she was more or less purchased herself, and the sisters are ignored too as they are all set to be exchanged for commodities when they reach 12 or 13. . . . Because they have been “bought,” many teenage girls are forced to accept polygamous marriages, mul-

tiple pregnancies and have no right to deny their husbands sex even if they suspect he is HIV positive. . . . Girls are being removed from school to be married off as young as possible so the families can get a few cows or sacks of rice—the younger the bride, the higher the bride price paid.¹⁹

In light of such circumstances, Hyde's general analysis of bridewealth actually seems to understate the dangers of these practices:

If we take property to be a right to action and therefore an expression of the human will, then whenever a woman is treated as property, even if she is a gift [as when she is given away by her father in marriage], we know that she is not strictly her own person: her will is somewhere subject to someone else's. . . . If . . . a woman does not receive the right of bestowal in herself, then she can never become an actor in her own right, and never an autonomous individual. This last is what is onerous to us in the idea that a woman may be given in marriage—not, I think, that people are sometimes treated as gifts [as when a baby is bestowed by its parents to another family through adoption], not even that there is such a thing as “the right of bestowal in persons,” but that that right passes to the son when he comes of age, but not to the daughter. For where men alone may give and receive, and where women alone are the gifts, men will be active and women passive, men self-possessed and women dependent, men worldly and women domestic, and so on, through all the clichés of gender in a patriarchy.²⁰

Mormon society, which actively advocates a world where “men will be active and women passive, men self-possessed and women dependent, men worldly and women domestic, and so on” does not view the buying and selling of women as property as essentially or inherently wrong—instead, it's cute, as long as women are not direct beneficiaries of any transaction and the price is appropriate. This conclusion is borne out by interviews in the documentary *8 Cows—Millions of Hearts*, which explores the frequency with which *Johnny Lingo* is referenced or mimicked in Mormon culture.

Kurt Hale, writer and director of the LDS films *The RM* and *Singles' Ward*, discusses meeting with his future father-in-law to “barter” over the price of Jamie, the woman Hale wants to marry. Hale asks his fiancée's father, “How many cows do you want for your daughter's hand in marriage?” Jamie's father asks in return, “How many cows do you think my daughter's worth?” Hale counts up the tiny plastic cows he has brought with him; he has fourteen.

As this is more than Johnny Lingo paid for Mahana, it seems to both men an appropriate price. Neither considers the possibility that they might instead see this woman as either priceless or simply unsellable, the way one can't sell a father or grandmother—the notion is absurd.²¹

More grotesque is an anecdote told by Stephen M. Weber, an LDS Institute of Religion instructor. Weber relates events at a restaurant the night before his oldest son, Jake, married his fiancée, Megan, in the Oakland Temple. Weber arrived at the restaurant carrying a gift bag, “certain that Jake and Megan thought it was for them.” However, Weber gives it to his son's future father-in-law, Dave, who lifts, one by one, eight beanie baby cows out of the bag, along with a note reading “Payment in Full.” A few years later, after the birth of Jake and Megan's first child, Dave sends a cow to Weber along with a notice reading “Interest Payment.”²²

As Megan's father is not interviewed in the documentary, it's hard to judge his precise feelings about the cows exchanged as payment and interest. Weber, however, beams gleefully at his own cleverness and cuteness. Neither man seems to understand or care that the symbolic import of their exchange of cows turns Megan into a brood mare (or cow), a creature sold and bought to be impregnated and to bear offspring. But Megan doesn't seem to matter in this business. The transaction is really about the relationship between the two men. What it might mean to Megan, what it says about her, is of secondary importance to what it says about the men—which is to be expected, for as I already pointed out, the story their interaction mimics is a reinforcement of male, not female, power and identity.

Having read the Old Testament, every last word of it, having encountered stories like the one in Judges 19 of the Levite who dismembers his concubine after she is gang-raped, or Amnon's rape of his half-sister Tamar, or Dinah's brothers' refusal to allow her to be married after she is raped, or Lot offering to let the men of Sodom and Gomorrah rape his daughters if they will refrain from raping the angels sent to visit him by God, or the elders of Israel who arranged to let the daughters of Shiloh be kidnapped, raped and married off against their will to the outlaw tribe of Benjamin (whose own women had all been murdered already in a

nasty war against the rest of Israel) as part of a subterfuge to protect the men of Israel from violating their oath never to “give” their daughters in marriage to Benjamin, etc., etc., I don’t generally consider the Old Testament a likely source for worthwhile information on admirable ways to treat women. But Proverbs 31, the chapter that asks the question “Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies”—or, to use the currency of *Johnny Lingo*, greater than an entire herd of cattle—actually gets some things right. Initially I included the phrase “a price far above rubies” in my title for its precious, limitless, and metaphorical valuation of women as contrasted to the concrete specificity of eight prosaic cows, but the verses that follow contain substantive ideas about female identity.

While I must quibble with the notion that particular traits rather than personhood itself make a woman priceless, I can’t fault the worthiness of the attributes that Proverbs 31 suggests women cultivate, including trustworthiness, generosity, honesty, resourcefulness, industry, shrewdness, strength, wisdom, kindness, courage. The chapter points out that “favor [or charm] is deceitful, and beauty is vain [and insubstantial],” and closes by suggesting that the best way to honor a great woman and reveal her worth is to “give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates” (Prov. 31:31).

In other words, the best way to foster self-esteem and reveal the inherent worth of women is to educate them. Help them develop their talents and acquire skills—not just domestic skills valuable at home, but skills that command respect in the world at large. Do not tell women that their worth is determined by the wealth spent by their husbands to purchase or pamper them. Instead, let women retain the fruits of their hands, the results of their work. Make women’s personal achievements, rather than personal beauty, the foundation of their self-worth and their worth in the communities to which they belong. And retire completely the notion that it’s affirming or “cute” to buy or sell women for *any* sum.

Notes

1. Christopher A. Jensen, director, *8 Cows—Millions of Hearts* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2004), DVD; copy in my possession.

2. "Johnny Lingo" (1969), LDSFilm.com, March 15, 2003, <http://www.ldsfilm.com/BYU/JohnnyLingo1969.html> (accessed July 26, 2009).

3. Ibid.

4. A full consideration of the film's treatment of race is beyond the scope of this paper. It must be noted, however, that Mr. Harris's ethnicity and race—an American of European descent—are crucial to the film. His curiosity and confusion as an outsider enable him to pose the questions that allow the film's moral message to emerge. His character is so necessary to making the story's meaning intelligible to its intended audience that he is something of a stock figure: the white man whose experience mediates a colonized culture for an audience composed of domestic members of the colonizing culture. In other words, like Marlow in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Mr. Harris is a sort of tour guide to exotic locales and narratives and "comes through to us not only as a witness of truth, but [as] one holding those advanced and humane views appropriate to the English [and American] liberal tradition." Chinua Achebe, "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*," <http://kirbyk.net/hod/image.of.africa.html> (accessed September 3, 2009).

5. For this statement and all other dialogue from and descriptions of scenes in the film, see *Johnny Lingo* (1969), directed by Wetzel O. Whitaker, screenplay by Orma W. Wallengren, based on a story by Patricia McGerr (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2004), DVD in my possession.

6. Lewis Hyde, *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property* (New York: Random House, 1983), 94.

7. Unable to locate a copy of the original script or a copy of the film with captions or subtitles, I have had to rely on my own ears to transcribe the dialogue of the film. I have listened to this particular speech by Johnny dozens of times, and although people have suggested that I must have misheard, I am confident that the actor (whose enunciation is quite crisp) actually says, "Think what it must mean to a woman: her future husband meeting with her father to discuss the lowest price for which *he* [not *she*, which seems more logical] can be bought." As I will discuss below, this particular choice of pronoun suggests that what is really being negotiated is the terms of a relationship between two men, rather than a relationship between a man and his wife.

8. *8 Cows—Millions of Hearts*.

9. George Bernard Shaw, *Pygmalion* (1913), (New York: Dover Publications, 1994), Act 2. This play has no scenes, only acts.

10. Hyde, *The Gift*, 94.

11. Shaw, *Pygmalion*, Act 3.

12. Ibid., Act 4.

13. Ibid., Act 5.

14. Ibid.

15. Natalie Dylan. "Why I'm Selling My Virginity." *The Daily Beast*, January 23, 2009, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/blogs-and-stories/2009-01-23/why-im-selling-my-virginity/> (accessed July 26, 2009).

16. I have been unable to locate further information about Dylan's auction. As far as I can tell, although she wished to explain her decision to auction off her virginity, she felt no obligation to inform the world whose offer she accepted, how much it was for, or when the transaction was completed.

17. Hyde, *The Gift*, 100.

18. Ibid.

19. Evelyn Shiller, "Paying the Price for Marriage," *The Guardian*, August 18, 2009, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/katineblog/2009/aug/18/money-women> (accessed August 18, 2009).

20. Hyde, *The Gift*, 100–102. This passage also reveals what is onerous in the supposedly divinely authored idea that "if any man espouse a virgin, and desire to espouse another, and the first give her consent, and if he espouse the second, and they are virgins, and have vowed to no other man, then is he justified; he cannot commit adultery for they are given unto him; for he cannot commit adultery with that that *belongeth unto him* and to no one else" (D&C 132:61; emphasis mine). The sense of male ownership and entitlement expressed here is one of the most disconcerting elements of this revelatory document authorizing Mormon polygamy and should also be disconcerting now that the same revelation is deemed to describe eternal marriage. That sense of ownership is not only difficult to reconcile with doctrines proclaiming the inherent worth of each individual soul; it is also, in comparison with more egalitarian views of humanity, absolutely vile.

21. *8 Cows—Millions of Hearts*.

22. Ibid.

Violence in the Scriptures: Mormonism and the Cultural Theory of René Girard

Mack C. Stirling

Introduction

Many who revere the scriptures as the inspired word of God are nonetheless disturbed by them. The scriptures contain inconsistencies and outright contradictions. Particularly disturbing for many are scriptural portrayals of God as wrathful, vengeful, and violent. This article will introduce these problems with several examples from the Old Testament, then present a succinct overview of René Girard's theory of culture because of its unique value in helping us to interpret these difficult texts. The final portion of the paper will present selected texts from the LDS canon in light of Girard's theory.¹

Second Samuel 24 begins ominously: "Again the anger of the Lord burned against Israel, and he incited David against them, saying, 'Go and take a census of Israel and Judah'" (2 Sam. 24:1, New International Version [NIV]; unless otherwise noted, all biblical quotations are from this translation). David took the census, against the advice of his general Joab, but then felt very guilty. He prayed for God to take away his guilt, and the next morning the prophet Gad brought David a message from the Lord. He must choose among three different punishments for Israel: three years of famine, three months of defeat in war, or three days of plague. David chose the plague, "so the Lord sent a plague on Israel" (v. 15), killing 70,000 people in three days. As the Lord was about to finish the job by destroying Jerusalem, he "was grieved because of the calamity" (v. 16) and stayed the hand of the destroying angel. David then pled with God to stop killing innocent people and instead let any further punishment fall on him. Gad, obeying God's

next command, told David to build an altar on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite. David purchased the land, built the altar, and offered sacrifice. "Then the Lord answered [David's] prayer in behalf of the land, and the plague on Israel was stopped" (v. 25).

This is a strange and troubling text, which raises difficult questions about the nature of God and his relationship with humankind. The text gives no reason for God's anger against Israel. Why then would God incite David against Israel? Why did David feel so guilty after simply taking a census, especially one commanded by God Himself? Why would God kill 70,000 ostensibly innocent Israelites? What accounts for the strange options of three different punishments? Why didn't the plague simply end in three days, as originally agreed? Why did God feel sorrow for massive death and destruction that He Himself caused? Why did God direct David to build an altar? Why was animal sacrifice necessary to turn away the wrath of God and terminate the plague?²

We are presented with a capricious God who is willing to kill Israelites, whether for David's sin of taking a census or for unspecified sins of the nation in general. This Deity doesn't care what method He employs (famine, war, or plague) or whom He kills (but insists on the killing itself). He apparently isn't ready to stop killing after the agreed-upon three days of plague but nonetheless experiences remorse and is placated by animal sacrifice.

Worse yet, the familiar account of the destruction of Pharaoh's army by God and Moses in Exodus 14 portrays a God who exults over the impending death of Pharaoh's soldiers and who declares that by destroying the Egyptians He brings Himself glory (vv. 4, 17, 18). We are told that "the Lord hardened the heart of the Pharaoh King of Egypt, so that he pursued" the Israelites into the Red Sea (v. 8), then asked Moses to stretch forth his hand so that the waters would drown Pharaoh's entire army. What are we to make of a God whose glory consists, in part, of His ability to annihilate humans at will? Can we trust our redemption to such a God?

Jeremiah depicts God as similarly vindictive. In Kings and Chronicles, Israel's sins against its covenant with the Lord are well documented. In Deuteronomy, the penalty for covenant violation is destruction of the nation (Deut. 28:15-68, 30:11-20). Jeremiah portrays God as assuming personal responsibility for the imposition of this penalty:

Therefore the Lord Almighty says this:

“Because you have not listened to my word, I will summon all the peoples of the north and my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon,” declares the Lord, “and I will bring them against this land and its inhabitants and against all the surrounding nations. I will completely destroy them and make them an object of horror and scorn, and an everlasting ruin.” (Jer. 25:8–9).

Do we follow the plain sense of this text and assume that God personally sent the Babylonians to do His work of punishing Judah? Do we believe that God was with Nebuchadnezzar and his soldiers in their murder, rape, and pillage because they were His servants? Were they less culpable in their greed and bloodlust because the punishment was necessary and deserved? Are such atrocities ever deserved? Is offensive war ever consistent with the will of God?

As a fourth example, Judges 9 tells the story of Abimelech, son of the famous judge Gideon. After Gideon’s death, Abimelech seized the rulership at Shechem by murdering his seventy brothers in collusion with Shechem’s citizens. The youngest brother, Jotham, escaped and cursed both Shechem and Abimelech with causing each other’s destruction by fire. After three years of Abimelech’s misrule, “God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the citizens of Shechem” (v. 23), resulting in the city’s rebellion and in reciprocal violence from Abimelech. Abimelech besieged and burned Shechem but was killed during a siege of an allied city when the defenders dropped a millstone on his head, ending the civil strife. The account concludes: “Thus God repaid the wickedness that Abimelech had done to his father by murdering his seventy brothers . . . [and] God also made the men of Shechem pay for all their wickedness” (vv. 56–57).

This narrative is fascinating because of the parallel appearance and virtual equivalence of the following ideas: (1) prophesied destruction by fire, (2) God’s sending an “evil spirit” between Abimelech and Shechem, (3) God’s wrathful vengeance on Abimelech and Shechem, and (4) the mutual destruction of wicked men in a civil war. Must we conclude from this story that God directly inspired a civil war to inflict a justified vengeance on two unrighteous parties? What does the destruction of the wicked by “fire” really mean, and what role does God play?

Finally, Jeremiah 7:21–23, an often-overlooked and challenging text reads:

Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: “add your burnt offerings to your sacrifices, and eat the flesh.

For in the day I brought them out of the land of Egypt, *I did not speak to your fathers or command them concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices.*

But this command I gave them, ‘Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people; and walk in all the way that I command you, that it may be well with you.’ (Revised Standard Version, emphasis mine).

This text makes the startling assertion that God did not command animal sacrifice in ancient Israel, flatly contradicting extensive writings in the Pentateuch. Attempts to resolve this discrepancy have included dismissing Jeremiah’s statement as prophetic hyperbole, deliberate mistranslation from the Hebrew (NIV), asserting that Jeremiah referred only to personal (not communal) sacrifices, and the claim that God is referring here only to sacrifices done when Israel was in a state of gross apostasy.³ None of these approaches provides a satisfactory answer.⁴ If God did not initiate ritual animal sacrifice or need it, then where did it come from and why does much of the Bible claim that it did come from God?

Overview of René Girard’s Mimetic Theory

René Girard (b. 1923) has developed a theory of human culture which yields important insights when applied to these questions raised by the Old Testament narratives. Girard trained as a historian but spent most of his distinguished career teaching literature. He began his intellectual and spiritual journey as an agnostic but ended as a committed (Catholic) Christian. He was elected to the Académie Française in 2005 and received a Lifetime Scholarly Achievement Award from the Modern Language Association in 2008. From his study of Cervantes, Flaubert, Stendhal, Proust, and Dostoevsky, Girard developed important insights into the mimetic nature of human desire, which he published in his influential *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* (1961).⁵ (See also his interview in this issue, which discusses several of these topics.)

Girard extended his insights in *Violence and the Sacred* (1972), rooted in his study of Greek tragedy and human anthropology.

Here, Girard postulated the origin of archaic religion (sacrificial ritual, prohibitions, and myth) in the nonconscious, unanimous killing of human victims by a mob. Girard believes that all human culture descends from archaic religion. His third great series of insights is about the relationship of biblical revelation, particularly Christ, to human culture. These ideas were first published in *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World* (1978).

Girard's mimetic theory is conveniently organized in three parts: mimetic desire, the origins of human culture, and the Bible against human culture.

Mimetic Desire

Central to Girard's cultural theory is his exploration of human desire which he maintains is mimetic by nature—that is, we learn desire by imitating others. Furthermore, this imitation of others occurs, in large part, unconsciously and is inherently acquisitive. Girard distinguishes desire from universal physiological needs for food, water, shelter, etc. It is rather in the manner of fulfillment of these basic needs and in the genesis of other desires and their attempted satiation that desire, in the Girardian sense, comes into play. We learn from other humans what to desire and how to acquire it. Mimetic desire is therefore intimately connected to our learning capacity: "Everything that we know under the titles of apprenticeship, education, and imitation rests on this capacity for mimesis."⁶

We want things *because* others want them, have them, or seem to have them. It is the very possession of the object by another that signals its value to us. Thus, our desires are mediated to us by human models in the surrounding culture. The fundamental structure of human desire is therefore *triangular* and not *linear*. Our desires are not primarily or directly for the object (linear), but rather are absorbed from the model who leads us to the object (triangular). Desire is therefore neither spontaneous nor individualistic. It is learned from others.

As a corollary, Girard rejects the idea of the self as an entirely autonomous, choosing entity. Human beings exist only in, and because of, relationships to other human beings. We choose what to become by the models we choose to imitate. We do choose our models to some extent, but imitating *some* model is an inescapable

feature of human existence. It goes without saying that we unconsciously imitate some models, but we consciously chose others because we admire, respect, or love them.

We have all seen a child (the “model” in Girardian terms) who gets bored playing with a fire engine but becomes rabidly possessive when a second child (the “subject”) wants it. Each has signaled to the other the value of the fire engine, and rivalry has arisen. Mimetic desire thus leads naturally and often unconsciously to mimetic rivalry.

Girard elaborates on the genesis of mimetic rivalry in the example of the master and his disciples:

The master is delighted to see more and more disciples around him, and delighted to see that he is being taken as a model. Yet if the imitation is too perfect, and the imitator threatens to surpass the model, the master will completely change his attitude and begin to display jealousy, mistrust, and hostility. He will be tempted to do everything he can to discredit and discourage his disciple.

The disciple can only be blamed for being the best of all disciples. He admires and respects the model; if he had not done so, he would hardly have chosen him as model in the first place. So inevitably he lacks the necessary “distance” to put what is happening to him “in perspective.” He does not recognize the signs of rivalry in the behavior of the model. It is all the more difficult for the disciple to do so because the model tries very hard to reinforce this blindness. The model tries his best to hide the real reason for his hostility.⁷

Such mimetic rivalry is pervasive and can easily spiral out of control. Rare is the person who has not seen rivalries destroy families, church communities, or other institutions.

Mimetic rivalry can become all-consuming, destroying all sense of perspective, balance, and fairness. One’s life becomes centered around the rivalry. The model literally becomes one’s god or devil. He is a god because he is all-powerful, possessing the things, status, position, or person that the desiring subject wants more than anything in the world. He is a devil because he impedes, punishes, or ignores the deepest desires of the subject. The model is simultaneously good/evil, beloved friend/hated enemy, guide/monster, god/devil. He therefore has two faces. He is *bivalent*.

A serious mimetic rivalry makes life extremely miserable for the subject. He is at the mercy of intense passions, oscillating between inappropriate highs when he perceives he is gaining in the

mimetic battle and inappropriate lows when he perceives he is losing. Advanced mimetic rivalry (mimetic crisis) is ripe for resolution by violent means. The violence may be directed against the model (murder), against the subject (suicide, submission to the rival, insanity), or against a third person (scapegoat). In fact, it is surprisingly easy to shift anger and resentment to a third person. Frustration generated at work, for example, is often vented later on a spouse, child, or pet. Furthermore, virtually all of us have experienced the communion of joining with another person or two to criticize, demean, or make fun of another. We are all natural scapegoaters, often sliding into this behavior unconsciously.

Saul's mimetic rivalry with David illustrates virtually all of the ways of dealing with mimetic rivalry. After David's victory over Goliath, Saul brings David into his court. This is a place of honor but also indicates David's inferior status to Saul. However, David soon becomes more popular with the people (1 Sam. 18:5-16). Saul experiences an increasingly severe mimetic crisis, fluctuating between submitting to David (1 Sam. 25:16-22, 26:17-25) and trying to murder him (1 Sam. 9:11, 20:32-33, 23:1-14). Saul also blames (scapegoats) his son Jonathan for undermining him by supporting David (1 Sam. 20:28-32). He massacres the priests at Nob after they unwittingly support David (1 Sam. 22:11-19). The priests here have become surrogate victims in place of David. But all of these strategies fail to resolve Saul's mimetic crisis. Saul finally stages a great battle with the Philistines to regain popular acclaim. Before the battle, he consults the medium at Endor and is rebuked by the dead prophet Samuel (1 Sam. 28), a probable lapse into insanity. Saul loses the battle and commits suicide (1 Sam. 31:1-6).

All of us, with rare exceptions, exist in a number of ongoing mimetic rivalries, which are generally held in check by social and psychological mechanisms such as the law, social structure, social distance, common sense, religious and ethical teachings, "low-grade" scapegoating, etc. Archaic humans, however, lacked many of these mechanisms or had them only in rudimentary form, according to Girard's theory. Given the powerful mimetic abilities of humans, the inevitable mimetic rivalries, and the disastrous effects of mimetic crisis, how did human culture originate in the first place?

How was it maintained? Why is the scapegoating reflex seemingly so natural to us? It is to these issues that we now turn.

The Origins of Human Culture

Girard asks us to imagine a group of archaic humans.⁸ Resources are scarce; social bonds are limited and weak. Competition for food, shelter, mates, etc., is fierce. Individual mimetic rivalries flare up intermittently and sometimes dissipate. A stronger member of the group may, on occasion, kill a weaker member. The group leads a precarious existence in a constant state of mimetic tension because of continuous competition for survival and unresolved mimetic rivalries.

Now, imagine the group faced with a new external stress: famine, disease, catastrophic weather, etc. The level of tension and resentment increases. Individual mimetic rivalries heat up. One's rivals now seem different, evil, even monstrous. There is no one to trust. The world seems to be ending. The group, as a whole, is descending into a mimetic crisis, into a war of all against all. Relations between individuals no longer have any basis in affection, common sense, or mutual benefit. Everyone is possessed by fear, anger, finding fault, and hostility. Chaos reigns, and the group is faced with dissolution.

In the midst of such chaos, Girard hypothesizes, one person in a mimetic rivalry transfers his primary hostility from the rival to a third person. If the rival imitates the first person, two people will find themselves in agreement against the third person—a small island of stability in a sea of dissension. As more people imitate the original rivals, the entire group becomes rapidly polarized against one individual in a mimetic crescendo. The intense passions of hate, resentment, and blame which were formerly diffused through the group become focused on this one person. He now seems different, monstrous, inhuman, and guilty of causing all the group's problems. In reality, there is little or no difference between this person and the rest. However, in the collective, impassioned mind of the crowd, his evil and guilt are infinite. Abruptly and unconsciously, the crowd attacks and kills this "monstrous deviant." He has become the *scapegoat*. The mimetic crisis of all against all has shifted to a polarization of all against one.

The crowd, formerly at odds with itself, has now acted unani-

mously, psychologically transferring hostility, hate, anger, blame, and guilt to the scapegoat. The catharsis of violently eliminating the scapegoat is real and powerful. The crowd feels united, powerful, and guiltless. One has died (been killed) and facilitated the preservation of all. The peace and harmony are real and are experienced as overwhelming. In fact, these psychological effects seem utterly transcendent, completely beyond human control or ability. The crowd, therefore, perceives the catharsis as divine in origin—as sacred and holy. Thus, a human victim has been violently eliminated, but the crowd experiences communion with the divine. The *violent sacred* has been created by the mental projections of the crowd on the scapegoat-victim. The individual members of the crowd are not cognizant of their complicity in the killing. They simply remember the mimetic crisis as the wrath of God and the subsequent peace and harmony as the blessing of God.

After his obliteration, the scapegoat appears in a different light. Before, he was perceived as evil, inhuman, monstrous—someone who brought calamity. Afterward, he is seen as a source of peace, goodness, and harmony. He is therefore bivalent (both good and evil), like everyone's rival for whom he substitutes. The cause of the victim's death is similarly transfigured in the mind of the crowd. It is seen as the will of God, the work of God, or not even as death at all. This is a lie, but the crowd perceives it as truth. With this self-deception, the crowd hides its own guilt from itself and hides its own complicity in the murder of an (innocent) victim.⁹ The crowd was deluded about the scapegoat's guilt before the killing and deluded about its own guilt, in the opposite sense, after the killing. Thus, the community maintains the myth of its own innocence. Its violence has become God's violence. The unanimous voice of the community has become, unbeknownst to it, the voice of God.

Girard maintains that human culture originated in countless such events since time immemorial. "Humanity springs forth from religion, i.e., from many 'founding murders,'" he has said.¹⁰ The beneficial effects of sacred violence have thus been the foundation of human culture. Undifferentiated and chaotic violent energy from multiple mimetic conflicts in the crowd in mimetic crisis is focused on the scapegoat. This collective violent power is

then reflected back to the crowd as the differentiating violence of the cultural order. Undifferentiated and unfocused mimetic violence creates the communal crisis. Mimetic violence focused on the scapegoat solves the crisis and results in creation of culture. The scapegoat therefore structures human culture.

Archaic human culture consisted essentially of language and religion. Girard asserts that both originated in the scapegoat event. With respect to language, Girard accepts many of the conclusions of modern structuralist linguistics, which sees language as a complicated system of signs. Each sign gains meaning only in contrast to other signs. Differences between signs make a system of symbolic communication possible. Girard goes beyond structuralism to postulate that the first or original difference is the difference between the scapegoat and the crowd. The scapegoat victim is the first sign, the root of human language. From this first sign (difference), all other differences in language/culture are generated.¹¹ The scapegoat serves as an absolute referent in the symbolic system of language.

Religion is the other essential component of archaic human culture. Archaic religion consists of *prohibition, ritual, and myth*, each element arising from the scapegoat victim. Prohibitions (rules) come from the evil acts by which the scapegoat allegedly caused the societal crisis. Prohibitions are implemented by the communal will to prevent subsequent crises. Many common prohibitions, such as those against murder, theft, and adultery, correspond to our modern ethical notions. Other prohibitions seem mere superstitions.¹²

Ritual sacrifice also originated in the community's instinctive fear of returning to the original mimetic crisis.¹³ The crowd, in the aftermath of the spontaneous murder, tries to imagine how to reexperience that sense of salvation. Rituals gradually evolve, recapitulating both the mimetic crisis and its violent resolution. Dancing, shouting, war games, the wearing of masks, etc. may be used to excite mimetic passions, thereby imitating the mimetic crisis. Then, these passions are focused on a victim who is ritually sacrificed, re-presenting the founding murder. Sacrificial victims may be human or animal, both representing the original human murder victim.

When ritual sacrifice is effective, it unifies the community

against the victim and serves as a mechanism for venting hostility, resentment, and accusation. It fosters peace and communal good will. The community feels that it is experiencing the blessing of God. Indeed, the community firmly believes that God has commanded the sacrifice and requires it to satisfy His wrath. Failure to offer a proper sacrifice will precipitate punishment, the wrath of God. Sacrifice also functions to order and differentiate society. Priests and their assistants, for example, have a special relationship to the violent sacred, differentiating them from the crowd. Economic exchange eventually grows up around temple sacrificial ritual, resulting in further differentiation. Society structures itself in relation to ritual sacrifice, which comes from the founding murder.

Myth is the retelling of the founding murder *from the perspective of the crowd trapped in the lie of its own innocence*. In myth, all human responsibility for the murder is effaced. Traces of violence are either removed completely or transferred to the gods. Myth therefore transforms human violence into divine violence and dead human scapegoats into living gods. For example, in the Babylonian creation myth, Marduk kills Tiamat to create the heavens and the earth. Humans are subsequently created from the bones and blood of Tiamat's lover Kingu.¹⁴ This myth thus presents humanity as originating in the violence of gods. Girard maintains that human victims, killed by frenzied crowds, underlie all the idolatrous gods of archaic religion. Myths reflect the delusional belief of the crowd in its own guiltlessness and conceal the truth of the victim, violently murdered by the human crowd.

In myth, other events that seem totally beyond human control are readily connected to the transcendence of the violent sacred. Storms, earthquakes, floods, plagues, famines, and wars are seen as acts of a wrathful deity who is punishing the community for its sins. Similarly, fruitful rains, good health, good weather, and peace are perceived as God's blessings.

Girard believes that all other cultural institutions descend from archaic religion.¹⁵ For example, our modern legal system uses a dose of carefully controlled "good violence" in a reasoned attempt to punish the guilty and protect society. The legal system is thus directly connected to the economy of ritual sacrifice where a dose of carefully controlled good violence (the sacrifice) effec-

tively discharges hostility and protects the community. Indeed, public executions in our culture have often served a quasi-ritual function, bringing people together and serving to vent anger not necessarily connected to the person being executed.

In summary, Girard argues that two essential features lie at the foundation of culture: (1) murder by the crowd, and (2) the lie that conceals the true nature of the murder from the crowd. Culture derives from scapegoating; we are psychosocially constituted and therefore trapped by the lie of sacred violence. We naturally think in sacrificial terms: better that one person should die than that all should perish. We unconsciously sanctify our violence as divine in origin and necessary for redemption. We therefore have great difficulty recognizing the truth of our own violence and its foundational role in culture.

The Bible against Human Culture

Girard finds in the Gospels the clearest revelation of the scapegoating mechanism. In the accounts of Jesus's life and death the mimetic nature and violence of human beings are clearly revealed. Jesus's story cuts unequivocally through the lie of sacred violence, allowing us to see the truth about ourselves.

The Gospels also contain the ultimate revelation of God's nonviolence and transcendent love. Jesus refuses to cooperate in any way with violence. He teaches love of one's enemy and is eventually crucified because of fidelity to this message. As Girard puts it, "A non-violent deity can only signal his existence to mankind by having himself driven out by violence—by demonstrating that he is not able to establish himself in the Kingdom of Violence."¹⁶ Jesus conquers violence without violence; to do otherwise would be no victory at all.¹⁷ Jesus came to end all communal sacrifice of the other by the shedding of blood, by making it impossible for us to deceive ourselves about it any longer. Jesus came to destroy the scapegoat mechanism of human culture.

A Girardian approach to scriptural interpretation of the Bible involves the two fundamental concepts already discussed: (1) the crowd's murder of a scapegoat and concealment of the murder by the lie of sacred violence that projects human violence on God; and (2) God is a god of utter nonviolence and transcendent love. Therefore, when the scriptures present God as violent, Girard

asks us to suspect that the text misrepresents God. Girard challenges us to identify traces of the violent sacred in the text, subtract it from our understanding of God, and use it to understand humanity.

Detractors of both Girard and Christianity claim that Jesus is just one more example of the dying and reviving God found in some pagan myths.¹⁸ It is true that the Gospels recount the essential features of mythic culture-founding violence. Jesus's death has features both of uncontrolled mimetic mob violence and a ritualized execution. Even His closest disciples temporarily melt into the crowd by betraying, denying, or simply leaving Him. All are against one, putting Jesus in the place of all victims since the world began. As in myth, Jesus is venerated as God after his death. However, according to Girard, the Jesus of the Gospels "interacts" with myth to deconstruct it, just as He steps into the human scapegoating mechanism to destroy it. The critical difference between Gospel and myth is that *the Gospels are written from the perspective of the victim*. Myths are written from the perspective of the crowd which unconsciously sanctifies and divinizes its own violence by projecting it onto the gods.

According to Girard, the Gospels were written by inspired witnesses who step away from the crowd and tell the truth of a perfectly innocent victim, thus exposing human violence and revealing the full truth of the scapegoating phenomenon. Moreover, the Gospels bear witness that Jesus was God before He was crucified and resurrected; He was not divinized by the crowd's distorted transformation of its victim. His resurrection simply confirms that He is God. Witnesses of the resurrected victim bear witness of His divinity and the crowd's guilt and violence. In contrast to the Gospels, myth preserves the lie of the crowd's innocence. Jesus's empty tomb represents the repudiation of the mechanism of human culture and prevents mythical transformations of Jesus's death and resurrection. In contrast, Girard sees the sealed, whitened tombs to which Jesus compared the Pharisees (Matt. 23:27-28) as a perfect metaphor for human culture.¹⁹ As the whitewashed tomb hides the victim's body, so does the mythology of sacred violence conceal our violence against the victim.

Jesus's disciples are called to a new community by repentance

(suspension of mimetic rivalry) and love. They are united in love with a living victim, whom they know, instead of being united by violence around a dead victim, whom they don't recognize. The new community will result from mimesis of Jesus as true disciples mediate Christ to others. In Jesus we have a new model, one who stands against human culture.

However, we naturally resist the revelation of the cross, a human tendency against which Jesus constantly struggles. An important example is Jesus's question, "How can Satan drive out Satan?" (Mark 3:23). Girard maintains that Satan (the name means "adversary" or "accuser") does drive out Satan in a very real sense; indeed, this is the very foundation of human culture.²⁰ One face of Satan is the mimetic rivalry of all against all: every man accusing his brother. This manifestation of Satan is driven out by the other face of Satan: every man accusing the scapegoat in the mimetic polarization of the crowd against its victim. Girard's Satan thus rules with violence but can also produce a temporary peace at the expense of our victims. Satan, manifested in our accusations and actions against our fellow human beings, is a murderer and liar from the beginning. The cross reveals the source of archaic religion in the "satanic" unanimous accusation of the crowd against its victim.

The purpose of the gospel revelation is to deconstruct archaic religion in all of its aspects and thereby destroy the grip of the violent sacred on the minds and hearts of humankind. It exposes myth as a lie by telling the story from the perspective of the victim. The gospel also destroys the efficacy of ritual sacrifice, which is diminished in importance when Jesus asserts that he "desires mercy and not sacrifice" (Matt. 9:13), condemned by Jesus's prophetic symbolic act in temporarily shutting down the sacrificial system of the temple (Mark 11:15-17), and ultimately undone by the cross, where our violence (the origin of ritual sacrifice) is definitively revealed to us. Finally, the gospel exposes the emptiness of prohibitions not based in love of God and one's fellow beings, such as the plethora of rules about Sabbath-keeping (Mark 2:23-28, 3:1-4) and the stigmatizing of menstruating women (Mark 5:24-34).

The gospel confronts every person with fundamental questions. Will I continue to sacrifice my fellow humans for my own benefit, or am I willing to sacrifice myself for their benefit? Will I continue to follow the sacrificial economy of Satan, or will I imi-

tate Christ in his voluntary self-giving for others? Will I construct my identity through the eyes of the persecuting crowd or through the eyes of Christ? To respond in the first way is idolatry; to respond in the second is true worship.

The Old Testament is a record of God's attempt to reveal the gospel to His chosen people, Israel. God's challenge is to speak to human beings according to their language and way of understanding. Human language, however, is formed and imprisoned by the scapegoating mechanism of human culture. God must find a way to use but transform these symbols, break us out of the system of sacred violence, and bring us to an understanding of the truth about Himself. As may be expected, this is an exceedingly difficult process. The revelation is not always perceived, frequently distorted, and sometimes ignored in the expediency of maintaining culture. Thus, in the Old Testament, texts of transcendent inspiration lie alongside texts that almost completely embody the myth of sacred violence. Nonetheless, the overall revelatory pressure in the Old Testament tends to expose the violence of human nature that lies at the root of culture, to put a human face on our victims, and to reveal the true nature of God. (See a Girardian reading of several Old Testament narratives in the Appendix.)

The story of David's census noted earlier is an example of a text that embodies a myth of sacred violence. In a Girardian reading of this difficult story, David himself decides to take a politically controversial census for military and/or taxation purposes and thereby infringes on tribal freedoms. Serious civil strife breaks out throughout the kingdom, and many people are killed. It seems beyond human control. It is the "wrath of God," and God is even blamed for the census. These elements are all mythological. Seeking an end to the crisis, David resorts to divination (three years of famine, three months of defeat in war, or three days of plague). Finally, at Gad's suggestion, David unifies the nation with a spectacular ritual animal sacrifice on neutral ground. The unity achieved by the sacrifice ends the crisis. Girard helps us to filter out the mythological elements in the text and to understand the real power that effective animal sacrifice had to unify, stabilize, and maintain ancient societies.

In contrast to David's census is the story of Joseph (Gen.

37–50) that shows the Bible’s ability to expose myth and reveal the truth of the victim. Joseph’s brothers envy him because of his favored status with their father. The brothers consider killing him but then sell him into slavery at Judah’s suggestion. With time Joseph rises to the position of grand vizier in Egypt while his family descends into famine in Canaan. The brothers travel to Egypt and receive food from Joseph, whom they do not recognize. Joseph frames the youngest brother, Benjamin, now the father’s favorite, for theft and arrests the brothers. He offers the brothers their freedom in return for Benjamin as hostage. Much earlier, the brothers had sacrificed Joseph for their (perceived) benefit, each hoping to become their father’s favorite. Will they again sacrifice the favored brother for themselves? No. Judah, representing the ten brothers, begs to be held hostage instead of Benjamin. The brothers have passed from the desire to sacrifice others to a willingness to offer themselves for the other. In Girard’s view, this change is the essence of Christian conversion.

This story clearly reveals mimetic rivalry and shows that true and lasting reconciliation does not come from the violent exclusion of a scapegoat victim who is later deified. Rather it comes from the living scapegoat’s (Joseph’s) love and forgiveness, coupled with the brothers’ repentance and love. The contrast between the violent, scapegoating mechanism of archaic religion and true revelation could not be starker.²¹

Another revelatory high point of the Old Testament is the fourth “servant song” of Isaiah (Isa. 52:13–53:12), which Girard reads as typologically prophetic of Christ.²² This passage describes a righteous, honest, and peaceful man who is persecuted and eventually killed as a “guilt offering” (Isa. 53:10). The community reflects on his innocent death with transcendent insight:

Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him and afflicted.

But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed by our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. (Isa. 53:4–5)

Here, we see a persecuting community understanding the innocence of the victim, understanding that the victim is bearing the

consequences of their sins, and understanding that they have benefited from this.

Thus, though less consistently and thoroughly than the New Testament, the Old Testament also exposes mimetic rivalry and its sequel—the violent scapegoating upon which human culture is founded. It begins to overturn myth and other features of archaic religion which come from the violent sacred. For example, Judges 9, referred to earlier, is revelatory precisely because it equates God’s wrath, God’s sending an evil spirit, destruction by fire, and civil war. Perceptive readers are thus better prepared to understand subsequent texts about “God’s” destruction of the wicked.

Jeremiah’s surprising statement that God did not command ritual animal sacrifice during Israel’s wilderness wanderings (Jer. 7:21–23) forms part of a substantial critique of ritual animal sacrifice by the pre-Exilic prophets (Amos 5:21–25; Hos. 5:6, 6:6; Mic. 6:6–8; Isa. 1:1–14; Jer. 7:21–23) and the psalmists (Ps. 50:5–15, 51:14–17). These texts question the relationship of ritual animal sacrifice to the Lord and its ultimate value in creating a bond between the worshipper and the Lord. The existence of these counter-texts is all the more surprising since Israelite religion centered on ritual sacrifice. A Girardian perspective sees these passages as instances of revelation from the true God against religion derived from the violent sacred.

Girard thus sees ancient Israel as a people journeying out of the violent sacred (myth, ritual, useless or harmful prohibitions) toward knowledge and worship of the true God. The journey does not occur in a straight line but rather with delays, reversals, and failures of understanding. Ancient Israelite religion is always a compromise between the violent sacred and true worship, even as revelation struggles to end or transform the violent sacred. Much of ancient Israelite religion, therefore, does not reflect the pure will of God but shows a dynamic interplay among revelation from God, Israel’s spiritual sensitivity to the revelation, and vestiges of the violent sacred foundations of their social and cultural milieu.

Mormon Scripture and Girard’s Cultural Theory

Joseph Smith’s revelations on the state of ancient Israel under Moses can be profitably compared with Girard’s insights. In his revelation on priesthood in September 1832, Joseph articulates

the concept that, without the ordinances and power of the Holy (Melchizedek) Priesthood, human beings cannot fully know God nor fully experience salvation (D&C 84:19–22). He continues:

Now this Moses plainly taught to the children of Israel in the wilderness, and sought diligently to sanctify his people that they might behold the face of God;

But they hardened their hearts and could not endure his presence; therefore, the Lord in his wrath, for his anger was kindled against them, swore that they should not enter into his rest while in the wilderness, which rest is the fullness of his glory.

Therefore, he took Moses out of their midst, and the Holy Priesthood also.

And the lesser priesthood continued . . . and the preparatory gospel;

Which gospel is the gospel of repentance and of baptism, and the remission of sins, and the law of carnal commandments, which the Lord in his wrath caused to continue with the house of Aaron among the children of Israel until John. (D&C 84:23–27)

Because ancient Israelites resisted God’s revelation, they lost access to the fullness of the gospel, to the fullness of the power and presence of God. In God’s wrath (meaning God’s absence), they were left with a “preparatory” gospel and the “law of carnal commandments.”

The law of carnal commandments may refer to a set of precepts explicitly revealed by God for the carnal men and women who have rejected His gospel, which, from my observations, seems to be the majority LDS interpretation. However, I suggest a different reading. The text from Doctrine and Covenants 84 quoted above strongly implies that such “commandments” result from the hardened human heart in the absence of God. Furthermore, Doctrine and Covenants 29:34–35 clearly expresses the idea that God has never given a carnal commandment. Finally, “carnal” in KJV and LDS scripture exclusively describes fallen human beings who have yielded to the devil and hardened their hearts against God (Rom. 8:6–7; 1 Cor. 3:1–3; 2 Cor. 10:4; Heb. 7:16, 9:10; 2 Ne. 28:21; Mosiah 4:2, 16:5, 16:16, 27:25; Alma 30:53, 36:4, 41:11, 42:10; D&C 3:4, 29:35, 67:10). I conclude that “carnal commandments” are human attempts to please, propitiate, or approach God; they are not of divine origin. They have the potential to harm human beings. In Girardian terms, such laws

are derived from human culture or, in other words, from the violent sacred.

Joseph Smith and Girard thus seem to be in profound agreement that something important was missing from ancient Israelite religion. Furthermore, elements of the law of Moses and Old Testament religion seem to be of human rather than divine origin. How else can we explain the large number of laws which are obviously inconsistent with Christ's basic teachings? Men with crushed testicles were forbidden to enter the assembly of the Lord, as were descendants of Moabites or Ammonites down to the tenth generation (Deut. 23:1-3). Menstruating women and men with nocturnal emissions were "unclean" and contaminated anything or anyone they touched (Lev. 15). People with scaling skin disease ("leprosy")²³ were excluded from the camp of ancient Israel until healing was documented (Lev. 13). They were believed to be afflicted by God for some moral offense (Num. 12:9, 2 Kgs. 5:27, 2 Chr. 26:18-21). The ancient Babylonians, Greeks, Persians, and Arabs all had similar prohibitions.²⁴ These were all culturally determined prohibitions of the violent sacred, not divine in origin.

The topic of animal sacrifice is particularly interesting since the Joseph Smith scriptures also seem to confirm that God ordained such sacrifices. For example, God commanded Adam and Eve to "offer the firstlings of their flocks" (Moses 5:5). In a Girardian reading, "God's" voice is actually the voice of Adam's culture, and ritual sacrifice is of cultural origin.²⁵ Adam obeys but without understanding why. Then a revelation from God transforms the meaning of animal sacrifice: "This thing is a similitude of the sacrifice of the Only Begotten of the Father" (Moses 5:7). Girard similarly sees all victims of ritual sacrifice as typologically prophetic of Christ who came to stand in their place and who has been with all victims since the beginning. Moses 5:5-7 both confirms Girard's idea and confers symbolic meaning on the animal victim, a meaning that goes beyond the original cultural significance of the sacrifice.

There are other approaches to resolving the apparent contradiction between Girard's theory and God's "commanding" of animal sacrifice in Moses 5, which may be more congenial to LDS thinkers. Because ritual sacrifice played an immensely important

role in stabilizing and maintaining human culture, God may well have acceded to the needs of fallen humankind and permitted (“commanded”) ritual animal sacrifice as a culture-stabilizing crutch at earlier stages of social and religious development. Another explanation is seeing animal sacrifice as God’s way of moving humankind away from human sacrifice.

According to Girard, revelation begins a process of symbolic transformation designed to lead humans out of the violent sacred to true worship. This idea seems harmonious with several LDS texts:

For the Lord God . . . speaketh unto men according to their language, unto their understanding. (2 Ne. 31:3)

Behold, I am God and have spoken it; these commandments are of me, and were given unto my servants in their weakness, after the manner of their language, that they might come to understanding. (D&C 1:24)

And now, if there are faults they are the mistakes of men. (Book of Mormon title page; see also Morm. 8:17)

In Girard’s theory, a nonviolent God has difficulty breaking through the barrier of human language which was formed in the violent sacred. I suggest that these LDS texts, which are unlike any in the Bible, confirm the presence of the barrier and the difficulty of surmounting it in the revelatory process.

For Girard, a critically important role that Christ plays is to end the mechanism of human sacrificial victimage, including ritual human and animal sacrifice and any other killing or abuse of another for communal or individual benefit. Christ gives himself as the “last sacrifice” to end all sacrifice of the other. This principle is directly confirmed by Amulek: “Therefore, it is expedient that there should be a great and last sacrifice, and then shall there be . . . a stop to the shedding of blood . . . and that great and last sacrifice will be the Son of God, yea infinite and eternal” (Alma 34:13-14). Although God directly commanded the end of animal sacrifice (3 Ne. 9:19–20), in Girard’s view Christ’s death functions in another important way to end communal sacrifice by the shedding of blood. This is by exposing it openly to the world. The violent unanimity of the crowd against its (innocent) victims is stripped of its mythological veil. This unveiling breaks the unanimity by engendering concern for victims and therefore robs the

scapegoat mechanism of its power. Society can no longer be stabilized at the expense of its victims. Ritual sacrifice does not work and is abandoned.

Girard emphasizes the importance of human culture in mediating our desires. Moses 6:55 provides a parallel: “Inasmuch as thy children are conceived in sin, even so when they begin to grow up, sin conceiveth in their hearts, and they taste the bitter, that they may know how to prize the good.” We are conceived and born into a sinful, fallen world, and we inevitably imitate the sin that surrounds us. Having conceived sin in our hearts, revelation challenges us to prize the good, mediated to us by God (Moro. 7:11–12) and leave sin behind.

The Book of Mormon has much to say about the destruction of the wicked—sometimes describing it with passive verbs (1 Ne. 22:13–23, 2 Ne. 6:9–15), but more often ascribing an active role to God (1 Ne. 4:13; 3 Ne. 9:1–12; 3 Ne. 21:12–18). Doctrine and Covenants 29:9 also presents God as having an active role in the destruction of the wicked: “I will burn them up.” Girard invites us to question these texts based on his theory of the violent sacred and our knowledge of Christ from the New Testament. Does Christ truly purify by killing or are these texts a result of literary convention, a depiction of God as presiding over the whole earth, or rhetoric designed to bring man to repentance?

The Book of Mormon provides a basis for critiquing the concept of a violent God who kills or orders humans to kill. The allegory of the olive tree portrays God as saying that He cut down the Jaredites in the promised land to make room for the Nephites (Jacob 5:43–45). However, the Jaredite narrative describes how they withdrew from God, hardened their hearts, and embraced civil war, leading to their destruction (Ether 14–15). Similarly, the “wrath of God,” the frequently described force behind God’s violence, is directly equated with human-caused wars (1 Ne. 14:14–16, 1 Ne. 22:13, Ether 14:21–25). Finally, Mormon after reviewing all of Nephite history concludes: “It is by the wicked that the wicked are punished, for it is the wicked that stir up the hearts of the children of men unto bloodshed” (Morm. 4:5). Mormon thus puts full responsibility for bloodshed on human beings, though

equating such bloodshed with the “judgments of God on the wicked” (Morm. 4:5; see also D&C 63:33).

Girard posits another way in which God may be understood as “causing” outbreaks of human violence, based on his interpretation of Jesus’s provocative statement to His apostles: “Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword” (Matt. 10:34). Jesus’s suffering and death ruin the effectiveness of the scapegoating mechanism; the “second face of Satan” no longer has power to bring peace at our victims’ expense. We are faced with a simple choice: We may repent and forgive, or we may descend deeper into mimetic rivalry without the protective effects of the scapegoat mechanism. We may attempt to find more victims (genocide) or more prestigious victims (regicide), but they will ultimately fail. The false unity of identifying an enemy and going to war will also fail. Violence will increase. Because the gospel robs ritual sacrifice and scapegoating of their effectiveness, often resulting in increasing endemic violence, God can be seen as causing violence because His action precipitated the human response of increased violence. Such increased violence is an unavoidable side effect of rejecting the gospel revelation. This is Girard’s understanding of the mechanism of apocalyptic destruction.

The Book of Mormon (2 Ne. 30:10), like all scripture, maintains that God will destroy the wicked by fire before the second coming, which may refer to human wars and other conflicts or, more interestingly, to the baptism of fire which results in conversion to Christ. The best illustration is Nephi and Lehi imprisoned in the land of Nephi as they preach to the Lamanites (Hel. 5:20–52). Threatened with death, they are encircled by fire while the Lamanites are immobilized in a cloud of darkness, rebuked for their murderous desires, and challenged to repent. When they call on God, the darkness dissipates, the Lamanites also become encircled by fire, and the Holy Spirit enters their hearts. Might not much of the “destruction of the wicked by fire” in the last days refer to such conversions?

3 Nephi 8 describes a terrible destruction of many Nephite cities, leaving a thick darkness upon all the land. An excellent case can be made that this devastation resulted from a single massive volcanic eruption.²⁶ In 3 Nephi 9, speaking out of the dark-

ness, Jesus Christ explicitly states that He caused the destructions because of the people's sins. Should we therefore believe that Jesus directly triggered a volcanic eruption, willingly exterminated innocent children along with sinners, and surgically directed the destructive effects to result in the deaths of all accountable persons living below a certain standard of righteousness?

A Girardian perspective would, of course, challenge these conclusions. Living on this earth, which was created by God but the elements of which proceed according to natural law, is a risky business. God is not directly responsible for every volcanic eruption, tornado, or flood. He grieves with us in our sufferings and, at the same time, hopes that our sufferings will lead us to repentance. He is also willing in certain circumstances to *protect* us from the calamities of war and nature (Hel. 4:24–25, 1 Ne. 14:13–14, D&C 45:66–69, Moses 7:18–21).

Furthermore, even though 3 Nephi states that Jesus claims responsibility for the destruction, the thick darkness through which He speaks (3 Ne. 8:20–9:15) suggests the possibility that His hearers did not understand clearly. In fact, as the darkness later dissipates, the Father must make three efforts before the people can understand His introduction of Jesus (2 Ne. 11:1–7). Possibly God in 3 Nephi 8–9 was speaking to the people in the only language they could understand or hear, in language calculated to bring about repentance (3 Ne. 9:13–15). Finally, when Jesus descended among the Nephites, He acted, not with anger or continued destruction, but only with mercy, love, kindness, and healing.

Many Book of Mormon stories confirm aspects of Girard's theory and are, in turn, illuminated by it, providing these examples of mimetic rivalry: Nephi versus Laman and Lemuel, Nephi versus Laban, Jacob versus Sherem, Zeezrom versus Alma and Amulek, Ammon versus Lamoni's father, Moroni versus Amalickiah, Alma versus Korihor, and Shiz versus Coriantumr. In general, these accounts are not very nuanced. Almost all show God as firmly on one rival's side, and almost all include a violent attempt to end the rivalry.

Perhaps the most spectacular rivalry is that of Shiz and Coriantumr, the last Jaredites (Ether 14–15). They become so drunk with hatred for one another that nothing else in life has any

meaning except killing the other. All differences between Shiz and Coriantumr are erased. Both are simply vengeful, killing machines. Their followers imitate their bloodlust, resulting in a conflagration of culture-destroying violence. This result corroborates Girard's understanding of apocalypse as the end result of unchecked human desire after the gospel has been rejected.

The final wars between the Nephites and Lamanites also illustrate and confirm much of Girard's theory. After Christ appears, all of the survivors are converted and establish a society based on repentance, covenant love, and economic equality (4 Ne. 1:1–4). They suspend ritual animal sacrifice (3 Ne. 9:17–20) and have, at this point, moved beyond mimetic rivalry. Girard's theory predicts that, should they reject the gospel, they will descend into apocalyptic chaos. Ritual sacrifice will not be available to vent hostility. The power of law to retard mimetic rivalry will be effaced, since the law will have lost its sacred aura. Unchecked rivalry will first cause divisions in society and, with time, complete societal breakdown with erasure of all cultural structure. Attempts to unify the society against a common external enemy may be made, but the unity will not be lasting. Reversion to human sacrifice may occur, but it will not be effective.

This is precisely what we see with the Nephites. Peace and prosperity endure for two hundred years; then the people reject the gospel, resulting in pride, economic competition, and class divisions (2 Ne. 1:23–26). Two main groups emerge, reviving the ancient names of Nephite (those who at least nominally follow the gospel of Christ) and Lamanite (those who do not) (4 Ne. 1:35–38). By A.D. 300, “both the people of Nephi and the Lamanites had become exceedingly wicked one like unto another” (4 Ne. 1:45).

Wars between the two groups begin in A.D. 322 (Morm 1:8), increasing in frequency and severity over the next sixty-three years (Morm. 1–6). Finally, both peoples live only to make war with one another (Morm. 4:11), engaging in unspeakable brutality including the rape and murder of prisoners, cannibalism, and human sacrifice (Morm. 4:14–15, 21; Moro. 9:7–10). The Lamanites eventually exterminate the less numerous Nephites (Morm. 6) but, predictably, remain mired in violence: “The Lamanites are at war with another; and the whole face of this land is one continual round of murder and bloodshed” (Morm. 8:8). Interestingly,

Moroni explicitly attributes all these wars and destructions to “the hand of the Lord” (Morm. 8:8) even though his narrative has clearly shown that it was the people’s rejection of the gospel which resulted in the destructions. Girard’s theory provides a paradigm for understanding this savagery.

Girard’s understanding of ritual and sacrifice also illuminates Captain Moroni’s behavior as he rallied freedom-loving Nephites against the usurper Amalickiah in 73 B.C. (Alma 46). Moroni publicly tore his coat, wrote a slogan upon it, pronounced the land a land of liberty, and invited all to join him in making a covenant with God to defend liberty. The response of the people was immediate and vigorous. They rushed together around Moroni, tore their garments, cast the garments at his feet, and entered into a covenant with God to maintain their rights (freedom) and religion (Christianity). As part of the covenant, the people invoked a self-imprecatory curse upon themselves that they would be torn or trampled, like their garments, should they violate the commandments of God.²⁷ In exchange for this, they received a firm belief that God would protect their liberty and religion.

Moroni’s coat/garment represents him. Its tearing represents his self-sacrifice or willingness to give himself for his people’s liberty. The people are immediately unified around this living sacrifice. They offer themselves in turn, ritually indicated by tearing their own garments. The ritual exchange of sacrifice (originating in the violent exchange of a human victim for the crowd) is continued in the sacred oath where they give themselves to God in return for the belief/promise that God will preserve them. The people’s gathering around Moroni as ritualized living sacrifices typifies the gathering of Christians around Christ. Christians are ideally living sacrifices (Rom. 12:1–2, Omni 1:26) who are committed to giving themselves for others. They gather around the ultimate living sacrifice (Christ) who has ended sacrifice by the shedding of blood.²⁸

Moroni’s ritualized event has marked structural similarities to two Old Testament stories. In the first (Judg. 19–20), a Levite gives his concubine to a mob to save himself. She dies as a result of the rape and abuse. He cuts her body into twelve parts, sending one part to each tribe. This sacrificial act unifies the people and they come together as “one man” (Judg. 20:1) to help the Levite exact

revenge. In the second event (1 Sam. 11), King Saul unifies all Israel against the Ammonites by cutting two oxen to pieces and sending the pieces throughout Israel. Again, the people of Israel turn out as “one man” (1 Sam. 11:7) and massacre the Ammonites.

These three episodes show a progression in sacrifice from a human victim to animal victims to a garment substitute for a victim. We also see a transformation in the meaning of sacrifice. In the first episode, the Levite sacrifices his concubine to save himself. In the last, Moroni sacrifices himself for his nation. This is precisely the kind of transformation of sacrifice induced by the gospel revelation, as Girard would see it. Interestingly, Doctrine and Covenants 20:8–9 confirms that the Nephites, in contrast to ancient Israel (D&C 84:24–27), had the fullness of the gospel.

Moroni, nevertheless, uses the language and power (unanimity against a common enemy) of the violent sacred to bring his army together. Captain Moroni, like almost all men, is trapped in structures of sacred violence—in the double-bind between Christ’s gospel of love for one’s enemy and the need to use violence to survive. Moroni, in God’s name, violently defends his conception of Nephite liberty and does not hesitate to execute dissenters (Alma 46:30–36). He thus employs the economy of the violent sacred: It is better that a few die rather than that many suffer. Moroni resorts to sacrificial means (killing others) to save his nation and is convinced that he is doing God’s will. Tellingly, Moroni claims that God had commanded him to go to battle against the Nephite “governors” if they would not repent and support the army (Alma 60:33) even though the chief governor and recipient of Moroni’s threat, Pahoran, was innocent (Alma 61).

Another illustration of this double-bind—trying to live the gospel of love in a violent world—is the people of Ammon (Alma 23–27). These Lamanites grew up in a violence-saturated culture where they committed “many murders” (Alma 24:9). In approximately 80 B.C. they were converted to the gospel, repented of their sins, and felt that God had taken away the “guilt of their murders” or the “stain from their hearts” by the “merits of his son” (Alma 24:8–11). They saw themselves like their swords—formerly blood-stained but now clean and bright.

Their greatest concern was to retain their new spiritual life, and they concluded that they must never kill again, for any reason,

for fear of losing their tenuous grip on redemption. This belief shows remarkable insight into the corrosive effects of violence, even apparently justifiable violence, on the human soul. In a great communal ceremony, they buried their swords deep in the earth and made a covenant with God that they would die before shedding blood again (Alma 24:16–18). This gesture is clearly a type of ritual sacrifice, signifying that they died to violence in order to live in God. They ritually exchanged their swords for spiritual life.

The people of Ammon remained true to their covenant. When assaulted by a large army, they offered no resistance, with the astonishing result, that, at some point in the slaughter, their attackers suddenly became horrified by their own violence, dropped their weapons, and joined the people of Ammon in their gospel covenant of nonviolence (Alma 24:21–26). This action anticipates what Girard understands as one of the major effects of Christ's death on the cross. The cross is an open revelation to all humankind of its own disgusting violence, a revelation that motivates repentance.²⁹

This situation, however, represents a double-bind. The people of Ammon were perfectly willing to die rather than shed blood, but the Nephites were not willing to allow this slaughter. They moved the people of Ammon deep behind their own borders, with the stipulation, willingly accepted, that the people of Ammon support the Nephite armies. Furthermore, the people of Ammon's sons became Nephite warriors in the next generation. Thus, even the most pacifistic people in this world find it virtually impossible to sever themselves completely from violence.

Joseph Smith received a highly significant revelation on peace and war when the Saints were ejected from Jackson County in 1833. It commands the Saints to “renounce war and proclaim peace, and seek diligently to turn the hearts of the children to the fathers, and the hearts of the fathers to the children” (D&C 98:16). Earlier revelations had expressly forbidden the Saints to use violence (in contrast to the behavior of ancient Israel) to obtain land in Missouri (D&C 58:51–56, 63:26–31). There they would build Zion, a city of peace where “every man that will not take his sword against his neighbor must flee for safety . . . and it shall be the only people that shall not be at war with another” (D&C 45:68–69). The Saints were

thus challenged to build a refuge of peace for the world, protected by God and not by human weapons (D&C 45:66–67).

Doctrine and Covenants 98 forbids offensive war completely and even imposes restrictions on defensive war. The Saints, like all the Lord's ancient peoples, may wage defensive war only when "commanded" by God (D&C 98:32–33). Preceding this command will be an attack by an enemy to whom they must offer peace three times (D&C 98:34–36). This formula seems to be a rhetorical way of saying that the Saints should do everything possible to resolve conflict peacefully. If they do so, the Lord "will fight their battles" (D&C 98:37), suggesting, at the least, that God will not withdraw His spiritual blessings from them as they proceed to war.

This approach is very consistent with a Girardian perspective, which sees war as a human, not divine endeavor. Girard insists that God does not resort to violence to do his work. Defensive war and/or individual self-protection may be required for survival, so God may allow it (as He once allowed animal sacrifice), without ceasing to bless us spiritually. However, we must never divinize nor sanctify our violence. We must continually remember that God is calling humankind to learn to live without war.

The Old Testament portrays God as commanding Israel to "completely destroy" all of the inhabitants of Canaan (men, women, children, animals), ostensibly to prevent Israel from being contaminated by their idolatry (Deut. 7:1–2, 16; 20:16–18). Several Canaanite cities indeed seem to have been destroyed in this way: Jericho, Ai, and Hazor (Josh. 6, 8, 11).³⁰ Such genocidal offensive wars clearly contradict Christ's teachings. Furthermore, true righteousness is never established by exterminating all those who might mediate temptation. Jewish Bible scholars have similarly criticized these texts in Deuteronomy as representing neither the will of God nor historical reality.³¹

From a Girardian perspective, the Deuteronomy texts and the conquest of Canaan described in Joshua result from humans enmeshed in a myth of divinely sanctioned violence. The concept of holy war emerges directly from the violent sacred. One's community is seen as holy, righteous, and sacred. One's enemy is seen as evil, God's enemy, someone who provokes God's wrath. God will bestow his favor on those who annihilate ("devote to God") an enemy city—a frequent practice in the ancient world.³² Israelites ab-

sorbed such ideas from the surrounding culture, not from God, and used them to divinize their own violence, murder, rape, and pillage.

LDS scriptures already cited also provide grounds for criticizing the commands of Deuteronomy to “completely destroy” the Canaanites. First is the description of the hard-hearted Israelites as having received “carnal commandments.” We must therefore assume that not everything they did—or wrote—was in harmony with the will of God. Second is God’s prohibition of offensive war, which applies to all of God’s people at all times. Third is God’s command to purchase Jackson County land instead of stealing it, a command to prevent the frenzied violence into which ancient Israel lapsed. All of these statements reinforce the concept that the violent conquest of Canaan was not God’s will.

Nephi, however, justifies the slaughter of Canaanites by ancient Israel:

And after they had crossed the river Jordan he [God] did make them mighty unto the driving out of the children of the land, yea, unto the scattering them to destruction.

But behold, this people had rejected every word of God, and they were ripe in iniquity; and the fullness of the wrath of God was upon them; and the Lord did curse the land against them, and bless it unto our fathers; yea, he did curse it against them unto their destruction and he did bless it unto our fathers unto their obtaining power over it. (1 Ne. 17:32, 35)

Although Nephi argues that the Canaanites had rejected God’s word, thus justifying their dispossession, scripture itself contests this view. Ancient Israel’s sins and rebellions against God are well attested in virtually every book of scripture, but nowhere is it recorded that the Canaanites had heard, let alone rejected, God’s word at the time of Moses or Joshua.

From a Girardian perspective, Nephi, though a prophet, held a partially mythical view of Israel’s righteousness and the Canaanites’ wickedness. Influenced by his culture, he accepted the myth of divinely sanctioned violence as justification for slaughtering the Canaanites.³³

LDS scriptures occasionally present a more confusing relationship of the divine to violence. In the mission of Alma and Amulek in Ammoniah (Alma 8–14), their converts are burned to

death. They are imprisoned and tortured; but after several days, when a group arrives to subject them to more abuse, Alma and Amulek, filled with God's power, rise up, pray aloud for deliverance, and break their bonds (Alma 14:25–26). Their frightened persecutors begin to flee but are felled by an earthquake that destroys the prison, killing everyone inside except Alma and Amulek (Alma 14:27–28). The only action directly attributed to God is the power for Alma and Amulek to stand, break their bonds, and survive the earthquake. Whether the writer assumed that God sent the deadly earthquake or whether he intentionally did not specify an origin is not clear, leaving the text's relationship to divine violence ambiguous.

God's relationship to violence is also ambiguous in the story of Ammon's conversion of King Lamoni and his people (Alma 17–19). Ammon and his three brothers have refused the Nephite kingship so they can preach the gospel to the Lamanites. God promises their father that He will preserve their lives (Mosiah 28:7). Ammon is captured and volunteers to be Lamoni's servant. He is assigned duty as a herdsman, a dangerous occupation since Lamoni has executed previous herdsman for failing to protect the herd against raiders who scatter the flock. When raiders attack, Ammon's fellows panic but regather the flock. Ammon, secure in the Lord's promise of protection, confronts them alone and kills six with his sling and one with his sword. He also cuts off the arms of others. Ammon, a missionary of the gospel, does not hesitate to engage in the violence endemic to Lamanite culture and thus receives serious attention from Lamoni.

The king has begun to experience guilt for killing many of his former servants and also begins to comprehend the cyclic murderous violence among his people (Alma 18:1–6). Ammon declares the gospel to Lamoni and converts him. Lamoni prays for mercy, is overcome by the Spirit, and falls to the earth "as if he were dead" (Alma 18:42). After two days, the worried queen approaches Ammon, who reassures her that Lamoni is not dead but rather is "sleeping with God" (Alma 19:7–8). Ammon promises the queen that Lamoni will arise in the morning and teaches her the gospel. The next day Lamoni awakes, declares that he has seen his Redeemer, and is again overcome, this time joined by the queen and the household servants.

One servant, Abish, who had been previously converted, summons the community to the king's house, hoping they will also be converted. Instead, they voice mistrust of Ammon as an agent of evil. One man, whose brother Ammon had killed, takes out his sword to attack Ammon, but falls "dead" (Alma 19:22–24). The multitude reacts with fear and contention. Abish takes the queen's hand, who arises and testifies that she is redeemed. The rest of the group awake and declare God's word to the multitude. Some are converted. Many are not.

This story illustrates how quickly an angry crowd, looking for scapegoats, can form but also shows God protecting potential victims from the crowd. If the bereaved brother had succeeded in killing Ammon, there is little doubt that his act would have been imitated by others and Lamoni's entire household would have been quickly exterminated. However, troublingly, the text strongly implies, although it does not explicitly say, that God killed Ammon's would-be murderer. Does God kill to prevent more killing? Was this man really dead or in the same state as Lamoni? The text says nothing more about him. But it does seem, in an absolute sense, that he was no more deserving of death than Lamoni himself.

Even more troubling is the glorification of Ammon's killing and mutilation of the marauders. True, he was acting in self-defense, but he had helped provoke the confrontation. In Girardian terms, Ammon gains a violent victory over his mimetic rivals; then, both he and his fellow servants present it as a manifestation of God's power (Alma 18:1–3, 22–35). The greatest paradox is that it is precisely Ammon's spectacular violence that prompts guilt in Lamoni for his own violence and prepares him to hear the gospel message. Furthermore, these very same people who are converted by Ammon's message subsequently take an oath of nonviolence and convert others by allowing themselves to be slaughtered. The text thus draws a sharp distinction between the "good" killing (justifiably committed by a righteous missionary) and the "bad" killing (unjustifiably committed by the unenlightened Lamanites). From a Girardian perspective, a more likely interpretation is that the text reflects the incomplete understanding that Book of Mormon people had of their own violence.

Approximately twenty years before the birth of Christ, Nephi-

ite society reached a point of near total dissolution because of internal dissensions and wars (Hel. 10–11). Nephi, son of Helaman, unsuccessfully declared the word of God at considerable risk to his own life, but was assured by hearing God’s voice:

Behold, I declare it unto thee in the presence of mine angels, that ye shall have power over this people, and shall smite the earth with famine, and with pestilence . . . according to the wickedness of this people.

Behold, I give unto you power that whatsoever ye shall seal on earth shall be sealed in heaven. (Hel. 10:6–7)

After two more years of bloodshed, Nephi prayed for famine, hoping the people would repent and not totally destroy themselves in warfare. Thousands died in the ensuing famine; and after two more years, the people finally repented. Nephi then prayed that God would end the famine; the rains came and the famine ended. Interestingly, Nephi did not personally smite the earth with famine or bring the rains. Rather, he asked God to grant his prayers. Did God therefore directly cause the deaths of the thousands who perished? A Girardian perspective would suggest not. Droughts occur in natural cycles. They may cause famine by themselves but are more likely to do so when warfare has depleted food reserves, destroyed farms, and diminished the labor pool. God can be understood as *indirectly* causing the famine: God spoke; Nephites rejected God’s word; war ensued; famine resulted. Nephi’s prayer can be understood as his hope that the natural consequences of war (famine, pestilence) would lead to repentance. Finally unable to wage war, Nephite repentance coincided with the end of the drought cycle, which they accepted as God’s intervention, and with their renewed attention to farming. To this naturalistic explanation may be added the possibility that God intervened directly in nature to bring the rains, an action perhaps facilitated by the Nephites’ faith and repentance.

In an alternative view, God both directly caused and terminated the famine, mercifully initiating a lesser evil (famine) to interrupt a greater one (war). However, this scenario implies a concept of God actively blessing His people when they are righteous and actively punishing them when they are wicked. In Girard’s theory, such a concept of God originates in the “bi-valent” gods of the violent sacred and is not ultimately reflective of the true God.

The true God is “univalent.” He offers us love, life, and salvation which He is able to give us as we heed Him. Death and destruction are the *natural* consequences of disobeying God, not God’s work.

Noah’s flood offers interesting scriptural texts about the relationship of God to natural disasters. Joseph Smith provided two texts about the flood: Moses 8:14–30 (expanded variant of Gen. 6:1–13) and Moses 7:28–45 (part of Enoch’s vision with no corresponding variant in Genesis). All three texts state unequivocally that God sent or would send the flood because of man’s wickedness. A Girardian approach would critique the literalness of these statements. The following arguments may be made: First, Girard’s theory of the violent sacred helps us to understand why ancient cultures saw all transcendent events, including floods and war, as acts of God. Second, God speaks according to our language and manner of understanding (2 Ne. 31:3, D&C 1:34). Third, the first two points are reflected in the literary conventions of scripture. Fourth, God wants both scripture and the uncertainties of the natural world to foster humility and repentance (D&C 88:84–90, 43:22–26). Fifth, God uses literary convention, even if it is not literally reflective of ultimate reality, to promote repentance.³⁴ Sixth, the flood is described as a manifestation of God’s wrath (Moses 7:34), just like war, which God clearly does not cause. Seventh, many scriptural texts describe God as doing other things which He clearly did not do: hardening Pharaoh’s heart (Ex. 7:3; see Ne. 2:26–27), sending a delusion on the wicked (2 Thess. 2:1–12; see Ether 3:12), and killing Saul (1 Chr. 10:13–14; see 1 Sam. 31:4). Eighth, in the creation, God brought together preexisting “matter” whose elements then interact according to their inherent properties, eventually resulting in events such as epidemics, floods, earthquakes, etc.³⁵

Prior to the flood, the earth was “filled with violence” (Moses 8:28, 30). In effect, there was a “flood” of human violence, matching Girard’s understanding of the ease with which human violence can spiral out of control and destroy culture/society. The understanding that God personally sent the flood sees God as responding violently to human violence. One may argue that God acted in humankind’s best interest in sending the flood, but this line of reasoning is dubious. The Old Testament itself attests that

the flood was not effective in producing a righteous humanity. Violence never cures violence. God certainly already knew that truth, even if humanity has yet to learn the lesson.

In the Gospels, sinful humans kill Jesus. In the flood story, the Lord kills sinful human beings. The two stories present a radical discontinuity. Can they both represent the truth about the same person? In the Girardian view, no. For Girard, the meaning of the cross is that God can and will redeem humankind without violent means.

A Book of Mormon story that, like the flood, seems to depict God acting violently to destroy the wicked is that of Korihor (Alma 30). Korihor, an “anti-Christ,” argues publicly against Christ, prophecy, and the idea of remission of sins. Achieving significant popularity, he leads many into sin and unbelief. Because he has not broken the law of the land (Alma 30:7, 12), he is able to continue preaching, although he is expelled from two believing communities. Finally, he is bound and brought before Alma, who is both chief priest and chief judge in Zarahemla.

In the resulting confrontation (Alma 30:31–55), Korihor continues to deny God’s existence and impugns the motives of the priests in the church. Alma bears testimony of Christ, challenges Korihor to believe, and states that Korihor is denying what he himself knows but is “possessed with a lying spirit” (Alma 30:37–42). The argument continues with Korihor demanding a sign of God’s power and Alma offering additional arguments and warnings. Finally, Alma states that God will strike Korihor dumb (as the sign) if Korihor denies God again. Alma reasons that it is better that Korihor’s “soul should be lost than that [he] should be the means of bringing many souls down to destruction by [his] lying” (Alma 30:47). (The text does not explain why being struck dumb would mean Korihor’s damnation or why losing his soul alone—without dumbness—would diminish the effectiveness of his rhetoric.)

Korihor retreats to an agnostic position but repeats his refusal to believe without a sign. Alma then announces: “In the name of God, ye shall be struck dumb” (Alma 30:49). Korihor, who can no longer speak, confesses in writing that he always believed in God but that the devil had deceived him. He begs Alma to return his speech. Alma refuses lest Korihor’s “conversion” be false. Korihor is *cast out* and forced to beg for a living, his influence among

the people destroyed. He is later trampled to death by the Zoramites. Meanwhile, frightened by Korihor's fate, his followers repent, ending dissent among the Nephites.

This story replicates several elements of sacred violence. Social dissensions occur. One person is blamed. Compelled to agree with his accusers, he is punished and expelled. The dissensions are resolved. Although the final step, divinization of the scapegoat, did not occur, did God wish Korihor to serve as a classic scapegoat? Korihor is clearly guilty to some degree of the charges against him, and his chief accuser, Alma, is a dedicated prophet and righteous judge. The text of the Book of Mormon does lead one to conclude that Korihor's fate is justified and that it is the will of God. Alma is presented as being guided by God to solve a serious threat to Nephite society and religion.

Girardian analysis of this story, however, notes the intense mimetic rivalry between Alma and Korihor, which Alma, despite his good motives, exacerbated. Although Korihor was not breaking the law, Alma insisted that Korihor confess belief. Ironically, young Alma had, like Korihor, attempted to destroy the church by leading people into sin and away from God (Mosiah 27:8–10). Doubly ironically, Alma was only converted after receiving a sign—an angelic visitation (Mosiah 27:11–24). Might not Alma have found a way to deal with Korihor that would be more in keeping with Christ's injunction to love and forgive one's enemy?

Alma shows some concern for Korihor's well-being but is perfectly willing to sacrifice Korihor's power of speech and cast him out for the good of the people. This approach embodies the economy of sacred violence: kill or expel one for the good of many. The text, however, directly implicates God in striking Korihor dumb. Does God, in fact, sometimes follow the economy of sacred violence, thereby proving one of Girard's essential postulates false? Although each reader must make that decision, Girardians would ask if the text may have undergone mythological transformation when it presents God as striking Korihor dumb. Was it truly God's will that Korihor be cast out? Would God treat Korihor so much differently than he treated young Alma?

A Girardian perspective also highlights the structural parallels

between Korihor and Abinadi (Mosiah 11–17). Like Korihor, Abinadi preaches against what he perceives as a false religion of his people and accuses the priests of exploitation. Abinadi is also bound without legal basis and brought before King Noah and his priests. He refuses their efforts to bring him to confessional unity, testifies of Christ's future mission, and is burned to death.

This structural analysis overlooks, of course, the issue of personal sanctity. Alma and his people were striving to live the gospel while Korihor advocated a dissolute lifestyle. Abinadi was a righteous prophet, while King Noah and his priests were dissolute. Still, seeing the two stories in parallel casts Alma's behavior into clearer relief, making it possible to learn more from him. Girard emphasizes that God wants us to move beyond structures of sacred violence, in addition to cultivating our personal sanctity. Both things are ultimately necessary.

One of Girard's essential theses is that God takes the side of the victim against the persecuting crowd.³⁶ In the Book of Mormon, God always takes the side of the righteous (crowd or person), meaning that these two perspectives are not always in harmony. The Korihor story raises the interesting question of whether a more righteous crowd can scapegoat (in the Girardian sense) a less righteous victim. Girard would answer yes. Even a righteous person can unconsciously slide into scapegoating, into the unjustified blaming of another for one's or society's problems. We must constantly be aware of the risks of maintaining a myth of personal sanctity purchased by means of self-deception about our own violence or that of our culture. The message of the cross is that we should look inside ourselves and root out all victimage of others.³⁷

Probably the greatest challenge to Girard's theory from an LDS perspective is Nephi's murder of Laban, an event that happened when Nephi was young but which he wrote about much later (1 Ne. 3–4). It is certainly a difficult text for many who take the Book of Mormon seriously. After Lehi obeyed God and led his family from Jerusalem into the desert, the Lord ordered his four sons to return and obtain the brass plates held by Laban, an officer of the city. The faithful youngest son, Nephi, undertakes the task willingly while the two older sons, Laman and Lemuel, are reluctant. The first two strategies (a direct request and an attempt to purchase) fail, and Laban also issues death threats. Nephi swears, "As the

Lord liveth, and as we live, we will . . . [accomplish] the thing which the Lord has commanded of us” (1 Ne. 3:15). After considerable resistance, Nephi enters the city alone by night, without a specific plan. He encounters Laban, lying in the street, drunk and unconscious. Admiring Laban’s sword, Nephi “was constrained by the Spirit that I should kill Laban” (1 Ne. 4:10). He hesitates and the Spirit reminds him that the Lord has delivered Laban into his hands and repeats the command to slay him: “Behold the Lord slayeth the wicked to bring forth his righteous purposes. It is better that one man should perish than that a nation should dwindle and perish in unbelief” (1 Ne. 4:13). Nephi beheads Laban, dresses in Laban’s clothes, and deceives Laban’s servant into giving him the plates.

This disturbing story confronts us with many unanswered questions. Who was the rightful owner of the plates? Why didn’t God provide the record miraculously, as he subsequently did with the Liahona (1 Ne. 16)? Why couldn’t the Nephites have received the law of Moses, the writings of prophets, and Lehi’s genealogy by revelation? Why would the Lord send Nephi, a young man, to kill another person? Why couldn’t Nephi have simply passed by the drunken Laban and obtained the plates by some other means? Did Laban deserve to die?

It is relatively easy from a human perspective to understand why Nephi might have been tempted to kill Laban. His level of stress would have been very high. His father’s life had been threatened. His family had effectively been driven out of Jerusalem. His brothers were so resistant that they beat Nephi for his persistence. Nephi, absolutely convinced that God requires them to obtain the plates, has committed himself with an oath. He is convinced God wants him to kill Laban. Killing Laban seems to be an act of self-defense, a justified killing. It seems the most secure way to obtain the plates, perhaps the only way.

A Girardian analysis does not seek to condemn or scapegoat Nephi but rather to shed light on his dilemma. Nephi is in a mimetic crisis, and the Lord seems to deliver Laban—who represents all of Nephi’s and his family’s persecutors—into his hands. Eliminating this enemy/scapegoat promises to bring family unity and God’s favor. After brief hesitation, Nephi yields to his culture’s sa-

cred violence, perceived by him to be the voice of the Spirit, and kills the one for the good of the many. Laban's killing is the founding murder of the Nephite nation, partially and unconsciously mythologized by Nephi in the years before he writes his record. The text contains elements of self-justification by a great man who struggled internally for the rest of his life with the implications of his violent deed.

Believers in the Book of Mormon are rightly troubled by this Girardian approach. They argue that Nephi had spiritual experiences prior to the killing of Laban and had even seen an angel. Many would argue that such a spiritual person could not misinterpret the voice of the Spirit in such a circumstance. Does not a Girardian analysis attack the Book of Mormon itself? If we cannot trust Nephi's impressions of the Spirit, how can we trust any of the book's other spiritual manifestations? All believers would point out that Nephi went on to have incredible, transcendent, immensely important visions of Christ (1 Ne. 11–14) and profound Christ-centered theological insights (2 Ne. 30–32). Could such a person have deluded himself into murder as God's will and retained that delusion to the end of his life? Wouldn't God have told him the truth?

Girardians would counter that the text gives no good evidence that Nephi knew much of Christ prior to killing Laban. God would certainly forgive Nephi for "he knew not what he did" (cf. Luke 23:34). The Apostle Paul also unwittingly participated in killing but later received great revelations and knowledge of Christ. Moses, before his call as prophet, killed in questionable circumstances (Ex. 2:11–15). All human beings possess the potential for violence and self-delusion. All depend on God's grace for salvation, in part for sins committed in ignorance. Nephi's knowledge of Christ becomes strongly evident only after killing Laban. When Laman and Lemuel later seek to kill Nephi, Nephi does not resolve the problem by killing them. He leads his followers to found a new colony (2 Ne. 5). Instead of killing or expelling the wicked, Nephi suffers the burden of starting over.

From the Girardian perspective, the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon does not depend on Nephi's correctly interpreting the whisperings of the Spirit before killing Laban. The truth of any scriptural text, including the Book of Mormon, is

understood by reading under the influence of the Holy Spirit by the “lens of the cross” (see 1 Cor. 2:2). The cross, argues Girardians, reveals both God’s nonviolent nature and humankind’s scapegoating violence. All scripture must be interpreted from this perspective.

The traditional LDS interpretation of this event, which sees Nephi as the virtually perfect example of human obedience, cannot be harmonized with the Girardian.³⁸ In traditional LDS thought, Nephi was able to listen to the Spirit and obey the voice of God against the voice of his culture, which told him *not* to kill Laban (1 Ne. 4:10). A traditional LDS response might argue that, although Girard may be right that some scriptural texts result from projecting human violence onto God, there are clearly exceptions to this rule. God gave us life, and He has the right to take it away. Divine killing or divinely sanctioned killing is occasionally necessary, ultimately justifiable, and redemptive. Laban’s death was necessary for the beneficial effects of the brass plates, as the plain sense of the Book of Mormon text indicates. Traditional LDS thought would thus reject the Girardian perspective as an absolute interpretive standard.

In contrast, Girardians will continue to see Nephi as a tragic illustration of the fact that even the most devoted individual may slide unconsciously into scapegoating and the violent sacred. Nephi stands as a warning against the seductive temptation to sacrifice one’s rival in the name of God.

In any case, it is hard to argue that Laban was not *compelled* to hand over the brass plates.

This point leads to a final example of God’s exposure of the human propensity toward violence. A revelation to Joseph Smith in 1839 states:

The rights of the priesthood are inseparably connected with the powers of heaven, and . . . the powers of heaven cannot be controlled or handled only upon the principles of righteousness.

But when we undertake to cover our sins, or to gratify our pride, our vain ambition, or to exercise control or dominion or compulsion upon the souls of the children of men, in any degree of unrighteousness, behold, the heavens withdraw themselves; the Spirit of the Lord is grieved; and when it is withdrawn, Amen to the priesthood of that man.

We have learned by sad experience that it is the nature and disposition of almost all men . . . [to] exercise unrighteous dominion. (D&C 121:36, 37, 39)

This text confirms the Girardian insights that we attempt to use compulsion to cover our sins and to delude ourselves about it. Indeed, one purpose of this great revelation is to make us more conscious of these tendencies.

Even the best of people are prone to such behavior. The Book of Mormon, for example, was written by inspired prophets for people struggling to implement the gospel. Part of their struggle was against the structures of the violent sacred. They were faced with serious culture-threatening challenges: unbelief, internal dissension, evil deeds by members of their society, and wars. It is no surprise, from a Girardian perspective, that they did not always rise to the highest standards of Christ and that they sometimes used sacred violence to solve their problems. It is no surprise that these failures appear throughout the text, even though the narrators do not always recognize them as such. A Girardian perspective helps us to deal honestly with these issues and to learn from their experiences.

The revelation in Doctrine and Covenants 121 urges us to maintain our influence by persuasion, gentleness, and unfeigned love (v. 41). It concludes:

Let thy bowels also be full of charity towards all men . . . [L]et virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly; then shall thy confidence wax strong in the presence of God.

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; emphasis mine)

This passage promises that the righteous will enjoy eternal dominions in the world to come—dominions that will be free of compulsion. If that is our eternal destiny, then, by implication, God must be ruling us even now without compulsion. Girard's work challenges us to believe in and imitate such a God, a God who accomplishes his work without compulsion, without violence.

Appendix

These eight examples provide additional Girardian analyses of biblical texts.

1. The story of the Fall (Gen. 3) illustrates Girard's concept of mimetic desire and scapegoating.³⁹ Eve learned her desire for the forbidden fruit from the serpent, like him rivalrously desiring to "be like God" (v. 5; see also Moses 4:1-4). Eve then mediated this desire to Adam. The desire was spontaneous for neither. When called to account by God, Adam blamed (scapegoated) Eve, who, in turn, blamed the serpent.

2. Girard finds it highly significant that the first murderer, Cain, founded the first city (Gen. 4).⁴⁰ This story identifies murder as the origin of human culture. Myth would have presented Cain as a hero or a god. In contrast to myth, the text condemns this murder as resulting from Cain's mimetic crisis, with his victim's blood crying to God from the ground. The Bible thus preserves Abel's voice, which would have been obliterated in myth.

3. In Exodus 7-12, God is portrayed as afflicting Egypt with ten plagues, culminating in the death of all Egyptian firstborn males. Israelites are protected by ritual animal sacrifice and escape from Egypt under God's protection, with God destroying Pharaoh's army. A Girardian interpretation sees as mythological the attribution of the plagues and other violence to God. God does not boast about His ability to destroy; rather, the text reflects the human desire for a powerful deity to vanquish one's enemies. Rather than originating in divine violence, the plagues indicate a mimetic crisis in Egyptian society, possibly induced by meteorological, entomological, and epidemiological disasters.⁴¹ The deaths of Egyptian firstborn sons could represent human sacrifices attempting to resolve the crisis. The Lord is revealed, not in the catastrophic violence, but in leading the victimized Israelites to form a covenant society with Him.

4. In the apostasy at Baal Peor (Num. 25), plague smites the Israelites to punish their idolatry and sexual immorality with Moabite women. God commands Moses to execute the (non-guilty) leaders of the people to turn away His wrath (the plague). Instead, Moses tells the judges to execute the guilty idolaters. They do not. Israel remains paralyzed. Suddenly a brazen Israelite brings a foreign woman into a tent in the middle of the camp, an event witnessed by pious Israelites gathered at the tabernacle. Phineas, son of Aaron, enters the tent and kills the immoral couple with a single spear thrust, an act that averts God's wrath. The plague, which has killed twenty-four thousand, ends; and Phineas is rewarded with eternal priesthood.

According to a Girardian reading, the plague is human mimetic vio-

lence and impending societal dissolution. Israel is unable to solve the crisis either by judicial execution of the guilty or by ritual sacrificial substitution of innocent leaders. A spontaneous murder, which attracts the Israelites' mimetic approval, ends the crisis. The founding features of human culture are only partially concealed by the mythological elements of the text. Priesthood (to direct ritual sacrifice) results from the dual murder, consistent with Girard's theory of ritual sacrifice as a re-presentation of the founding murder. Furthermore, the biblical text names and gives the genealogy of Phineas's victims, thus refusing to let the victims be mythologized into demons, monsters, or gods.

5. The stoning of Achan also partly exposes the violent scapegoating at the base of human culture (Josh. 7).⁴² The Israelite army has taken Jericho, killed every living thing (including animals), and given the treasure to the Lord. However, Achan kept some items for himself. As a result, when Israel besieges Ai, it is defeated. God reveals to Joshua that someone has retained some of Jericho's "devoted" treasure and identifies the guilty in a dramatic episode of increasingly refined ritual lot-casting. Achan, once identified, confesses his guilt, and "all Israel stoned him . . . before the Lord" (Josh. 7:25, 23). Astonishingly, his sons and daughters are also stoned and then burned. This excess killing of innocents should raise the suspicion of uncontrolled mob violence, especially since Deuteronomy 24:16 forbids executing children for their parents' sins. The probable mob violence and the ritualized execution of Achan revitalize and unify Israel, which then successfully annihilates Ai. As a final note, Girardians suspect that Achan was not the only Israelite who kept back "devoted" things, but rather was made to bear the guilt of many.

6. When the Old Testament unambiguously makes God the author of violence, Girard reads these texts as our delusion about our own violence. Nadab and Abihu, two sons of Aaron, "offered unauthorized fire" (Lev. 10:1) so "fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them" (Lev. 10:2). A Girardian perspective argues instead that they became scapegoats when the crowd, envious of their new power, interpreted them as transgressing a ritual prohibition. Killing them was the crowd's way to prevent God's wrath from falling upon themselves. Priests as ritual sacrificers had a special relationship to the power of the violently unanimous crowd. They had the privilege of using and channeling the power of sacred violence, but they also ran the risk that this power could spill out against them.

7. After Saul was installed as king of Israel, God sent Samuel to command Saul to take vengeance against the Amalekites for what they had done to Israel in the wilderness wanderings two to three hundred years earlier (1 Sam. 15). He tells Saul to "completely destroy" the Amalekites, killing all men, women, children, and animals. Saul does so, sparing only

the Amalekite king, Agag, and some choice sacrificial animals. Samuel subsequently reprimands Saul for this lapse in obedience, informs him that God has rejected him as king, and proclaims, “to obey is better than sacrifice” (1 Sam. 15:22). Samuel then kills Agag “before the Lord at [the temple in] Gilgal” (1 Sam. 15:33).

Girard’s perspective asks us to see the massacre of the Amalekites as a humanly initiated endeavor, sanctified beforehand by ascribing it to God’s will, possibly as a result of divination. Such ideas arise from the violent sacred: The enemies of one’s culture are God’s enemies. The Bible itself implicitly criticizes the behavior of Samuel and Saul, forbidding the killing of children for the sins of their parents (Deut. 24:16) and commanding us to love our enemies (Matt. 5:43–44). There is clearly mimetic rivalry between Samuel and Saul, with Samuel definitively gaining the upper hand by his spectacular sacrifice of Agag at the temple. Those who control sacrifice control the culture. It is ironic that the oft-quoted injunction “to obey is better than sacrifice” comes from a text actually describing the violent sacrifice of innocent others as obedience. In Girard’s view, God does not desire such obedience—rather, its inverse.

8. David had the Ark of the Covenant transported with immense ritual scrupulousness into Jerusalem (2 Sam. 6). However, the ark was transported on an ox cart by men whose Levitical status was unclear. Prohibitions had already been violated since the law required that Levites transport the ark by using poles passed through rings on its sides. Furthermore, it could not be touched on pain of death (Ex. 25:12–15; Num. 4:15). When the oxen stumbled, it was already a mark of God’s disfavor. Uzzah, one of the men responsible for transporting the ark, steadied it, and “God struck him down and he died there beside the ark of God” (v. 7).

Did God personally kill Uzzah for his well-intentioned though forbidden act? According to a Girardian reading, it is more likely that Uzzah was crushed by the ox cart, killed by his associates out of fear of God’s wrath, or even died later of an unrelated illness. Any of these events would have been interpreted as acts of God, leading to this distorted understanding being recorded in the text.

Notes

1. A detailed analysis of Christ’s atonement or any theology of post-mortual human suffering (hell) lie beyond the scope of this paper.

2. Some of the problems in this text have been recognized within the canonical tradition. The version in 1 Chronicles 21, which was written later, says “Satan [not God] rose up against Israel and incited David to take a census” (1 Chr. 21:1). It also adds the detail that God sent fire from heaven as a sign that He accepted David’s sacrifice on the threshing

floor and further adds that David chose Araunah's threshing floor as the site of the temple that David's son Solomon would build (1 Chr. 22:1). In the Joseph Smith Translation (JST), Joseph removed the phrase describing the Lord's repentance or grief after the deaths of 70,000 Israelites and changed it to Israel's repentance of a still-unspecified evil (JST 2 Sam. 24:16, 1 Chr. 21:15). Interestingly, Joseph left unchanged the discrepancy between 2 Samuel and 1 Chronicles about who had initiated the census—God or Satan. Both Chronicles and the JST represent theological improvements over the original text in 2 Samuel. However, neither comes close to solving all of its problems.

3. Gary A. Anderson, "Sacrifice and Sacrificial Offerings," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, edited by David Noel Freedman (New York City: Doubleday, 1992), 5:881–82.

4. Raymund Schwager, *Must There Be Scapegoats?*, translated by Maria L. Assad (New York: Crossroads, 2000), 80–91.

5. Girard's principal works in English translation are *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, translated by Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1966); *Resurrection from the Underground*, translated by James G. Williams (New York: Crossroads, 1997); *Violence and the Sacred*, translated by Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977); *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*, translated by Stephen Bann and Michael Metteer (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1987); *The Scapegoat*, translated by Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986); *To Double Business Bound* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978); *Job*, translated by Yvonne Freccero (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1987); *A Theater of Envy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); *I See Satan Fall like Lightning*, translated by James G. Williams (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2001); *Oedipus Unbound*, edited by Mark R. Anspach (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2004); *Evolution and Conversion: Dialogues on the Origin of Culture* (New York: Continuum International Publishing, 2007); and *Mimesis and Theory*, edited by Robert Doran (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2008). Two recent book-length introductions to Girard are Chris Fleming, *René Girard: Violence and Mimesis* (Malden, Mass.: Polity Press, 2004) and Michael Kirwan, *Discovering Girard* (Cambridge, Mass.: Cowly Publications, 2005).

6. Girard, *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*, 290.

7. *Ibid.*, 290–91.

8. Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, 64–69, and *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*, 64–65, 93–97.

9. By "innocent" Girard does not mean guiltless in all respects but that the victim is innocent of all or most of all of what the crowd is pro-

jecting on to him. Suzanne Ross, *The Wicked Truth* (Glenview, Ill.: Doers Publishing, 2007), 212, insightfully terms this innocence of the victim “structural innocence.”

10. Girard, *I See Satan Fall like Lightning*, 93.

11. Girard, *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*, 99–104.

12. Examples are the prohibitions against boiling a kid in its mother’s milk (Ex. 23:19) and against eating rabbit (Lev. 11:6). Although such prohibitions seem superstitious to us, they were undoubtedly very logical within the system in which they arose.

13. Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 89–118. Girard’s thesis is controversial. For reviews of other theories of the origin of sacrifice, see Joseph Henniger, “Sacrifice,” in *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 12:550–54; James G. Williams, *The Bible, Violence, and the Sacred* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991), 14–20; and Robert G. Hamerton-Kelly, ed., *Violent Origins* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1987).

14. David A. Leeming and Margaret A. Leeming, *A Dictionary of Creation Myths* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 23–29.

15. Girard, *Things Hidden from the Foundation of the World*, 48–83.

16. *Ibid.*, 219.

17. *Ibid.*, 205–15.

18. Jonathan Z. Smith, “Dying and Rising Gods,” in *Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 4:521–27.

19. Girard, *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*, 163–67.

20. James G. Williams, ed., *The Girard Reader* (New York: Crossroads, 1996) 194–210.

21. Girard, *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*, 149–53, and Williams, *The Bible, Violence, and the Sacred*, 54–60.

22. Girard, *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*, 155–57.

23. The ailment frequently translated as “leprosy” does not appear to correspond to the modern Hansen’s disease caused by *mycobacterium leprae*. Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, in the *Anchor Bible Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 3:816–24.

24. *Ibid.*, 3:820–23.

25. In addition to equating culture with God, which may be difficult for many Mormons, this reading assumes that Adam lived in an already formed human culture. This assumption will not be acceptable to those who believe that Adam was literally the first human being.

26. Bart Kowallis, “In the Thirty and Fourth Year: A Geologist’s View of the Great Destruction in 3 Nephi,” *BYU Studies* 37, no. 3 (1998): 136–90.

27. See similar oaths in Genesis 15 and Jeremiah 34:8–10.

28. Girardian thought sees Jesus as condemning/ending both Jew-

ish sacrificial ritual and the Jewish temple itself. Robert G. Hamerton-Kelly, *The Gospel and the Sacred* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 15–57. A temple that incorporated Girard’s understanding of Christianity would require that the worshippers become living sacrifices who leave behind Satan’s accusing crowd, who reject Satan’s false peace, and who care for victims. In LDS temples, vicarious work for the dead ritually replicates the Girardian “good mimesis” of Christian discipleship where one disciple mediates Christ to another.

29. Girard, *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*, 166–67, 206–9.

30. There is no archeological evidence for a siege and destruction of Jericho during the time of Joshua (late Bronze Age: 1550–1200 B.C.). Paul F. Jacobs, “Jericho” in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, edited by David Noel Freedman (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000), 689–91. The location of Ai is uncertain.

31. Moshe Weinfield, *Deuteronomy 1–11*, in the *Anchor Bible Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 5:50–53; Jeffrey H. Tigay, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Deuteronomy* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996), 470–72.

32. For example, see the “Translation of the Mesha Stone” in James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1969), 320–21. King Mesha of Moab (ruled ca. 830 B.C.) boasts of “devoting” Israelite towns to his god, Chemosh.

33. My assumption, as should be obvious, is that Nephi and other Book of Mormon characters and events are historical. By critiquing Nephi’s opinion, I am not implying that he was not a good man nor an important prophet. But he was also fallible, subject to cultural influences. I see the Book of Mormon as accurately transmitting Nephi’s worldview to us. Many Bible scholars see the proscription against the Canaanites (Deut. 7:1–2, 20:16–18) as the product of Deuteronomic writers/editors about a hundred years before Nephi’s birth. Weinfield, *Deuteronomy 1–11*. These texts and ideas would probably have been very influential during Nephi’s youth and were probably recorded on the brass plates. Nephi’s opinions therefore match what is known of Israelite culture about 600 B.C.

34. In Doctrine and Covenants 19:4–12, God explains that “endless torment” and “eternal damnation” do not mean no literal end but that He let both the phrasing and its incorrect interpretation stand so “that it might work upon the hearts of the children of men.” Repentance was seemingly more likely if humans believed that the torments of hell, rather than God’s mercy, were literally without end. Similarly, some may repent quicker if they see natural disasters as divine retribution for their

sins. In such ways, God may speak to us “according to our language and manner of understanding” (2 Ne. 31:3, D&C 1:34).

35. This eighth argument, based on rejecting *creation ex nihilo*, would not be acceptable to Girard personally.

36. This does not mean that God regularly saves victims from the persecuting crowd—to the contrary, human culture is based on the crowd’s killing of victims. Rather, it means that, in Christ, God stands with all victims and confronts the crowd with its violence. The resurrection of Christ is, in a sense, the vindication of all victims since the foundation of the world.

37. This discussion exposes a weakness in Girard’s theory. Granted, the goals of overcoming mimetic rivalry and violence in our own lives and of living without structures of sacred violence in our society are lofty. However, evil people really exist, harming others without compunction. Further, no human organization is totally free of sacred violence. How then, are we to live without violence in the meantime until God’s transforming work is complete? Girard, for example, would certainly support actions that would prevent rapists and murderers from continuing to harm the innocent. I offer the following guidelines: (1) Use as little violence/compulsion as is necessary. (2) Couple the use of violence with preaching the gospel. (3) Seek actively to transform society into the kingdom of God. (4) Remember the corrupting effects of violence on its perpetrator, even if it is “justified.” (5) Seek to avoid the temptation to dehumanize and scapegoat prisoners/criminals. (6) Remember that the violence is our violence and not God’s.

38. Eugene England, “Why Nephi Killed Laban: Reflections on the Truth of the Book of Mormon,” in his *Making Peace* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1995), 131–57, presents an insightful Girardian analysis of the Nephi and Laban story. However, he stops short of its final implications and sees Nephi as undergoing an “Abrahamic test.” I would simply note that Abraham did not actually kill Isaac and question whether God would test the youthful Nephi in this fashion before he knew much of Christ.

39. Gil Bailie, *Violence Unveiled* (New York City: Crossroad Publishing, 1995), 160–63.

40. Girard, *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*, 144–49.

41. Nahum M. Sarna, *Exploring Exodus* (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), 63–80.

42. Bailie, *Violence Unveiled*, 160–63.



John Sproul,
Baby baby,
acrylic on paper, 48"x 48",
2008.

Scandals, Scapegoats, and the Cross: An Interview with René Girard

Note: Mack Stirling, Director of Cardiothoracic Surgery at the Munson Medical Center, Traverse City, Michigan, and Scott Burton, director of the LDS Institute of Religion at Ohio State University, conducted this interview with René Girard, Andrew B. Hammond Professor Emeritus of French Language, Literature, and Civilization at Stanford University, at Girard's home in Palo Alto, California, on April 3–4, 2009.

Stirling: We would appreciate it if you would tell us a little bit about your family background and your education in France and then how you ended up immigrating to the United States.

Girard: I was born in Avignon on Christmas day, 1923. I am the second son of a family of four. My father was curator of the museum, of the library. The museum is a kind of foundation, a private foundation of an eighteenth-century collector who had a library, which is the basis of the public library in Avignon; but my father created the first lending library in Avignon, which is part of the library. He was very active; he was very dedicated to his work. In France, a job like that is a state job. You are a *fonctionnaire*, which means a city servant. My father had been a student at l'École des Chartes in Paris, which is where I went to the university during the war.

Stirling: I think I read once that your father was more of an agnostic, whereas your mother was more of a believer?

Girard: Yes, this is true. My father was the typical French agnostic. He was a member of what they called the Radical Socialist Party, which is a party of the right.

Stirling: Where did you attend school?

Girard: I was at the Lycée d'Avignon, which is a public school with Latin and Greek. I have some kind of phobia of educational institutions, and it started when I was about ten. I was scared to

death of the schoolteacher, who was a perfectly innocuous lady—nothing dangerous about her. But I was so terrified that my mother took me out of school and sent me to what my father called a school for spoiled children. It had only four or five students. The teacher was some kind of a spinster who taught students who had fragile health or some special problems, or didn't like school, which was my case. But with her, I think I learned quite a bit, as a matter of fact, because it was almost like an individual education, with only three or four students talking to her. It was more like home. I went back to the Lycée later.

Burton: So at what age did you move to the university?

Girard: I didn't move directly to the university because I was thrown out of high school. After the first two years when I had what was called the "excellence" prize and was the first in the class, I started to become rambunctious and noisy and so forth. They threw me out because I had become too rambunctious and was organizing big upsets in the school. Even though my father was a member of the school council, they threw me out.

My father was very mad, but I said I wanted to work at home. In a way, it was a return to the time when I refused to go to school as a young child. And then I received the next to the highest *mention*. They practically never give the highest *mention*, so my father was very impressed by that.

Stirling: After this, you went to the university—l'École des Chartes in Paris?

Girard: Yes. I prepared for the examination, the contest you know, and I was accepted, even though I was in the lowest, last numbers. I went to Paris. When I was alone in Paris, I found it very difficult. I found it insufferable for food; there was very little heat. I was not in student houses, which are pretty well organized. During World War II, there was quite a difference between a student house and a student hotel. So I was in a hotel. I was cold, I was getting a little hungry, and my first decision was to do the same thing I did when I was ten: Go back home immediately. My fellow students said, "If you go back home, what will happen to you? You know that everything is in Paris for higher education in France." So I stayed, but I sure didn't like it, and I ended that school at a pretty low level. That is one of the reasons I went to the United States [in 1947], and it was pretty fortunate for me because

I was preparing for a career like that of my father's—as museum curator, librarian, archivist. I didn't want to be an archivist. . . .

My thesis was “Private Life in Avignon in the Fifteenth Century,” using marriage contracts, birth certificates, wills, and documents like that. If you look at the wills, you see immediately what people owned or didn't own, you know. And, therefore, you can classify, and that is what I had done. Studying the way people lived, the kitchen utensils they had, their furniture, and so forth is fascinating. It doesn't teach you anything about the lower classes, but it teaches you practically everything about the life of the higher class, middle class, and aristocracy. I went into anthropology without knowing anything about it. I was kind of pushed by my literary studies, which is the strangest thing.

Burton: Why strange?

Girard: Strange from the point of view of what science thinks it is. I really think that it is not that different from literature—not because it is false, but just the opposite: because it is just as likely to be true as literature. Literature is generally limited to the truth of certain individuals who tell you about their life, and in my view, literature is essentially autobiographical.

* * *

Burton: Could you talk to us a little bit about texts that led you to begin to think about the origins of culture? Novels and other texts?

Girard: Yes. Probably the most important of my novelists and the one who is closest to a scientific observer of psychic life, even compared to most psychologists, is Proust. His writing is incredibly detailed and precise. I discovered Proust two or three years before leaving for the United States. I think it was Proust that triggered my taste for psychological observation. I read him mostly from the beginning.

Stirling: How does Proust compare to Dostoevsky?

Girard: They are very different. Proust is much closer to scientific observation, and Dostoevsky is the observer of extreme situations, conflict, and so forth. He says countless fascinating things about psychology and violence. Proust is more like an observer of modern psychology. Cervantes and Proust are the two novelists I met first, then Dostoevsky. Then I added Stendahl. Flaubert is

probably the least recognized in that company. Proust is a born psychologist in his observations. It is always mixed with humor, and he is extremely precise and detailed. He fascinated me.

Stirling: So those novelists were fundamental for your developing the idea of mimesis?

Girard: The recognition that the resemblances between them are just as important as the differences. I was reacting to modern criticism, which said that each writer is a masterpiece in himself and has nothing to do with any other writers.

That is true of two volcanoes, you see. Neither of them is identical, but they both have something to do with what is at the center of the earth.

* * *

Stirling: And what role did Greek drama play in your thinking at that time?

Girard: At the beginning, it was really just the novel. I went into Greek drama in order to check if some of the things I thought I had discovered in the novel were already present there. My conclusion is that, yes, they are, although in a very different form. And the view of man which is present in the Greek drama, is justly regarded as universal, because Greeks had a unique genius. I don't accept the modern skepticism or the idea that there is some kind of sharp separation between science and the humanities.

I moved to Greek tragedy because the study of the novels had brought concepts which I felt would probably be first visible from a literary and chronological point of view in Greek tragedy. And the same concepts were there. Greek tragedy was a simpler version of the same things; the structure was already there.

I think that the purely mimetic crisis can be turned into comedy or something like that. The Greeks invented a type of comedy which is very important. There is a comedy in which two brothers are so much alike that one brother gets into the wrong house with the wrong wife and there are exchanges of this type during five nights. This is a fundamental comedy because the doubles are not only tragic, but they are also comic. These features appear together. If you look at the origins of comedy and what the first comedies are about, you see it is really the same thing as the tragedies. The comedy of doubles is the fundamental comedy. The

doubles are confused by other people, but they also confuse each other and that is very important.

Burton: In what way do the tragedies and the comedies treat the doubles differently or approach them differently?

Girard: In the tragedies, there is always one or very often two who die. In the comedy the consequences at the end are cancelled and everybody is happy.

Burton: And what are they trying to say?

Girard: I am not sure they always know. You know, I think you can be a very good observer of these things without getting to the basic principle, which is sameness, or the inability to distinguish.

Stirling: The end result of the mimetic crisis is this inability to distinguish?

Girard: Yes. The misunderstanding is born through the inability to distinguish. The wife is unable to distinguish her husband.

Burton: That is about as much of a crisis as you can get!

Girard: As much of a crisis you can get and as funny as you can get as a basic comedy, because all comedies are about sex and doubles. In Greek comedies, usually the two doubles have been raised in different parts of the Mediterranean world and don't know each other. Suddenly one arrives in the same city where the other one lives, and it is the beginning of the entanglement, which gets solved in the last scene.

* * *

Burton: And then you moved to Shakespeare.

Girard: And then I moved to Shakespeare because my biggest literary experience with mimetic patterns was in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. It appeared to me as a total mimetic masterpiece in a humorous plot. *Midsummer Night's Dream* is total genius as a model of mimetic desire. After that, I went to other plays of Shakespeare, which confirmed this, but *Midsummer Night's Dream* remains my favorite.

Stirling: You have spoken of imitating in a spirit of rivalry versus imitating without rivalry.

Girard: The rivalry comes from imitation. The imitation comes first and produces rivalry if it is an imitation of desire. If you look at Shakespeare's plays, how many begin with two friends who are so much in love with each other that nothing can ever happen to their

friendship? Then, the next minute they are fighting over the same woman, because one of the two imitates the other. This is especially true and obvious in *The Winter's Tale*, which is very late in Shakespeare's canon. Shakespeare is obviously interested in the subject and it cannot be by chance. Fundamentally, his plot is an imitation that goes wrong. And it doesn't go wrong because it is a bad imitation, but because it is a naive imitation, which doesn't realize it is going to get into trouble—that the model is only a man and not a god.

Stirling: When did you begin to think about how the Bible is connected to your theory of human desire and the origins of human culture?

Girard: I decided to look in the Bible to see if it confirmed the ideas from the novel, anthropology, and Greek drama. The culture of French secularism in which I was raised at the lycée in Avignon is remarkable for an absolute, total absence of the Bible. I went to the Gospels. I immediately felt that there was a lot of truth in them, and I began to be really fascinated. I can say I had a conversion experience at the time and went back to church.

Stirling: In *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, you described conversion—at least among the novelists that you were studying—as an intellectual understanding that we are all part of the mimetic process. So when writers are making observations as an author, it is not from an independent position outside this mimetic structure of human relations. Is conversion to Christianity the same? Does it involve any more than that kind of an intellectual understanding?

Girard: Yes, I think so. I had my mystical period when I was teaching at Johns Hopkins for the first time—from 1957 to 1968. It was a very strong thing with me.

Stirling: So, there is a component of intellectual understanding, but also a spiritual. . .

Girard: Spiritual, affective. I went back to the church. I had my children baptized. I remarried. The priest in Baltimore who performed these rites—I think he may have wondered a little bit if I was crazy. He shouldn't have! He had a feeling that I was dropped on him from outer space. We did everything at the same time.

Martha, my wife, was very nice, even though she has remained an atheist. She was raised in a Methodist Church in Union City, Indiana, but she was nauseated by it her entire life. She is very

strong, so I have absolutely no influence on her. But at the same time, she is more of a Christian than I. She hates the outward manifestations, although she goes to church on Sundays with me. But she brings in Protestant habits. She brings food there—because Catholics go to mass, but they leave immediately.

* * *

Burton: After your conversion, did you find confirmation in studying the Bible of the ideas you were developing from your study of Greek tragedy? Did you, for instance, look at the story of Jacob and Esau in the Old Testament and find the same kinds of doubling?

Girard: It is there, but it is not developed in the same way. The comic aspects are more subdued. But in the case of David and Jonathan, it is discussed openly. There is something to write about the comparison between the Greek way of handling the subject and the biblical way. What the Greek writer wants to do is to bring back the people who came to the theater the first time. They want more of the same, and they get more of the same; whereas in the Bible, once a subject is really treated, the Bible moves on. Are there other parts of the Bible, for example, where the subject of the David and Jonathan story is being repeated?

Stirling: I don't think there is anything quite comparable to Jonathan and David.

Girard: I am not a good scholar in the sense of research; but from everything I have known about Greek comedy and so forth, the origins of comedy have to be in something basically human, not in a pure invention.

Stirling: One element you examine in the Bible that is not prominent in Greek tragedy is the scapegoat. In a human mimetic crisis, the differentiation of society is lost or originally never existed. The natural human solution to the crisis is to mimetically polarize against one victim, obliterating him.

Girard: Well, in mimetic crisis it gets worse and worse when more people get involved. The saving device—the scapegoat—is, in a way, the same thing which is bad about the crisis. It is the sameness of people. Because the choice of the scapegoat will not be determined by some real difference (which does not exist), but by something ridiculous like, you know, the pimple on your nose or

something. There is always this tiny difference which distinguishes, which polarizes a whole community against a single individual, which you will find in the archaic myth where there is one little detail, like a limp, a physical defect, which is meaningless because . . .

Stirling: In a moral sense, it is meaningless, yet the victim is arbitrarily selected as guilty. And you have talked a great deal about the innocence of the victim—

Girard: —because my definition of Christianity versus myth is the simplest it can be. In myth it is a scapegoat phenomenon, which is never discovered. Modern scholars have not yet discovered that the mythic hero is a scapegoat, whereas, the fact that Jesus was a scapegoat is the basic fact about Him. But of course, this was not recognized by the people who crucified Him.

Stirling: When Christians and other religious people talk about guilt and innocence, they often attribute that state to whether a person has sinned or not. In ancient human history, the scapegoats were unlikely to be totally without sin in that sense, but they were innocent of what the group was projecting onto them.

Girard: There are really cases where everybody starts a problem at the same time, and it is literally impossible to decide fairly on a culprit. So the scapegoat instinct is very strong, because as long as you haven't attributed the guilt to someone, it remains there in the group and everybody is supposed to bear a little bit of it. People want to get rid of it, and that is really why they are looking for a scapegoat.

Burton: How is the scapegoat different from the mimetic double?

Girard: I would say they make themselves double by retaliation. Everybody retaliates, and everybody accuses the other of starting the confrontation. Everyone does that honestly, really believing they are right, because the contamination at the beginning is invisible, even to the participants. People are not observant enough of the moment when things become sour between two people. It is retrospectively impossible to reconstitute. Therefore, human violence is a difficult problem.

* * *

Burton: We were hoping that you might summarize your view of human cultural origins.

Girard: I think it starts with scapegoating.

Stirling: With murder?

Girard: Probably.

Stirling: Do you see scapegoating as one isolated event, or is it something that happens many different times in many different places?

Girard: My own tendency would be to see it happening in different places, in many instances. Crowds have a tendency to become united against something. Original sin is probably that—to be united not around something, but against. All the archaic gods always have bad aspects, bad signs. Even the very old gods—like Jupiter in the Roman world—are fundamentally adulterers, murderers, and so forth. This characteristic has been attenuated over countless centuries but probably started with specific accusations of the crowds against a human scapegoat. That is how I would see it.

Stirling: And so you see all of these ancient gods—these idolatrous gods—as having an origin in a scapegoat that was blamed for all of the evil in the group and later credited with establishing peace?

Girard: Credited with establishing peace. Because when the group accepts that idea, you know, it feels better; and it attributes, rightly, this feeling better to the victim. Therefore, the ancient god is fundamentally bad and good. The essential features of myth are precisely that: a scapegoat phenomenon, which became so important that there was a tendency to replay it, to ask how it happened. It is because archaic people were very concrete. They believe that the scapegoat may be a god, but they also recollect somewhat how spontaneous murder by the crowd happened. So someone must say at some point, “Why don’t we try to do it ourselves with another victim?”

Stirling: So that is how ritual sacrifice began?

Girard: Ritual sacrifice would be the first institution, when the society is going back again to the beginning and there is enough recollection of what happened. And if the god did it for us, accepting to be mistreated, wasn’t it because he wants us to replay it?

Stirling: What about prohibitions? How did they originate?

Girard: Well, prohibitions are very simple. Because people are very observant, they know very well what gets them into trouble.

And prohibitions usually make sense. But if they don't make sense to us, it may be because they are linked to a very specific incident that we don't know, which we would have to know to understand. Everything was copied religiously in the ritual and was often remembered because of its very irrationality. Therefore, it persisted long enough to make the whole institution unintelligible—because in order to have a good scapegoat phenomenon, you must *not* understand it. They were misunderstood, these phenomena. So it was natural to try to redo them. Doing things exactly. Getting the equivalent. So if they had killed a member of the community, they knew very well that this murder increased the violence because it set the family of the victim against the family of the killer. But if you managed to have a scapegoat ritual, it was very different.

Stirling: Now, in the current world, it seems that we have lost the ability to generate new myths—

Girard: —because we understand the scapegoat phenomenon. And this is both good and bad. We want to avoid scapegoat phenomena. In archaic societies, probably there were always things that were understood about it, but it was an incomplete knowledge, which makes allowance for the existence of a scapegoat world.

Stirling: And when you say we want to avoid scapegoating in the modern world, you must be referring to the group as a whole. Because each one of us individually pretty naturally lapses into scapegoating. We can't do it en masse.

Girard: You have to spread the impulse to have scapegoating, but the fact that it diminishes with more understanding is, I think, unquestionable. And then it can no longer create the sacred.

Stirling: That leads me to another question I was going to ask a moment ago. Do you still see most human institutions that we have now as descending in some way from the ritual sacrifice of archaic religion?

Girard: Indirectly. Not directly. There are many institutions—

Stirling: As time goes on, many of the institutions will be further and further removed from ritual sacrifice, but you have described how kingship could have originated from the prestige of the scapegoat victim. It is also quite easy to see how legal systems could evolve at a step removed from ritual sacrifice. You have described this as well.

Girard: Yes, I am in a state of flux with respect to this aspect of culture. I have been thinking about modern anthropology, which is an anthropology essentially of the gift, the counter-gift, etc. So, I was thinking that there was the possibility, instead, of doing an anthropology of avoidance. For instance, instead of thinking that people go far away to marry girls from outside the group, one could think that the group wants to get rid of its girls because it is afraid that its males are going to fight over them. What categorizes human culture is that, instead of doing things in the vicinity, in being as close to the first object that can satisfy their desires and so forth, they go far away in order to get people who are unrelated. It is probably a movement of avoidance, more than a search, or a combination of both, see what I mean? And avoidance is something which anthropology has not thought out, which is not there.

Stirling: Could this relate to your idea of the prohibitions as well?

Girard: Yes, because prohibitions are most important. Prohibitions, in a way, come first; and rituals become used when prohibitions fail. Because in a way, ritual is the opposite of prohibition. In rituals, you redo the behavior, which is forbidden by the prohibitions, which is supposed to become the medicine. I think that this concept could become a development in concrete anthropology when you look at archaic culture. But it would involve a shift away from the idea of the gift, which is too optimistic, typical of European socialists at the beginning of the twentieth century. But this is a myth—that people want to give, want to exchange gifts. They want to avoid trouble. This is more fundamental, and one of its consequences is the gift. The importance of the gift should not be denied, but to say that it can become powerful enough to pull apart the community in search of wives is not convincing to me.

The main phenomenon to explain human culture is avoidance. I don't think that there is real evidence that this avoidance is a natural one. Otherwise, you are forced to see things which are mad. For instance, you see people who exchange even corpses—because there are some tribes in which no member of the culture buries its own dead; one always gives them to someone else and vice versa. But one cannot say they exchange corpses as gifts; that is ridiculous. Obviously, they avoid corpses. Because, even today,

funerals are often the occasion for conflicts in families, old conflicts being revived by the presence at the funeral of people who never see each other. So you would avoid it completely by having something like professional undertakers. Everybody becomes a professional undertaker of the people who don't matter to him. Because if the people matter to him, it is better to avoid them.

That is what I mean by an anthropology of avoidance, by putting avoidance first. Of course, the gift is important, but cannot be an origin. Avoidance may be, because you try to protect your own life. And, in a way, in the theory of the gift and the anthropology of the gift, there is something anti-Christian, because it is directed against original sin.

Stirling: Does it deny original sin? If one sees the origin of culture in the spontaneous exchange of gifts, one denies the founding violence—the original sin—that the Christian revelation exposes.

Girard: Yes, it seems obvious to me . . . , but I am too old to write a book about it; it is too complex a subject.

Stirling: How do people typically deal with their resentment today, when mythology does not create the sacred and when the institution of sacrifice is attenuated?

Girard: I think you can show that there are still sacrificial aspects in human nature. That sacrificial aspect, we experience it every day. For instance, take a young man who is forced all day long to submit to his boss. His boss has very different worries from him. The boss tends to express his anger at his subordinate, who really doesn't deserve it. In the evening, the subordinate goes back home; and if he is really mad, he will kick the dog. Is that not sacrificial? If he is angrier, he will slap his child. And if it gets even worse, he will have a quarrel with his wife. So, isn't that a sacrificial hierarchy of sorts?

Stirling: It is. We also see how easily anger can be displaced from one target to another. What did the discovery of ritual sacrifice do for archaic societies?

Girard: You can see how in a more primitive humanity the discovery of sacrifice could have been a real discovery in the sense that it made possible the stabilization of temper by discharging its resentment onto a victim. This discovery was perceived as something great and, as a result, created an institution.

Stirling: How did sacrificial ritual engender human knowl-

edge? You have suggested that the sacrificial ritual itself gave more ancient humans an ability to relate different things in their lives to one another in a conceptual framework. It also seems to have created a kind of intellectual peace or space in which they could devote their capacity to discovering—

Girard: —which was enlarged by time, experience, and repetition. So they chose a victim who was not their child. We do not want to disturb our community; the main thing is to save our community. But a victim who resembles a member of the community can function to absorb the anger and save the community from itself.

* * *

Stirling: What about philosophical explorations of origins? Do you see philosophy as an enterprise that seeks to cover up our origins in violence? Does philosophy in some sense try to support the idea of human culture as a peaceful enterprise, the result of intelligent good will?

Girard: Yes, well, philosophy seeks to cover the violent origination of social institutions, in a sense. The philosophical descriptions of human origins usually wouldn't talk about violence.

Burton: Would not?

Girard: Would not. These philosophies would tell you some kind of fairy tale about human origins. The philosophers usually want to review excellence and inculcate a favorable idea of primitive culture as being empty of violence. This fashion has disappeared, to a certain extent, but not as fast as it should. I think I have contributed a little bit to that movement—at least to say, “Look, it makes no sense.”

Stirling: The more evidence that we gain from biology, archeology, and anthropology, the more we see violence going all the way back, underpinning human culture at every level.

Girard: Sure, and we see it in animals too, in more cases where we didn't see it before. Philosophy is tied up with the general movement toward the idea of human autonomy and anti-Christian aspects of the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century. The idea of human autonomy is completely out in the open in the sixteenth century and is still that way. Therefore, it is fundamentally

anti-Christian. It is the origin of modern human sciences. I depart too much from that view to be acceptable.

Stirling: You mention that Shakespeare went beyond Greek drama in laying bare the origins of human culture, perhaps most explicitly in *Julius Caesar*. Why was he able to do that?

Girard: Well, my tendency would be to say because of Christianity. It is impossible for a man like Shakespeare, as intelligent as he was, to represent a scapegoat phenomenon, which he did not understand, and then make it understood by his readers. So, I think there is a fundamental superiority of Shakespeare over the Greek dramatists.

But I am not sure I want to say that because I don't know what is behind Euripides's *Bacchae*. You can read it in a modern way and see the scapegoat phenomenon and think that Euripides understood it. But is it really true? I don't know. Were they terribly exceptional men or mostly artists? We don't know, but they were disliked by the community and were regarded as betrayers, speaking about the gods in a way one hadn't heard before. You have Plato's opposition against dramatists and art. This attitude is probably typical of the extremely conservative guy who sees culture being destroyed and who realizes that the knowledge of the dramatists is playing a role in this destruction. The conservative is right, but you cannot go back in time and restructure what is being destructured.

Stirling: How does the Bible differ from myth?

Girard: The Bible reveals scapegoating. And it revealed scapegoating very early. It is difficult to say, but there is one text, which obviously is very ancient, according to the scholars, which is the story of Joseph. Joseph is the story of a scapegoat who is treated in the Bible as a scapegoat. That is why I had in one of my books a parallel between the Oedipus myth in which you believe in patricide and incest and the Joseph story where you don't [*Oedipus Unbound*, chap. 5]. Freud tells you it is scientific. That is a comic thing, I think. And the Bible does not believe Joseph is a scoundrel. Rather Joseph is seen as a scapegoat in the Bible. The story of Joseph is a magnificent story.

Stirling: It is indeed. It inverts mythology. Many myths contain signs in themselves of undifferentiation and differentiation. There are myths that show some evidence of communal violence or col-

lective violence against a victim. However, there are many myths that don't have these elements.

Girard: I would reserve the word *myth* for misunderstood scapegoats, but that is my definition, and I don't try to generalize to all myths or talk about myth as defined by modern science. I talk about a certain type of myth, which has the victim at the center. That victim at the center is never like Christ, an innocent condemned for the false reasons. The condemnation always seems justified in the myth. And that, I think, is maybe the most important concept—central for converting people to the mimetic theory. It is very important to say, “Look at myth, and ask why is the hero guilty?” It's not an answer to say that the Bible is cruel, because the Bible also contains stories that denounce human violence. We say that the Bible is cruel because it shows the cruelty of men—while mythology, precisely because it *is* cruel, doesn't show it. Cruel people don't show their cruelty. Only good people talk about evil, talk intelligently as the Bible does. I think the Joseph story is the best example.

Stirling: Do you believe that the true God has used the false transcendence of the violent sacred in any way to begin His process of revelation? As a starting point to help humans understand the scapegoat mechanism or original sin, as you see it?

Girard: Yes, we may say that God wanted human beings to collaborate in their own salvation and therefore understand themselves and their own sins. People see the similarity of structure between mythology and Christianity. But Christianity and myth are not the same story at all. The victim's innocence in Christianity potentially destroys all myth. So the idea of Christianity as a universal revelation makes sense. When I first talked about the mimetic theory, I didn't see the tremendous importance of that concept. In a truly popular—in the best sense—version of the mimetic theory, it should be in the center.

* * *

Burton: Does the Hebrew Bible have an emergent rejection or a full rejection of the scapegoat mechanism?

Girard: Fundamentally the Jewish religion and Christianity are aware of scapegoating and its consequences. The scapegoat

mechanism does not appear in the first chapters of Genesis. The first significant example is the story of Joseph.

The conquest of the Holy Land, for example, is always quoted by enemies of the Bible as a story that fully justifies violence. This is, indeed, the case. The Bible has texts that are similar to mythology or other texts connected with origins, but the knowledge of scapegoating appears sporadically. From the perspective of Christians, the Gospels are the supreme revelation of human scapegoating because it is a full expression. God is not a scapegoater. He is a victim of scapegoating. Of course, I think the Christian story can also be strongly emphasized as the reversal of certain aspects of archaic religion. You have so many myths in which human scapegoating is wrongly justified as the “judgment of God” or the “victory of the good people.”

Burton: Why, in the Old Testament, do we see the beginnings of rejecting the scapegoat mechanism, even though there were relapses, as you say. What about their culture or their thought that allowed them to see this scapegoating mechanism as—

Girard: It is revelation—I mean, if the scapegoat revelation is really unique to the Bible. As far as I know it is, but I cannot claim that I have studied all religions. Countless archaic myths justify the human scapegoating of victims. For instance, I quote one about the visitor from abroad who steals. So they follow him to the top of the mountain. He falls and disappears, and the community is founded. In the myth, the punishment is just. The thief is guilty—the only guilty one—and the community is right to expel him. That doesn’t prevent him from becoming divine in a way. That’s a benefit of scapegoating, which in turn becomes the origin of sacrifice and culture. Scapegoating in mythology is misunderstood, only partly understood, or understood as a sudden divine intervention at the expense of a guilty victim. This intervention saves the community and must be the starting point of a culture.

Burton: Would you comment on the possible relationship in the Hebrew Bible between this emergent understanding of scapegoat and monotheism? Would the monotheism have played a part and, if so, how?

Girard: Sure. There is something very special about what God says to the Jews. He says, You have been liberated yourselves and

so you must be kind to people who take refuge with you. These concepts are very striking because they are unique in ancient writings. They are also anti-scapegoating. However, other parts of the Hebrew Bible are clearly (or probably) scapegoat phenomena. It is a mixed bag, but it's the sort of mixed bag you don't really find in mythology. Mythology has pretty clear scapegoating which is never criticized. The Bible contains scapegoating but also contains a critique of scapegoating. It does not show a uniform movement away from scapegoating, but it does show a general trend that is a historical process. The process is complex, but I think it is visibly present. I don't think you can find the equivalent of the story of Joseph in the Oedipus myth, for instance, where Oedipus is seriously regarded as guilty of patricide and incest. The great mistake of Freud was to think that patricide and incest were the important discovery the Oedipus myth, which is not true at all. They are standard scapegoat accusations.

Burton: Is the individual scapegoat always divinized after the event?

Girard: How can we know that? If the scapegoat is not divinized, no myth is generated. There may have been countless unknown scapegoats. I don't think we are in the position to answer that question definitively. Even if we have no mythic scapegoat, there may be one in actuality. The collective delusion may work so well that the scapegoat disappears completely. Even the story disappears. That is a possibility, I think. It is a pretty common theme to show a community beginning with a scapegoat affair, which is remembered because it had a saving effect—it interrupted a fight, a potentially fatal fight.

Burton: In 1 Kings 12, the Northern Kingdom has rebelled against Solomon but hasn't really formed a nation yet. Adoram comes up from the south to collect taxes in the north and is slain by the Israelites. The text says he was stoned by "all Israel" (v. 18).

Girard: People who collect taxes are always badly treated!

Burton: Maybe! But immediately afterward, Israel formed a nation in the north separate from Judea in the south. They created their own cult. But Adoram is never made part of the cult. He is never divinized. Can we call him a scapegoat, even though his death leads to the founding of the Northern Kingdom, Israel? I've

wondered if it isn't partly to do with the fact that Israel had no way to divinize Adoram, because they believed in one God.

Girard: Yes. And you can see why the concept of one God would have led inevitably to the death of archaic religion because it was an obstacle to divinization. So you have to tell the story in a realistic way. That story is good proof that belief in one God can cleanse a story of the temptation to idolatry.

Stirling: Yes, so we can see him as a scapegoat, but he can no longer can be divinized.

Girard: Yes, he becomes a scapegoat in the modern sense. I wish I had known that story better. I would have used it. I think your interpretation is very good. These are important moments in the Hebrew Bible where its fundamental, structural difference from mythology appears.

Burton: It does seem to flow in some way from Abraham's monotheism, which came, at least in part, as a consequence of his attempt to sacrifice his son, but then being stopped.

Girard: In the so-called sacrifice of Isaac, Abraham is presented as the object of a special command from God, which was not for everybody. In fact, the whole beginning of the Bible occurs in the context of human sacrifice, but this story has been manipulated a little bit to make human sacrifice seem a very special thing. This human-sacrifice culture is abolished by the beginning of the Bible. So I think it is very close to telling us the truth of human sacrifice and especially the sacrifice of children. Today we know that the practice of sacrificing children existed everywhere—all over the world—to some degree. It is part of the sacrifice of the first fruits.

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Stirling: You have talked about the cross or the Gospel accounts of Jesus's death and resurrection as being the summit of biblical revelation. What is the most important teaching of the cross?

Girard: It teaches us that human beings are fundamentally prone to look for and to murder scapegoat victims. This looking for victims is very important in the birth of human culture. So the revelation of the cross brings out this dreadful aspect of humankind.

Stirling: We see it perhaps most clearly there.

Girard: Yes, we see it most clearly there. It is very interesting

that the modern period, which is anti-Christian, has also created an anthropology, which makes Western culture—perhaps because it is Christian—guiltier than any other. The myth of the innocence of the primitive is an invention of modern humanism. The cross teaches us about true religion because at the same time it teaches the badness of false religion. It shows the murderous aspects of humanity, but this is true of the whole Bible in a way.

Stirling: What does the cross teach us about the nature of God?

Girard: It teaches that God has devised a way to save humankind by enlightening us about our murderous nature, but God doesn't murder anyone. His Son, God Himself, accepts to be murdered for us and thereby to bring our nature to our conscious knowledge.

Stirling: Paul said: "I resolve to know nothing except Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (2 Cor. 2:2). You have said that that statement made sense to you because it designates the cross as the source of all knowledge, both about God and about man. Do you still feel that that is correct?

Girard: Yes. It is an extremely brief sentence, which becomes intelligible only in view of the scapegoat mechanism.

Burton: Paul also says: "If the kings of this world had foreseen the consequences. . ." (1 Cor. 2:8). What does that mean?

Girard: Paul is saying that they would have never crucified the Lord. This is the marvelous idea that, when you understand the cross, you understand that all society is based on scapegoat violence. Christianity today seems to be disintegrating, but the state is also disintegrating—disintegrating in a particular way. We know with increasing clarity that states are always based on something like the crucifixion—on the ability to kill to cure the community of disorder—or, in other words, a smart use of the scapegoat mechanism, which the leader himself triggers to reconcile his people against the scapegoat. When you think of the Roman circus games and so forth, you can see that much of ancient civilization was organized to make people participate in the scapegoating.

Stirling: Different from scapegoating the ruler himself?

Girard: Yes, a form of scapegoating that saves the rulers. And people have always seen the relationship between the guy sen-

tenced to death and the ruler. You can see from many signs all over the place.

Stirling: You, in fact, believe that the institution of kingship derives from the sacred aura surrounding the victim. The victim eventually succeeded in using that aura to propel himself into a position of authority.

Girard: We westerners were very surprised to discover the relationship between the victim and the ruler in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It is a theme that scholars discovered from Egypt to South Africa. The king was essentially a victim killed by the crowd. That is pretty fundamental. There are aspects of this cultural theme in Asia and even Europe. I think that, if culture were studied without a prejudice in favor of public order, we would see that the murder of the victim is always present. But it is quite distant in time, and it becomes less and less visible as civilization advances.

Burton: Just a question: Can you give an example, a modern example, of a scapegoat phenomenon?

Girard: Well, a modern example of a scapegoat phenomenon would be the system of elections. President Mitterrand (he was a man with quite a sense of humor) used to say that when you are president, first there is a state of grace; you cannot do anything wrong. Sooner or later, it is always replaced by the state of disgrace, and then you cannot do anything right and you may be killed. In those African monarchies, it always ended with a murder. But the anthropologists take for granted that the murder of the kings was purely a formal thing which had no meaning. This is ridiculous. The monarch is essentially the enthroned victim. Instead of being enthroned or divinized after he is dead, it happens before he is dead. And probably the invention of political power is one with this. They want to use him as a leader before killing him.

Stirling: So, certainly all of our leaders oscillate between excessive and inappropriate adulation, on the one hand, and then excessive—

Girard: And then a state of disgrace. That is why the more popular they are, the more they are at risk for a fall. Today we have a good example because people are all asking: “When will Obama fall into disgrace?” The people are aware of this phenomenon of

scapegoating rulers and celebrities, but they continue to do it anyway!

Burton: Can we imagine a scapegoat selected who really *is* guilty of all that the mob puts on him?

Girard: Well, no. You see, the idea of a scapegoat was there before the idea of punishing only the guilty man. In many primitive societies, you can see very well that, for reconciliation, the tribe which has been guilty of doing something does not look for the single guilty culprit. You take someone in the tribe whom you feel is more expendable than the others. You chose a victim, and you give that victim to the other party, or you execute him. But very often it may be someone who is not doing well in the society and so forth, who is already on the way to being scapegoated in his own group. There may be an exchange of victims between tribes against which they can each get rid of their own violence.

Stirling: When you have a human crowd revved up, there are always metaphysical projections onto the victim—onto the scapegoat—that far exceed his actual guilt.

Girard: Sure. Because it is multiplied by the crowd. Everyone invents something new.

Stirling: That is the essence of the phenomenon.

Girard: That is the essence, yes. All crowds are dangerous. The police know that. That trouble arises for no reason at all. It doesn't matter.

Burton: Part of the Christian revelation is the revelation of the victim's innocence but at the same time—the mirror image of it, also part of the Christian revelation—is the revelation of the individual's guilt, the guilt of each member in the crowd. Both things are essential.

Girard: Yes. Both things are essential. The essence of the crowd is that the individual hides within the crowd, and all can say that no one is responsible for the death of the victim.

Burton: Some time ago, I watched a report on TV of an execution in Texas. Outside the jail, a big group of people gathered. At the moment he was killed, they started blowing party horns and put on party hats. As I watched that, I thought of your theory. It seemed like classic scapegoating.

Girard: It is classic scapegoating, and there was a time when it

existed everywhere. Executions were supposed to be public, you know, in the old regime. As the tendency grows to suppress capital punishment, it becomes private, done in the jail. But if you don't dare show it to people, why do you have a right to do it at all? What is the state if not the union of all the people? Therefore, the public nature of capital punishment was essential to its effect. As this begins to disappear, you can be pretty sure that capital punishment itself is not going to last very long. This is the normal evolution of our world.

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Stirling: Is it fundamental to your way of seeing things to consider God as non-violent, as not a killer of human beings?

Girard: Yes, it is fundamental, but that doesn't mean that I have an explanation for the fact that we live in a dangerous world, full of volcanoes and hurricanes.

Burton: Would any elements of your theory respond to the criticism of Christianity that a truly good and powerful God would not allow so much suffering?

Girard: If God had created man as happy and peaceful as cows in a nice meadow, there would be no point to the creation. In a way, suffering is part of education, but that is all we can say. We see it at only the human level. If you want to educate yourself, you have to suffer. It is more difficult than playing cards all day long. This explanation is imperfect and incomplete and doesn't help much. Christianity is a religion which demands faith, and faith makes sense precisely because we don't have all the pieces for understanding. Otherwise, it is not faith. It is the same thing as driving on the right side of the road—because everybody does that. If you don't do it, the consequences will be bad. Whichever way you look at it you have mysteries, which are unfathomable because we are just not good enough, not holy enough to understand all the points, all the reason for creation.

Stirling: I think we are all in agreement that we don't know all the answers. Do you believe that here, in this earth life, God has ever killed anyone or has sent somebody else to kill for Him?

Girard: Our period of time is especially sensitive to the violence of God because it is so much against violence. It is now politically correct to believe in a non-violent God and to justify rejec-

tion of the biblical God because of His supposed violence. It is a problem that made no sense in earlier times, and so why does it make sense to us? I would like to believe that it is a sign of progress towards real Christianity. It is a result of the biblical revelation.

Stirling: Your theory of human culture teaches that the concept of a violent God arose when the crowd was obliterating a victim. Humans have projected their violence onto other humans and eventually onto their victims whom they deified. So the idea of a violent God stems from that phenomenon, and the idea of a non-violent God stems from the cross. Were God to resort to the expedient use of violence, it would cancel the message of the cross. I have been pretty well convinced by the things I learned from you that God does not kill nor does He send other humans to kill other humans in His name.

Girard: The way you've stated it is a very good way to explain it to people, because many are scandalized by the idea of a violent God.

Stirling: Well, let me ask a follow-up question. Was Jesus's cleansing of the temple a violent act? He upset the tables and drove out the money changers. The account in John says Jesus made a whip of cords (absent in the synoptic Gospels), although a close reading suggests he used it to drive out the cattle and the sheep that were to be used for sacrificial purposes.

Girard: But it doesn't say that He actually used violence.

Stirling: It doesn't say that He used His fists or killed anyone.

Girard: And so, what is your question?

Stirling: My question is this: People will correctly perceive that you are teaching that God is not violent, based on the revelation of the cross. Then they will say, "But right here in the New Testament, Jesus is being violent; therefore, your conclusions are invalid."

Girard: Yes. So what do you answer to that problem?

Stirling: Well, if I recall correctly, you have said that a true peace can never be built upon a lie; it must be built upon the truth. Cleansing the temple represented one of Jesus's last chances to express the truth publicly. Shutting down the sacrificial ritual in the temple was a prophetic, symbolic act, demonstrating that the temple of the old archaic religion—the center of sacred violence—would not lead to salvation. It had to be de-

stroyed or transformed. It was one of His only ways to express that truth at that time in his culture. It certainly didn't involve killing anyone and probably didn't involve a fist fight either. It was an attempt by a non-violent God to express the truth that was being driven out by a violent world.

Girard: Sure. The scandalous aspect is that it was done in the name of religion, you know.

Stirling: The driving out of Jesus, you mean?

Girard: Yes.

Burton: On that point, you have said, "The [g]ospel does not provide [a] happy ending to our history" [*Evolution and Conversion*, 213].

Girard: The gospel simply shows us two options, which is exactly what ideologies never provide. Either we imitate Christ, or we run the risk of self-destruction.

Stirling: That is the gospel's message.

Girard: We are in a world that is very different than what it was before. In our lifetime, people have become concerned with the livability of our planet and with the issue of humanity destroying itself. Justifiably so. First they were concerned only with war. Today, they are concerned with both war and environment. Even if there is no war, it is quite possible that the atmosphere could become unbreathable. And the interesting thing is, why is this apocalyptic ending found in the Gospels? It is our fault. There is nothing divine about the violence of the apocalypse. God permits it, but it is a consequence of human behavior. The apocalyptic texts should be studied rationally, not merely by people who dream of not being "left behind."

* * *

Stirling: Some Christians do see the second coming as a time when Jesus is going to come down and finish off all the bad guys—

Girard: Yes, but Jesus doesn't need to finish off all the bad guys. They finish each other off. Today, what should be emphasized is that we are already verifying aspects of the gospel that seem completely mad, aspects that have played a great role in the gospel's rejection by modern rationality. However, modern rationality is beginning to perceive that it carries within itself the seeds of destroying our environment. And if you look at the apocalyptic texts of the

Bible, they never tell you that God is violent or that the apocalypse is quick. These texts are very profound, much more pertinent to our condition than people have realized. I find it amazing that rational churches, which do not try to terrify people, do not focus on this aspect.

Then there is another thing about the apocalyptic texts. People conclude that they are irrational because they mix up natural phenomena like storm and tsunamis with the human capacity for destruction. So they seem totally anti-scientific. Science, fundamentally, has been separating the results of human culture from nature and understanding them both separately. But if today there is a new hurricane in New Orleans, we don't know if human beings are partly responsible or whether it is nature alone. Human culture affects nature. There should be a rational investigation of this relationship. That is a book I would like to write. The apocalyptic texts are not anti-scientific. The distinction between nature and culture is beginning to erode. That is tremendously important for me.

Burton: So you would be hesitant to read the book of Revelation or other apocalyptic texts and see a violent, vengeful God in human history?

Girard: That is right. I think that the apocalyptic texts of the Gospels are extremely important for our time. I would like to write a book specifically on them. John's Revelation is a narrative—very different, I think, from the synoptic Gospels, which never mention God as an agent of violence in the apocalyptic passages. The apocalypse is becoming true, and its rationality should be more emphasized in relationship to its text. I think this is an important subject from an apologetic viewpoint, too, that is avoided today.

Stirling: In *Evolution and Conversion* (224), you said the cross is a scandal because we do not understand a violent God who suffers his prosecutors humbly.

Girard: His *persecutors* humbly. . .

Stirling: So the cross is scandalous to us because naturally we do not know what to think about a God who would not retaliate and achieve a glorious victory.

Girard: Yes, when we choose a leader, we want him to fight back.

Stirling: Yes. So here is the problem. Jesus *did* suffer His persecutors humbly during His mortal ministry. If, then, we saw Him at His second coming violently destroying the wicked, would He not seem to be an opposite kind of God?

Girard: And, in a way, a cancellation of what the cross tells us.

Stirling: Exactly.

Girard: Yes, that is a very good argument. I think it should be there. There is a difficulty with the Christians themselves to assimilate fully the nature of the cross and the refusal to see its implications. It is becoming more apparent that we are responsible if something happens to the marvelous place that God has given us. It is ours. Of course, he could intervene to stop it, but in a way it would cancel the lesson.

Stirling: It would also cancel human choice.

Girard: . . . and turn us into zoo animals.

Stirling: Exactly. In Mormon theology, we all existed before we came to earth and we chose to come here, knowing what it was like. We came to learn. The learning is critically important, as is our freedom to choose.

Girard: So, freedom is greatly emphasized.

Stirling: And responsibility.

Girard: And responsibility, sure. Even the history of the Mormons gives you a theme that illustrates this aspect. This theme is a bit lacking for established Christians, you might say. They settle in Rome or in Constantinople, or wherever and they don't move from there.

Burton: The mimetic crisis erases all difference. Right? Makes people alike, creates doubles, they all become one in their anger and their hostility toward that scapegoat, so why is there no crisis now?

Girard: But there *are* crises. There is a latent crisis, of course, but we are ashamed of solving it with a scapegoat in the classic manner. Instead of going all the way to the scapegoat mechanism, we hesitate because we are "too Christian." We are not Christian enough to be fully Christian, but we are Christian enough to be ashamed and therefore resort less efficiently to the mechanism. Or suddenly there occurs a regression. The twentieth century was a period of great regression because of Marxism and Nazism. These were obviously scapegoat systems, which were very power-

ful since they convinced hundreds of millions. If you look at today's elections, there is always a little scapegoating, but it is nothing compared to the past. So, contrary to what many people say, mimetic theory is not a pessimistic theory. Today we are in a very dangerous world, which we can destroy at any time. And if we don't, it is simply because we know enough to understand that we ourselves will be the victims.

In the Catholic liturgical year, after Pentecost and just before the beginning of the new year comes Advent, when the priest would give his homily based on the apocalyptic texts. I still remember these sermons from when I was a child; but with the invention of the atom bomb, the apocalyptic homilies stopped. This is fascinating. They were afraid of scaring people.

Stirling: So, they dropped it from the liturgy?

Girard: They didn't drop it from the liturgy—that they wouldn't do—but from the sermons. But we really are moving inexorably toward the end of the world. We should be aware of it and work to postpone it.

Burton: So you think we ought to be talking about the apocalyptic texts more?

Girard: They have never been so relevant, and yet we ignore them. For some churches, which are very excited about the end times, these texts are always relevant. But for the bourgeois churches, I have not heard one sermon about the apocalyptic texts since the invention of the atom bomb.

Stirling: Do you believe that God is calling us to somehow evolve so that we give up all violence?

Girard: Yes, He allowed us to play our game and it is coming back against us now.

Burton: Are you hopeful?

Girard: I am hopeful because I am a Christian. However, I would like to write a book on apocalyptic texts and show that they are true. It cannot be mere chance that suddenly we find ourselves in a situation where we threaten our own survival, all described in advance by the biblical texts.

Stirling: Although you so clearly value the revelation contained in the Bible, many Christians who are anchored in the Bible are frightened by your approach to it. Your approach sees

many biblical texts as being influenced to some extent by the mythology of the violent sacred, rather than being purely the product of infallible inspiration.

Girard: You mean that I put the Bible in a historical context as I did for the sacrifice of Isaac?

Stirling: Yes. For example, let's take the stoning of Achan (Josh. 7). The literal interpretation is that this one evil man was responsible for Israel's defeat and God wanted him to be executed by stoning. Your theory would ask us to read that story in a different way, suspecting a crowd phenomenon with elements of ritualized scapegoating. Many people are uncomfortable with taking that kind of liberty with the biblical text.

Girard: The Bible is so rich and so powerful and so inspired, yet at the same time, it is a human book. You pose a very important question, because it is the relationship between modern science and faith. My basic point is that they don't have to be enemies. When modern science becomes anti-religious, it goes beyond its own possibilities. It is wrong to see religion as something so fantastic that it cannot be studied rationally and must be discarded. However, the opposite is wrong, too. To dismiss modern science as something which doesn't contain many truths and achieves much good (as well as bad) is obviously wrong.

Stirling: Some people feel that they cannot have a Bible which is not wholly a divine product and still have confidence in it. That is the problem.

Girard: The Bible, even if you believe it is divinely inspired, is transmitted by human beings who are extremely fallible. We can accept forms of criticism. I value the insights of scholars. Many people who work on the Bible in a scientific way are believers, but they are not literalists.

Burton: I appreciate your example of faith. Your scholarship is a great example of faith.

Girard: Faith is faith, and there are variations in faith. There are days when I believe more than others. I am just like everybody else, you know; I am not a saint.

Stirling: We have heard differently, frankly. I am personally grateful for your theory and how it has helped me to understand myself, human society, and God better.

Undefined Borders

M. Davis

My husband Jake loves women's fashions. A lot. One of his hobbies is spending time at the mall, looking for shoes, dresses, make-up, and jewelry, and he is an expert at finding clothes that are flattering and stylish. He can pull together a fabulous outfit with ease, which might come in handy, except that the outfits aren't for me—they're for him. I am an LDS woman who is married to a loving, wonderful man who also happens to be a cross-dresser. Not exactly the stuff of Mormon fairy tales.

My husband and I were both raised in families from Utah Valley who were actively involved in the Church. Our lives followed the typical pattern of so many of our peers, and included baptism, a mission, Church callings, temple marriage, and children. Even now, we are active in our ward, participate in our callings, and might outwardly seem to be a "typical" Mormon family. But, there are few things about a cross-dressing Mormon man that are typical, and it has taken a lot of effort for us to come to terms with how complicated the issue is. After years of marriage, I have acknowledged that having a heterosexual husband who likes cross-dressing doesn't need to be the defining factor for the relationships in our lives, but he feels very differently.

Jake feels terrible guilt because of his desire to cross-dress. The guilt comes both from the Church's focus on conventional heterosexual marriages and children as the only acceptable familial unit ordained by God, as well as from the social taboo of cross-dressing as an effeminate and stereotypically homosexual behavior. While some cross-dressers are actually heterosexual, some people still view cross-dressing as a behavior of homosexual men and transgender men.

Our family fits the definition of an acceptable family by the Church's standards, but because Jake also has urges that have such strong associations with deviant sexuality, he feels that the fit isn't

genuine. This discrepancy has left him to suffer the anguish that comes from feeling displaced and alone. While he has enjoyed much success and happiness in his life, he constantly feels as if his “issue” is somehow inhibiting his spiritual salvation. As a result, it complicates every relationship in his life—our marriage and the relationships with his parents, his siblings, his children, and most particularly, the Church. The culmination of these convoluted relationships leaves him living in a constant state of ambiguity.

The relationship that has suffered most significantly in Jake’s life is with his parents. Like many Mormon parents, my in-laws explained only the most basic details of sex to their kids. The subject of sex was so off-limits that Jake never felt comfortable asking what his parents did or did not believe. Jake felt that sexual pleasure was a sin and grew up presuming that sex was a sacred obligation that would lead to procreation and heavenly advancement. Thus, Jake never perceived sex as a gift from God to foster happiness and enjoyment as a means in and of itself, but only as a means to an end. Sexual transgression was explained as masturbation, premarital sex, extramarital sex, and anything remotely related to homosexuality. Quoting from Leviticus 18:22, Jake’s parents told him that homosexuality was an “abomination” that would bring swift and everlasting damnation. They also taught that homosexuality was a choice and, therefore, that gay and lesbian people were openly choosing to mock God in an attempt to avoid the procreation that would bring eternal happiness.

Because sex was considered such a taboo topic while Jake was growing up, he didn’t understand what cross-dressing was; and at first, he didn’t even realize that it was a sexual issue. Instead, in his early childhood, it began as a natural curiosity about gender difference. Boys’ clothing was boring and plain. The pants and shirt he wore to play in during the week resembled the pants and shirt he wore to church; there was nothing that set apart his clothes as being special. In contrast, his sister got to wear dresses on Sunday and put bows in her curled hair. His sister would twirl around in a circle to show off her clothes, which made Jake particularly envious. Jake loved dress patterns and the soft material that her dresses were made of. The velvet and silky fabrics were rarely found in boys’ clothing. In addition, Jake’s mother bought his sis-

ter pretty tights and shoes for church, which were far more distinctive than his brown socks and shoes.

As a child, not only did Jake like the clothing of women, but he remembers wanting to dress up to look like girls and women. This included desiring to mimic the curved body shape of women, to have longer hair, and to wear perfume. To him, the idea of being dressed up as a woman was not only exciting but also evoked the peace and nurturing he associated with femininity. In wanting to dress like a woman, he hoped to be able to nurture himself and calm himself down when he was feeling anxious or sad.

It wasn't until Jake was older and began to get information from friends that he realized there was even such a thing as a "cross-dresser" and was horrified that it was linked, to a certain extent within American culture, to homosexuality. His father in particular was very intolerant of homosexuals, so Jake felt that, if he in any way exhibited effeminate behavior, his father's disfavor would spiritually disinherit him from the family. Jake remembers frequently hearing his father talk about homosexuals as compromising their masculinity. Jake was afraid that his embrace of femininity and his pleasure in cross-dressing automatically made him homosexual to some extent.

Thus, Jake hid his curiosity and tried to ignore his fascination with women's clothing. His ability to experiment was limited because he was still living at home; while he had an older sister whose clothes he often tried to wear, he was disappointed that she didn't own any sexy clothing to make him feel more feminine. His mother bought his sister plain white underwear and bras that resembled the simplicity of garments, perhaps in an effort to discourage his sister from viewing her body in a sexual way; to this day, his sister jokes about her "grandma underwear." Jake would try on her clothes when she was gone; but when he realized how much he enjoyed it, he sank into spells of guilt and self-hatred that would last for weeks. In keeping with what he had been taught, he turned to prayer and fasting to try and rid himself of his cross-dressing urge. He figured that if only he demonstrated enough faith by praying hard enough or fasting long enough, God would remove his trial. This approach ultimately did not work, and Jake

concluded that he wasn't exhibiting enough faith—that he needed to try even harder.

Jake hoped that his urge to cross-dress would gradually subside, but it did not; and once he left for college, his newfound freedom brought with it an increase in experimentation. No longer feeling the need to be quite as discreet, he bought lingerie, clothing, and wigs online and in local stores. While many college boys spent time looking at pornography and marveling at naked women, Jake was more enthralled with trying to *be* a woman. Fully aware that his behavior was uncommon within his religious and cultural community, he began to transfer the disgust he felt with himself over his cross-dressing to disgust with every aspect of his life. He was unable to feel self-love or acceptance, which gradually led to a severe depression.

As he prepared his mission papers, Jake felt obligated to see his bishop to explain the situation. Although he knew that cross-dressing wasn't encouraged by the Church, where did it fit exactly? It wasn't a gender-identity issue because he felt overwhelmingly that he was still a man and didn't want that to change. It wasn't homosexual behavior; but because it was presumably linked to so many forbidden behaviors, Jake knew it was strongly discouraged. Instead of discussing the cross-dressing, the bishop's questions revolved entirely around masturbation. It must have seemed logical to the bishop to find some sexual transgression that could be associated with the behavior, and thus simultaneously discourage both. Jake still felt confused, but certain that his urge needed to be more strictly controlled. As his mission grew closer, Jake remembers one episode where he actually burned some of his clothing and wigs. Although throwing the items away would have sufficed, Jake instead wanted to completely destroy any evidence of his behavior.

After his mission, Jake and I began dating; and he knew his cross-dressing would affect our future relationship. Before we became engaged, Jake was completely honest with me and explained that he liked to cross-dress. Being extremely young, I didn't entirely understand the marital consequences of what he was explaining and was so in love that I willingly accepted his behavior. Jake gradually eased me into what his cross-dressing entailed, and it was initially easy to accept. I believed that this impulse might

lessen significantly once we were married and he experienced the sexual intimacy of marriage. To me, Jake's cross-dressing seemed like a way to cope with the frustration of being in love and trying to wait until marriage to have sex. I didn't think to ask any questions about how long he had experimented with cross-dressing, how it made him feel, or whether he wanted to continue the behavior in the future.

Through most of our early marriage, Jake used cross-dressing as a way to relieve stress. By taking on a different persona, he felt able to escape from his own problems. After a couple of hours, he was able to change back into his clothes, wash off the make-up, and go on with his life. The cross-dressing itself didn't present as many problems as the sadness that accompanied it.

The more I accepted Jake's cross-dressing, the more he wanted to take it to deeper levels. Once he began dressing up to look as close to a real woman as possible, it became more problematic for me. I wanted the cross-dressing to be completely separate from our own sex life, because I am not sexually attracted to women, particularly women who are technically men. However, I was obviously aware of how problematic my feelings were. How do you keep a sexual issue out of a marriage? It isn't easy to just draw distinct lines and say, "This part of your sexuality is fine to share with me, but this part isn't."

The mutual frustration became intense, as we both asked those unanswerable questions. Why couldn't my husband's sexual feelings be similar to those of what I considered an "average" man's to be? I had fallen in love with my husband before I was aware of his cross-dressing and therefore felt I had specifically tried to avoid the messy conflict surrounding sexual ambiguity. I was frustrated that I needed to deal with cross-dressing in addition to adjusting to married life, and I often wondered if I would have agreed to date him had I known the information when we first met. Jake's frustration was equally intense, if not worse. He kept wondering why God wouldn't take these feelings from him. Why couldn't he just feel "acceptable" urges and not have to put me through all this sadness and frustration?

Jake has tried at various points in our marriage to completely suppress the behavior; but when he inevitably returns to it, he ex-

periences such a strong sense of failure and inadequacy that it affects our relationship. I am very accepting of Jake, but he still wishes that he could somehow overcome his impulse toward cross-dressing. At times, he has been angry that I am so accepting, as if my displaying a strong aversion to cross-dressing would provide sufficient motivation to rid himself of it. These challenges have been frequent and difficult, particularly when Jake wants the sexual aspects of cross-dressing to be part of our heterosexual relationship. However, after years of struggle, we are finally comfortable with openly communicating about the issue and Jake has become more accepting of his cross-dressing as it relates to our relationship.

There are still moments when I ask myself what a sexual relationship might be like without the cross-dressing. How would I view my husband differently? If I went through the closet and didn't find lingerie that he bought for himself, would I consider him to be more masculine? I even wonder sometimes if he might decide eventually that he is transgendered and leave to pursue another life. Although I know that he loves me and our children, I don't understand the intensity of his feelings and can't accurately judge what he feels about his cross-dressing.

After our son was born, Jake began to view his cross-dressing in terms of how it would affect his parenting. Should he ever explain to our children, particularly to our son, what he has struggled with his entire life? What if he did try to eventually tell our children, and it deeply affected the way they viewed him? Or what if he didn't tell them, and one of our own children suffered with similar feelings that could perhaps be eased if he or she had the unconditional support of a parent who truly understands? Jake is convinced that his own suffering could have been greatly minimized if his parents had been able to talk more openly about sex, and is determined to avoid the same mistake with our children.

Soon after our last child was born, Jake's hatred of his cross-dressing became almost suffocating, so we decided to seek medical help. He tried an anti-depressant but still felt immense disgust with himself. Then, Jake sought professional counseling. His therapist helped him to explore his need for acceptance by suggesting that he tell a few close family members about his cross-dressing to find a small support group. This approach became increasingly

complicated because Jake had always felt the need to tell his parents but anticipated a negative reaction. He suspected that his parents' pride in his successful life would be marred if they actually knew the "real" him.

Jake started out by telling my family, who espouse more liberal beliefs than many members of the Church. They accepted him wholeheartedly and encouraged his decision to work toward gaining self-love. He also decided to tell his sister, who was extremely supportive and loving. He desperately wanted to tell his parents as well; however, the thought of their rejection and disgust made him literally want to die. By this point, he was on a suicide watch and unable to function. His close relationship with his sister became beneficial, and she bravely volunteered to tell his parents for him. Under the circumstances, this was the best option, so he gratefully accepted and she explained the situation to their parents.

As expected, his father's first question was "Is he gay?" Her assurance that he was not gradually led to his parents' conclusion that the cross-dressing was partially okay because "it's not technically a sin." My in-laws judge behavior only by what the Church has declared regarding its righteous or sinful nature. My father-in-law, who has served in several bishoprics, specifically told me that the *Church Handbook of Instructions* did not discuss the topic at length; however, since I am not privy to the handbook, I am unsure of whether this is true. Regardless, my in-laws were so relieved that Jake wasn't gay and committing "grievous sin," that they didn't even address the issue further.

However, in a phone conversation with my father-in-law, I specifically explained that even if cross-dressing *were* a sin, Jake would still engage in the behavior. I wanted him to understand that Jake wasn't choosing to cross-dress because it was a form of sexual expression that he thought was acceptable; he was choosing to cross-dress because he felt strongly impelled to do so, and would continue to engage in it, regardless of what the Church's policy might be. Instead, my father-in-law ignored me and only talked about how Scottish men wear kilts, failing to see that as a cultural tradition, wearing a kilt is very different than the cross-dressing Jake does. He couldn't grasp that cross-dressing is a sexually tied behavior and instead asked if we had prayed about trying to help

Jake “fix” his “problem” so he could be normal. Although my in-laws didn’t seem to overtly blame me for the cross-dressing, I could sense that letting it escalate to this point was a reflection on me as well. The conversation was frustrating and hopeless, but Jake at least felt some relief in knowing that his parents were finally aware of his struggle.

To this day, my in-laws refuse to bring up cross-dressing and continue on as if they aren’t aware of it. It is this reaction that has brought the greatest disappointment to Jake. He sees their behavior as an extension of the tendency of many Church members to shy away from independent, critical thinking. As Mormons, we excel at focusing on the absolutes—and, more specifically, absolute obedience. As soon as young children enter Primary, we focus on following the Prophet, how the Prophet won’t lead us astray, and the importance of obedience. These themes are consistent throughout the entire Church, and questioning is often viewed as a sign of disobedience. We believe we cannot be righteous and disobedient—these two concepts must be diametrically opposed.

As a Church member, Jake sensed the very clear implications surrounding homosexuality. Although cross-dressing is often a heterosexual behavior, many Church members view anything that deviates from the norms of conventional masculinity and femininity with suspicion. Within the Church framework, we’re taught that homosexual acts are entirely and absolutely wrong; and if even small shades of gray creep in (homosexual feelings), they are quickly put back into very specific categories (feelings versus acts). If an individual is subject to these feelings, that is tolerated; but the instant that someone acts on those feelings, that is blameworthy. Therefore, we take a complex concept like sexuality and continually divide it further and further into absolutes to ensure that any issue can be seen through the framework of absolutism that we understand.

If we can put sexuality in such stark terms of black and white, it frees us, as a Church, from dealing with the messy nature of sexuality. However, in spite of the efforts to see everything in terms of black and white, at some point it becomes clear that many shades of gray inevitably creep in, defying our ability to see them as wholly good or wholly bad. What do we do about homosexuals? Bisexuals? Transsexuals? Cross-dressers? To a lesser extent, what

about heterosexual couples who have no desire to have children and instead pursue careers and other interests? At some point, it seems to many in the Church that any departure from sexual norms is merely a matter of self-control, facing the trial, and drawing strength from God to overcome the inappropriate feelings. I expect that, like Jake, many live on the border of what is viewed as wholly good or wholly bad.

From our own situation, Jake and I have experienced firsthand the hurt of conditional love and acceptance. The greater edict of Christ to love fully and without guile is overshadowed by the finer points of policy. Many of us have become so engrossed in a need to have everything strictly defined that we have missed the straightforward, powerful simplicity of loving others and aiding them in their spiritual progression. The love that Jake's parents exhibit seems very much dependent on his choices as they relate to the Church's absolutist strictures. We know that Jake's parents love him very much and are not trying to cause him stress or hurt with their reaction, but they are afraid to ask the questions that might lead them to the conclusion that the Church doesn't have an answer to everything. More importantly, they are afraid that, if the Church doesn't have an absolute explanation for sexual ambiguity, then perhaps there are other ways in which the Church is limited.

As we have struggled to place our struggle in the context of our beliefs, I often think of Christ chastising the scribes and Pharisees in the New Testament. He denounces their hypocrisy and calls them "whited sepulchers, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness" (Matt. 23:27-28). Because the Pharisees viewed religion as a strict and unyielding set of rules, they found safety in absolute obedience. Jake and I have encountered many Church members who are just as fervently dedicated to following every small detail of our own policies, even to an obsessive degree. I inwardly recoil at the numerous references my father-in-law makes to the *Church Handbook of Instructions*. He seems to reverence it as scripture. Some Church members could probably quote the rules of such texts backwards and forwards; but if someone asked them to sit down and have a conversation with a homosexual, bisexual, or

transgendered person, would they be able to summon the acceptance and love to view him or her as a beloved child of God? Of all the rules, it seems ironic that we, as a Church, often seem to have the biggest problem following the most basic and essential commandment: to act with love.

We have now moved away from Utah and Jake's parents. I am happy to report that Jake has found greater peace and self-acceptance. Cross-dressing has and will continue to affect every personal relationship in Jake's life, and he still finds the interaction with his parents difficult. In spite of this, he is trying his best to show them the unconditional love and respect they have not been able to reciprocate. Perhaps the most pivotal issue for Jake is how his cross-dressing has affected both his belief in and feeling toward the Church. Having been raised in an environment where you either knew the Church was true or you didn't, Jake has realized that, if it came down to viewing things with that certainty, he wouldn't be able to say that the Church was true. To Jake, the "truth" of the Church is intertwined with its ability to promote love and, more specifically, the type of love that isn't tied to someone's willingness to submit to a set of absolute rules. With this realization, Jake accepts that the Church is just one option of many available to use in seeking happiness and contentment in life.

Being married to a cross-dresser has drawn me into a world that is not only sexually ambiguous but also religiously ambiguous. Seeing Jake's struggle to find unconditional love in both his family and the Church has also caused me to examine my own relationship with the Church. For me, the Church is something I've had to sort through piece by piece, finding some things that I believe in and other things I don't. By allowing myself to accept the good that it has to offer without obsessing about the truth of each teaching, I've found that it becomes more worthwhile. Because of this, both Jake and I continue to participate in the Church, while still grappling with the difficult question of where exactly we fit in. We have come to terms with the fact that there are plenty of questions and few answers. Not wholly included or excluded, accepted or unaccepted, we occupy the immense and ambiguous borderland of the undefined.



John Sproul,
Untitled,
graphite on paper, 19"x 19",
2008.



John Sproul,
Untitled,
graphite on paper, 10"x 8",
2008.

Badge and Bryant, or, the Decline and Fall of the Dogfrey Club

Levi S. Peterson

Badge and Bryant Braunhil were first cousins, but they could have passed for fraternal twins, having—both of them—bright blue eyes, big grins, and unkempt blond hair. They lived in Linroth, a Mormon town in northern Arizona. Their houses were just a block apart, and Bryant always came by to accompany Badge to school or church or the Saturday night movie.

Their parents thought they were bound to be a good influence on one another, which they were until their fourteenth year, when they underwent a physiological change. Almost overnight they took up the use of the bad language they had heard their older brothers and the town loafers and wastrels using. With a casual affectation of long-established experience, they talked about doing dirty things with girls and created hilarious parodies of the bishop and their Sunday School teacher. Ambling along in the darkness after a movie or evening church, they were prone to belch, break wind, and write their names in the dust with urine. They vehemently denied being in love with any girl—though secretly both had given their hearts to LillieDale Mortensen, whose family had moved to Linroth at the beginning of their freshman year in high school.

On the last day of their freshman year, Badge and Bryant learned that a junior boy and a senior girl from one of the up-country towns had suddenly had to get married. The sturdy, heavy-set junior boy had already acquired a prominent five-o'clock shadow and a sullen, indolent voice that had settled into the bass range. The senior girl had a thin, sallow face and long brunette hair that brushed her frail shoulders. At dismissal time,

Badge and Bryant had seen the girl walking toward her bus with a sober—perhaps even frightened—look on her face. This development provided the dominant topic for their conversation on their lazy stroll toward home on that hot May afternoon.

Bryant, for his part, responded to the sudden wedding with consternation. He was not as ardent as Badge in breaking the commandments, feigning a taste for irreverence and wrongdoing chiefly to maintain his cousin's esteem. Bryant had been an initiate for only a short time into the secret order of those who know that human beings create offspring in the manner of cattle, horses, and hogs. It was one thing to accept that the dignitaries of his town—the bishop, the high school principal, even his own father—begat offspring by connecting to a female. But it was quite another thing to accept that someone near his own age could get a girl pregnant—a fact that began at once to work a curiously cautionary effect upon him. He sensed already that his interest in girls had become more complicated. It wasn't enough that he had elevated LillieDale Mortensen to a station far beyond lust or passion. He also had an obligation, he now recognized, to respect all girls more consistently than he had lately done. In particular, he recognized an obligation to refrain from banter about such things as falsies, the padding with which girls supposedly stuffed their bras, and the bloody rag, the derisive term his schoolmates applied to sanitary napkins. He was to regard all girls as his sisters.

In contrast, the misadventure of the junior boy and senior girl had triggered Badge's vivid imagination. Even as he and Bryant strolled along, he envisioned the couple in their scandalous act, imagining them in the back seat of a car or in a hay loft, where older friends claimed to have done the deed. With a stroke of creative insight, he moved from imagining the junior boy and senior girl in their covert copulation to imagining himself similarly engaged with LillieDale. With that one small step, rich possibilities suddenly burst upon him. Here was new fodder for the daydreams into which he compulsively retreated while milking cows, chopping wood, or suffering through a sermon in church.

At fourteen, Badge had not yet abandoned the habit of fantasy in which children universally engage. From his earliest memory, he had been a scop, a bard, a creator of tales with himself at the center. Countless times, he had leapt effortlessly over a house or

curled his body into a circle and rolled down a hill with the speed of an automobile or dug a hole so deep that it came out on the other side of the earth. He had mastered mustangs, flown biplanes, conducted duels with swords high in the rigging of a sailing vessel. But never before this last day of school in his fourteenth year had the inexhaustible potential of romantic ardor as a subject for his fantasies presented itself to him.

He had been in love precisely seven times before the advent of LillieDale. This phenomenon had first occurred when, at age five, he had said, "I like the looks of you," to a girl he had sat beside in the back seat of a car while on a stake Relief Society trip with his mother and other members of the stake Relief Society presidency. But compared to the buxom, full-lipped LillieDale, such loves were mere dross and refuse. No wonder then that the misadventure of the junior boy and senior girl who had to get married ignited a mimicking impulse. With a rumble and a jolt, the ecstatic shame of bedding LillieDale in disallowed circumstances locked itself into a preeminent position among Badge's aspirations. With scarcely a moment's reflection, he recognized a consummate theme for the fantasies of an entire summer.

How is it that a person can aspire so eagerly, so ecstatically, to an imagined shame for both himself and his beloved that either of them would have done almost anything to avoid in actuality?

Hardships that prove excruciating in actuality may be borne in fantasy with a good deal of stoic resolve. Boys at play happily imagine themselves in combat conditions that in the real world leave adult soldiers—if they survive—shattered in mind and body. Furthermore, the excoriations of conscience may be borne with much greater fortitude in a daydream than in real life. In fact, in Badge's case, conscience saw no reason whatsoever to be alarmed. The theology preached in the Linroth church house held that God sternly disapproved of fornication—and had the guardians of that theology ever considered the matter, they would undoubtedly have held that God disapproved only a little less sternly of an imagined fornication. However, Badge was so malnourished in theology that it had never occurred to him even to conjecture whether God might pay attention to a person's daydreams.

Also, if Badge had reasoned further on the matter, he would

have granted that his neighbors sided with God on the issue of fornication. It is a fact, however, that the human species diverts itself from the tedium of polite behavior by the contemplation of scandal. By simple instinct, Badge understood that, despite their mandate to openly disapprove of an unseemly deed, his neighbors would be subliminally grateful for the distraction its contemplation brought to their otherwise monotonous lives.

When Badge and Bryant had completed their leisurely meander from the high school, they seated themselves on the edge of Badge's porch. Badge needed to expatiate further upon his newfound pleasure, it being his nature to emote, enthuse, and think out loud. He also felt obliged to orient his less imaginative cousin to the satisfactions with which such a wedding swarmed. First of all, Bryant would need an acceptable partner. Obviously, it wouldn't do to direct his attention to LillieDale, given Badge's proprietary interest in her. Badge's duty to his cousin could be satisfied far short of that. Any one of a half dozen other girls in town would do.

"How about we make a pact?" Badge said abruptly. "We'll promise each other to get a girl pregnant. I mean, before we're married to her. And that's how we'll get married."

Bryant grimaced with bewilderment. "Which girl are we going to get pregnant?"

Badge snorted. "We can't get the same girl pregnant. We'll get different girls pregnant. Their fathers and brothers will come after us. They'll rough us up and drag us in front of the bishop and make us marry them. It will be a shotgun wedding, plain and simple." Then, as something of an afterthought, he added, "For example, you could get Panella Wall pregnant."

"Panella Wall! She's a total scag."

"Don't be so dang fussy."

"Well, then, *you* get her pregnant!"

By consensus among the boys in the shower room after PE class, Panella Wall actually fell into a middle rank for dating purposes—the she'll-do-in-a-pinch category. Certainly, she was no queen like LillieDale Mortensen. However, although she had a large nose, an awkward gait, and a tendency to take the lead while dancing, she was a good-humored, lively conversationalist whom

Badge and Bryant had walked home from evening church more than once.

“Besides,” Bryant went on, “what’s wrong with getting married the regular way?”

“Well, hell, lots of things are wrong with it.”

Bryant shook his head. “A girl won’t let us do that to her if we aren’t married to her.”

“Sure, she will,” Badge insisted.

“What do you know about it?”

“If you lick their earlobe, they let you do it,” Badge asserted.

“Who told you that?”

“It doesn’t matter who told me. It’s true. If you lick on their earlobe with your tongue, they’re helpless. They more or less pass out. So you won’t have any excuse for not getting married that way. It’s easy to do.”

Badge got up from the edge of the porch, opened his pocket knife, and began to carve a tiny image into one of the wooden pillars. “This,” he said, “is the sign of the Dogfrey Club, which you and I now belong to.”

“What’s a Dogfrey Club?” Bryant asked.

“It’s just what I’m telling you.”

“Where did you get that word? I never heard of any club like that before.”

“It’s just a word I made up.”

Bryant got to his feet and ambled to the pillar. He peered at the minute figure, which looked something like an old-time cannon with a muzzle sitting on top of wheels.

“That’s your you-know-what,” Badge said. “That’s the sign of the Dogfrey Club, the club that guys belong to who have to get married. That’s the sign that you and I promise each other faithfully never to get married except by a shotgun wedding.”

Bryant took another look. “That doesn’t look like my you-know-what,” he said.

“Well, that’s what it stands for,” Badge insisted. “Today is May 17. Every year till we are married we have to come here on May 17 and look at this sign of the Dogfrey Club and promise all over again to have a shotgun wedding.”

A Dogfrey Club struck Bryant as taking clubs a little too far.

He believed that, in general, clubs were a good thing. He and Badge had formed thirty or forty of them over the years. That is, Badge had thought them up and Bryant had endorsed them. Nothing had ever come of any of them, of course. Badge never bothered to shut them down formally; he just stopped talking about them, at which time Bryant knew they were finished. However, setting up a Dogfrey Club had ominous implications—something like consecrating motor oil instead of olive oil for healing the sick, which their older brothers had been warned not to try because a couple of fellows in Utah had tried it and had been killed by a bolt of lightning.

For one thing, a decent, church-going Mormon girl like Pannella Wall was not a likely candidate for getting pregnant before she was married. The only girls in town who might be considered good prospects along that line were the two Gentile Fortnight sisters, whose parents lived in a big trailer on the west side of town. Hannah Fortnight might have passed as a she'll-do-in-a-pinch specimen, but Lucinda was a scag by any measure. Nonetheless, they had their followers, the Keefer boys, a clan from two families whose Mormon mothers had married arrant, break-wind-in-your-face Gentiles.

This pack of boys had lately been declaring their collective success with getting a hand up under the skirt of one or another of the Fortnight girls at the Saturday night movie. Billy Keefer, a ten year old, had gone one better than his older exemplars by claiming that he had been forced to satisfy the sisters' insatiable demands by resorting to a makeshift dildo, an extendable rubber stopper for soda pop bottles, which he flourished before his listeners by way of inarguable evidence.

Such an egregious lie needed no open rebuttal from the likes of Badge and Bryant, who happened by chance to be among Billy's listeners one Sunday afternoon. But as the Braunhil cousins had strolled on from this chance encounter, Badge fulminated with scornful indignation that Billy—a mere gnat, a cockroach, a maggot—should presume upon their credulity, whereas the silent Bryant shrank from the image that the ten year old's vaunt called to mind. It had seemed to him then, as it again seemed on the hot May afternoon at the end of their freshman year, that sex was too delicate, too problematic, too fraught with ambiguity, to trifle

with by inventing such a superfluity as a Dogfrey Club. Sex being what it had turned out to be, as much of a messy necessity for human beings as for animals, you shouldn't come to it via the back door by not even taking the trouble to get married first when getting married was what you had in mind all along.

That summer when the boys were fourteen droned on, failing—like all other summers—to live up to anticipations formed in mucky, frozen corrals during the dismal months of winter. But toward the end of the summer, Badge's father proposed that the boys spend a few days with their Uncle Trevor and Aunt Sybil in Phoenix. Obviously, midsummer wasn't the best time to visit Phoenix, but given that they had never been there and could hitch a free ride down and back on a cucumber truck, it would make a nice, safe, inexpensive break in the summer routine. Badge's father had, in fact, already spoken to one of the truck owners, Diff Greenfleck, who was a good, steady, church-attending man and could be counted on to keep the boys out of trouble in transit.

On a Monday morning Badge's mother delivered the boys to the cucumber-loading shed halfway between Linroth and its somewhat less respectable sister-town of Saller's Cove. Diff's truck was backed up to a dock, and Diff and a couple of Apache helpers were stacking crates of cucumbers on the truck bed. Several pickups and a tractor and wagon waited to be unloaded. Their owners stood nearby, watching while an agent for the pickle factory weighed their cucumbers. Having spoken politely to the men, Badge's mother made sure each boy had his lunch, admonished them both to behave themselves, and left. With her departure, the men resumed interrupted conversations. Paying no attention to Badge and Bryant, they sprinkled their speech with swear words of the sort permissible to men who made some pretension of being good Mormons. Shortly, Diff and his helpers finished loading the truck, and Diff threw a tarp over the load and began to tie it down. However, the end of his rope was frayed and he had trouble feeding it through the first grommet. At that point one of the farmers said something that made all the men laugh. Bryant knew it was a dirty joke though he couldn't figure out precisely why. Badge, who had older sisters and knew more about the anatomy of women than Bryant, saw the point; but he didn't feel

authorized to laugh, not being an adult. Sorting out an adult identity was perplexing, to say the least. On the one hand, both boys envied the insouciance, the slouching ease, with which the farmers casually tossed off an obscenity every few minutes. On the other hand—instructed by the secretive lore of their extended family—they esteemed that Braunhils were of a caste sublimely above the ordinary, whose scions were obliged by destiny to shun levity and unclean thoughts.

A half hour later they were on their way in Diff's truck, Bryant in the middle because he found sitting there more tolerable than quarreling with Badge over who got the seat by the window. Diff was a likeable sort of fellow despite having a jutting hawk-beak nose and cheeks that drooped into discernible jowls. He talked slowly, drawling out his words as if he had to pause mid-word to let his thoughts catch up with his language. He seemed glad for the boys' company and confident that they would want to know about his wife's hemorrhoids and his son Kenny's prowess as a football player, also about the strengths and weaknesses of every one of the players on the five teams in the county summer softball league—he being an enthusiastic participant, sometimes playing left field and sometimes third base.

Some of Diff's traits bothered Badge, particularly his drawl and apparent assumption that whatever interested him would interest everybody else. But generally, both boys felt at ease in his presence. They also liked his wife, a tall, willowy, flat-chested woman, not really pretty but very nice, as Mormon mothers were supposed to be. Besides Kenny, Diff had two other kids, a peaked-looking daughter of twelve and a sniveling boy of eight, but that was nothing to hold against Diff who couldn't help what kind of lackluster kids God gave him—Kenny not being much of a looker, either.

When they got to Showlow, Diff stopped at an auto parts store. "Won't be but a second," he said. "I'm going to overhaul the wife's car. Gotta pick up a couple of gaskets. This place won't be open when I come back through here tonight."

The cigar-smoking proprietor of a curio store was unloading Navajo rugs from a panel truck next to the auto parts store. He paused and stepped closer to the truck. "You boys are Braunhil kids, aren't you?" he said. "I know your daddy." He blew a cloud of

cigar smoke through the open window in an absent-minded way, almost as if he hadn't done it on purpose.

"We're not brothers," Badge said. "We're cousins."

"Hitching a ride with Diff Greenfleck I see," the fellow said. "You're riding with a hypocrite, boys. Diff was on the high council that excommunicated me. They ought to excommunicate him, too. More than one night I've seen his truck parked in back of that cathouse in Globe. Though I don't suppose he'll stop there if you're coming home with him tonight." He pulled the cigar from his mouth and stared at the saliva-slickened butt bitterly, as if it were the taste of the tobacco that bothered him rather than the unjust treatment of a Church court. Then he turned his back to the truck and went on unloading rugs.

Bryant wasn't sure what a cathouse was. It didn't seem likely that Diff would be picking up cats in Globe. There were more than enough of those around Linroth. Badge, however, knew it was a place where whores lived. That is, given the man's leering intonation, he supposed he meant a whorehouse. "Whore" was a word Badge had looked up in a dictionary in the grade school library, having heard it in the schoolyard at recess. Finding the word hadn't been easy because he assumed that it began with an "h." The librarian asked whether she could help. When he told her the word, she flushed and said, "You shouldn't be interested in words like that." Then she said, just before turning away, "Go ahead and look it up. Find out for yourself. But it begins with a 'w,' like 'where.'"

The cigar-smoking man came back to the truck window and said, "I suppose you're wondering what I was doing driving past the back side of that cathouse in Globe. Well, I'll tell you. Ever since I got unchurched, I've made it my business to do that whenever I come through Globe, which is twice a week in the summer. I want to see whose automobile I might find parked there. It would surprise you who." With that, he blew another cloud of smoke into the truck and went inside his store. A second or two later, Diff came out of the auto parts store and they were on their way.

"Somebody's been smoking a cigar," Diff said, after sniffing two or three times.

"It was that old guy who owns that curio store," Badge said. "He blew it in here on purpose."

"Oh, yeah," Diff said. "That's just like him. He's an old reprobate. Claims the good brethren who go to church try to get downwind from his cigar so they can enjoy it second hand."

Beyond Showlow they entered a forest of ponderosa pines. About ten miles down the road they came to a tiny hamlet named Forest Dale, which was nothing more than a small mercantile and a grouping of small, unpainted frame houses. On the porch of the mercantile stood a couple of Apache women wearing billowy ankle-length skirts and long-sleeved over-blouses of brightly colored calico. This was the reservation, Diff explained, and white people couldn't own land or live here—except for one fellow who had married an Indian and could therefore not only live here but also hunt deer and elk and run his bear- and cougar-hounds.

"I wouldn't mind being able to take elk on the reservation," Diff said. "Elk are smart. They know where the reservation boundary is, and they stay inside it. Of course, you would have to feel okay about your wife not bathing very often. These folks don't have bathrooms and a lot of them cook over outdoor fires."

Badge and Bryant knew about their smell. Every summer Apache families camped in the cottonwoods along the creek and picked cucumbers for the Linroth farmers, and on more than one summer Badge and Bryant had struck up a friendship with Apache boys. When they had time, they haunted the willow patches up and down the creek with these boys, who could talk better English than their parents. The Apaches slept in blankets wrapped in tarps, and as far as Badge and Bryant could tell, they didn't take off their work clothes when they went to bed. There was a spring near their camp that flowed with clear water for drinking and cooking and for hand-washing clothes on a Sunday afternoon. A lot of white people in Linroth looked down on these Indians, but Badge's and Bryant's parents weren't among them. Their mothers took turns bringing ice-cold sodas out for the pickers in their husbands' fields every afternoon except Sunday. The pickers never said thanks, that not being their custom, but their brown faces beamed with pleasure when they saw the white women approaching.

A couple of miles past Forest Dale, Diff and the boys went by a

grassy, treeless flat. At the far end stood the ruin of a sawmill—a caved-in incinerator and a long, wood, deck-like structure that Diff said had supported a conveyer chain. “Me and an Apache fellow named Horace Clayly pulled green chain at that mill one summer before the war,” Diff said. “He was a nice guy. Talked good English, except of course all of them use verbs only in the present tense. Horace went on binges a couple times that summer. His wife asked me to drive over to Whiteriver and get him out of jail. Which I did.”

By now it was only Bryant who was paying close attention to these details, being the kind of fellow who had to listen to what adults were saying and utter brief exclamations of an affirmative sort that would show his respect for their station, such as “Wow!” and “Gosh!” and “Boy howdy!” For his part, Badge was trying hard to ignore all the interruptions and settle into an important phase of his current episode of having to get married to Lillie-Dale. Ever since school had adjourned in June, Badge had been creating elaborate daydreams about getting her pregnant to occupy his attention while working at vacant, mindless chores such as hoeing corn or tramping hay. He had generously sought to share his pleasant escape with Bryant, even going so far as to remind him of their mutual commitment to the vows of the Dogfrey Club, but Bryant had seemed at best indifferent. Badge’s fantasies were essentially a saga, a series of episodes or, as it were, a serial daydream. The problem with a serial daydream such as this, of course, was that over and over Badge had to invent new particulars for what was fundamentally the same story, a task that had become increasingly difficult as the summer progressed.

Nonetheless, on this August day, traveling in Diff’s truck through a pine forest on the highway between Showlow and Globe, Badge succeeded at last in screening out all distractions and settled into one of his favorite scenes. In it, a distraught, sobbing LillieDale informed her parents of her pregnancy. She could bring herself to do this only when her belly began to swell and concealment was no longer possible. Her parents were, of course, thunder-struck, her mother bursting into tears, her father into a torrent of rage. That scene quickly melted into another, in which Mr. and Mrs. Mortensen knocked at Badge’s door and, upon be-

ing invited in by his parents, announced the condition of their daughter, who stood between them with tears of shame gilding her flushed cheeks. On hearing their accusation against his son, Badge's slack-jawed father strode to the backdoor and called his errant son to come forth from the barnyard and make his account, only to be informed by another son that an hour earlier Badge had tied his .22 rifle and a sack of provisions to his saddle and galloped away down a lane. In the meantime, Badge's mother sat on the sofa sobbing with her face buried in her hands. She knew only too well that news of the disgrace that had fallen upon her family would ricochet about town within a few hours, and it wouldn't stop at the town limits but would broadcast itself hither and yon, taking a prominent place in the repertoire of the county's infamous scandals.

The public nature of his disgrace was an indispensable aspect of the fantasy with which Badge entertained himself. He was pleased to imagine furtive conversations held at dinner tables in towns as far away as Holbrook to the north or McNary to the south. Women shook their heads indignantly, and men pursed their lips with incredulity upon hearing that over in Linroth a Mortensen girl had got herself pregnant and the Braunhil boy who had done it to her was hiding out in the mountains. Men were saying things like, "They ought to lynch him," and "Tar and feathering's too good for a skunk like him." It was a delicious notoriety.

Fifteen or twenty miles beyond Forest Dale, the truck bore the three travelers past a little valley spread with corn and squash fields and, alongside a cottonwood-lined creek, a cluster of frame houses. Just off the highway was a gas station with a sign that said this was Carrizo. A yellow cat sat on its haunches by one of the gas pumps. That set Bryant to wondering again what a cathouse might be and why Diff might be interested in stopping at one of them and, if he wasn't, then why the owner of the curio store would make up a preposterous story by claiming that he was. Bryant was almost to the point of wishing he hadn't come on this trip in the first place.

"I'll tell you a story about Carrizo, boys," Diff said. "A couple of years ago, I had a phone call in the middle of the night. I was home in bed. Chief of the police force over at Whiteriver said his officers were in a standoff with a drunk guy in Carrizo whose wife

was being held hostage. These Apache cops were playing it cool and trying to talk the guy into surrendering. The chief of police said on the phone the guy insisted he wouldn't surrender to anyone but his old buddy Diff Greenfleck, so would I drive out to Carrizo and get him to come out peaceful? I said, 'Who the heck is he?' Chief of police said, 'Horace Clayly.' So I did it, boys. Took me an hour and a half to get there. It was close to dawn. He came out, handed me the rifle, then broke down and started to sob. He had been through the war since I had seen him last, got shot up on Guadalcanal. All filled out now, a little on the heavy side."

Even Badge had to perk up and pay attention to that story, so much so, in fact, that when Diff stopped talking, he asked, "What happened after that?"

"They kept him in jail in Whiteriver for a while. Talked about a stint in the penitentiary. But it never happened. These folks are pretty lax on carrying out white man's justice. Four or five months later, they let him loose. Him and his wife still live in Carrizo. I stop by once in a while, drop off something out of our garden or maybe a five-pound cheese. That's the kind of gift they like."

"That's awful nice of you to take them some vegetables or a block of cheese," Bryant said thoughtfully.

Diff whistled a little and tapped a finger on a spoke of the steering wheel as if his mind had wandered on to some other topic. A few minutes later, with the truck grinding up a steep dugway, he went on where he had left off. "A sack of potatoes, five pounds of cheese—that ain't much of a gift, is it, boys? I'm just trying to make up for the fact he had to go to war and I didn't. I tried to enlist, I really did. But I had a hernia."

Shortly thereafter, Badge succeeded in slipping away into his fantasy again, being somewhere in these very mountains evading capture by Mr. Mortensen and his elder sons. These earnest individuals, assisted by a shifting variety of townsmen, combed the forested terrain relentlessly, forcing Badge into constant movement. He was, of course, the craftiest of fugitives, having achieved a cunning found only in coyotes or foxes that have survived to old age—grizzled and hatch-marked by scars from traps, bullets, and the slashing fangs of hounds. For example, Badge made sure the thickets and ravines in which he hid had more than one exit. He

hid by day and moved by night. He built small, smokeless fires and took small game by snares rather than by rifle. So expert was he in the art of concealment that he sometimes overheard the angry, frustrated speech of his pursuers only yards from where they had dismounted. Such details were enhanced when Badge shifted the scene of his narrative to such places as the Linroth post office where those reporting on the futile search in the mountains were beginning to express a begrudging admiration for the fugitive. "Who would have figured on it?" exclaimed old Wilbur Linroth, current patriarch of the town's founding family, as he fingered through his mail. "That Braunhil boy is one smart cookie!"

Eventually, of course, the plot called for his capture. Overcome by fatigue one morning at daybreak, he fell asleep and failed to muffle the nickering of his horse. By the sheerest accident, his pursuers also heard the sound and raised a mighty clamor. Although he awoke and, with a single leap, mounted his unsaddled steed, they had him surrounded. Pulling him roughly from his horse, LillieDale's eldest brother pummeled him with savage fists while a younger brother lashed him with the knotted end of a lariat.

"Let's hang him, Dad!" exclaimed this zealous punisher.

"No, sir!" said his father. "This boy is going to marry your sister whether he wants to or not. Now, listen to me, boy. Are you going to come peaceable, or do we tie you to your saddle?"

The unquenchable spirit of a mountain man of the Olden Days surged in Badge, and he leaped to his feet and sprinted for freedom, only to be knocked to the ground again.

The truck had come to a terrain chopped and broken by arroyos and canyons. Stunted piñons, gnarled junipers, and thickets of rust-brown manzanita dotted the landscape. They passed the junction to Cibecue, an Apache town of some size, as Diff informed the boys, where there had been a battle between the U.S. cavalry and some Apaches in 1881. It had had to do with a medicine man who claimed he had the power to resurrect dead Indians who would drive white people out of Arizona. Six or seven of the troopers and the medicine man were killed in the fight.

"You gotta admire the Apaches," Diff said. "There wasn't all

that many of them. But they still tied up most of the U.S. cavalry for five or six years.”

About twenty miles past the Cibecue turnoff, they came to Salt River Canyon, a dramatic gorge into which the road dropped nearly two thousand feet via short, steep hairpin curves, only to cross the silvery river by means of an iron truss bridge, and quickly regain its lost altitude by equally steep hairpin curves. On the descent, the odor of burnt brake linings filled the cab; and on the climb out, the truck slowed to a crawl—all of which seemed to trouble Diff not at all. As cool and collected as if he were instructing them in their priesthood class on a Sunday morning, Diff lectured the boys on the vegetation of the canyon, particularly pointing out the bayonet-spiked agave plant, from which long, graceful, white-gray stems reached skyward, culminating in a halo of yellowish blossoms.

At the point where the road emerged from the canyon stood a café with a couple of gas pumps out front and, to the side, a large cottonwood tree whose overarching boughs shaded the café. A sign at the side of the road declared this to be Seneca. Diff steered the truck to a halt beneath the tree and got out. He said he was going to have some lunch and offered to bring the boys a soda to go with the lunches their mothers had prepared. They said no thanks because it seemed on the one hand that, since they had money, they couldn't accept his charity, yet on the other hand, having hoarded the money for weeks so they could spend it in Phoenix, they didn't feel good about spending it before they even got there.

While they ate their lunch, Bryant noticed a black and white dog sleeping in the shade of an awning. The dog reminded him of the yellow cat at Carizzo, which reminded him to ask Badge what he thought a cathouse might be.

“It's a place where ladies let you screw them for money. It's where whores live,” Badge asserted.

Bryant was flabbergasted, having never thought of whores being people who might live in a clean, decent state like Arizona, whose history and constitution he had studied in the eighth grade.

“It's the same as a brothel,” Badge said. “That's another word for a whorehouse.”

Bryant naturally wanted to ask another question or two, but

Diff came out, putting a momentary end to his education in sexual matters. Diff handed them each a grape soda as he climbed into the truck. "Treat's on me," he said.

"You boys are in the teachers' quorum now, aren't you?" he asked as he looked up and down the highway before pulling the truck back onto the road. "We gottta get you assigned to an adult partner for ward teaching. Maybe your dads." After he had the truck on the road, he added, "But you likely would rather go with somebody else, wouldn't you? I went ward teaching with my dad when I was about your age. He wouldn't quit talking. I remember a place or two where our visit lasted more than an hour. Two hours, once in a while. He wouldn't have been rude enough to keep somebody else's boy pinned down so long."

Bryant was feeling doubly grateful to Diff just now, who had not only given him a grape soda but had also reminded him of what a faithful Mormon he was. Even if there was a whorehouse in Globe, the cigar-smoking owner of the curio store had it all wrong. A man as nice and decent and generous as Diff wouldn't visit a place like that. Not in a thousand years.

Badge was also grateful for the soda. However, unlike Bryant, he wasn't preoccupied just now with Diff and the insinuations of the proprietor of the curio store, being eager to get on with his current episode of having to marry LillieDale. He had left off the narrative at the point where the Mortensen cavalcade entered Linroth following its successful venture in the mountains. Now, with Badge's horse in tow, Mr. Mortensen lifted a hand in triumphant salute to this friend or that along Main Street. Behind him, the slumping Badge—bruised, battered, and securely tied to his saddle—stared indifferently at the ground. As the cavalcade arrived at the Mortensen house, LillieDale shrieked a despairing protest and dashed from the door.

"Back off, girl!" said her father sternly. "You'll have him soon enough."

Ordering one of his sons to fetch the bishop and another to alert the Braunhils to the imminent wedding of their son to his daughter, he ordered yet another son to help him tie Badge to a chair in the living room. "That rascal's a slippery one," he muttered. "Tie him tight. We can't risk his escape. Not after all this trouble."

A considerable crowd of Mortensen and Braunhil relatives assembled in the Mortensen living room for the wedding. Their talk was sober and subdued, nothing like the usual Mormon social gathering. Badge's parents brought his dark blue Sunday suit and a white shirt and tie, which Badge, released from the chair, put on in the bathroom.

LillieDale wore a loose-fitting lavender Sunday dress and held a modest nosegay of white daisies and blue bachelor's buttons gathered from her mother's garden. When asked to say "I do," LillieDale's voice broke, and she wiped away tears with the back of a hand, while Badge uttered the same affirmation with a sullen, downcast grunt. When the bishop had declared them man and wife, Badge brushed LillieDale's puckered lips with the merest touch of a kiss.

Badge emerged from his daydream when Diff pointed out, some miles beyond Seneca, a dead coyote on the shoulder of the highway. "That's rare," Diff said. "Coyotes are usually too smart to get hit by a car." They had by now passed beyond the lower-montane forests of juniper and piñon and were upon a wide plain covered by mesquite, chaparral, and patches of dry yellow grass. They saw some cattle sheltering themselves in the shade of a scrubby tamarisk grove near a windmill. "Tough country for animals in the summer," Diff said. "But there are more wild animals here than you'd think. Some mule deer, antelope, bobcats, coyotes, wild pigs—peccaries, that is, a distant cousin to the domestic pig, I understand. Folks around here call them javelinas."

Bryant listened with satisfaction to all these facts. He hoped he'd know about such a wide range of things when he was an adult. Badge, however, was once again feeling out of sorts with Diff for interrupting his daydream about LillieDale with talk about facts he already knew.

Diff hummed a bit of song, slapping a hand on the steering wheel in keeping with its rhythm. Then, as if there was a connection between peccaries and the song he was humming, he said, "When I was in high school, I drove to Mesa; and a friend and I drove on down to Tucson and went javelina hunting in the desert. Never saw any. My friend decided to relieve himself on a big overhanging rock. So he took down his pants and squatted and did his

business. A bobcat jumped out from under the rock. My friend stood up with his pants down around his knees and shot it. Back in Mesa we drove by his girlfriend's house to show off his trophy. She came out in pin curlers. She wasn't interested in the bobcat, but she did seem interested in me. So next time I was in Mesa, I went by her house and asked for a date. Now she's my wife. My buddy was sore for a while. But he got over it."

The truck rumbled on, hot air rushing in both windows. Bryant mulled this latest story, wondering what Sister Greenfleck had looked like in pin curlers when she was high school age. Badge, for his part, had finally managed to shut off the listening machine in his head and turned on his imagination, which had automatically begun to play the finale of his latest episode.

Following the perfunctory wedding ceremony, LillieDale's mother invited the guests to partake of cookies and punch which she and her sister had set out on card tables in the flower garden. The nuptial pair stood at formal attention, glass cups in hand, accepting the solemn salutations of their families, friends, and neighbors. Underneath a veneer of polite cordiality, these good, decent people could scarcely contain their seething indignation against Badge for deflowering such a delicate, defenseless blossom as LillieDale, who wiped tears from her downcast eyes every few moments.

Reveling in the ignominy into which the citizens of Linroth had cast him, Badge lingered on this lachrymose scene at length. Eventually, however, he had to disperse the crowd and imagine himself and LillieDale standing alone in the room where they had been wed.

Glancing piteously up at him, she obviously expected at best a callous indifference on his part. Happily, the narrative now called for Badge to yield to his throbbing love and allow a warm, reassuring smile to replace his hitherto stolid, apathetic countenance—a transmutation which the long-neglected girl at first did not dare accept as sincere. It was not until he took her in his arms and pressed a long, fervent kiss upon her lips that she began to feel the first inklings of a hope that had eluded her for weeks. Suddenly, relief and gratitude swept her wan, fine-featured face, and her eyes welled with happy tears. With that, this version of the saga ended.

About a half hour later, the truck pulled into a gas station at the outskirts of Globe. "Better get out and come inside, boys," Diff said. "You can cool off a bit before we hit the desert."

Bryant crawled out of the truck through the driver's door and followed Diff into the station. Badge didn't move. Although he was tired of imagining things just now, he felt compelled to at least outline a new plot before turning his attention elsewhere. He needed something shiny, something innovative, something that made LillieDale's suffering even more poignant and his own reasons for failing to reassure her of his eternal love more tragic. There was, he recognized, an illogic to his weeks-long evasion of capture which could justifiably be interpreted as a lack of pity for the despairing girl. He needed some dark compulsion, a sinister force, which left him no alternative to evasion. But who could call upon his best, most creative, most concentrated energy in such heat? With a surge of disgust, he climbed from the truck and stalked into the station.

Inside, Bryant was extracting a strawberry soda from an insulated container. "Want one?" he asked Badge, who grunted his assent and dug into a pocket for change. Diff stood at a counter feeding a few nickels into a slot machine. Sodas in hand, the boys watched while the slot machine's three little wheels, each bearing the image of a lemon, a banana, or an apple, circled frantically, always failing to halt with a winning lineup of a single fruit. "Well, damn!" Diff said at last, turning on his heel and striding from the station. "I won a buck last week," he added as they climbed into the truck. "But it's a fool's game. They adjust those slots to pay off about once every five hundred tries. They're illegal, you know. But, heck, Globe is a mining town. What do you expect?"

Moments later they topped over a hill, and a squalid, heat-blistered town stretched before them. It filled a narrow valley, its streets extending up a slope on either hand. Above the houses on the northern slope loomed a crushing mill, conveyer belt, and smelter serving an open-pit copper mine. Despite such evidence of a flourishing economy, the residential area presented the decayed, half-ruined aspect of a ghost town, as if none of its present inhabitants expected to remain for long and had no incentive to repair, clean, or paint. There was no hint of trees or lawn around

the houses, which floated like small, soiled islands in a sea of dust. At the center of town, the highway showed some sign of citification—a commercial district six or seven blocks long with curbs and concrete sidewalks. There were stores, a bank, a hotel, a couple of restaurants, and an insurance agency—with an occasional house standing between.

While the truck made its slow progress through town, both Badge and Bryant were entranced by the possibility that one of the tarnished, decayed buildings they were passing served as a brothel.

For Bryant, simply granting the possibility was a disillusionment, an unhappy schooling in the nature of mortality, something like the disillusioning—though also enfranchising—perception that his father and mother had had to couple in the same astonishing fashion as the bucks and does in his rabbit cages to bring him and his siblings into the world. Nonetheless, he remained at peace. He had made up his mind on the key issue, which was whether Diff would frequent such a place. He had already decided at Seneca that Diff was too likeable, too regular in attendance at church, too generous and considerate, to have secret associations with evil women. Furthermore, a hitherto tenuous thought had by now coalesced into a firm conviction for Bryant. The cigar-smoking owner of the curio store in Showlow was an arrant mischief maker, a man so given to evil that he could find delight only in tainting genuinely good men with accusations of it. It was such as he who—as the scriptures ordain—are to be cast into outer darkness on the day of judgment, a determination that had released Bryant from further agitation over this matter and allowed his mind to wander on to matters entirely unrelated to evil-doing in Globe, Arizona.

It was otherwise with Badge, who again struggled to lock his thoughts on the task of sketching out a new episode about having to marry LillieDale that would infuse his fantasy with a distinctly new energy. The present obstacle to concentration on this task was the disturbing question whether, late in the night, Diff Greenfleck's truck, loaded with empty cucumber crates, might be found parked behind one of the tarnished, decayed buildings lining this road.

Within moments of Badge's turning his thoughts to that topic, Diff stopped the truck at a traffic light. Waiting for the green sig-

nal, he whistled a joyless tune through puckered lips and again tapped a senseless rhythm upon the steering wheel with his fingers. A woman wearing a light blue sundress and white sandals crossed from the opposite side of the street in the crosswalk immediately in front of the truck. The thin straps of her dress made no pretense at covering her bare, tanned shoulders. Below the hem, which came a little under her knees, her legs were similarly tanned. Diff and the boys watched till she reached the curb near the truck. When the light changed, Diff revved the engine and engaged the clutch, and the truck passed through the intersection. For a few seconds, Badge could see the receding figure of the woman in the rear-view mirror outside his window. Just before they passed beyond her range, he saw that she had turned and started up the steps of a house.

Badge considered whether she was a prostitute. It wasn't her appearance that put that possibility into his mind. He had no preconceptions about what a prostitute might look like—except that she would surely have distinguishing marks of some sort. As far as he could tell, this woman had none. She hadn't a particularly pretty face, nor a nicely contoured body, nor a coiffure of any note. However, even plain and ordinary women were charged with an aura of sexuality that required attention. This one had to be considered, had to be assessed and ranked, if only for a few seconds.

Among the changes Badge had undergone during the past year was the perception that women no longer mingled indistinctly with men in the general population. Within a few short months, they had become, more or less all of them, objects of sexual interest. That this woman—that almost any woman—was sexually attractive to Badge was a discomfiting fact for both practical and moral reasons. Lust was not an emotion that any Mormon male, old or young, could easily admit to, it being generally supposed in the Mormon world that there is no similarity between the sinful emotion of lust and the ardor which drives a husband to beget legitimate babies upon his duly-wed wife. Badge had fed on lust for LillieDale without thinking of it as lust. It was love—tender, grand, unique in the annals of history, light-years beyond mere lust. But a sexual interest in a grown woman had something of the unsavory, even something of the incestuous, about it. It was like lusting after

his own mother. Although he had lately fancied himself a man—swaggering and swearing and teaching Bryant to do the same—he refused to imagine what went on in his parents’ bedroom or at least, since from time to time he *did* imagine it, he made certain to expel it from his consciousness as quickly as possible.

Even worse, admitting a sexual interest in the woman wearing the light blue dress implied that Diff shared that interest—for among the changes Badge had undergone during the past year was the recognition that his sexual interest in almost any woman was shared by almost any man. This recognition would not have been an issue just now, or in almost any other circumstance, had it not been for the accusation that the cigar-smoking proprietor of the curio shop had made against Diff. Diff had said nothing about the woman at the intersection, nor, to be truthful, could Badge testify that he had watched Diff’s eyes follow the woman. But it had to be assumed. The naive, innocent Bryant may have paid her no more attention than he would have paid a man. But if Badge had viewed her with a sexual interest, then so had Diff. The unsettling conviction now grew upon Badge that it was not merely possible, but certain, that Diff would visit a whorehouse on his way home from Phoenix tonight.

That certitude was something Badge didn’t wish to linger on. For a few seconds, he reviewed the exonerating evidence—Diff went to church with his wife and kids every Sunday, he played softball in the county league, and he was generous and thoughtful to a couple of kids who happened to have hitched a ride with him. For a few seconds more, Badge noted that the evidence against Diff was dubious—the bitter testimony of an angry, rumor-mongering, cigar-smoking reprobate whose very appearance, starkly alien to the model of decency to which Badge adhered, undermined his credibility. Compulsively, Badge resumed his effort to jump-start a new fantasy about having to marry LillieDale. There was, in fact, a touch of desperation to the gesture.

Try as he might to fix his mind on LillieDale, he could not help envisioning—from the perspective of one who peers through a keyhole or some other tiny aperture—the woman in the light blue dress sitting on the edge of a bed in a room whose perimeter was lost in shadow. He had, he recognized, cast her in the character of a prostitute and from that followed the further recognition

that it was not, after all, so much a matter of being certain that Diff would visit a brothel on his way home tonight as of *hoping* that he would. Therein lay the shame. Someday not so far into the future, Badge would have to settle with himself—since no one else could do it for him—whether he himself would or would not stop to visit ladies of the night in Globe, Arizona.

The truck soon carried them through Globe's sister town of Miami. Although it too boasted a smelter and an open-pit mine, it was even smaller and graced by even less of a commercial district. Beyond Miami, the highway began a tortuous descent, passing through a tunnel and giving views of a handsome, arched bridge long before passing over it. Emerging from a canyon, the road passed through the town of Superior, set picturesquely amid barren, turreted sandstone mountains. Beyond Superior, at a point where the road began another descent, Diff said, "It's plenty hot, boys. But it's about to get hotter."

Shortly, the road leveled out on the wide, undulating expanse of the Sonoran Desert, which stretched distantly into a horizon hazy with heat and dust. The desert was thick with a gray, dusty, thorny vegetation: saguaro cactus with upthrust arms, giant prickly pear, domed barrel cactus, wicked-looking cholla whose branching joints bristled with sinister spines, and delicately arched ocotillo, which, according to Diff, was often used for fences in Mexico.

Diff wiped his neck with a bandana, muttering as he did so, "A little heat won't kill you." After a moment he added, "Actually, it *will* kill you if you don't have water. Lots of it. You sweat out a gallon a day in this heat. More if you have to work in it. Roofers in Mesa and Phoenix start work at four and quit at noon in this weather. Some of them take salt tablets."

In time they came to Apache Junction, which was nothing more than a handful of houses and a gas station where a road to Florence and Tucson split off from the highway to Mesa and Phoenix. A couple of miles past Apache Junction, Diff said, "When I get old, I'm going to move to the Northwest and build a house in a rain forest. It will have a corrugated tin roof and a bunk bed just inches from the roof, and night and day I'm going to listen to the patter of rain on the tin roof."

The air continued to rush through the open windows of the

cab like a blast from an oven, drying off perspiration before it had a chance to form. Bryant bore his misery stoically, his thoughts having pretty much gone into estivation, like a desert salamander or turtle that digs into the soil to escape the baking heat of the surface. For his part, Badge writhed with a poorly suppressed impatience. Almost anything that came to mind irritated him.

First and foremost among the irritants was his inability to find composure enough to generate a new daydream about having to get married to LillieDale. But a list of lesser irritants also presented themselves. He resented Diff anew for drawling when he spoke, a particularly acute irritant, given Diff's propensity for lecturing. He resented Bryant for playing the constant sycophant to any adult and also, as Badge reminded himself, for failing to pay his cousin the same kind of respect, considering that Badge constantly went out his way to think up clever activities, an example of which was the Dogfrey Club, toward which Bryant displayed an almost supercilious indifference. It wasn't easy to think of ways to pass the time of day pleasantly; and if Badge was kind enough to include Bryant in his special projects, then Bryant ought to demonstrate a little more gratitude.

After a while, they passed some pecan and citrus orchards; and shortly after that, houses began to line the highway. Pretty soon they came to the Mesa city limits, and their misery was compounded by the necessity of stopping often at red lights. They passed the Mormon temple, a handsome, flat-roofed, one-story structure with tall recessed windows and date palms and decorative orange trees all around. They toiled on through Tempe and on into the outskirts of Phoenix, where Diff pulled into a service station and made a phone call to the boys' Uncle Trevor, who would come pick them up and save Diff the trouble of crossing the city in heavy traffic with his loaded truck.

Trevor showed up after a while in a fancy new ice-blue Buick with a V-8 engine and air conditioning. He didn't look anything like his brothers, Badge's and Bryant's fathers, who were short, bald, and ruddy-faced and who, like their sons, could have passed for fraternal twins. Endowed with a full head of dark hair, duly oiled, and a carefully clipped pencil-line mustache, Trevor wore office attire—light poplin pants and a white shirt with sleeves rolled up to mid-arm and a tie with a half-loosened knot.

Trevor and Diff made arrangements for Diff to pick up the boys on Friday afternoon for their return to Linroth and then stood chatting in the shade of the store awning for a few minutes. Trevor seemed interested in the cucumber crop this year; also, he wondered whether the rainy season had started yet up north and, if so, whether the folks around Linroth and Saller's Cove were getting hit by some good thunderstorms. Eventually, he got around to asking whether Diff had ridden any broncs at the Pioneer Day rodeo in Linroth this year.

"You know better than that!" Diff protested. "It's been years since I was dumb enough to get on a bronc."

"Diff wasn't any older than you fellows when he started riding broncs and bulls," Trevor said to the boys.

"These boys are too smart to get into that game," Diff said, shaking his head ruefully. He turned and walked toward his truck, saying, "Gotta go get this bolt heap unloaded before the cukes wilt in the heat."

"Good old guy, that Diff!" Trevor said.

Trevor drove the boys across town to the brick and cement block yard where he was the superintendent. He bought them ice cream sandwiches from a machine and took them into his air-conditioned office, which wasn't much of a place—a couple of utility desks with swivel chairs, some filing cabinets, and half a dozen metal chairs set against the walls. He said a secretary normally sat at the desk that had a phone on it, but she had left early to make a deposit before the bank closed. After he had phoned his wife to let her know the boys had made it and could be counted on for supper, he said he had to get back out in the yard. He told the boys they could stay in the office where it was cool; or if they wanted to look over the operation, they were welcome to watch from a little roofed balcony where they'd be out of the way of men and machines.

The boys sat for a while cooling off, more or less slumped in a torpor of silence. Bryant was thinking about things at Uncle Trevor's and Aunt Sybil's house. They had five kids, all of them younger than Bryant and Badge. On summer visits to Linroth, the kids had acquired an expectation of wit and mimicry on the part of their cousins, which Bryant hoped he and Badge could live up to during the coming few days. He had in fact sanitized a couple of dirty lim-

ericks he had heard at school which he thought his younger cousins would enjoy. He was counting on Badge to lead the way as usual with some farcical ideas to keep the kids in stitches.

Badge sat abstracted, his head cocked a little and his eyes fixed on a plaque on the wall that said Trevor Braunhil had been certified by an institute in Milwaukee as a service master of some kind of a concrete mixing machine. A concrete mixing machine was what Badge felt like just now, his mind being full of inarticulate thoughts and feelings that refused to arrange themselves in an orderly sequence, being just bubbles of awareness that burst almost as quickly as they surfaced.

After a while, Bryant said, "Want to go watch them make blocks?"

"Might just as well," Badge said. However, he didn't move, so Bryant went out and closed the door.

Sitting there, still looking at the certification plaque, Badge realized he had never felt so depressed in his life. He hadn't known a person could feel so depressed.

He was wishing he hadn't been so certain that Diff would visit a brothel on his way home tonight. He was wishing he hadn't recognized that he *hoped* Diff would. He was especially wishing he hadn't realized, that sometime soon, he would have to decide whether he himself would stop there, too. Then it came to him that he had to make that decision now; and with that recognition, as ordained by a simple line of logic, his depression evaporated. If he could resolve, truly resolve, never to visit a whorehouse, then very likely, Diff had long ago made a similar resolution.

Then he began to feel depressed again for being irritated with Diff and Bryant out on the highway with the hot wind rushing through the windows of the truck. Also, he recognized it didn't demonstrate much gumption to make up his mind never to visit a cathouse in the future when he wasn't willing to give up his present vices, foremost among which was a non-stop daydream about fornicating with LillieDale. So he decided to abandon his fantasy of having to marry LillieDale, which made him feel depressed in a different sort of way because he could see there wasn't any end to this business of moral reformation, it now being his clear duty to learn how to get through the tedium of the day without fantasies

of any sort. With something of an inward groan, he made up his mind to get by with nothing but facts all day long.

But it didn't seem like there was much to live for on a steady diet of only facts all day long. Maybe things would change when he became an adult. But he wasn't sure, having observed good, decent adults for fourteen years. He never saw adults really enjoying themselves. They were mostly dedicated to work and worry and wondering if the price of pinto beans would hold up long enough to allow for a profit on the twenty acres of dryland planted to them. If adults tried to catch a moment of relaxation with a book in the evening, they promptly went to sleep in their chair. If they went to a movie, they went to sleep. At least, Badge's parents did. Also they went to sleep when they went to church—though as far as church was concerned, going to sleep could be considered a mercy. Nonetheless, facts were facts, and sooner or later Badge had to accept them.

Pretty soon, Bryant came back inside the office. "Making concrete blocks with a big machine isn't much different than mixing cement in a trough and pouring it into molds with a shovel," he said.

He sat down in a chair facing Badge and said, "A guy just came into the yard and reported one of the delivery trucks was broken down, and Uncle Trevor just said, 'Dang!'"

"My dad would've said 'Dadgost it!'" Badge observed.

"Where did he get that word?"

"Just made it up, I think."

"Braunhils don't ever swear, I guess," Bryant said.

They sat staring at each other for a while. "I've been thinking," Badge said. "What if we give up on that Dogfrey Club business? I have in mind when we get home I'm going to take my knife and dig that little sign off that pillar on the porch."

Bryant tilted his head and rolled his eyes upward to show he was weighing the matter carefully.

"It was a dumb idea," Badge said.

Bryant nodded. "Yeah," he said, "it kind of was."

Straight Home

Lisa Torcasso Downing

Six cars pulled through the intersection, one after the other over the course of an hour, but none of them was hers. Barefoot, Bart waited on the slat bench outside his front door, picking away at the curls of varnish and eyeing the stop sign at the end of the block, two houses down. Natalie had never been one to stay late at church, never been one to linger over some Relief Society assignment or to dawdle in the foyer with girlfriends before heading to the car. No, she'd always come straight home.

A Suburban slurred through the intersection, its windows and side panels splattered by rain from a storm that had yet to burst over this side of town.

That's what Bart had expected from his wife today—that she'd be home by now. He thought she'd finish with the bishop as fast as humanly possible, close his office door on the way out, and drive home.

Bart took measure of the sky. Dark clouds gathered like a street gang.

Not that Natalie would want to talk it all out with him. She wouldn't. But he'd force the issue. He'd gotten rid of the kids.

From the east flew an arrowhead of mallards, skewed on the left side as though their formation needed a little grinding down.

She should be home. They needed to talk. He'd arranged everything.

No, he thought, he needed to talk—she needed to listen. Those weren't the terms Dr. Cohen used, but they were what he meant, Bart was sure of it.

The flock beat on, traversing the gray turmoil. Bart paid particular attention to the fifth duck in the left line, the one that stood out. He pulled for instinct to veer it inward and measure it up with the others. Instead, the flock—the duck—flapped on out of sync, and Bart returned to staring at the corner.

Sometimes, it was true, Natalie disappeared during the week. He didn't know where she went or what she did. Her alone time, he generously called it. But she'd never taken off on a Sunday.

He let his head thud against the stucco wall and felt the pain three inches below the vertex of his skull. No matter how hard he stared at that red, octagonal sign, its message didn't change.

He shouldn't have deceived Natalie that morning, never should have claimed that the president of the elders' quorum had scheduled a meeting with him before the sacrament meeting. "We'll need to take separate cars," he had told his wife as she stood in front of the wide-screen TV, working a hairbrush through Christy's blond curls. "I have to meet with Tanner."

In truth, President Tanner was probably still eating waffles with his family, but Bart took off anyway, leaving Natalie to bring the kids in their late model Ford Taurus, the blue one. He had made a promise to Dr. Cohen and he'd have to follow through.

When he arrived, three other early birds had lined up on the rust-colored couch like crows on a fence, so Bart lingered outside the clerk's office. As soon as Bishop Avery walked out of ward council, Bart separated him from the herd of well-dressed congregants and corralled him against the nearby exit, the glass door no one used. He asked the bishop to please meet with Natalie today.

Avery refused, explaining that the stake presidency would be here today for temple recommend interviews. The sign-up sheet was full and he had to meet with nearly everyone on it first. "Now if you'll excuse me . . ." he said politely, trying to navigate around Bart.

But Bart grabbed his arm, wrinkled his rayon sleeve, and, in a hushed voice, spat out what the psychologist suspected about Natalie.

The bishop blinked, looked deeply into Bart's eyes, and then looked away. Yes, he said, he'd meet with her. First thing. Right after the block of meetings ended. "But I can't give her more than the standard fifteen minutes. Not today. You'll be there?"

Bart clasped the bishop's hand and shook it. "Just do your best," he said, "I don't expect a miracle."

In truth, Bart didn't expect anything. He didn't believe an appointment of any duration would make any difference whatso-

ever. A rope to jump, a pledge to keep, a way to say it wasn't his fault: I tried, Dr. Cohen, but she won't talk to anyone, not even our clergy. And so, while the sacrament was passed, Bart had slipped Natalie a note, penned on the back of the Church bulletin.

"The bishop asked to see you after church."

After the final meeting, he prompted Brennan and Christy to kiss Mommy good-bye and herded them into their other Taurus, the green one. On the ten-minute drive home, he used a cell phone to call the Beckers. After explaining that Natalie had a migraine and that he had a critical deadline to meet today, after promising the kids wouldn't be there more than two hours—two and a half tops—he dropped them off.

At first, he had paced the house, carefully practicing what he might say in response to what she might say about being ambushed by Bishop Avery. When he began talking in circles, he distracted himself by putting up the dishes, dusting the blinds, stirring the split pea soup in the crock pot, replacing the toilet float in the kids' bathroom and finally wandering outside so that he could recoil the hose. But the moment he had smelled the storm, he sat down under the darkening sky and began counting the cars that were not hers.

He should have touched base with the Beckers long before he detected the familiar rattle of her car. He leaned forward, lengthening his torso and retracting his legs beneath the bench. He watched the little blue car, water trickling off, slowly forge through the intersection and onto their block. The two wipers fanned the windshield, though the one on the driver's side left the glass badly smeared.

Bart pushed himself to his feet. Feeling lightheaded, he steadied himself against the wall, his palm inadvertently touching the wound in the stucco where Brennan had successfully destroyed a mud dauber with his baseball bat. Then he stepped from the porch onto the walk. An upswEEP of wind pushed the tart smell of stubborn, fall marigolds at him. He strained to see Natalie as she drove past.

A handful of dead maple leaves skidded across the lawn, which lay dormant except for the weeds.

Natalie had her hand on the rear-view mirror. At least there had not been an accident.

He pivoted as her car crawled up the driveway, disappearing behind the red-tipped photinia he'd trimmed three times that summer. The sudden grating sound of metal gears testified that the garage door was opening. He waited, heard the car door slam, and waited some more.

He waited because, early in their marriage, during those lingering years before their firstborn arrived, she had waited for him. He'd drive up after work and find her sitting on the bench, her head resting against the stucco wall. Some days she'd stand on the path, arms folded. Never forearm over forearm, but wrist clutching wrist in that way of hers. A sure sign that she missed him. Or so he thought.

The clanking noise, the door descending.

Each of those days he had found Natalie waiting, he had responded in precisely the same manner. He had deposited his briefcase in the garage beside the kitchen door and headed on foot back down the driveway and across the grass, which always needed mowing. He'd shroud her with his arms and squeeze her tightly. She'd mutter into his armpit, "Tough day?" or "Glad to be home?" Always a question.

The garage door groaned as its lip smacked the concrete.

And so today he hoped that his wife might remember, might do as he did and appear from behind that bush, skirt the house, and tramp across the lawn, take him in her arms, hug him. All he wished for was the chance to touch her as he used to.

As he waited alongside the marigolds, he heard through the cheap, fiberglass door the sound of her heels tap-tapping. Turning, he looked through the window in time to see her moving across the laminate floor which he had laid last summer to make her happy. She disappeared into their bedroom.

A sorrow like thick, curdled milk spread through his stomach.

He opened the front door and followed her, Dr. Cohen's advice on a slow simmer in his mind. He knew that he wouldn't, that he couldn't, that he shouldn't, ask Natalie about her conversation with Bishop Avery.

He found her in the master bathroom, standing beside the

bath tub, right where it connects to the shower stall. She unzipped her fawn-colored skirt, the one she'd bought to match his Sunday suit. When he came in, she turned away and gave him her back. She wore her hair in the usual way, clipped up.

She moved deep inside the walk-in closet. He gave her a moment, then ambled after her and positioned himself near the dresser.

Her back to him, she wiggled inside her skirt, listing left and then right. When it dropped to her ankles, she stood before him in her temple garments which, of late, had come to fit her so tightly that the silky white fabric stretched bluish across the pitted areas of her buttocks.

As he watched her bend and retrieve the skirt, his breath turned heavy, humid, and his groin suffered that old, familiar tug. He hated the way his body betrayed him, the way it reacted like an animal when all he wanted was to cherish her.

"Where are the kids?" she asked. She held the skirt in one hand and began shuffling clothes on the rod as she searched for an empty hanger with clips.

"At the Beckers'," he replied, noticing that her wedding band was not on her finger. His eyes darted to the dresser where he discovered it already placed beside the photo of the kids, that one taken at the lake. "I dropped them off on the way home."

"I bet Brennan was beside himself," she said. "Getting to go to his friend's house on the Sabbath."

The remark felt like a slap, and Bart slumped against the door jamb. He hadn't expected Natalie to divulge anything about her meeting with Bishop Avery, but it shocked him, the way she could so flawlessly behave as though their interview hadn't happened and focus on chastising him for not keeping the Fourth Commandment.

"I think he was pretty happy, yeah," Bart said, watching the hem of Natalie's pink blouse lift higher as she reached up for a hanger, revealing the full slope of her bottom. The hem descended as she tucked the hanger under her chin and clipped the skirt into position.

"The Becker mom," Bart said. "What's her first name again?"

"DeeDee." Natalie hung up the skirt, kept her back to him. The hem rose and fell again.

“Yeah, DeeDee,” he repeated. “She seemed a little unsure when I asked if she’d take Christy, too. But Katie’s family is out of town.”

Natalie didn’t respond. Instead, she busied her hands on the other side of her body. Though Bart couldn’t see her fingers in action, he presumed them to be about the work of unbuttoning her blouse.

He wanted this moment to be like a Hollywood film, with him as leading man. He’d go to her, take those buttons in his own hands and undo them, reverently, one at a time. Feel her loving him with her eyes, sense her inviting him closer with parted lips.

But he did nothing, said nothing, made no move.

A few seconds later, she pulled her blouse from her shoulders, exposing the garment camisole and the bra she wore over it. She fisted her blouse and tossed it into the hamper.

He peered at the blotchy patch of skin at the base of her neck, at the pair of small, circular welts which stared back at him. During their two-month courtship, she had always worn her hair down, and he hadn’t gathered the courage to investigate this hidden, erogenous area with his touch or his kiss. He simply hadn’t known.

Bart’s eyes fluttered open and he luxuriated on the bed in the bungalow, naked beneath the sheet, watching what had seemed to be a million diamond speckles of dust swirling in a beam of morning light. He breathed deeply the cool, salt air, listened as the surf rolled onto the sand, and let his eyes roam around the cottage on the rim of Maui. A thatched roof overhead and silk sheets beneath him; rattan furniture smothered in tropical prints; a full bar stocked with sparkling cider, and, in the corner, a plasma television, unplugged. Bart’s parents had spared no expense for this once in a lifetime event—his honeymoon.

Content to a degree he hadn’t known possible, he turned on his side, his head resting in the crook of his arm. Beside him slept a treasure he loved more than life.

“Natalie?” he whispered.

His bride lay sprawled on her stomach, her face turned toward the alarm clock. The white bed sheet covered only her lower legs.

Her back shone pink and white from a sunburn that had sneaked up on her last week as she slept on the balcony of her apartment in Plano, Texas. A giant petal, he thought, and he touched her. Three fingertips in the dimple above her buttocks. Slowly, he brushed his hand up her spine. She moaned and her body elongated as if his touch somehow possessed a magical effect.

“Good morning, Angel.”

She groaned again, but didn’t move.

It was right for her to be tired, Bart reminded himself. After all, in the past thirty-six hours they had married in the Dallas temple, hosted a reception for 250 people—and they had danced with nearly all of them, including fat Uncle Ephraim with his sweaty scalp and palsied Cousin Dolores, nearly ninety. The next day, they had boarded a plane and flown through the night. He had no inkling what the clock read when those Hawaiian girls placed leis about his neck, but he knew it wasn’t time for bed because the sun hovered overhead.

He had found the car rental counter and driven Natalie to their hotel. Without unpacking, the newlyweds fell into bed. Later, they slept.

This morning, Bart was keenly aware that it was Sunday. That meant that he and his bride could lounge in the suite all day if they wanted. He moved his body closer to hers and swelled with joy at the memory of joining with her, completely, for the first time yesterday.

“It’s morning, Beautiful.” He leaned against her, pressed himself into her hip. For the first time, he pushed her long hair aside and kissed the base of her neck. He pulled back, surprised to feel an uneven, rough patch of skin against his lips.

Natalie brushed past him. “I need to take a shower.”

Bart didn’t move.

He heard the reverberating ping of the shower door opening, then closing. The pipes inside the wall hummed.

Water spurted in three blasts. He looked again at the photograph of the kids, his two silly-billy goats, their hair disheveled, their bodies dripping with lake water. He picked up the pewter frame, ran his eyes across the “Families Are Forever” banner etched into its base and then settled his gaze back on the image of

his children. Brennan stood knee-deep in the mucky lake, grinning into the camera. Behind him, up to her waist, his younger sister flashed a peace sign with her left hand. Beyond them both, the lake stretched on. There in the distance, the dead, blackened branch of a submerged tree extended out of the water like an arm reaching from the grave for his children. He remembered a heron's nest in its twiggy fingertips, but he couldn't make it out in the snapshot. Why Natalie had chosen to frame that particular photograph escaped Bart.

Something landed softly on Bart's bare foot. Looking down, he found Natalie's white bra, each cup a smooth, molded curve.

The ocean rumbled outside the bungalow. Bart had never seen lesions like those at the base of Natalie's neck. Two little circles of raised skin, pink and white and all pinched together, sitting side-by-side like eyes. But not real eyes. Cartoon eyes. Mottled Orphan Annie eyes, right there between her shoulders. Each the size of a pencil eraser, no larger, no smaller. Bart pressed two fingertips into them.

She startled and arched her back as if she'd been shocked.

He yanked his hand away. She flipped over onto her elbows, her gray eyes storming.

"I'm sorry," he said. His hand, palm open, hovered above her exposed chest.

Her eyes raked across his expression, seemingly desperate.

"Did I hurt you?" he asked.

Her mouth parted and her eyes blinked.

"Are you okay? I hurt you."

She lowered herself, pressed her head into the pillow, and gazed up at the palm leaves strapped to the ceiling.

"Natalie?"

"I'm fine," she said.

"I'm so sorry." He touched her arm.

She responded by wrapping her fingers around his forearm. "You couldn't hurt me." She smiled. "Don't worry. It's nothing." She squeezed his deltoid. "I'm the one who's sorry."

His hand came down gently, cupped her marshmallow breast. "I never want to hurt you."

“Then don’t.” She pulled him down toward her and, as she did, there came to her lips a hint of a smile.

He rolled atop her, his legs between hers.

“It’s just a stupid birthmark,” she whispered and wrapped her legs around him.

The press of his groin against that patch of hair . . .

Her breath at his ear. . . “They can be sensitive.”

He rocked himself against her. “Oh God,” he said. “I love you.”

From where he stood near the mouth of the closet, Bart had a clear line of sight to Natalie. She stood in her garments in front of the open shower door. Behind her, the only window in the master bathroom speckled silently with droplets. The rainstorm had arrived.

With her right hand extended into the stream, she waited for the water to heat up, an event that, in this house, could easily take five minutes. Her nipples, though muted by the fabric, pointed right at him. They seemed an invitation, but he knew better.

He replaced the photo of the children on the dresser.

He walked away from the closet and again glanced toward the window. Lightning flashed and was gone. Rain continued to strike the glass soundlessly.

He moved around his wife, who still didn’t look at him, and settled on the edge of the bathtub. Thunder grumbled in the distance.

He watched her as she tested the water, saw the way her back formed a wall against him, and wondered how long she would despise him for figuring it out, for doling out secrets she would never have divulged.

“Natalie,” he said.

She did not turn, did not glance back or grunt an acknowledgement. Her shoulder held still, as if she’d forgotten to breathe, and Bart understood that, at that moment, Natalie wanted him to stop existing.

But he couldn’t accommodate her, wouldn’t walk away. He had something to say even if she did not. And so he said it, plain and simple, because he’d never been good at making speeches.

“I won’t lose them.”

It was nearly imperceptible, but these days he was watching more closely, so he saw it, her reaction, the way she stiffened across the shoulders as if he had just worked the crank that tightened her tendons against the muscle.

“Brennan and Christy,” he said. “I won’t lose my children.”

Dr. Cohen rented space two evenings a week down at the Methodist church. His office was nothing more than an enclosed waiting room outside the children’s Sunday School wing, but it was sufficient. There were several padded chairs and two couches, plus a mural of Noah and his animals, painted in bright colors. The room made Bart comfortable on some nights, uncomfortable on others.

It had been an accident, really, that he’d mentioned the birthmarks at all. He’d just been sitting there, eyeing the purple and green leopards on the gunwale and waiting for Dr. Cohen to set the alarm on his watch.

“Natalie has these birthmarks,” Bart had said absently, “pairs of them. Sets.”

The doctor took his hand from his watch and looked up at Bart.

“On her back,” he continued. “And on the inside of one of her thighs, up real high. Behind her knee cap.” He leaned over in his chair and touched the back side of his knee. “Right here, where it bends.”

The doctor entwined his fingers over his abdomen. “Strange,” he said, “to have all those birthmarks.”

Bart grinned with one side of his mouth. “I call them her other ‘eyes.’”

“That’s an interesting thing to say.”

He surveyed the teats on a milk cow that posed, head held high, on the gangway. “Well, really, they don’t look like eyes.” He tipped his head. “It’s just that the first ones I saw were on her back, so I made a joke about them.”

“Your wife has eyes on her back.”

Bart smirked. “That’s pretty much what I said.”

“And how did she react to your joke?”

He shrugged. For the first time, he noticed a tiny pair of ants, painted in black, on the pinnacle of the A in ARK.

The psychologist let the silence sit.

Bart hated the way Dr. Cohen liked to keep quiet and wait for him to speak. He shifted in his chair. Even though he'd been careful not to choose the seat with the bad spring, this one didn't feel much better, not when silence landed like lead in his lap. "Really, they don't look like eyes at all," Bart repeated, then glanced at Dr. Cohen.

Dr. Cohen's glasses set low on the end of his nose. "Then what do they look like?"

Bart shook his head and grimaced, hoping to suggest the answer didn't matter. But he spoke up anyway. "They're round."

Dr. Cohen waited.

"Maybe the circumference of a pencil. And they all set pretty close to each other."

Dr. Cohen remained stony faced, which made Bart nervous.

"Did I mention the two on the sole of her foot?" He lifted his right leg. "It's like, so she can see what, *who*, she's stepping on." He tapped himself on the chest and chortled.

Dr. Cohen's eyes held steady.

"Okay. All right. What *do* they look like." Bart leaned back in his chair and took each elbow in the opposing hand. "They're ugly, that's for sure." He chortled. "They're raised up. Little red and white welts."

Dr. Cohen drew his next breath very slowly. Bart felt the change in the air immediately. He released his elbows, gripped the arms of his chair, and watched the good doctor, waited.

The man sat back, exhaling long and loud. He uncrossed his legs and clipped his pen to the pad on his lap. "By any chance," the therapist began, "when Natalie was a child . . ." He leaned toward Bart. "I'm just asking you to consider the possibility, you understand. But did she ever live with—or was she ever exposed to—someone who smoked?"

Bart stared.

"Cigarettes in particular?"

For years, Bart had sensed a thin shadow roping through his subconscious. Suddenly, with Dr. Cohen's inquiry, that rope rose up like a cobra, looked him in the eye, and bared its fangs. He

couldn't breathe. The parade of animals behind Dr. Cohen's head vanished. Bart stared into the man's glasses, which now sat squarely on the bridge of his nose. Burns.

Natalie's father had left them when she was a toddler. She had no memory of him, and her mother wouldn't speak of him. Bart knew that Natalie's mother had never been a smoker, and he doubted that her father had been either, since their marriage had begun in a Mormon temple.

But there had been other men after her father. Many "uncles," Natalie had said, and some had been live-ins. He'd seen the pictures in the family photo album, had been shown them by her mother when Natalie slept. His stomach knotted. He couldn't remember a single face.

Which of those men—how many of them—had been smokers?

He thought of his own little Christy, wading up to her chin in a man-made lake. He blinked, felt as though his own head had slipped beneath the surface.

Dr. Cohen's voice came thick and wet. "If she's been molested, you know she'll need help."

Natalie withdrew her hand from the shower's stream, and the eyes on her back moved closer together. She turned on one heel like a slow-churning turbine and faced him. With the curve of her cheek taut, she held her lower lip between her teeth.

Bart glanced at the window. He noticed how the drops now spread, egg-like, against the glass. The sight put him in mind of the flock of ducks, and he imagined them grounded, clinging to the edge of a flooded pond, their soggy feathers as gray as the sky.

"LDS Social Services has counseling." He knew better than to tell her that Dr. Cohen had advised it. "It's free. Bishop Avery can arrange everything."

Her eyes shut and he could see the little bumps, her irises, flicking around behind the lids.

"I'll stop with Cohen," he said, "You're right. We can't afford him, I know."

Her head raised slightly.

He said, "You can go. I can go. We both can go. The counselors are all Mormon."

Her chin sank to her chest, then rolled sideways until the vertebrae in her neck pop, pop, popped. She opened her eyes.

"I need to wash up," she said. She hooked her thumbs inside the waistband of her garment bottoms, and slid them down.

Bart looked down at his toes, saw them pale against the clay tile. He shouldn't have been so direct.

Her undergarments puddled around her ankles. A burst of wind rattled the window and every sinew in Bart's body cautioned him. Every nerve went on alert. But his eyes wandered toward her feet anyway. She stepped out, one foot and then the other, her pink-painted toenails pointed, her slender ankles flexed.

A howl, the wind . . . and finally the rain gabbled against the pane, loud, incessant, as if it had always been there, always would be.

He lifted his eyes, moving his gaze up the arc of her calves and along the full curve of her thighs to that tawny wedge of hair.

She criss-crossed her arms, crowding her breasts until each heaped over the lace neckline of the upper garment. She clutched the lower hem of her camisole, all the while looking down on him.

Bart whispered, "I don't deserve this."

Slowly, leisurely, she lifted the camisole, drawing the symbol of protection first across the flesh of her belly, then off her breasts, and lastly over her head. She paused, statuesque, both hands upraised. In one hand, she dangled the sheer garment top. When she released it, it slithered down her backside and onto the tile. She lowered her hands to the back of her head and released her hair, longer now than when they had met. Her breasts wobbled, but did not touch. The clip clattered against the floor.

Bart moved not a muscle and yet his body responded.

Without another word, she stepped into the steaming shower and pulled the door closed. As the glass darkened with droplets of deflected water, she gazed at him through it.

"Natalie," he said, her name rushing out on his breath.

She backed into the stream as if she hadn't heard him. Water cascaded down her body, running in rivulets off her nipples.

The muscles in Bart's face fell slack. "Why can't you see me?"

She reached for the shampoo bottle that sat in the corner of the stall, and her breasts swung out.

“Why won’t you hear me?”

Straightening, she tipped some into her palm and began to lather.

He couldn’t take his eyes off her.

“Say something,” he pleaded, his voice louder, but hardly loud.

She tipped her head back, and white bubbles foamed down her neck, then canalled between her shoulder blades, sheeting over the cigarette burns. He watched the soapy froth slip toward the drain. As it traveled down her body, something rose in him, rigid and ugly, and brought him to his feet. He wanted to hit something, throw something, smash and destroy, but he bullied down the inclination by tightening every muscle in his arms and legs.

He wanted to shout at her, “Where were you? What were you doing? You weren’t with the bishop. Not that long!” Instead he clicked his tongue and then pulled open the shower door. He couldn’t believe there’d be another man. The door trembled, but his hand—that he kept steady.

A thin cloud of steam floated a honeysuckle scent into his face. Natalie wiped her hands across her eyes, clearing the water. Streaks of diluted lather clung to her temples. Outside the window, silent lightning repeated, and the rain now pummeled with authority.

His fingers tightened against the chrome. Water ricocheted and wet him. He loosened his grip, slackened his jaw as he exhaled, closed his eyes, and said, “Baby, just tell me.” He looked at her.

Water bounced off her, and her expression closed up like a wildflower in a child’s hand.

He leaned his head against the chrome. He lifted his voice. “Tell me what you’re thinking.”

A thin strip of water channeled lazily over her abdomen, forming a narrow stream that seemed to twist as it ran through the velvety, blonde hairs on her lower torso. She stared at him.

“I know you can hear me.”

She wiped her face clear once again. Water pounded her shoulder. When she eventually spoke, her words lolled out.

"I think . . ." she started, and he nodded even though she hadn't asked a question. "I think," she began again, "that you don't love me anymore."

Bart's lungs deflated as if each had been stabbed. He banged his head against the chrome edge. "If I didn't love you," he said, rolling his head until he looked in her direction, "I wouldn't keep trying." He shut his eyes, then opened them slowly. "I'd stop taking care of you. I'd disappear."

He lifted his head from the chrome and held the edge of the shower door in his hand. "You know I love you." His knees trembled. "The kids."

She blinked. A thin sluice of remaining froth slipped from above her ear onto her cheek.

His eyes caressed her, moving from the crown of her wet head down to the breasts with which she had suckled their children, then on to the abdomen that had swelled, and to the region that had delivered. Finally, he took in the legs that once upon a time had wrapped around him and made him believe she had wanted him.

"Look at you . . ." he said, then grew silent. The rain on the window tapped, weaker now. He whispered, "I'm invisible."

She extended her neck, raised her chin, and let the shower spray pelt the back of her head. Running her hands down her hair, she squeezed out any remaining shampoo residue and pressed the strands flat against the eyes which had been burned into her by a monster.

"Just once," he said, barely above a whisper. "Can't you say 'thank you'?"

Her head snapped up and she looked at him, long and hard, and he wished he could gather back those words, that there was some way to erase this moment and make it not about him.

She stepped out of the stream, her hands crossed above her breasts, and she looked at him as if she had finally figured him out. He tried to look away, but her gaze held his, wouldn't let go. He thought, *I should run*, but he didn't.

He hated that this was happening, that he was groveling again. His voice quivered. "I can't lose them."

First her eyebrows twitched and then her eyelids batted. She opened her mouth to speak, but closed it. A faint smile grew as though she had absorbed some fact. “You know,” she said, one hand sliding onto her breast, across her areola, and down to her side, “you really are a very sexy man.”

Bart stumbled back, leaving the shower door ajar. Silent rain ran in small, play rivers down the window, then fell toward the ground and disappeared. He dropped onto the edge of the tub. “Natalie,” he said, feeling her name like a stone in his side.

With the spout still running, she stepped out of the shower, dripping and glistening under the electric light. Water pooled on the tile as she came toward him. She placed her left hand, wet, atop the right shoulder of his best Sunday shirt. Several droplets of water landed in his lap as she swung her right leg over both of his, sank down and straddled him, soaking his pant legs. Her nipples grew pert in the cool air.

He shivered as she rested her forehead against his, as the water from her bangs dripped onto his cheek, then onto his chest, sopping his shirt. He groaned as she breathed in, as her breasts drew nearer his mouth. Tiny dots, pin pricks, rose all along her curves.

He inhaled her scent deeply—her body, the honeysuckle shampoo—and then blew it out and tipped his head up until their noses met. His eyes naturally closed. He willed his hands around her back instead of where months of longing directed them. He laced his fingers behind her.

She kissed him, a peck on the cheekbone, the kiss a little girl would give her father; but it tore through Bart like a hot wind on an island beach. He ran his left hand up her spine until he felt her two little eyes right there between her shoulder blades. He covered them with his middle and ring fingers and pressed, just as he had so long ago.

“I’m sorry,” she said.

He gazed at her beautiful, imperfect face. A damp curl formed from a lock over her left eye. He reached up and smoothed it away.

She curved her back, making herself smaller in his lap. He felt her hips and buttocks roll as she whimpered, “I’ve been a very

naughty girl.” Her breath came hot and sour, across his mouth. “I just get scared you don’t love me.”

He wondered at the way a child, two children, had emerged from this body, so slight.

“I don’t always do things right,” she went on. “You know how I am. Take care of me.” The kiss Bart received this time was long and deep and nearly knocked him into the tub.

“And thank you,” she breathed out, “for everything.”

“My pleasure,” he murmured. “The gratitude which swept through him wiped away Dr. Cohen’s counsel like so much dross. Bart’s hands moved to her breasts and she lengthened her torso like a cat stretching up for a bird. “Natalie,” he whispered, “I love you so much.” He took his wife by her hand, led her to the bed, and was satisfied.

REVIEWS

Prophet, Seer, Revelator, American Icon

Reid L. Neilson and Terryl L. Givens, eds. *Joseph Smith Jr.: Reappraisals after Two Centuries*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009. ix, 284 pp. Paper; \$24.95. ISBN: 978-0-19-536976-2

Reviewed by Kirsten M. Christensen

First, a confession and a little context. I am not a scholar of Mormonism, just a Mormon who is also a scholar (of medieval mysticism, it so happens). I am interested in but mostly unfamiliar with the growing body of Joseph Smith scholarship. As a result, I am unable to reference that tradition in this review or to argue how these essays augment or contrast with other work, although it is worth noting that the essays themselves do a fine job of that. Rather, my role, as I see it, is to respond to these essays both as an educated non-specialist and, perhaps most importantly, as a member of the Church who seeks “greater knowledge” (Abr. 1:2) regarding our founding prophet. This collection is a compelling read on both fronts, and I expect to recommend it to my colleagues in religious studies and history and to friends and family in and out of the Church.

The striking cover art of this volume is worth as much reflection as any of the essays.¹ The painting, *Monday, 24 June 1844, 4:15 a.m.: Beyond the Events*, is the work of Italian-born LDS artist Pino Drago (b. 1947) and won second place in the Church’s first international art competition in 1987. The dimensions and current exhibition location of Drago’s oil-on-canvas painting are not provided on the cover or elsewhere in the book. It features a highly stylized portrait of the Prophet, who nearly fills the entire left half of the picture. He is sitting, resolutely upright and finely dressed, in an almost entirely unfurnished room, one elbow resting on the surface of a brilliant green table or counter, the fingers of his other hand spread across his knee. The image clearly evokes another well-known but undated portrait of the Prophet, attributed in many sources to David Rogers.²

In Drago’s depiction, a lush, red drape falls from ceiling to floor behind Joseph, covering about one-third of the painting. Also behind the Prophet, and just past the drape, two short steps lead into another empty room that includes a small window, possibly obstructed by a few bars, and through which the Nauvoo Temple is partially visible. On the right side of the painting hangs a portrait of an Italian renaissance nobleman, whose posture mirrors Joseph’s. The image of the nobleman is unabash-

edly modeled on the *Portrait of Ugolino Martelli* (ca. 1535), a Florentine humanist, by Agnolo di Cosimo (also known as Il Bronzino).³

According to a *Liahona* article on the Church art competition, Drago's painting "depict[s] a decisive moment in the hours prior to the Prophet's martyrdom."⁴ That moment is undoubtedly the Prophet's famous declaration that he was "going like a lamb to the slaughter . . . but . . . calm as a summer's morning," made in the early morning hours of Monday, June 24, 1844, as he and seventeen friends left Nauvoo for Carthage.⁵ Incidentally and unfortunately, the Drago painting is mislabeled on the back cover of the book as "Monday, 24 June, 1833," a date that will likely cause more than a few readers to wonder what events the title references, not to mention to puzzle at the Nauvoo Temple visible through the window in the background.

A 1992 *Ensign* article on symbolism in LDS art describes the painting as

communicat[ing] some of the eternal lessons associated with the Prophet's martyrdom. Joseph's face is partially in shadow, partially in light, reflecting both his concern with dying and the assurance that his life is in Christ's hands. The hand on his knee is tense, as if clinging tightly to life, while the other is relaxed as he faces the next world. The open window and the Nauvoo Temple in the background represent divine revelation and Joseph's establishing the earthly foundation of Zion. The portrait of a nobleman contrasts the uninspired man's limited capacity to make contributions with the Prophet's legacy of enduring accomplishments.⁶

The presence of the nobleman is perhaps the most striking feature of the painting, from my perspective. Although it takes up a large portion of the wall on which it hangs, the figure of the nobleman himself, who looks toward Joseph Smith, is diminutive next to the looming figure of the Prophet, who gazes directly and piercingly at viewers. The nobleman sits with a stylus and paper in one hand, his other hand resting on a book, behind him architecture and art suggestive of Renaissance Italy. The *Ensign* interpretation above seeks to juxtapose the "uninspired" nobleman with the Prophet, but another interpretation, especially in the context of this volume, seems just as compelling, namely one that links Joseph to deep intellectual engagement and history-altering changes, such as those we associate with the Renaissance and which one can hardly call "uninspired."

Other features of Drago's painting also invite contemplation and admiration. The sparsely furnished room in which Joseph sits, not to mention the bars on the window, evoke the jail that housed him before his death, even as that connection is disrupted by Joseph's elegant attire and regal deportment. The folds of the lush, red velvet drape just behind Jo-

seph suggest movement, perhaps evoking the veil that would close Joseph's life only days later. Our eyes are drawn to the light on Joseph's face but then immediately move to the partially visible temple, a concrete manifestation of Joseph's legacy (albeit not completed at Joseph's death) and the picture's thematic, if not actual, vanishing point, and to which the steps in the room seem to lead. The editors should be commended for choosing this lesser known and highly evocative image of the Prophet.⁷

Next we can note a few features of the book's organization and other technical aspects. Although it makes for a more visually appealing page layout, the use of endnotes, rather than footnotes, is not reader friendly. Following the notes is a fourteen-page index. I came across seven typographical errors in the volume, including one instance of "belief" when "unbelief" was intended (132). This number is small, I suppose, but nonetheless surprising for a volume of this quality.

The fifteen essays are numbered and divided thematically and usefully into three parts: "American Prophet," "Sacred Encounters," and "Prophetic Legacy." The introduction, with its own chapter number, gives a wonderfully succinct yet exuberant summary of Joseph Smith's life, the state of scholarship, and the essays, and is thus a highly practical guide to the volume.

Richard Brodhead's essay, "Prophets in America circa 1830: Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nat Turner, and Joseph Smith," is the first of several essays that engage the issue of authenticity, which for Brodhead remains "in some crucial sense beside the point" (17). Although authenticity is not a major concern for Brodhead, I raise it here because it is a—perhaps *the*—major concern about Joseph Smith for most LDS. Was he authentic? Real? True? If not, then what else falls with him? The issue of authenticity arises again and again in this volume, sometimes to be engaged vigorously, at other times to be put aside, as by Brodhead. This putting aside of the authenticity question will likely be enough to keep many Church members from reading this book, a lamentable fact, since, as those more familiar with Joseph Smith scholarship will likely attest, a willingness to move the focus away from authenticity allows other facets of Joseph's legacy to be given richly nuanced consideration. Indeed, perhaps the greatest contribution these essays make to believing members of the Church is their demonstration that by *needing* Joseph to be authentic, we obscure much else about his magnificent gifts and legacy. A more fruitful approach would be to allow the historical and human contours—both vast and intimate, messy and moving—that these essays lend to the often unidimensional Joseph of standard Church presentation to increase,

rather than undermine, our reverence and gratitude for the authenticity we accept as a starting point.

Brodhead's essay, a comparison of Joseph Smith to two of his contemporaries, is a gripping read, laying out the very different paths taken by Turner (whose revelations led to a bloody slave uprising), Emerson, and Smith, while, in the process, using these disparate contemporaries to shed light on the "history of prophetism in their time" (18), a time that saw a "rush of prophetic activity" and in which "the category of the prophetic was unusually accessible in America" (20). Brodhead articulates a wonderfully cogent description of prophetic identity, a concept that should be of enormous interest for members of a Church that claims to continue to be led by prophets. Brodhead's reassessment of Emerson is a major contribution, especially his analysis of the very different results of prophecy for Emerson (the dissolution of religious institutions) than for Smith (the restoration of them "as the vehicle through which the Spirit performs its saving work," 28).

Klaus J. Hansen's essay, "Joseph Smith, American Culture, and the Origins of Mormonism," argues for the emergence of Joseph's "genius" both within and transcending his historical context. Following comparisons of Joseph to Samuel Johnson and Abraham Lincoln, Hansen argues in particular for the importance of Joseph's "desire to redeem his father" (44) as a site where culture and religion met with particular sharpness and poignancy. Hansen's provocative essay raises as many questions as it answers and indirectly suggests many avenues for additional inquiry. It also includes a plethora of facts and details about the early days of the Church that reminds us that, even with the flood of Joseph's visions and revelations, the uniformness and stability of today's Church did not (or not always) drop pre-formed out of the heavens, but rather emerged and evolved within a dynamic cultural context.

Richard Dilworth Rust's essay, "'I Love All Men Who Dive': Herman Melville and Joseph Smith," like the two contributions that precede it, illuminates the accomplishments of Joseph Smith in surprising ways by comparing him to another contemporary. Rust, a literary critic, focuses on the writings of both men, which compels us to think of Joseph Smith not just as a passive prophetic receptor but, indeed, as a writer with creative gifts and agency. Rust contrasts in particular motifs of darkness, which both men knew well from their personal trials and which manifest in a pervasive gloominess for Melville, but which for Joseph are powerfully connected to images of light.

Catherine Albanese's essay, "The Metaphysical Joseph Smith," argues that metaphysical religion owes a significant and unacknowledged debt to Joseph Smith. She describes Mormonism as a "combinative" reli-

gion, like others in its day, but one that emerged as uniquely successful thanks to Smith's "prodigious religious creativity" and corporate strengths. In her words, "Mormons did metaphysical religion in community" (71).

James B. Allen's "Joseph Smith vs. John C. Calhoun: The States' Rights Dilemma and Early Mormon History" is an absorbing study that provides a fascinating look at the context that motivated Joseph's candidacy for the U.S. presidency. In Allen's reconstruction, Joseph saw the failure of Missouri to protect the Saints as an insurrection that deserved, indeed demanded, federal intervention. When his correspondence with the likely presidential candidates convinced him that none of them could adequately support this stance and thus be able to make a difference for the Saints, Joseph declared his own candidacy. In this essay, more than any of the others, we see Joseph in largely unfamiliar roles: activist, lobbyist, opportunistic but deeply and sincerely engaged politician, and, above all, as a fiercely protective shepherd of his relentlessly persecuted flock.

Part 2, "Sacred Encounters," begins with Richard Lyman Bushman's contribution, "Joseph Smith and Creation of the Sacred." He suggests that Joseph's appeal to the "generation of seekers" (94) of his day (and by extension of ours) lies in the "new sites for encountering the sacred" (95) that he offered: sacred words (the Book of Mormon, the books of Moses and Abraham, the revelations that became the Doctrine and Covenants) and sacred places, both geographic centers for the gathering of the Saints and temples. In contrast to Rust's depiction of Joseph as a creative, *creating* writer, Bushman suggests that the power and success of Joseph's sacred words lie in his passivity—in fact, in his almost complete absence from his texts. He shows us a Joseph who received his own revelations "along with everyone else" (98) and presented the Book of Mormon as the product not of his own creation but rather of his obedience to divine directive. Moreover, he explains that Joseph was almost completely absent from early Church tracts, which focused instead on the sacred words of the Book of Mormon, as if they had emerged miraculously without Joseph as intermediary.

Joseph's conception of sacred space differed dramatically from other sacred spaces of the day, which generally appeared, Bushman explains, at sites of "repeated sacred happenings." In contrast, "Smith's Zion [the declaration of Independence, Missouri, as the New Jerusalem] was created in a stroke . . . on an open plain at the edge of American settlement" (102).

Bushman's arguments should resonate deeply with believing Saints, even though they are expressed in a novel way. For us, Joseph's passiv-

ity—his role as a vessel rather than an agent—is generally assumed, and his success thus points not to tactic or strategy (i.e., consciously leaving himself out) but to divine wisdom. Intentional or not, Bushman’s moving articulation of these features of his success imbues Joseph with renewed richness.

In “Joseph Smith: Prophecy, Process, and Plenitude,” Terryl L. Givens focuses on the process, not the “products,” of Joseph’s prophetic role (107). He argues that Joseph grew incrementally into his understanding of this role, having “no clear intimation of future projects and heavenly callings” (113) in the immediate wake of his first vision. Givens further presents a prophet for whom historical time—more than the moment of restoration in his own day—is everything, because of his “integration of the divine into the historical” (111). This reversal of the time line, or Joseph’s inclusion of ancient (not just Christian) truths and traditions in the restoration—what Givens calls “a gospel plenitude that transcended, preceded, and subsumed any and all earthly incarnations” (116)—is a major theological distinction, but one that has also made it hard for scholars to systematize Joseph’s work.

Douglas Davies’s “Visions, Revelations and Courage in Joseph Smith” is a learned but somewhat bewildering articulation of “the notion of courage as a means of analyzing the part played by visions and revelations in the unfolding of Joseph’s life” (119). The confusion comes from the vast array of theories and thinkers Davies calls on to support his case—arguably too many for a single article. And although he mentions sociologist William Whyte at the outset as a major source, along with theologian Paul Tillich, of “analytical insights” (120), Whyte does not turn up until near the end of the article, while a dizzying array of other theorists appears in the meantime.

Still, Joseph Smith emerges sometimes surprisingly, but generally uniquely elucidated, from Davies’s theological and methodological thicket. In particular, Davies casts convincing light on the emergence of the Mormon emphasis on Gethsemane as the locus of atonement as an outgrowth of the First Vision. Specifically, he argues that the powerful experience of an “impasse” (the question of which church to join), for which the First Vision provided an answer, allowed Joseph to identify directly and powerfully with the Savior’s own “impasse” experience in Gethsemane. He further suggests that this identification “was energized by Joseph’s experience of personal and bloody suffering as a child” (131) when he was held in his father’s arms during the unanesthetized surgery on his leg. Thus, Davies argues, the symbols of blood, struggle, and paternal support coalesced for Joseph in the First Vision and informed his theology of Gethsemane.

In “Seeking the Face of the Lord: Joseph Smith and the First Temple Tradition,” Margaret Barker and Kevin Christensen partner to illuminate the deep connections between Joseph’s temple traditions and those of the Old Testament. Barker’s contribution is rich and erudite, overflowing with enlightening etymologies and lovely, literal translations of both canonical and apocryphal texts that highlight a specific instance of intentional theological muddying over time, namely of the crucial concept of seeing (and being seen by) God. In a nutshell, the Deuteronomists did not believe God could be seen; the visionaries did. Much of what has been transmitted in the canon came through Deuteronomist hands, resulting, Barker convincingly shows, in the obfuscation of crucial passages discussing theophanies.

Christensen’s portion of the essay explores what these early debates can tell us about Joseph’s visionary experiences and LDS temple worship and scripture. A particularly enlightening section argues that Mormon theology uniquely blends the numinous (awe-inspiring experiences that stress the otherness of the divine from the beholding individual) and the mystical (experiences that stress unity and that tend to transcend difference between the individual and the divine).

Barker’s learned contribution, which launches immediately into her “independent reconstruction of temple theology” (161, Christensen’s term) would have benefited, I believe, from a brief introduction linking the ancient and early Christian material to Joseph Smith. As it stands, those links are established only in Christensen’s essay (eighteen pages in), leaving readers to wander a bit through Barker’s fascinating, but detailed, and at times dense, analysis.

Part 3, “Prophetic Legacy,” begins with Laurie Maffly-Kipp’s “Tracking the Sincere Believer: ‘Authentic’ Religion and the Enduring Legacy of Joseph Smith Jr.,” in which she calls the concept of sincerity into question, considering it more often a problem than a solution. Her questioning, in particular, of the frequent scholarly conflation of Joseph’s sincerity with the truth of Mormon teachings should immediately engage LDS readers, since we naturally, and perhaps unfortunately, do the same thing. The dilemma in equating Joseph Smith’s sincerity with religious legitimacy, as Maffly-Kipp succinctly puts it, “means that any personal failing of Smith calls into question the truth of Mormonism itself” (185). When put so baldly, the dangers seem both immediate and avoidable.

Maffly-Kipp offers an array of other, potentially more useful, “framings for the exploration of Mormon history” (177), beginning with shifting the chronological focus of studying Mormonism away from the First Vision. She views the vision not as the origin of the faith but, echoing

Givens, as a culminating event in the sweep of history. A second proposal is to focus the study of Mormonism's narrative away from leaders and toward ordinary believers, which leads naturally to her third possibility: focusing on "diversity of experience rather than unity of purpose" (186). Fourth, and relatedly, she suggests a more pointed focus on family histories, rather than religious history. And finally, she argues that an emphasis on the "new geographies" that exist in the Church's now vast cultural and ethnic landscape will "yield different historical narratives" (186) whose value is not inextricably linked to the sincerity of a single figure (what did Joseph Smith believe or think he believed?), even if that figure is the founder of the movement. Doing so, she suggests, may actually allow us to "see more in Joseph Smith and in Mormonism by recognizing that our focus has been relatively narrow" (187).

Richard Mouw's essay, "The Possibility of Joseph Smith: Some Evangelical Probing," is an intriguing selection to follow Maffly-Kipp's, since the "sincerity question" is, on a basic level, central to Mouw. But as an Evangelical who rejects Joseph Smith's claims, he nonetheless seeks "to create . . . some space between the liar-or-lunatic options" (191). Although his stated audience is fellow Evangelicals, sensitive LDS readers will quickly find that his suggestions for openness and tolerance have profound relevance for us in our interactions with believers of other traditions. It is moving to see an Evangelical grapple with Joseph Smith as Mouw does in his attempts to "create space" for understanding. It struck me as I read that we do very little grappling with other religions' core beliefs, and even far too little with our own. Mouw's challenge to focus away from antagonism and fear-based interactions toward an agenda that instead allows us to ask what it is "about [others'] teachings that speaks to what they understand to be their deepest human needs and yearnings" (193) should guide our every interaction with believers of other traditions.

Mouw further encourages us to "at least try to show that some of the features [of another religion's beliefs] are not unlike elements" that we accept in other contexts (196), including our own. His comments reminded me of an experience I had several years ago, when, as a faculty member at the University of Notre Dame, I accompanied a group of BYU students who were visiting Church history sites in the Midwest on a tour of our beautiful campus. We stopped at the grotto, a replica of the site at Lourdes where the Virgin Mary is reported to have appeared repeatedly to Bernadette Soubirous in 1858, less than forty years after Joseph's first vision. I stood at the back of the group as an LDS graduate student thoughtfully explained the significance of the site for faithful Catholics and was stunned to hear a student ahead of me guffaw audibly and say to a companion, "They actually *believe* that?!" The irony of a Mor-

mon's scoffing at a vision struck me as more than a little profound. Mouw's compassionate essay gives us sorely needed approaches for gentler, more Christ-like encounters with believers from other traditions.

"The Prophethood of Joseph Smith," a powerful essay by non-Mormon Wayne Hudson, takes Joseph Smith's role as a prophet of God "as the beginning and not the end of our investigations" (202). Here again the question of Joseph's sincerity arises repeatedly, but Hudson deftly and confidently diffuses it by claiming that "even someone who has a testimony of the truth of his revelation" can admit that "Joseph was not perfect, and his inspiration varied in quality and reliability" (203) and that "taking Joseph's prophethood seriously does not imply . . . adopting an uncritical attitude toward more controversial aspects of his career or an unwillingness to undertake forms of inquiry that may not immediately benefit his reputation" (206). Fascinatingly, Hudson also advocates that Mormons study prophets of other traditions as an avenue for more fully understanding the innovations of our own.

Reid Neilson's essay on "Joseph Smith and Nineteenth-Century Mormon Mappings of Asian Religions" provides an intriguing look at a particular historical moment in the decades following the organization of the Church. That moment was the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893, attended by the First Presidency (Wilford Woodruff, George Q. Cannon, and Joseph F. Smith) and B. H. Roberts. Neilson paints an arresting picture of the parliament, at which "the Mormon leaders were awed by the exposition's international spectacle and astonished by the richness of the Asian religions they encountered," most notably by the "striking Christian parallels" (218), for which they now had to account. Previously limited encounters with Asians or Asian religions meant that the Church had espoused what Neilson calls the "light and spirit of Christ theory" (216), which originated with Joseph Smith and includes the belief that God's children in all traditions had access to divine inspiration and would thus be given the opportunity to enter God's kingdom. In a nearly tectonic shift in response to the World's Parliament, the Church adopted a "diffusionary hypothesis" (218), in which Christian teachings originated in the Garden of Eden and became increasingly diffuse through generations of apostasy and wickedness. Moving the origins of Christianity back to the creation (the expanded timeline also discussed by both Givens and Maffly-Kipp) allowed Church leaders "to avoid the timing issue of Christian parallels found in non-Christian religions" (219). Neilson notes that the huge theological and rhetorical shift resulting from the parliament was undertaken by "unfazed Latter-day Saints" (220) who later evangelized across Asia.

The volume concludes with David J. Whittaker's "Studying Joseph

Smith Jr.: A Guide to the Sources,” a remarkable compilation that consists of useful sections categorizing and describing the wide array of genres and media among the sources (manuscripts, journals, letters, etc.). It concludes with an extensive and enormously useful bibliography of published sources, which is similarly organized by genre/media. If this marvelous guide is not already available as a stand-alone and also as an on-line publication, it should be.

It would be gratifying to see this book on the shelf of every ward library, not to mention at every LDS bookstore. This volume has enormous potential to dramatically increase our respect for Joseph Smith. We may already see him as chosen and prophetic, but the fact that he influenced American history, not just American *religious* history, makes him a figure worthy of study as a great man, as a harbinger of huge social and cultural shifts, even as a genius—without apology and by non-Mormons with no religious agendas. This view may be news to many Latter-day Saints, but it is news that we should all hear. The professional experience and disciplinary diversity of the scholars who contributed to this collection are dazzling, as is the range of theoretical and methodological approaches they bring to their reappraisals of our Prophet. As a scholar and a believer, I am deeply grateful for their efforts.

Notes

1. Large image of the book cover, <http://www.amazon.com/Joseph-Smith-Jr-Reappraisals-Centuries/dp/0195369769> (accessed October 7, 2009).

2. Well-known image of the Prophet available on the Church’s website: http://www.lds.org/Static%20Images/rogers-joseph-smith_MD.jpg (accessed October 7, 2009).

3. Bronzino, *Portrait of Ugolino Martelli*, c. 1535. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Angelo_Bronzino_057.jpg (accessed October 7, 2009). I thank David Price, University of Illinois, for directing me to Bronzino’s oeuvre.

4. [No author named], “A Rich Visual Harvest,” *Liahona*, August 1988, 19; http://www.lds.org/ldsorg/v/index.jsp?hideNav=1&locale=0&sourceId=53748b5c1dbdb010VgnVCM1000004d82620a___&vgnnextoid=f318118dd536c010VgnVCM1000004d82620aRCRD (accessed October 7, 2009).

5. *History of the Church*, 6:554–55.

6. [No author named], “Arts: Seeing beyond the Surface,” *Ensign*, October 1992, 39, http://www.lds.org/ldsorg/v/index.jsp?hideNav=1&locale=0&sourceId=7ba89209df38b010VgnVCM1000004d82620a___&vgnnextoid=2354fccf2b7db010VgnVCM1000004d82620aRCRD (accessed October 7, 2009).

7. Drago’s portrait is reproduced on the Church’s website (see notes 4,6) in reverse. I cannot confirm the orientation of the original. My description refers to the image as it appears on the cover of the book under review here.

Mordred Had a Good Point

Gary Topping. *Leonard J. Arrington: A Historian's Life*. Norman: The Arthur H. Clark Company, an imprint of the University of Oklahoma Press, 2008. 251 pp. Cloth: \$39.95. ISBN: 978-0-87062-363-9

Reviewed by Nathan B. Oman

It is difficult not to like Leonard Arrington. By all accounts, he was an exceptionally generous and decent man. His *Great Basin Kingdom* was a kind of Big Bang of Mormon historiography, doing more than any other volume to create the New Mormon History. In addition, Arrington was an enormously productive researcher and scholarly entrepreneur, churning out articles and monographs at a prodigious rate and helping to found such institutions as the Mormon History Association and the *Journal of Mormon History*. Finally, he was a mentor of rare abilities, indentifying, encouraging, and supporting dozens of junior scholars who went on to make major contributions to our understanding of the Mormon past. Not surprisingly, Garry Topping's generous—even at times hagiographic—biography is sure to please those who remember Leonard personally. In recounting Arrington's intellectual and professional career, however, the book also provides a useful moment of reflection on the turbulent world of Mormon studies in the last decades of the twentieth century.

With one exception, Arrington's life was largely devoid of the kind of drama that makes for a page-turning biography. Reading the book, I was reminded of a comment by William Blackstone's most recent biographer. Blackstone was the first university professor of English law; and through his four-volume *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, he had an enormous influence on the development of law in the United States and Britain. Nevertheless, his biographer observes, "Blackstone's relatively short lifespan was not saturated with drama or sensation."¹ The same could be said of Arrington's much longer life. With the exception of his dramatic tenure as Church Historian, what excitement there was in Leonard Arrington's life lies in the story of his intellectual career and his contribution to the scholarly study of Mormonism.

Arrington was first and foremost an economic historian, and Topping does a workmanlike job of running down the influences on Arrington's early thought. The book, unfortunately, makes little or no attempt to place Arrington's intellectual training in the broader history of eco-

conomic thought. In many ways, Arrington's graduate training in economics came just prior to a sea change in the discipline. When he arrived in North Carolina from Idaho to begin his graduate schooling in 1939, economics was dominated by thinkers whose intellectual roots lay in the Progressive Era. By the end of the 1930s, their ideas dominated not only the academy but also public policy. In retrospect, it has become common to see the New Deal as a triumph of Keynesian economics. At the heart of Keynesianism is a general equilibrium model of the economy that insists that the state can alleviate the business cycle by propping up aggregate demand in times of downturn through deficit spending. While the New Deal provided public relief through iconic programs such as the Works Progress Administration, the heart of its economic program did not lie in Keynesian pump-priming. Indeed, Franklin D. Roosevelt ran a deficit for only one year during the 1930s, and it was a minor one at that.

Rather, what the Progressive economists prescribed in the Great Depression was the National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933, which aimed to cartelize all of the major sectors of the American economy and subject them to "rational" control via a system of exhaustive administrative regulation. Once purged of the "wasteful . . . irrationality" of the unrestrained market, so the thinking went, business would pick up and prosperity would return. The original NIRA was declared unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court, but FDR succeeded in bullying the court into abandoning its hostility to the New Deal and pushed forward with similarly motivated policies. By 1939, when Arrington began his graduate studies, however, the Progressive economics that he began studying had, in many ways, reached the point of intellectual exhaustion. Unable to defeat a depression from which the rest of the world had already emerged, it had little to offer the Roosevelt administration in terms of new policy prescriptions. Of course, in September of that year, the Wehrmacht invaded Poland, and the resulting demand for armaments meant that FDR began pursuing what amounted to a Keynesian policy by default, eliminating unemployment through the draft and weapons production. This, however, was never the policy urged on him by Progressive economists.

Nevertheless, the economists who influenced Arrington at North Carolina, such as Richard T. Ely, belonged firmly within this waning tradition. Intellectually they were hostile to the neoclassical economic theory of Alfred Marshall and others, whom they cast as apologists for the rapacious robber barons of the Gilded Age. Indeed, their general hostility to economic theory can be seen in their repeated calls for greater "rationalization" of the economy by state actors which was justified with thick, factual descriptions of economic activities unencumbered by for-

mal economic arguments.² Describing the work of one of the giants in this field, Richard Posner—a federal judge, professor at the University of Chicago, and leading scholar of law and economics—has written: “I once tried to read Willard Hurst’s magnum opus, a massive tome on the history of the lumber industry of Wisconsin, but didn’t get far. The book is a dense mass of description—lucid, intelligent, and I am sure scrupulously accurate, but so wanting in theoretical framework—in a perceptible *point*—as to be unreadable, almost as if the author had forgotten to arrange his words into sentences.”³ Posner’s assessment, of course, is uncharitable, but it does capture something of the intellectual world in which Arrington came to scholarly maturity. By 1950, the Progressive school in which he was trained would be decisively on the wane, replaced by the general equilibrium theory of John Maynard Keynes and the turn toward formal modeling championed by such works as Paul Samuelson’s *The Foundations of Economic Analysis* (1947). At this point, however, Arrington was already immersed in the Church archives doing the primary research that would result in *Great Basin Kingdom*.

There is thus a sense in which, from the outset, Arrington was alienated from the scholarly world that had trained him. Topping notes that, by the end of his tenure as an economics professor at Utah State University, Arrington had trouble attracting students to his classes and felt cut off from a profession that had turned increasingly to “econometrics.” (“Econometrics” technically refers to the use of statistical methods to empirically test economic theories. I suspect that Topping is using the term loosely to refer to the mathematical and formal turn in economics.) Arrington’s great contribution, of course, was not as an economist but as a historian. However, he tied his historical narrative decisively to the particular view of economic development that he inherited from the Progressive economists he studied in graduate school. Put in the starkest terms, economic history could be seen in terms of a Manichean struggle between the competing forces of a rapacious and heartless individualism and a wise and generous communitarianism. In this narrative, the robber barons of the Gilded Age epitomized the wickedness of the marketplace, while the Progressives and New Dealers epitomized the benevolent power of collective action.

In their nineteenth-century communitarian exertions, Arrington interpreted the Mormons as proto-Progressives, the keepers of a communitarian heritage that would eventually redeem the nation in the New Deal. As Topping summarizes the argument: “As government regulation emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as the Progressive movement’s means of restraining individualistic capitalism and later as the New Deal’s means of reforming American economic institu-

tions in the interest of the common good, Mormonism became once again a useful model. . . . Brigham Young was a harbinger of Franklin Roosevelt!" (63–64)

The narrative has proved beguiling to two generations of scholars precisely because it places Mormonism at the center of what is for many an appealing ideological narrative about American history. One of its great virtues is that it allows left-leaning Mormon scholars beset with ideological anxiety about the decidedly conservative political culture of twentieth-century Mormonism to tell a story that places nineteenth-century Latter-day Saints on the side of the Progressive angels. The irony, of course, is that Arrington was almost literally in the last group of economists whose formal training was structured around the Progressive narrative. By the time that *Great Basin Kingdom* appeared in 1958, the consensus among economists was that economic salvation lay less in collective control—the old ideal of Mormon cooperatives and the government-administered cartels envisioned by the NIRA—than in fiscal stimulus on the Keynesian model. Arrington (and Topping), however, seem blissfully unaware of this irony, which is just as well. It would be difficult to cast the parsimonious Brigham Young as a prophet of counter-cyclical deficits and automatic stabilizers.

Despite its allegiance to an anachronistic model of economic thought, however, there is no denying the immense power of Arrington's work in *Great Basin Kingdom*. He brought to light a mass of new information and provided it with a coherent narrative (Posner's critique of Progressive economists notwithstanding). Even if that narrative has been problematized by later historians, as Topping rightly notes, it provided a fruitful starting point for future developments. One of the striking aspects of Topping's telling of Arrington's career, however, is the extent to which the story after *Great Basin Kingdom* becomes one of institutional as much as intellectual struggle. After the completion of his magnum opus, Arrington never reconsidered his master narrative of Mormon history. While he continued to perform the spade work of Mormon scholarship, it is almost as though his major interpretive work was completed with the publication of his first book. Even his later biography of Brigham Young does not seek to revisit the conclusions that he reached in *Great Basin Kingdom*.

Given the circumstances under which he worked, however, it is nothing short of remarkable that Arrington was able to continue producing scholarship as he did. His teaching load at Utah State was heavy, and the institution provided very little support for his scholarship. The result was that Arrington turned to a variety of studies and biographies commissioned and, more importantly, funded by corporate sponsors and de-

cedents. Furthermore, much of this work was less authored by Arrington than supervised by him. Indeed, to an extent that is shocking to contemporary academic norms, Arrington attached his name to books that were very nearly researched and written in their entirety by secretaries and research assistants. To be sure, none of these ghost writers has ever accused Arrington of skullduggery, and he was always effusive in his praise of them in the prefaces to the volumes (which he did apparently author). Nevertheless, his biographies of David Eccles and especially Edwin Wooley, for example, were largely penned by others. Indeed, it is jarring to read Topping's forthright narrative of the extent of Arrington's distance from these projects, only to be followed by his discussion of what these ghost-written books reveal about Arrington's thought. If he was indeed as distant as Topping suggests, it would seem that the answer to that question must often be "not very much." Indeed, the David Eccles biography entirely abandons Arrington's earlier Progressive framework for economic history, telling the story instead as a rags-to-riches glorification of American capitalism and individualism. Topping cites a private letter by Wallace Stegner on Arrington's book, which noted that David Eccles might just as easily have been cast as a home-grown example of the ruthless robber baron (156).

Ultimately, rather than looking in the production of these works for insight into Arrington's thought or sententiously criticizing him from the point of view of the contemporary academy, it is best to see what they reveal about the institutional basis of Mormon studies in the 1960s and 1970s. Arrington ran into difficulties in part because he lacked strong institutional support for his research, turning instead to wealthy benefactors with strong agendas of their own. Arrington had the freedom to pursue a professionally peripheral research agenda such as Mormonism at Utah State in part because the university did not expect its faculty to actively produce scholarship. The price was a lack of real institutional support. Tellingly, Topping recounts how, when Arrington considered leaving USU for the more supportive environment of the University of Wisconsin, the calculations included abandoning Mormon history for more mainstream topics (98). Given this dynamic, the production of scholarship on Mormon history required a heroic effort from under-supported academics such as Arrington. This lack of an institutional base is also evidenced by the fact that the field included so many independent scholars, such as Juanita Brooks or, later, Lester Bush.

Given the paucity of any strong institutional support, the invitation to serve as Church Historian in 1972 came to Arrington literally as a god-send. At last, an institution with substantial resources was willing to support the production of scholarship on Mormonism. The story of Arring-

ton's tenure as Church Historian has assumed the status of myth within Mormon studies. In the influential phrase applied by Davis Bitton, one of Arrington's assistant Church historians, it has become "Camelot," a place where scholars were given free rein in the archives and substantial resources to pursue the production of a range of works on Mormon history. The story, however, is always told as tragedy. In the end, Arrington and his associates fell victim to reactionary forces within the Church hierarchy implacably opposed to honest history. The result was the humiliating relocation of Arrington and his staff to the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Latter-day Saint History at Brigham Young University, restricted access to the Church archives, and a suspicious attitude of Church officials toward Mormon intellectuals that culminated in the September Six, a group of six writers excommunicated in September 1993.

Topping's treatment of this key period, however, is unusually shallow. I suspect that he (and perhaps Mormon historians in general) are still too close to these events to treat them as history. One expects a historian to approach his subject with a certain balance, attempting to understand the motivations and forces that give rise to events from a variety of perspectives. In his treatment of Camelot, however, Topping makes no effort to offer such a perspective. Rather, his interpretive framework is, from first to last, that offered up by the participants on Arrington's side of the events. In this story, the historians pursue a noble goal that is ultimately sabotaged by irrational and vindictive "right-wingers" and "red baiters" within the Church hierarchy. Toward the end of the book, Topping quotes a letter from Arrington's son Carl, explaining clearly who were the villains in the story: "G. Homer Durham was a scumbag and invertebrate. Gordon Hinckley is a shrewd and lying S.O.B. BYU is a bastion of mealy-mouths and apologists. Joseph Anderson was a fog who could be hoodwinked" (203). To be sure, Topping quotes the letter to contrast it with Arrington's moderate stance; and in his telling, Topping's tone is more even-handed. Nevertheless, his interpretation of events essentially coincides with that of Arrington the Younger, although his prose lacks the vituperative verve of Carl's polemic and reads rather more like partisan middle-brow journalism. His footnotes reveal that the only primary sources consulted for the chapter were the Leonard J. Arrington Papers at Utah State University. For example, he does not seem to have consulted the G. Homer Durham papers in the Marriott Library at the University of Utah, despite the fact that, as a member of the Seventy, Durham presided over the dismantling of Arrington's Camelot, ultimately replacing him as Church Historian.

The problem with Topping's narrative of events is not that he offers a critical assessment of the actions of Church leaders. Clearly, some

members of the Quorum of the Twelve reacted violently to such ultimately innocuous works as James B. Allen and Glen Leonard's *The Story of the Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976). It is also true that Arrington found himself in a bureaucratic battle with more powerful and wily players in the Church hierarchy. The immediate result was a lost decade and a half of scholarly access to key sources and a destructive climate of paranoia within Mormon studies. The long-term results may be seen today in the relative paucity of scholars in their forties at work on Mormon studies. We have the grand old men and dames who came of age during Arrington's tenure and a group of younger scholars for whom its vicissitudes are history rather than memory. There does, however, seem to be something of a lost generation of scholars—those who might have been graduate students in the 1980s and early 1990s—who were scared away from Mormon history.

The problem with Topping's Manichean narrative, however, is that it ultimately clouds our understanding of the events themselves. Hence, after informing his readers that the historians had no more implacable foe than Elder Boyd K. Packer, Topping tells us that "surprisingly" he gave a favorable report on *The Mormon Experience*, which Arrington co-authored with Davis Bitton. The event becomes inexplicable precisely because it does not fit into Topping's neat and Manichean narrative. Rather than dig deeper to make sense of events, however, Topping is content to stick with the interpretative framework bequeathed to him by the refugees from Arrington's Camelot. Admittedly, he would have faced a formidable research problem in trying to assemble sources giving a more complete picture, but the main barrier seems to have been Topping's absence of interest.⁴

Aside from his apparent lack of curiosity about the thinking and motivation of many of the key players in the drama surrounding Arrington's History Division, Topping also lacks critical distance when it comes to evaluating the ultimate merits of the project. The problem, of course, is that it is far from clear that the model made scholarly sense. The goal was to create what amounted to an academic center within the Church bureaucracy itself. Top scholars would be Church employees writing for both a scholarly and a Church audience. The model, however, has rather obvious drawbacks. First, because scholars would depend for their livelihoods on the Church, they would be unusually vulnerable to any pressure from ecclesiastical superiors, pressure that would inevitably be magnified within the bureaucracy by the institutional desire to align resources and policies with any directives from the Brethren. Given such realities, many non-Mormon readers would inevitably treat the productions of the system with suspicion. It also, however, placed the Church in

the awkward position of being tied directly to the particular interpretations put forward by its employees. Given these facts, it was naive to suppose that Church leaders would not take an interest in the work being produced by the History Division, judging it not simply in intellectual terms but also according to pastoral criteria.

Of course, there is a powerful argument to be made (one that I find persuasive) that open intellectual inquiry into Mormonism's past, including those aspects of the past that make some uncomfortable, is ultimately a good pastoral strategy. Ultimately, however, this is a theological and pastoral debate rather than a historiographic one. Furthermore, even accepting the religious and ecclesiastical value of such work, it is not at all clear why such inquiry is best done under the direct auspices of the Church. It is easy to understand how the ready access to archives and resources made Arrington's History Division seem like a lost Camelot; but in retrospect, the model itself seems ill conceived. At the end of the day, both the Church and its scholars are better off if, generally, the best and the brightest of its historians do not work for the Church. The Church benefits from not having to worry about the extent to which this or that interpretation of the past is "official." For their part, scholars are better off if they can offer their interpretations in the provisional and continually evolving manner of the academy, free of ecclesiastical anxieties and non-Mormon suspicion. According to Topping, Elder G. Homer Durham made this argument when the History Division was moved to BYU (124). Topping's narrative, unfortunately, lacks sufficient distance from its story; and in his simplified telling, Elder Durham is cast as Mordred. Despite the messy and acrimonious end of Camelot, however, with the benefit of hindsight, it seems clear that he had the better argument.

In 2005, the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute was reabsorbed into the LDS Church History Department in Salt Lake City. Topping notes the fact but adds sadly that, rather than pursuing the grand plans of Arrington's History Division, their work was to be confined to the production of the Joseph Smith Papers (227 note 55). Nostalgia for Arrington's History Division, however, should not obscure the fact that what seems to be emerging in Salt Lake is a new model for how the Church relates to Mormon scholarship. Rather than providing scholarly interpretations through its employees, it seems to be providing an infrastructure of published documents and modern library space for scholars who are not employees to explore the Mormon past. In the end, this strikes me as a much more sensible model than Arrington's glittering Camelot. Indeed, for all the romance and drama associated with the History Division of the 1970s, that ill-begotten institutional arrangement is not Arrington's greatest legacy. Rather that legacy lies in revealing the Mor-

mon past as a fit subject for serious scholarship and in providing two generations of scholars with an interpretative framework to use, attack, and—one hopes—ultimately progress beyond. In short, Arrington as author and historian is a more compelling figure than Arrington as the center of a lost golden age. On the ultimate merits of Camelot, I suspect that history will side with Mordred.

Notes

1. Wilfrid Prest, *William Blackstone: Law and Letters in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press) 4.

2. It is a testament to the anti-theoretical character of these thinkers that they do not even appear in the standard textbook on the history of economic theory. See generally Mark Blaug, *Economic Theory in Retrospect*, 5th ed. (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

3. Richard Posner, *Overcoming Law* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), 427.

4. Such efforts might have revealed, for example, that Packer has generally had a far more positive assessment of the value of Mormon history than Topping suggests. Packer has, for example, been one of the chief proponents in the upper councils of the Church for historic preservation, working to protect pioneer buildings from the often mindless destructiveness of the Church Building Department.

Narnia's Aslan, Earth's Darwin, and Heaven's God

Wesley J. Wildman

Note: This sermon was delivered at the Marsh Chapel, Boston University, Boston University Worship Service, Sunday, June 21, 2009. Readings: Psalm 8, Job 38:1-7, John 1:1-5

Text: "*Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?*" (Job 38:4a)

I

I consider myself an evangelical Christian of the liberal sort, but I have many evangelical Christian relatives, friends, and students who are extremely conservative. Despite mutual respect, it appears that I have little in common with them theologically. My outlook on life and faith leaves me feeling dismayed by what strikes me as their doctrinal and moral rigidity, appalled by their dismissal of the wisdom of other religions, and a little frightened by their willingness to vest absolute authority in an allegedly plain reading of the Bible.

But my self-righteous theological appraisal does not go unchallenged. From their point of view, I am disloyal to what they see as the supernaturally established tradition of the Christian faith, dangerously cavalier about the fragile moral fabric of society, and all too willing to besmirch the purity of divine revelation with arrogant reliance on human reason and experience. They wouldn't hesitate to declare, with relief, that they share little in common theologically with *me*.

At the personal level, this liberal-conservative difference is manageable, so long as we don't have to resolve disagreements about biblical authority, so long as we care for one another, and so long as we remember to laugh at ourselves from time to time. At

the cultural level, however, the liberal-conservative difference has the proportions of an unbridgeable chasm, which makes it seem deadly serious. Often enough, it is a hateful and deadly disagreement. You know about the murder on May 31, 2009, of late-term abortion provider Dr. George Tiller inside the Reformation Lutheran Church of Wichita, Kansas, as he prepared to welcome worshippers into the sanctuary and talked with a friend about taking his grandchildren to Disneyworld. This act of violence shows how deadly the disagreement can become as effectively as any of the other disastrous consequences of religious hatred.

Most fundamentalist and conservative evangelical groups decried Dr. Tiller's murder; but others, such as Rev. Fred Phelps's Westboro Baptist Church, said Dr. Tiller got what he deserved and even picketed his funeral. Meanwhile, the violent rhetoric that inspires extremists to act out their distorted heroic fantasies continues. Sometimes it seems that the United States is only a small step away from the religious violence that has been so disastrous between Catholics and Protestants in Ireland, or between Sunnis and Shiites in the Middle East.

Such disagreements among religious people are sad and strange, in some ways. After all, we do have a great deal in common, including our love of children, our preference for peaceful neighborhoods, our quest for health and happiness, and our conviction that life is best lived in relation to an ultimate reality that suffuses everyday events and transcends everyday concerns. But despite these shared life goals, mutual suspicion and hostility are very real.

As I address this issue today, I will not take up the abortion controversy, despite our shared awareness of how painful that topic is on all sides. Rather I will focus on another front of the disagreement, namely, the evolution wars. As far as I know, the evolution controversy has not produced fanatical murders. But it surfaces the substantive disagreements clearly, as we shall see.

This sermon will increase neither peace in the world nor consensus about creation and evolution among Christian subgroups. Keep in mind that I am not addressing the wider debate over evolution between secular and religious perspectives. Rather, I am speaking to a dispute among religious people, all of whom accept that the world is God's creation and thereafter have to figure out

whether and how to incorporate evolutionary theory into that basic conviction. I hope to demonstrate that each group of Christians has something valuable to learn from the other.

II

The dispute among Christians over the theological implications of evolution arises from four deeper disagreements.

First, we have conflicting visions of reality. The conservative evangelical imaginative world is defined by a God who knows the world intimately, who cares about each one of us personally, who acts freely according to divine purposes, and who answers our prayers when we ask in confident faith. The liberal evangelical imaginative world is defined by a God who is beyond measure and understanding, speaking from the whirlwind of creativity in ways that are sometimes difficult to comprehend. One God is scaled to human needs and interests and sits awkwardly with evolution, while the other is vastly beyond every worldly agenda and suits evolution more naturally.

Second, we have conflicting visions of authority. The conservative evangelical vests authority in definitive divine revelation, expressed decisively through the Bible, the Pope, or some other religious touchstone. The liberal evangelical vests authority in traditions of interpretation, accepting diversity, contradictions, and struggles within those traditions as unavoidable and valuable. If evolution contradicts the authoritative revelation of the nature of God, then evolution is easily rejected for one side, while the other side naturally seeks for a creative synthesis.

Third, we have conflicting visions of history. The conservative evangelical regards culture and civilization and scientific discovery as the ambiguous stage for the drama of salvation but never salvific in itself and always subordinate to theological truth. The liberal evangelical sees history as a process of development that can be appreciated as part of what salvation means and thus as able to challenge traditionally received religious beliefs. One side has little reason to respect scientific theories such as evolution if they contradict revealed truth, while the other side receives evolution as a magnificent divine revelation about the world that must be taken seriously no matter what theology says.

Finally, we have conflicting visions of church. The conserva-

tive evangelical sees correctness of doctrine as a vital form of religious purity and will sacrifice church unity to protect it. Meanwhile, the liberal evangelical tries hard to tolerate doctrinal variations because certainty about such matters is impossible and because unity of believers matters more than purity of beliefs. One side handles tension between God-beliefs and evolution by rejecting evolution to protect doctrinal purity, while the other side minimizes the tension in the name of Christian unity and in hopes that God and evolution can somehow be reconciled.

III

Let me be clear: In my view, conservative evangelicals who reject evolution in favor of creationism or who embrace the neo-creationism of intelligent design theory make a serious error in judgment. Yet they understand what is theologically at stake in evolution far better than most of their liberal counterparts who casually resolve the issue by declaring that God creates through evolution, without pausing to think through what that must mean.

Charles Darwin, whose two-hundredth birthday we celebrated in 2009, began his scholarly career as a convinced believer that God intentionally conceived, designed, and created the world in roughly the form Darwin encountered it. As a young man, he read and accepted the still-famous design arguments of his countryman William Paley. After all, he couldn't explain the wondrous structure of the eye any other way; he had to assume a personal, benevolent, attentive, and active designer-God. As his studies widened and deepened, however, Darwin's theological views slowly shifted. Though he never discovered the DNA mechanism by which traits were transmitted across generations, he was confident that trait preservation and transmission occurred and that random variations of traits made organisms more and less fit to survive the rigors of any given environment. He believed that this process of trait inheritance, random variation, and natural selection in competitive environments was powerful enough to explain the origin of species, which is the name he gave to his most famous book, published in 1859. And he assembled a formidable array of evidence to support his theory—evidence that is extraordinarily difficult to explain apart from the evolutionary hypothesis.

Unsurprisingly, Darwin's view of God changed as the secrets

of the natural world opened before his astonishingly perceptive eyes. God was no longer necessary to explain the particulars of the world and its teeming life forms. Rather, God's domain was the creation of the potentialities of the world-as-a-whole, a world that answered to the description that the theory of evolution provided. Unsurprisingly, to Darwin, God gradually came to seem less personal, benevolent, attentive, and active. Surely such a loving, personal Deity would have created in another way, a way that involved less trial and error, fewer false starts, fewer mindless species extinctions, fewer pointless cruelties, and less reliance on predation to sort out the fit from the unfit. Darwin arguably never lost his faith in God. Rather, he believed that God created through the evolutionary process, but his growing knowledge of that process dramatically transformed his view of God, which left him ill at ease with the anthropomorphic personal theism of his day and at odds with friends and colleagues who believed in a personal, benevolent, attentive, and active divine being.

Christians and other theists who casually assert that God creates through evolution—as if there is no theological problem with this assertion—should pause and consider Darwin's faith journey. Darwin was theologically more perceptive than many of his liberal endorsers. He knew that evolution puts enormous stress on the idea of God. Evolution makes belief in a personal, benevolent, attentive, and active Deity far more difficult. It casts a pall over the moral clarity that most people want to see in the God they worship and serve. Darwin felt the difficulty. Many theologians since Darwin have struggled with the problem. Do you feel the challenge? Or do you casually meld evolutionary theory and belief in a personal, benevolent, attentive, and active God as if there is no problem?

IV

Many of my conservative evangelical Christian brothers and sisters who reject evolutionary theory feel acutely the problem that Darwin felt. They instinctively grasp that their personal, benevolent, attentive, and active God could not possibly have created the world as Darwin described it. Such a God would be morally unrecognizable to them, a kind of heartless gambler over the lives and well-being of Earth's creatures. This picture would con-

tradict their morally clear and homey worldview, which is borne up by a God of pure love and perfect goodness. Because they take on authority the proposition that God is personal, benevolent, attentive, and active, they know with confidence that Darwin must have been wrong.

To see the power of this argument, consider C. S. Lewis's creation story. It is in a lesser-known volume of his Narnia Chronicles called *The Magician's Nephew*. The children in that story are present when the great lion Aslan creates Narnia and its creatures. The method of creation is beautifully intimate and personal: Aslan sings in a majestic voice, with spectacularly complex undertones and rippling overtones, and the world awakens around him. Each creature struggles up and out of the Narnian soil, awakening to a new world, personally called into being by the Lion God himself. I find the story enormously moving. You see, C. S. Lewis grasped the point that Darwin also felt so forcefully: The God Lewis believed in could not create in a way much different than Aslan did. Good literature is able to test the coherence of the "God creates through evolution" idea. So long as God is conceived as a personal, benevolent, attentive, and active being, like Aslan, the literary acid test shows that God cannot and would not create through evolution. They just don't fit.

The conservative evangelical Christians who resist evolutionary theory for theological reasons are shrewdly targeting a problem for their God-infused worldview, perhaps the sharpest problem that worldview has ever faced. They are not tiptoeing around, pretending that the God they trust every day somehow creates through evolution. They feel the contradiction and "just say no" to evolution. I admire that decisiveness. I, too, feel the dilemma they feel. Since a personal, benevolent, attentive, and active Deity cannot create through evolution, either that view of God or acceptance of evolution must go. Unlike them, however, I am not in any doubt about the exceptional robustness of the theory of evolution. It is as stable a scientific theory as the atomic theory of matter.

For me, therefore, the choice leads to a different conclusion: God the creator is not a personal, benevolent, attentive, and active Deity. We can preserve those affirmations symbolically, but they no longer refer to a divine being with intentions and awareness,

with feelings and intelligence, with plans and powers to act. Rather, they refer to the ground of being itself, to the creative and fecund power source in the depths of nature, to the value structures and potentialities that the world manifests. They refer to the God beyond God, which is to say the truly ultimate reality that hovers behind and beneath and beyond the symbolic Gods we create and deploy to satisfy our personal needs, to make sense of our world, and to legitimate the exercise of social control.

V

You may be surprised to hear me praising the theological perceptiveness of the conservative evangelical resistance to evolutionary theory while also praising evolutionary theory itself. And you may be taken aback by my affirmation of the God beyond God, with the associated critique of more popular views of God as a personal, benevolent, attentive, and active being. I do not speak to you this way, however, to convince you to agree with me about God; I understand this view of God to be a bit of a stretch for most people. Rather, my aim is to convince you that there is a big problem trying to fit popular personal theism together with evolutionary theory—a bigger problem than many Christian believers and even many theologians are ready to admit. Ironically, it is the conservative evangelical resistance to evolutionary theory that best expresses this point. Conservative evangelicals who reject evolution believe in a God who could create the world only in something like the way Aslan creates Narnia.

But Darwin showed us a different world and that revelation demands not atheism—not for Darwin and not for us today either—but a different conception of the divine. You may not think it is necessary to embrace my solution to this problem, and I would not blame you for looking for some other solution. But I am confident that we will never understand the real passion and coherence of the anti-evolution position until we grasp the problem that evolutionary theory poses for personal theism.

The luminous Narnian creation story helps to confirm what evolutionary theory shows us, namely, that God did not create in Aslan's way. It also helps us grasp why a personal, benevolent, attentive, and active divine being could not and would not create through evolution. One of our readings has God interrogate Job,

“Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?” Well, according to Job’s way of thinking, we were nowhere to be found, so we have to approach these matters with humility. But that does not mean we should be casual in our theological reasoning. Conservative evangelical anti-evolutionists and neo-creationist ID theorists understand the inconsistency and are willing to protect their homey worldview at any cost—even if it means rejecting a scientific theory as thoroughly supported as evolutionary theory and their attendant migration into an anti-intellectual cultural backwater.

Are you as careful and consistent as they are? Do you believe in a God who would and could create the world in the way Aslan created Narnia? Such a God could not and would not and did not create the world that evolutionary theory shows us. So how do you resolve the theological puzzle? When God speaks to you from the evolutionary whirlwind, do you hear a personal, benevolent, attentive, and active divine being addressing you, soul to soul? Or do you hear the abysmal ground of being rumbling in fecund creativity, morally impenetrable, imponderably beautiful, and defying rational grasp? My spirituality is tuned to the latter conception, to the God beyond God, so I can afford to acknowledge the theological perceptiveness of my conservative evangelical anti-evolutionist brothers and sisters. What about you? What sort of God could, would, and did create the world through evolution?

This question haunted Darwin and we owe it to the great man to consider it carefully. And to the God who speaks to us from the whirlwind, we owe our very best efforts to absorb what is revealed to us about the world we inhabit and to incorporate that into our faith journeys as honestly and consistently as we can.

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ABOUT THE ARTIST

John Sproul

John Sproul grew up in Simi Valley, California, and Orem, Utah, and studied art at the University of Utah and Brigham Young University. John and his wife, Emily, who is also an artist, lived for many years in Los Angeles before recently moving to Salt Lake City. They now live in the Sugarhouse neighborhood with their three sons where John serves as high priests' group leader and chairs the community council's Arts and Culture Committee.

John begins his pictures by finding the desired expressive gesture and body language, but the surfaces of his paintings and drawings are as intriguing as the subject. He builds layers of acrylic paint onto paper or canvas to create a richly textured surface. The colors vary greatly in value and intensity but are layered in such a way as to create a vibrance and a sense of history—as if the surface has been used for many years. The sense of history continues in how John draws and paints, leaving early blocking in and gestural drawings in place as he establishes the final position and gesture of the figure.

John's drawings and paintings are centered around the human figure, which he uses to explore personal and universal themes. Referring to his work as “a dialogue of thought, both conscious and subconscious, realized in paint,” he believes that “one can come to know the spirit or self through the body and by extension the universal through the individual, the infinite through the finite.” In his work, John uses the figure and body language to reveal individual characteristics but also seeks to resonate with viewers on a larger level, as fellow human beings. As viewers, we bring an instinctual understanding of body language and the subtle cues of facial expression and gesture to our understanding of the work and a communication is established. We identify with the figures in a way that, as John says, “we are aware of, but never able to define.”

More of John's work can be seen on his website: www.johnsproul.com.

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