

# DIALOGUE

a journal of mormon thought

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## LETTERS

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### *Eight-Cow Wife*

Holly Welker's article, "A Price Far above Rubies versus Eight Cows: What's a Virtuous Woman Worth?", 43, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 37–58, is an entertaining but misleading article on the popular LDS movie *Johnny Lingo*.

Johnny Lingo is a handsome and popular Pacific Island young man who is mocked by his fellow islanders when he pays eight cows to marry Mahana. Mahana blossoms from an awkward and unattractive young girl into a beautiful young woman because Johnny Lingo believes in her. Johnny demonstrates his belief in Mahana by paying, to the surprise of the village, a high price for her hand in marriage.

In today's politically correct environment it is easy to criticize such a simple plot and examine the story through feminist theology as Ms. Welker did. However, such a review is misplaced and neglects to acknowledge the time frame within which the movie was made (1969) and, more importantly, the powerful message it conveys.

Simply stated, we all have experienced the positive influence of someone "believing in us." For me, I was told by a respected law professor in my first year of law school, that I did not have the intellectual capability to succeed in law school let alone as an attorney, and should pursue another field of study. Fortunately for me, I had other mentors who thought otherwise. They recognized my legal ability and encouraged me to continue to study law. After thirty years of a highly successful law practice, which has included two separate assignments in

the U.S. Supreme Court, service in the U.S. Senate, authoring over a dozen law review articles, and numerous special achievement awards for my work as a federal attorney, I can testify that the simple message of *Johnny Lingo* is very important.

It does make a difference if someone believes in you. Many members of the Church have been influenced by their bishop, Young Men, or Young Women leaders to attend college, go on a mission, and be loving and faithful husbands and wives. Most important, our Savior believes in us. During our mortal experience, we have been called to administer His church and teach His gospel. Yes, it does matter if someone believes in you.

G. Kevin Jones  
Salt Lake City

### *Holly Welker Responds*

G. Kevin Jones asserts in his letter that my review "is misplaced and neglects to acknowledge the time frame within which the movie was made (1969)." The publication date of the movie is stated in the first sentence of my review but ultimately is irrelevant to the attitude toward women in the movie: Sexism is sexism, even when it's old.

Jones also asserts that my review ignores the "simple message of *Johnny Lingo*," which is that "it does make a difference if someone believes in you." I certainly agree with this statement and addressed the idea in my review. I wrote:

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 . . . [but] 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.

Jones should acknowledge the fact that it is not my reading of the film but the film itself that minimizes the importance of being supported by people who believe in you.

Holly Welker  
Salt Lake City

### ***Borders on Pornography***

I am a long-time subscriber to *Dialogue* and thoroughly enjoy the scholarly articles that it features. I must inform you, however, that I found the fiction section of the Spring 2010 issue disturbing. In my opinion it borders on pornography and is not worthy of LDS publication.

Robert J. McCue  
Victoria, British Columbia

### ***Levi Peterson Responds***

I continue to endorse the defense of the erotic in literature that I made in the preface to *Greening Wheat: Fifteen Mormon Short Stories*, the collection of Mormon short stories that I edited (Midvale, Utah: Orion Books, 1983; distributed by Signature Books). I say there that “the moral purposes [of literature] are served, not by censorship and exclusion of the problematic or violent or forbidden but rather by the achievement of breadth, balance, and proportion” (ix-x). I believe both my story and that of Lisa Downing achieve those qualities.

Levi Peterson  
Issaquah, Washington

### ***Editor's Note:***

I regret that Robert J. McCue found the fiction section of the spring issue “disturbing.” However, I find his charge that the stories in that section “border . . . on pornography” incomprehensible. There is nothing in either piece intended to titillate, nothing gratuitous or lewd. Levi Peterson's story is convincingly narrated from the perspective of a teenaged boy baffled and delighted by his emergent sexual consciousness, and Lisa Torcasso Downing's story tries to fathom the effects of childhood abuse of one partner in a marriage with respect and sympathy, even reverence. Both stories approach their subjects with the candor, wit, and grace that are appropriate to an artistic consideration of God's most puzzling gift to humanity.

## NOTES AND COMMENTS

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### **Road Trip: The Strange Travels of Mark Sanford and Brigham Young**

*William P. MacKinnon*

*Absence makes the heart grow fonder – Thomas H. Bayly (ca. 1818)*

In the backwash from the 2008 U.S. presidential campaign, scandals at virtually all levels of government have plagued the American political landscape. Governors have been especially prominent in the media-intensive cavalcade of investigations, confessions, promises of redemption, and resignations. Illinois faces the prospect of having consecutive governors occupying the state penitentiary simultaneously. In New York, peccadillos atop the executive branch have come with such stunning rapidity that as many as six people may end up serving as the Empire State's governor and lieutenant governor in less than two years.

Among the strangest of these political spectacles is the ongoing soap opera triggered by the bizarre behavior of Mark Sanford, governor of South Carolina. Sanford's indignant wife, Jenny, has exited the gubernatorial mansion, divorced him (final in March 2010), published a tell-all memoir, and embarked on a national book tour that has become a triumphant antithesis of the traditional credo of the embarrassed American political wife: "Stand by your man." Meanwhile, an embattled Governor Sanford has held tearful press conferences unaccompanied as he fends off cries for impeachment, censure, and resignation from South Carolina's legislature as well as a continuing investigation into his admittedly improper use of state funds for personal purposes. How did the ongoing Sanford scandal come about, and is it unique?

South Carolinians, if not most Americans, were mystified in June of 2009 to find that Governor Sanford had gone missing, vanished without explanation. He left behind not only his puzzled family but his theoretically omnipresent security detail.

For the better part of a week, Governor Sanford's embarrassed

staff tried gamely but unsuccessfully to deal with press inquiries. Initially the story was that no one knew where he was. Pressed aggressively by reporters, the story morphed into a staff explanation that Sanford must have gone hiking along the mountainous Appalachian Trail to recharge his batteries after a stressful legislative session. No one knew on which segment of the Georgia-to-Maine track he had sought renewal or how he could be contacted.

Bauer, South Carolina's lieutenant governor, also left out of the loop, was not amused. He commented publicly: "I cannot take lightly that his staff has not had communication with him for more than four days, and that no one including his family, knows his whereabouts."<sup>1</sup> A state senator cogently asked who would have been able to authorize use of the South Carolina National Guard in Sanford's absence.

On June 24, the next bizarre chapter emerged. Governor Sanford had reappeared at the Atlanta airport in Georgia after returning unannounced from Buenos Aires, the capital of Argentina, far from either the Appalachian Trail or South Carolina. He had, Sanford explained, been tangoing with a woman other than the Palmetto State's First Lady.

Speculation about the impact of this extraordinary chain of events on Sanford's political career began immediately, fueled by the maverick governor's months-long refusal to apply for South Carolina's share of billions of dollars in federal stimulus aid at a time when the state's economy was reeling from the worst recession in seventy-five years. At stake also has been the viability of Sanford as a possible Republican presidential nominee in 2012, if not his current hold on South Carolina's gubernatorial chair.

Citizens of other states tempted to indulge in smug reactions of "it couldn't happen here" might wish to recall that it already has in at least one other place—Utah. In that case, Governor Brigham Young was involved; his unexplained five-week absence from his duties in the spring of 1857 took place on a scale, in a direction, and with a flourish that makes the Governor Sanford episode seem bland. As with Sanford's disappearance, Governor Young's absence had an international flavor as well as national political implications.

As early as January 1857, Brigham Young began to drop hints to relatives and Church colleagues that he was thinking of a trek



north to Oregon Territory to inspect the new Mormon Indian mission—Fort Limhi—on the Salmon River. By spring, he had made up his mind and, on April 24, left for Oregon, his first absence from Utah since 1848 and the last one before his death in 1877.

For relatives, Young devised a cover story that the trip was for the benefit of his health. This explanation lacked credibility, given the fact that he had been virtually prostrate since the death of his second counselor, Jedediah Morgan Grant, in December 1856, and the daunting, still-snow-packed wilderness awaiting him in the mountains of southern Oregon.

To his new boss in Washington, D.C., U.S. Secretary of State Lewis Cass, Young offered no explanation. He simply left his post, without either informing Cass or applying for the customary leave of absence, a lapse that later prompted Congress to pass legislation requiring territorial governors to seek such authorization. Unlike South Carolina today, in 1857 there was no lieutenant governor in Utah to assume the territory's executive duties. Next in the line of authority after the governor was Utah's territorial secretary, but that position had never been properly filled after the murder of incumbent Almon W. Babbitt in 1856. Nominally in charge of Utah's executive functioning during Governor Young's five-week absence was merchant William H. Hooper, a confidant whom Young had appointed interim territorial secretary on a de facto basis, without the authority or federal sanction to do so.

Why had Governor Brigham Young embarked on an arduous trek of a thousand miles—mostly outside of Utah—at a hazardous season of the year and at a time when he was in poor health?

Historian David L. Bigler of Roseville, California, the leading authority on Fort Limhi, has argued that Young was motivated, not by the need for a relaxing vacation but by a desire for strategic reasons to examine firsthand the terrain in southern Oregon Territory as well as in what later became southwestern Montana Territory. As Bigler sees it, Young viewed Fort Limhi as a way station for a possible mass Mormon migration out of Utah in the event of a renewal of troubles with the U.S. government. Possible destinations for such a move were either the isolated Bitterroot Valley of Montana or some unspecified haven on the Pacific Coast.<sup>2</sup>

As evidence that this tour was anything but routine, Bigler notes that Governor Young took an entourage of 142 follow-

ers—including the entire First Presidency, all but one of the Quorum of Twelve then in Utah, six Nauvoo Legion (militia) generals, and two Indian chiefs of the Northern Wasatch Utah and Pahvant Ute tribes. Did Young notify Oregon’s governor, George Curry, or his superintendent of Indian affairs of this impending visit? He did not, ignoring these worthies as he had Secretary Cass.

Whether the government of Argentina took note of Governor Sanford’s 2009 visit is not known, but we do know that the two European powers with possessions on North America’s Pacific Coast—Russia and the United Kingdom—were aware of Young’s trip soon after his return to Salt Lake City in May. This sensitivity arose as a consequence of speculation that welled up in California and the Pacific Northwest about a Mormon exodus from Utah.

So alarmed were the Russians about the possible, uncompensated loss of Russian America (Alaska) to a Mormon seizure, that in December 1857 Tsar Alexander II authorized the beginning of negotiations with the U.S. government to sell the colony.

Similarly, British concerns about the defensibility of Vancouver Island—a destination long of interest to the Mormons—was such that Queen Victoria removed the area from the ineffectual administration of the Hudson’s Bay Company and created the crown colony of British Columbia in June 1858.<sup>3</sup>

What followed Brigham Young’s return to Salt Lake City on May 26, 1857, was James Buchanan’s decision to replace him as governor and, two days later, General Winfield Scott’s creation of the U.S. Army’s Utah Expedition to escort Young’s successor west. The fat was in the fire. The Utah War was on.

Two years later, in June 1859, Brigham Young asked Utah’s territorial delegate in Congress, Dr. John M. Bernhisel, to write a memo setting forth his conversations over the past several years with President James Buchanan. Among the undated interactions that Bernhisel described was one that probably took place in early 1858. In this White House meeting, nearly a year after Brigham Young’s mysterious, unauthorized, five-week absence from Utah’s gubernatorial chair, President Buchanan was still pressing Bernhisel for an explanation about exactly where Young had gone and why.<sup>4</sup> They were the same questions that began circulating in South Carolina during the summer of 2009.

Did any of Brigham Young’s lonely wives storm out of Salt Lake

City's Beehive House in 1857 as Jenny Sanford did in Columbia, South Carolina, during 2009? The answer is both "no" and "sort of." Young minimized the likelihood of connubial dissatisfaction in his household(s) through the firm exercise of patriarchal authority and the shrewd decision, unlike Governor Sanford's, to take three of his more than twenty wives with him to Oregon. Nonetheless—for reasons unrelated to the Fort Limhi trek—in 1873, one of Brigham Young's disaffected plural wives, Ann Eliza Webb Young, did indeed leave his bed and board and forced him to appear in a Salt Lake City divorce court to answer charges of neglect, cruelty, and desertion. In 1876, the former Mrs. Young wrote an autobiography about her marital experiences, as Mrs. Sanford has done, and embarked on a sensational, long-running, cross-country lecture tour to exploit the turmoil in her domestic arrangement with Utah's occasionally absent governor.<sup>5</sup>

### Notes

1. Kate Linthicum, "South Carolina Governor Checks in after Taking a Hike," *Los Angeles Times*, June 24, 2009; <http://articles.latimes.com/2009/jun/24/nation/na-missing-gov24> (accessed March 28, 2010).

2. For the most complete description of Brigham Young's 1857 trek to Fort Limhi and analysis of its Utah War implications, see two works by David L. Bigler: *Fort Limhi: The Mormon Adventure in Oregon Territory, 1855–1858* (Spokane, Wash.: The Arthur H. Clark Co., 2003), 135–60; "Mormon Missionaries, the Utah War, and the 1858 Bannock Raid on Fort Limhi," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 53 (Autumn 2003): 30–53. See also William P. MacKinnon, *At Sword's Point, Part I: A Documentary History of the Utah War to 1858* (Norman: The Arthur H. Clark Co., an imprint of the University of Oklahoma Press, 2008), 143–45, 443 note 48.

3. For these politico-geographic consequences and 1857–58 European fears of a mass Mormon exodus to the Pacific Coast, see MacKinnon, "Epilogue to the Utah War: Impact and Legacy," *Journal of Mormon History* 29 (Fall 2003): 247–48, and his *At Sword's Point, Part I*, 439–44.

4. John M. Bernhisel, "Account of Conversations with President James Buchanan," June 1859, LDS Church History Library.

5. Jenny Sanford, *Staying True* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2010). Ann Eliza Webb Young titled her autobiography *Wife No. 19* (Hartford, Conn.: Dustin, Gilman, 1876), and revised it as *Life in Mormon Bondage* (Philadelphia: Aldine, 1908). The biography and fictional account about

Ann Eliza's life are Irving Wallace, *The Twenty-Seventh Wife* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1961) and David Ebershoff, *The Nineteenth Wife: A Novel* (New York: Random House, 2008).

## René Girard and Mormon Scripture: A Response

*Joseph M. Spencer*

This short piece responds to Mack C. Stirling's article, "Violence in the Scriptures: Mormonism and the Cultural Theory of René Girard," 43, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 59–105. I offer a counter-interpretation of what I take to be (1) the thrust of Girard's own work on scripture and (2) the implications of that thrust for Girardian interpretation of specifically Mormon scripture.

### Scripture through the Girardian Lens

Scripture, as scripture, is inconvenient. The Book of Mormon is exemplary in this regard. It appears in the hands of two young men or women on one's doorstep without warning, and yet it impatiently demands uncompromised attention from its reader. Indeed, not only does the Book of Mormon close by asking its readers to rethink the whole of world history carefully in light of the book (Moro. 10:3), but it also dares to assume that the pondering reader will naturally come to trust that the book is true even before asking God (Moro. 10:4).<sup>1</sup> The Book of Mormon's Old World predecessor—the Christian Bible—might be said to be slightly less inconvenient than the Book of Mormon (at least for believing Mormons). Offering recourse to the tangles of translation issues, to typological and allegorical readings justified by the relationship between the two testaments, and to a variety of rival but equally canonical traditions uncovered by historians and tex-

tual critics, the Bible provides the wary reader with a number of ways to get around passages with which one is not perfectly comfortable. Indeed, in an obviously reductive way (but not therefore without some truth), one might suggest that a major thread running through the history of biblical interpretation is the sustained attempt to render convenient what began as a decidedly inconvenient collection of texts. At least to some extent, the history of reading the Bible is the history of the battle between those who would convert scripture into something convenient and those who stubbornly insist on scripture's essential inconvenience. Among those currently battling in behalf of scripture's inconvenience is René Girard.

The evolution of Girard's work—which led to and follows from his conversion from atheism to Catholicism—is nicely summed up in Girard's recent and appropriately titled book, *Evolution and Conversion*.<sup>2</sup> Having developed, through work in comparative literature and comparative religion,<sup>3</sup> a unique anthropological theory about the nature of myth and the origins of culture, Girard discovered what he has since defended as the Bible's remarkably distinctive place in world literature.<sup>4</sup> His work, starting with *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World* and continuing into the present, amounts to a systematic defense of scripture's indispensable inconvenience.<sup>5</sup>

Of course, for Girard, scripture is inconvenient in a very particular sense. He sees scripture as that literature whose burden it is to reveal the nature of mythology. Since Sterling has, in the article referred to above, provided a summary of Girard's basic anthropological theory, explicating myth's obfuscatory function, I need not outline the theory here. Rather, I would like to contextualize and clarify the stakes of Girard's project, touching on important Girardian points not emphasized in Sterling's discussion.

In large part, Girard's claim about scripture is framed as a polemic against the arguments of students of comparative religion. As Girard summarizes their position: "For centuries the most respected scholars have declared that the Gospels are merely one myth among many, and have succeeded in convincing most people [of the idea]."<sup>6</sup> But Girard points out one crucial difference between the Passion narratives and the apparently parallel myths of the dying and rising God: It is only in the Christian story that

the one put to death is recognized as innocent. Whereas in every mythological account, the person/god persecuted and/or put to death is clearly presented as guilty, in the Gospels Jesus is innocent and that innocence “is advertised widely, and becomes the most talked-about and well-known news.”<sup>7</sup>

In short, though innocent victims had long been put to death to avert chaos, and though Jesus Christ was in many ways just another of those victims, there was a crucial difference between those events and what happened on Golgotha. Not only was Jesus an innocent victim, but His disciples *proclaimed*—and eventually convinced the world—that he was an innocent victim.<sup>8</sup> It was precisely through the preaching of Christ’s innocent death that the scapegoat mechanism—which *had* been “hidden since the foundation of the world”—was fully revealed and, through this definitive revelation, effectively frustrated. The preaching of Christ’s apostles, coupled in particular with the actual textual production of the New Testament, marked the beginning of a whole history of demystification and demythologization, often unconsciously rooted in Christian scripture.<sup>9</sup>

For Girard, the inconvenience of scripture consists in its unsettling of society, in its essentially revolutionary character vis-à-vis the status quo. But if Christian scripture is straightforward in denouncing the violence of the scapegoat mechanism, why is it necessary for Girard to battle on behalf of scripture’s inconvenient character?

Ironically, as Girard is careful to point out, Christian scripture—even as it reveals the sacrificial mechanism at the root of culture—can be read sacrificially instead of redemptively. A whole chapter of *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World* is dedicated to outlining the relationship between this all-too-common “sacrificial reading” and the history of Christianity after the writing of the New Testament.<sup>10</sup> As Girard summarizes: “Historical Christianity covers the texts [of scripture] with a veil of sacrifice. Or, to change the metaphor, it immolates them in the (albeit splendid) tomb of Western culture.”<sup>11</sup> Moreover, because Christianity has, historically speaking, determined to read the Christian scriptures as if they justified persecutory violence, rather than definitively revealing its wickedness, it has unfortunately been possible to dismiss Christian scripture as yet another exam-

ple of the violent nature of religion. The irony, however, is that this dismissal of Christian scripture is done, according to Girard, in the unnamed name of Christian scripture.<sup>12</sup>

Still more ironically, Girard himself has in part contributed to the Christian/anti-Christian dismissal of Christian scripture. In *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*, Girard argues that the Epistle to the Hebrews founded the traditional sacrificial reading of Christian scripture and that it is thus, in some sense, out of place in the New Testament.<sup>13</sup> Girard has more recently described this “hasty and wrong-headed dismissal of the Epistle to the Hebrews” as a “mistake,” and acknowledged that the error served to make of him “someone who could be used for anti-Christian propaganda.”<sup>14</sup> Girard’s treatment of Hebrews made it possible to see him as yet another advocate of a very particular historical Jesus, one who would have been opposed to historical Christianity had he lived to see it because his actual message in the first century had really amounted to a bland ethical prescription for human flourishing, well-suited to modern liberal sensibilities.

Still more lamentable, in many ways, is the fact that the same “uncorrected Girard”—that is, the over-hasty Girard of *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*—can also be used by Christians with humanistic leanings to purge the Bible, Thomas Jefferson-like, of everything that offends their ideological sensibilities. That is, it is possible (selectively) to construe Girard’s theory as outlining a hermeneutic methodology that legitimizes removing anything from the scriptures that appears or might be used to justify religious violence.

Such readings make scripture more convenient: Purging scripture of everything that disagrees with their own (generally pacifistic) ideologies, such readers end up with a slimmer, less offensive volume of (what they regard as) unquestionably inspired texts. Girard’s name thus all too often becomes a trump card to be played when one hopes to avoid having to do the kind of painstakingly inconvenient textual work necessary to sort out what scripture has to say—the kind of work that is visible on almost every page of Girard’s writings. Much “Girardian” work, as a result, is remarkably uninformed—as much about Girard’s own larger project as about the nuances and difficulties of the scriptural passages dealt with (or, more correctly, not dealt with).



Girard, in sum, does not provide the key to determining which scriptural texts should be accepted or dismissed; he calls for a closer reading of *all* scripture with an eye to the way that it progressively reveals human nature and its complex relationship to violence.

### **A Girardian Approach to the Book of Mormon**

I would like to explore the potential helpfulness of the Girardian project for making sense of Mormon scripture—as well as the potential helpfulness of Mormon scripture for the larger Girardian project. In order to give the most detailed attention to the nuances of the scriptural text, I will limit myself to an investigation of only one passage from Mormon scripture, one that appears to be a perfect embodiment of what Girard would call myth. It is particularly important, I believe, to take up this text because it has at least twice received explicitly “Girardian” attention in print. It is Nephi’s slaying of Laban.<sup>15</sup>

Even a passing familiarity with Girard would allow the reader to recognize that the whole Book of Mormon narrative is undergirded by the consistent rivalry between the Nephites and the Lamanites.<sup>16</sup> Importantly, this rivalry at the level of the tribe seems to have been set in motion quite early in Nephite history. Only “forty years” after Lehi’s family took leave of Jerusalem, Nephi reported that his people “had already had wars and contentions with our brethren” (2 Ne. 5:34).<sup>17</sup> That so much of the Book of Mormon’s larger narrative is occupied with the remarkably complex unfolding of this rivalry suggests that 1 Nephi can be read as describing both how this tragic rivalry was set in motion and how Nephi came to recognize and to deplore as tragic that same rivalry.<sup>18</sup> My intention here is only to outline the way that Nephi goes about this double task. At the very heart of the matter, I believe, is the slaying of Laban.

I should, from the very beginning, distinguish my reading of this episode from two others, both of which take 1 Nephi as effectively uniform in portraying Nephi’s character. Each thus regards the singularity of his slaying Laban as the limit situation that radically confirms the continuity of Nephi’s character. On the one hand, 1 Nephi can be read as a consistent story of Nephi’s faithful obedience and of Laman’s unrelenting rebellion. According to



this reading, the slaying of Laban marks the moment of radical testing, during which Nephi—Abraham-like—has to prove his willingness to obey God without question. I call this approach “conservative.” In contrast is the “liberal” approach in which 1 Nephi is read as a mostly consistent story of what Nephi regarded as his faithful obedience and Laman’s unrelenting rebellion. According to this reading, slaying Laban marks the moment at which it becomes most possible to recognize that Nephi’s confidence in himself deserves at least to be regarded critically, if not directly called into question.

Importantly, each of these approaches has its respective way of making sense of what I regard as the two crucial moments in the slaying of Laban. They are 1 Nephi 4:10 (Nephi’s hesitation at the Spirit’s initial prompting to kill Laban) and 1 Nephi 4:13 (the Spirit’s explanation that “it is better that one man should perish than that a nation should dwindle and perish in unbelief”). The conservative approach regards the first of these moments (Nephi’s hesitation) as evidence that Nephi had indeed come to his most extreme moment: If the infinitely obedient Nephi falters for a moment, this *must* be a test. The same approach takes the second crucial moment of the episode (“it is better . . .”) as the articulation of the Lord’s justifying logic that allows Nephi to proceed. The Lord, in His infinite wisdom, knows when the end justifies the means.

The liberal approach, on the other hand, regards the first moment (Nephi’s hesitation) as evidence that Nephi at least had an inkling that he ought not to listen to such a temptation. Even Abraham did not actually kill Isaac. The same approach takes the second crucial moment of the episode (“it is better . . .”) as Nephi’s work of convincing himself that he should indeed go through with the killing. Unfortunately vulnerable to his own human nature, Nephi seized upon a self-generated justification as a divine injunction even though it could not have come from the Lord.<sup>19</sup>

Neither of these approaches seems satisfactory. Indeed, it seems clear to me that each of them is inconsistent.<sup>20</sup> I will therefore propose a third way, one that attempts to leave behind what might be playfully described as the rivalry between conservative and liberal approaches to the text.<sup>21</sup> Crucial to this third approach is recognizing that the story does not present Nephi’s character uniformly.<sup>22</sup> Because the story both describes how the

Nephite/Lamanite rivalry was set in motion and also relates the revelatory events through which Nephi came to see this rivalry for what it was (and hence abandoned it), it seems best to read 1 Nephi as tracing the complicated process of Nephi's conversion, a process that began but certainly did not end with 1 Nephi 2:16.<sup>23</sup> The third reading I am proposing here sees Nephi as narratively suggesting that his conversion was worked out over the course of several revelatory events: 1 Nephi 2:16, 2:19–24, 4:10–18; and chaps. 11–14.

Importantly, the first of these revelatory events is recounted only in the briefest detail. Having listened to his brothers' complaints against Lehi, as well as to Lehi's stern rebuke, Nephi went to the Lord to decide what to believe. He explains the response: "Behold [the Lord] did visit me, and did soften my heart that I did believe all the words which had been spoken by my father" (1 Ne. 2:16). But, however grace-filled this event might have been, Nephi suggests that he originally took it as reason to plant the seed of a flourishing sibling rivalry. Apparently unable to receive the comforting word for what it was, Nephi concludes his recounting of the event by pointing out how it set him against his brothers: "wherefore, I did not rebel against [Lehi] like unto my brothers" (2:16).

This first revelatory experience gives way almost immediately in the narrative to a second. Having tried to let Laman and Lemuel know about his first experience with the Lord, and unsurprisingly finding that they "would not hearken unto my words," Nephi "cried unto the Lord for them" (2:18). The result was a communication from the Lord that Nephi significantly records at length. Obviously intended to serve as a further word of comfort and essentially telling Nephi to mind his own business where his brothers were concerned, the revelation introduced what unquestionably came to be regarded as *the* foundational covenant of the Lehitites in the New World: "Inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments, ye shall prosper, and shall be led to a land of promise" (1 Ne. 2:20). The revelation heavily emphasizes the necessity of obedience, twice mentioning "commandments" as the condition for receiving the promised blessings of the covenant. Importantly, though, the words of the Lord as recorded in 1 Nephi 2:19–24 never clarify *which* commandments are indicated,

and Nephi apparently does not bother to ask. Instead, moving forward with what the narrative, in my argument, portrays as zeal without knowledge, Nephi seems to have assumed he knew what was meant.<sup>24</sup>

The narrative of 1 Nephi 3–4—recounting the return to Jerusalem for the brass plates—thus recounts the process by which Nephi found himself forced, at long last, to ask what exactly the covenant meant. The story begins with Nephi “return[ing] from speaking with the Lord” only to have Lehi tell him that he had received “a *commandment* of the Lord” (3:6; emphasis mine). Nephi responds with a perfect homily about his zealous commitment to keeping commandments: “I will go and do the things which the Lord hath *commanded*, for I know that the Lord giveth no *commandments* unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he *commandeth* them” (3:7, emphases mine).<sup>25</sup> Nephi takes Lehi’s commission and his own expression of perfect obedience to it as evidence that his most recent communication from the Lord confirms his superiority over Laman in what will rapidly become a dangerous rivalry. Not only had the Lord told Nephi that his obedience would be rewarded with a position as “ruler” and “teacher” over Laman, but his father had issued the commandment to go to Jerusalem for the plates with the dual explanation that Nephi’s brothers were murmuring but that Nephi would “be favored of the Lord” because he was not murmuring (3:5–6).

Taking this differentiation between his own faithfulness and his brothers’ lack of fidelity as license to assume a position he had not yet been granted, Nephi endeavors to replace Laman as the leader of the group. Apparently Nephi believed that his obedience to the commandment to get the plates sufficed to make him Laman’s superior. The 1 Nephi narrative thus portrays the young Nephi as misappropriating the Lord’s genuine revelatory words. Nephi zealously places a kind of divine stamp of approval on what he himself has set in motion as a basic mimetic rivalry between him and his oldest brother.

A third divine encounter—the visit of an angel during the obviously rivalrous beating that Laman and Lemuel give to Nephi in the cave after the second failed attempt to get the plates—only allows Nephi to feel all the more transcendently justified in his pro-

fessions of innocent superiority to Laman. Thus, even before Nephi finds himself standing over the drunken Laban in Jerusalem's dark streets, he has already initiated, contributed substantially to, and even used several divine communications to solidify the basic mimetic rivalry between him and Laman, which will later become the basic mimetic rivalry between the Nephites and the Lamanites. If this discussion outlines how the tragic rivalry between the Nephites and the Lamanites was set in motion, what can be said about how Nephi came to recognize and deplore that rivalry? The revelatory word through which Nephi began to see his rivalry with Laman for what it was came in two crucial moments—(1) that of Nephi's hesitation at the Spirit's "constraint" and (2) that of the Spirit's explanation that one man's death would be "better" than a nation's dwindling in unbelief.

Significantly, when the Spirit initially instructs him to kill Laban, Nephi expresses horror, even disgust: "I said in my heart: Never at any time have I shed the blood of man. And I shrunk [sic] and would that I might not slay him" (4:10). As I read it, this encounter serves a double function. First, the nature of Nephi's rivalry with Laman is definitively revealed by his hesitation. Only at this point is Nephi's facade of perfect obedience stripped away to reveal that he has—despite all his professions of perfect fidelity—been Laman's mimetic double all along. Second, Nephi's expressed disgust—which Nephi reports in the form of a direct quotation, even though it was spoken "in [his] heart"—reveals the violent desires he harbors toward his brother. As Giorgio Agamben explains concerning disgust: "Whoever experiences disgust has in some way recognized himself in the object of his loathing and fears being recognized in turn."<sup>26</sup> The commandment to kill is repulsive to Nephi, and the narrative report of this excessive repulsion reveals that Nephi has been covering his ultimately violent desires toward his brother with a veneer of obedience.

The commandment to kill Laban thus becomes the revelation that begins to disentangle Nephi *from* mimetic rivalry, rather than the cultural manifestation that enmeshes him hopelessly *in* that rivalry.<sup>27</sup>

The second crucial moment in this episode is the Spirit's explanation: "It is better that one man should perish than that a nation should dwindle and perish in unbelief." This communication

from the Spirit does not directly convince Nephi that he ought to kill Laban.<sup>28</sup> Rather, narratively it redirects his attention to the covenant he had received in the desert before Lehi told him that the Lord had commanded the brothers to return to Jerusalem; therefore, it prompts him to finally ask what commandments the covenant indicated. Distracted from the role that obedience to the commandments was to play in making him “a ruler and a teacher” over his brothers (the role Nephi had emphasized in his mimetic appropriation of the covenant), Nephi here recognizes that the covenant required obedience to “the commandments of the Lord according to the law of Moses.” These commandments were contained on “the plates of brass” (4:15–16). His still-to-be-born children would have to keep these commandments to receive the blessings promised in the covenant that Nephi had already made. Only after laying out this chain of connections does Nephi say: “*Therefore* I did obey the voice of the Spirit” (4:18; emphasis mine).<sup>29</sup>

In the reading I am setting forth here, then, it was not until he faced the task of killing Laban that Nephi finally began to see how misguided his earlier interpretation of the Lord’s will had been. This recognition, I think, prepared him for the far more definitive revelation of the scapegoat mechanism that would come in the shape of his apocalyptic vision in 1 Nephi 11–14. In that vision, Nephi would come to see the consequences of the rivalry he had helped to set in motion and that had already—because of Laman’s now incurable hatred—spun beyond Nephi’s control. Significantly, it would be in the same vision that Nephi would see the coming of the Christ, the preaching of the apostles, and the basic unfolding of the Atonement. But all of these events were, when Nephi stood over Laban, still in the future. The first revelation helping Nephi to see what Christ would come to do took place when Nephi found himself dealing with the Spirit’s order to kill the unconscious Laban.

This reading, of course, leaves readers of the Book of Mormon with a God who could command Nephi to kill Laban—that is, with a God who is not necessarily opposed to violence in every circumstance. But no rigorously applied Girardian reading, it seems to me, can get around this God, as I hope I have here shown. Readers of the Book of Mormon will likely have to take the volume of

scripture—as they always have in the past<sup>30</sup>—on the understanding that it preaches a God who is indeed sovereign enough to command that a wicked man be killed.

But this acknowledgement is, perhaps, simply saying that the Book of Mormon is inconvenient. According to the reading I have here laid out, the book not only attempts to undermine violent religion (revelation functions precisely to disentangle Nephi from a mimetic rivalry that proved the undoing of the entire Nephite nation), but it also holds in reserve enough of the sovereignty of God that it cannot be said to be a treatise—however cleverly interpreted to make it such—on pacifism. In the end, both liberal and conservative approaches are ultimately frustrated by the revelatory inconvenience of the Book of Mormon. Perhaps it would be best just to say that it is revolutionary.

### Notes

1. I believe the best way of reading the exhortation of Moroni 10:4 is to take it as inviting the reader to ask God something like: “Are these things not true?” To ask *this* question is to come to the work of prayer with one’s mind more or less made up in advance that the book *is* true. Alexander Campbell recognized this dynamic as early as 1831 when he complained: “*I must believe it first, and then ask God if it be true!*” Alexander Campbell, “Delusions,” *Millennial Harbinger* 2 (February 7, 1831): 94; emphasis his.

2. René Girard, Pierpaolo Antonello, and João Cezar de Castro Rocha, *Evolution and Conversion: Dialogues on the Origins of Culture* (New York: Continuum, 2007), 17–55.

3. In, respectively, René Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*, translated by Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965), and René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, translated by Patrick Gregory (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977).

4. Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, 44–45: “It is not because I’m Christian that I think as I do; it is because of my research that I became Christian.”

5. René Girard, *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*, translated by Stephen Bann and Michael Metteer (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1987). This book remains the core theoretical work of Girard’s larger corpus.

6. René Girard, *The Scapegoat*, translated by Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 101.

7. *Ibid.*, 108.

8. Girard reads the Old Testament in a kind of typological fashion: The Old Testament is filled with initial but ultimately failed attempts to announce the workings of the scapegoat mechanism. However, for Girard, it is only with the announcement of Jesus's innocence that the definitive revelation took place. For a good illustration of how Girard sees the Old Testament as just (barely) failing to reveal what the New Testament would definitively reveal, see René Girard, *Job, the Victim of His People*, translated by Yvonne Freccero (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1987).

9. See esp. Girard, *The Scapegoat*, 198–212.

10. Girard, *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*, 224–62.

11. *Ibid.*, 249.

12. *Ibid.*, 253–62. Thus, as Girard puts it in *I See Satan Fall like Lightning*, 164, 179, today “we lament Christianity, the indispensable scapegoat, for there is no ritual without a victim, and in our day Christianity is always it, *the scapegoat of last resort*” (emphasis his). The result is that the modern era is one “that tries to escape from the Judeo-Christian orbit by ‘radicalizing’ the concern for victims in an anti-Christian manner.”

13. Girard, *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*, 227–31.

14. Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, 40.

15. The most substantial, important, interesting, frequently cited or simply standard interpretations of the story of Nephi's slaying of Laban are (as far as my research has taken me): Robert D. Anderson, *Inside the Mind of Joseph Smith: Psychobiography and the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1999), 45–46; Eugene England, *Making Peace: Personal Essays* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1995), 131–54; Fred Essig and Daniel Fuller, “Nephi's Slaying of Laban: A Legal Perspective” (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1982); Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 1:117–21; Alan Goff, “How Should We Then Read? Reading Mormon Scripture after the Fall,” *FARMS Review* 21, no. 1 (2009): 137–78; Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader's Guide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 16–23, 285–86; Brett L. Holbrook, “The Sword of Laban as a Symbol of Divine Authority and Kingship,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2, no. 1 (Spring 1993): 39–72; Jeffrey R. Holland, “How Can I Explain Nephi's Killing Laban to My Nonmember Friends?” *Ensign*, September 1976, 83–84; Val Larsen, “Killing Laban: The Birth of Sovereignty in the Nephite Constitutional Order,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 16, no. 1 (2007): 26–41; Daniel H. Ludlow, *A Companion to Your Study of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 96; Joseph Fielding



McConkie and Robert L. Millet, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 4 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1987–92), 1:43–44; Ben McGuire, “Nephi and Goliath: A Case Study of Literary Allusion in the Book of Mormon,” *Journal of Book of Mormon and Restoration Scripture* 18, no. 1 (2009): 16–31; William D. Morain, *The Sword of Laban: Joseph Smith Jr. and the Dissociated Mind* (Washington, D.C.: American Psychiatric Press, 1998), 92–96; Thomas W. Murphy, “Laban’s Ghost: On Writing and Transgression,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 30, no. 2 (Summer 1997): 105–26; Hugh Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book/Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1988), xii–xiii; Hugh Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert/The World of the Jaredites/There Were Jaredites* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book/Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1988), 98–102; Monte S. Nyman, *I Nephi Wrote This Record* (Orem, Utah: Granite Publishing, 2004), 65–68; Steven L. Olsen, “The Death of Laban: A Literary Interpretation,” *FARMS Review* 21, no. 1 (2009): 179–95; George Reynolds and Janne M. Sjodahl, *Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1955), 1:39; Eldin Ricks, *Book of Mormon Commentary* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1953), 69–71; Daniel N. Rolph, “Prophets, Kings, and Swords: The Sword of Laban and Its Possible Pre-Laban Origin,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2, no. 1 (Spring 1993): 73–79; Sidney B. Sperry, *Book of Mormon Compendium* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1968), 103; Mack C. Stirling, “Violence in the Scriptures: Mormonism and the Cultural Theory of René Girard,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 43, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 59–105; Gordon Thomasson, “Madness, Differentiation, and Sacrifice, or Reconciliation: Humanity’s Options as Seen in 2 Maccabees and Genesis,” Paper presented November 15, 1984, Eighth Annual BYU College of Humanities Symposium on “Myth, Literature, and the Bible” (I have been unable to locate an extant copy of this paper, though Eugene England summarizes it briefly in *Making Peace*); Dan Vogel, *Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2004), 134–35; John W. Welch, “Legal Perspectives on the Slaying of Laban,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 1, no. 1 (Fall 1992): 119–41. Among these many articles, two give specifically Girardian attention to the Nephi/Laban story: England’s chapter in *Making Peace* and Stirling’s *Dialogue* article.

16. The task of exploring the complex relationship between this Nephite/Lamanite rivalry and the preceding Jaredite rivalries is a major burden of the Book of Mormon. Any serious, sustained attempt to take up the Book of Mormon through a Girardian lens would do best to begin with a thorough analysis of this complex entanglement—particularly as this entanglement places a heavy emphasis on the role of written texts (that is, of scripture) and associated stones (the work of translation) in



both the instigation and the dismantling of the scapegoat mechanism. See especially Alma 37:21–25.

17. Nephi here inaugurates what becomes a long history of referring to the Lamanites as the Nephites' "brethren." The way in which this term emphasizes the rivalrous nature of the relationship between the Nephites and the Lamanites should not be missed.

18. This approach to the Book of Mormon is a subtle variant on Noel Reynolds's several "political" readings of the small plates of Nephi. See his "Nephi's Outline," in *Book of Mormon Authorship: New Light on Ancient Origins*, edited by Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1982), 53–74; "The Political Dimension in Nephi's Small Plates," *BYU Studies* 27 (Fall 1987): 15–37; and "Nephite Kingship Reconsidered," in *Mormons, Scripture, and the Ancient World: Studies in Honor of John L. Sorenson*, edited by Davis Bitton (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1998), 151–89.

19. Importantly, the liberal approach here can include—and indeed historically has included—a Girardian critique of the "It is better . . ." statement as a "classic statement of the scapegoat rationale." England, *Making Peace*, 141. See also Stirling, "Violence in the Scriptures," 96. Obviously, my reading departs from this approach.

20. On the one hand, the conservative approach regards the episode as Nephi's test of faith but then asserts that Nephi passes the test only by giving in to the Spirit's logic. On the other hand, the liberal approach takes Nephi to be the victim of his culture but nonetheless recognizes that his most natural inclination is actually against killing.

21. It is appropriate here to quote Girard, *I See Satan Fall like Lightning*, 164: "The concern for victims has become a paradoxical competition of mimetic rivalries, of opponents continually trying to outbid one another. The victims most interesting to us are always those who allow us to condemn our neighbors. And our neighbors do the same. They always think first about victims for whom they hold us responsible."

22. Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 31–57, has recently argued for a somewhat similar reading of Nephi, though Hardy's Nephi is perhaps less *self*-critical than the one for which I'm arguing.

23. The conservative and liberal approaches together assume (albeit generally implicitly) that Nephi wants to claim an absolute conversion (1 Ne. 2:16), after which he was always, or at least always regarded himself as, unwaveringly faithful.

24. Hugh Nibley notes Nephi's misunderstanding in passing: "Lehi had a dream in which he was commanded to get these records [the brass plates] which, as he already knew, were kept at the house of Laban. Nephi does not know exactly the reason for this and assumes, incorrectly as it turned out, that the object was 'to preserve unto our children the

language of our fathers' (1 Nephi 3:19)." Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book/Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1988), 111.

25. Lehi also uses "commandment" three times in his commission (1 Ne. 3:2-6). Nephi's triple mention of "commandment" seems meant to parallel and, so, to fully respond to Lehi's triple use.

26. Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen (New York: Zone Books, 2002), 107.

27. The narrative contains no hint whatsoever that Nephi and Laban are mimetic rivals. Nephi's rivalrous double is always Laman, and the constraint to kill Laban is precisely what distracts Nephi from that crucial rivalry long enough to recognize the functioning of the scapegoat mechanism.

28. Even if this reasoning had directly convinced Nephi to kill Laban, it does not, strictly speaking, reproduce the scapegoat mechanism in the situation. The "many" for whom the "one" is to die here does not yet exist at the time the killing takes place. Nephi is thus not delivering a people reduced to undifferentiation from the reign of chaos but rather is acting out of simple necessity, which ultimately requires violence.

29. I work out this reading in my forthcoming book, *An Other Testament: On Typology*.

30. The Book of Mormon has been criticized for including this episode since at least 1836. The earliest rebuttal I have found of such criticism is Parley P. Pratt, "Dear Brother Cowdery," *Messenger and Advocate* 2, no. 20 (May 1836): 320.

# “All Find What They Truly Seek”: C. S. Lewis, Latter-day Saints, and the Virtuous Unbeliever

*Blair Dee Hodges*

*R[oman] C[atholic]’s keep on writing to tell me (like you) that it is a pity that “knowing so much” I shd. be held back from knowing so much more!” –C. S. Lewis<sup>1</sup>*

*We should gather all the good and true principles in the world and treasure them up, or we shall not come out true “Mormons.” –Joseph Smith<sup>2</sup>*

The apologetic works of Clive Staples (“Jack”) Lewis have transcended denominational boundaries to reach an impressively diverse Christian audience. From the beginning of his apologetic career in the mid-1930s, Lewis received letters from Catholics, Evangelicals, Presbyterians, and other Christians thanking him for his inspiring words. Fans from various Christian traditions who felt a certain kinship with Lewis often expressed regret or bewilderment about his allegiance to the Anglican Church. A desire to claim Lewis as a representative of one’s own beliefs still tempts many Christians. Richard Ostling, a former *Time* magazine religion editor, has mentioned the “extraordinary” interest in Lewis among members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, who seem to believe Lewis is “almost a crypto-Mormon.” According to Ostling, this phenomenon “shows the extraordinary

acceptability and the usefulness of C. S. Lewis, because of course most of what he says is perfectly acceptable to Mormons.”<sup>3</sup>

My approach to Lewis and Latter-day Saints differs from previous approaches. Rather than selecting context-less proof-texts which resonate with Latter-day Saints, I will explore how Lewis’s experiences impacted his beliefs regarding conversion.<sup>4</sup> Lewis’s personal transition from atheism to Christianity led him to understand conversion as a process of coming home to God by embracing good and rejecting evil. For Lewis and Latter-day Saints alike, beliefs from an array of religions or philosophical traditions can be seen as signposts pointing to higher truths on the road home. Thus, part of Lewis’s broad appeal results from an ecumenical view of other religions that is similar to (though looser than) that of many Latter-day Saints.

This ecumenical view did not overshadow what Lewis saw as the fundamental necessity of faith in Jesus Christ, which raises the salient question: If Jesus Christ is the only name by which one can receive salvation, what is the fate of good people who have never heard, or had faith, in that name? Lewis held out hope for those not converted to Christianity during mortality, whom he referred to as “virtuous unbelievers” (2:256, 499). Moreover, because Lewis never came close to joining the LDS Church, he raises interesting questions for Latter-day Saints who believe one must accept “the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ” (D&C 20:9). To Latter-day Saints, Lewis is a believer—though a virtuous *unbeliever* in the “fulness of the gospel.” Often quoted by LDS authors, teachers, and General Authorities, Lewis is a representative recipient of God’s inspiration which Mormons believe can (and does) exist apart from official LDS channels. Further, he presents an interesting case study regarding the eternal status of non-LDS inspired voices.

Theology loosely understood involves the way believers conceptualize and make sense of their experiences in the world, their experiences with God, and their expected future experiences. Understanding Lewis’s place within the LDS theology of salvation helps clarify the soteriological possibilities extended by Latter-day Saint theology to those who, like Lewis, end their lives outside of Mormonism. Non-Mormons may be surprised to learn that Latter-day Saints do not expect to be the only residents in heaven. Further, because LDS theological positions have not been uni-

form or static, Latter-day Saints themselves may be surprised at the extent of these possibilities for non-Mormons.

Much of my analysis is drawn from Lewis's collected letters rather than from his other published works. I hope to include much fresh material that has remained untapped—material about the context of Lewis's conversion and its influence on his unsystematic theology. From the first letter in which seven-year-old Lewis described the “adventure” of his pet canary Peter being chased by a cat (1:2–3) to the final letter more than fifty years later when sixty-four-year-old Lewis thanked a young boy for telling him how much he enjoyed his books (3:1483–84), Lewis's letters trace his education, friendships, family life, inter-faith dialogue, and academic activities. He was a prolific correspondent; his letters fill three thick volumes and provide great insight into Lewis's philosophical and theological thought.

Occasionally, Lewis seems to turn around and catch you reading over his shoulder. For example, in earlier letters to lifelong friend Arthur Greeves, he said that their correspondence would make a “jolly interesting book” and a “great diversion” for future readers (1:173, 146). This prediction proved true, but it must have made Arthur nervous. Lewis later reassured him that anyone taking time to forage through their “tawdry nonsense” would be an “ill-bred cad” whose opinions they wouldn't care about anyway (1:274). Lewis also recognized the potential for misquotation and proof-texting. Some critics of Lewis have used isolated quotes from various letters to claim he never gave up his “unholy fascination with pagan gods,” or that he hated children, or that he was something of a pervert.<sup>5</sup> Careful evaluation of the letters is required because readers should not assume his letters, which were not written as a systematic whole, unequivocally give the clearest picture of Lewis's thought.<sup>6</sup> Lewis seems to warn later readers: “A heavy responsibility rests on those who forage through a dead man's correspondence and publish it indiscriminately. In those books of [Sir Walter] Raleigh's we find . . . letters like ‘a glass of good champagne’ side by side with mere squibs thrown off in high spirits or mere grumbles written when he was liverish.”<sup>7</sup>

I appreciate that heavy responsibility.<sup>8</sup> First, I discuss a few aspects of Lewis's journey to Christianity and argue that his personal experiences along that path contributed significantly to his

sympathetic understanding of other religious traditions and philosophies. The next section documents Lewis's views that conversion was a process, followed by the specific problem of the "virtuous unbeliever." The article concludes with the paradoxical problem that Lewis, in Mormon terms, is himself a "virtuous unbeliever." I explore the potential eternal status of inspired non-LDS post-Restoration voices.

### Journey to Christianity

In retrospect, Lewis summarized his religious journey as going "from materialism to idealism . . . to pantheism . . . to theism to Christianity."<sup>9</sup> His early materialism contained a good deal of contempt for religion. "You ask me my religious views," seventeen-year-old Lewis responded to Arthur Greeves on October 12, 1916. "You know, I think, that I believe in no religion. There is absolutely no proof for any of them, and from a philosophical standpoint Christianity is not even the best. All religions, that is, all mythologies to give them their proper name are merely man's own invention. . . . Superstition of course in every age has held the common people, but in every age the educated and thinking ones have stood outside it, though usually outwardly conceding to it for convenience" (1:230–31). Almost fifteen years later on October 1, 1931, he confessed, also to Arthur: "How deep I am just now beginning to see: for I have just passed on from believing in God to definitely believing in Christ—in Christianity" (1:974). Lewis's gradual conversion heavily influenced his later religious views, concerns, and apologetic method.

Religious conversion is a complex and delicate issue.<sup>10</sup> Susan Kwirecki has described conversion as development: a "gradual unfolding . . . something vague or indistinct becom[ing] definite or articulated." This unfolding occurs in the "thought, emotion, [or] will—directed towards whatever the individual takes to be divine or ultimately significant."<sup>11</sup> Though I believe this description is accurate for Lewis's own conversion, he would have disliked the ponderous vocabulary: "Any fool can write *learned* language," he wrote. "The vernacular is the real test. If you can't turn your faith into it, then either you don't understand it or you don't believe it" (3:1,007; emphasis his). Because of his own conversion experience, Lewis was sympathetic to seeing conversion as a pro-

cess rather than an event. Perhaps Lewis would have preferred this description from one of his favorite theologians, Scottish minister George MacDonald: “To give us the spiritual gift we desire, God may have to begin [to work] far back in our spirit, in regions unknown to us. . . . For our consciousness is to . . . our being . . . as the flame of the volcano to the world-gulf whence it issues: in the gulf of our unknown being God works behind our consciousness. With his holy influence . . . he may be approaching our consciousness from behind, coming forward through regions of our darkness into our light, long before we begin to be aware that he is answering our request.”<sup>12</sup>

This is the process Lewis described in his 1955 autobiography, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Life* (3:645). In his letters Lewis referred to the book as “SBJ,” and one friend teased that he planned to write a companion volume for Lewis using the same initials; he’d call it “Suppressed By Jack” (3:750). Lewis tended to emphasize different aspects of his loss and rediscovery of faith, depending on the audience. Bits of what influenced his conversion are strewn like bread crumbs throughout the personal letters, allowing later birds to follow the trail in further detail.

Lewis reports intellectually becoming an atheist around age fourteen when he saw how modern editors of Latin and Greek poets “always assumed that the ancient [pagan] religion was in pure error. Hence . . . came the obvious question ‘Why shouldn’t ours [Christianity] be equally false?’” (2:702). Lewis “pretended to believe for fear of my elders,” but this initial doubt grew to include problems with the efficacy of prayer and the problem of theodicy made acute by the death of his mother when he was nine years old. It was further cemented by a “‘Rationalist’ tutor,” W. T. (“the Great Knock”) Kirkpatrick, whom Lewis called the only “pure agnostic” he had ever met and whom he credited with teaching him “to think” (2:444, 702). Lewis’s youthful letters are often egotistic and antagonistic toward religion, though he was careful to maintain a facade of belief under certain circumstances.<sup>13</sup> Contrast his formal letters to his father (then unaware of his atheism) with letters to Arthur, whom he often poked in the religious eye. He quoted the Bible regularly—to his father as consolation or as advice to “study the lilies of the field” (Matt. 6:28) but to Arthur in

teasing about his “precious Jehovah,” the “old Hebrew thunder spirit” (1:82, 206).<sup>14</sup>

Despite such confidence, Lewis began doubting his empirical worldview as he felt a certain other-worldliness encroaching from behind. In 1916 Lewis eagerly wrote to tell Arthur about a “great literary experience.” He had picked up “by hazard” George MacDonald’s “Faerie Romance for Men and Women,” *Phantastes*, and urged: “You simply MUST get this at once” (1:169–70).<sup>15</sup> He would later credit the book with doing him “much good” before his conversion, “when I had no idea what was behind it.” He recommended it to a friend: “This [book] has always made it easier for me to understand how the better elements in mythology can be a real *praeparatio evangelica* [preparation for the gospel] for people who do not yet know whither they are being led” (2:453).<sup>16</sup>

Soon after recommending *Phantastes* to Arthur, Lewis wrote to tell him of another “great find”: an “increasing tendency towards philosophy,” which he had begun studying at Oxford. “All other questions really seem irrelevant till its [questions] are solved. I think you should take it up—its probings would at least save you from the intellectual stagnation that usually awaits a man who has found complete satisfaction in some traditional religious system.” He was impressed by alternate views of morality—for example, that morals can be regarded “as a kind of art . . . to be pursued for its own beauty” (1:341–43).<sup>17</sup> His contempt for “religious systems” was tempered by a fellow student named Leo Baker. One late-night conversation in 1920 turned to “shadowy subjects—ghosts and spirits and Gods.” Baker described “seeing things” as a child, which led him to dabble in hypnotism and automatic writing. He’d given it up, but now “‘things’ were coming back of their own accord.” Lewis became “dazed and drunk in all he said.” Everything seemed “incredibly real.” The conversation left Lewis with a splitting headache. He felt “tired and nervous and pulled to pieces.” He concluded, “Perhaps [Baker] is a bit mad” (1:473). A few months later, Lewis wrote Baker to report an interesting development. Studying philosophy had led him to “postulate some sort of God as the least objectionable theory” accounting for the existence of matter. “But of course,” he hedged, “we know nothing.” Jettisoning his confident atheism, he said, “I have no business to



object to the universe as long as I have nothing to offer myself—and in that respect we are all bankrupt” (1:509).<sup>18</sup>

Increasingly enamored with a spiritual side of life, though now agnostic on the question of God, Lewis continued discussing religion with Baker—at one point revisiting his former problems with petitionary prayer.<sup>19</sup> He described the conversation to his brother Warren: “[I told Baker] the trouble about God is that he is like a person who never acknowledges one’s letters and so, in time, one comes to the conclusion either that he does not exist or that you have got the address wrong.” He admitted that it was “of great moment” whether God was really there or not, “but what was the use of going on dispatching fervent messages—say to Edinburgh—if they all came back through the dead letter office. . . . His cryptic reply was that it would be almost worth going to Edinburgh to find out” (1:555). This possibility intrigued Lewis as he felt an ever-increasing “Something Else” mysteriously leaking into his life. Still, he doubted: “Whatever else the human race was made for, it at least was not made to know” (1:640).

Early in 1923 when he was twenty-four, Lewis was living with Janie King Moore, the mother of a deceased friend. Moore’s brother, John Askins, a psychologist, came to visit. He had dabbled in spiritualism and, during his visit, experienced an “attack of war neurasthenia” which Lewis described to Arthur: “[Askins] endured awful tortures. . . . [H]e had horrible maniacal fits—had to be held down” by Lewis and Mrs. Moore for several nights in a row. He “had the delusion he was going to Hell.” Lewis advised Arthur to “keep clear of introspection, of brooding, of spiritualism, of everything eccentric. Keep to work and sanity and open air—to the cheerful and matter of fact side of things. We hold our mental health by a thread” (1:605). In *Surprised by Joy* he cites this experience as one reason for “a retreat, almost a panic-stricken flight, from all that sort of romanticism which had hitherto been the chief concern of my life” (1:606 note 6). Shortly after this experience Lewis wrote his father to explain his related flight from the “solitude” of philosophy to English:

I am glad of the change. I have come to think that if I had the mind, I have not the brain and nerves for a life of pure philosophy. A continued search among the abstract roots of things, a perpetual questioning of all that plain men take for granted, a chewing the cud for fifty

years over inevitable ignorance and a constant frontier watch on the little tidy lighted conventional world of science and daily life—is this the best life for temperaments such as ours? Is it the way of health or even of sanity? There is a certain type of man, bull necked and self satisfied in his “pot bellied equanimity” who urgently needs that bleak and questioning atmosphere. But what is a tonic to the Saxon may be a debauch to us Celts. . . . I am not condemning philosophy. Indeed in turning from it to literary history and criticism, I am conscious of a descent: and if the air on the heights did not suit me, still I have brought back something of value. It will be a comfort to me all my life to know that the scientist and the materialist have not the last word: that Darwin and Spencer undermining ancestral beliefs stand themselves on a foundation of sand; of gigantic assumptions and irreconcilable contradictions an inch below the surface. It leaves the whole thing rich in possibilities: and if it dashes the shallow optimism it does the same for the shallow pessimisms. But having once seen all this “darkness”, a darkness full of promise, it is perhaps best to shut the trap door and come back to ordinary life: unless you are one of the really great who can see into it a little way—and I was not. (1:648–49)<sup>20</sup>

Lewis was “hideously shocked”<sup>21</sup> in 1923 when two of his closest friends converted to Anthroposophy, a spiritualist-materialist system involving concepts of reincarnation and karma.<sup>22</sup> Their conversion initiated what Lewis called “the Great War” (3:1,596–1,645) between him and Owen Barfield.<sup>23</sup> Their prolonged debate destroyed any remaining faith in what he called materialism, and years later he described the “kindly feeling” he had toward Anthroposophy for having “left the way open for Christianity” (3:198–99). Barfield had “failed to convert me to his own views . . . but his attack on my own presuppositions smashed the ordinary pseudo-‘scientific’ world-picture forever,” Lewis wrote (2:702–3). Looking back, Lewis attributed his appreciation and tolerance for non-Christian systems as being potential stepping stones to the ultimate truths of Christianity. He had developed strong reservations about the overriding (and in his view, overconfident) intellectual mood of his time.<sup>24</sup> His distaste for spiritualism was tempered by his skepticism of empiricism.

Always the bookworm, Lewis spent time with the plays of Euripides, Alexander’s *Space, Time, and Deity*, G. K. Chesterton’s *The Everlasting Man*,<sup>25</sup> and other works. Then in 1926, Lewis received another shock: “The hardest boiled of all the atheists I ever knew

sat in my room on the other side of the fire and remarked that the evidence for the historicity of the Gospels was surprisingly good. ‘Rum thing,’ he went on. ‘All that stuff of Frazer’s about the Dying God. Rum thing. It almost looks as if it really happened once.’” Lewis felt that, if this man was not “safe,” what could he say for his own mental defenses?<sup>26</sup>

By 1929 the leak of “Something Else” was becoming a flow. Lewis kicked off one of his many walking tours with friends by visiting Salisbury Cathedral where they attended evensong to hear the reading of psalms. He was very unimpressed by the “four fat and spongy clergymen [who] scampered and simpered through the job in a way that really disgusted me. It is perhaps too much to expect any intense spiritual quality in the reading of men who have to do it every day (and yet why are they in the church if the thing means so little to them as that?) . . . I know I should be ashamed to read out a recipe as abominably as they read out the psalms” (1:795).<sup>27</sup>

Lewis expected something more sincere and intimate in religious experience than he felt as he listened to this reading of the psalms. This concern for sincerity pervades his later apologetic approach and his understanding of the process of conversion. He had been feeling something—God creeping up behind him—but the feeling did not come and go merely as a verse of scripture was read or as he attended a religious service. Would these clergymen understand that feeling?<sup>28</sup> Though the exact date is unknown, it was during Trinity Term (from the end of April to the middle of June) in 1929 that Lewis discovered that he finally believed in God: “You must picture me alone in that room . . . night after night, feeling, whenever my mind lifted even for a second from my work, the steady, unrelenting approach of Him whom I so earnestly desired not to meet. . . . I gave in, and admitted that God was God, and knelt and prayed: perhaps, that night, the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England.”<sup>29</sup>

“Terrible things are happening to me,” he wrote to Barfield in February 1930. “The ‘Spirit’ . . . is showing an alarming tendency to become much more personal and is taking the offensive, and behaving just like God. You’d better come on Monday at the latest or I may have entered a monastery” (1:882–83). He wrote Arthur at the end of January 1930 to tell him about the “beauties of com-

ing . . . to an attempt at religion,” which included the many books on God he now read with interest. “One finds oneself on the main road with all humanity, and can compare notes with an endless succession of previous travelers. It is emphatically coming home: as Chaucer says ‘Returneth home from worldly vanitee’” (1:872–73). The changes kept coming; a few weeks later, he wrote to tell another friend that his outlook was now “definitely religious. It is not precisely Christianity, tho’ it may turn out that way in the end. . . . [W]hereas once I would have said ‘Shall I adopt Christianity’, I now wait to see whether it will adopt me” (1:887).

It adopted him “one sunny morning” in September 1931 while riding to Bedfordshire’s Whipsnade Zoo in the sidecar of his brother’s motorbike: “When we set out I did not believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and when we reached the zoo I did. Yet I had not exactly spent the journey in thought. Nor in great emotion. . . . It was more like when a man, after a long sleep, still lying motionless in bed, becomes aware that he is now awake” (1:972).<sup>30</sup>

Lewis began writing about his conversion. His first published fictional work on the subject was *The Pilgrim’s Regress* (1933), a Bunyan-esque portrait of “John” traveling through a philosophical landscape before arriving at Christianity. Lewis used his own conversion to inform John’s travels; when one reader asked Lewis why the book seemed to end so abruptly, he replied: “The reason why John’s return journey is so simple in the book is that I hadn’t then begun traveling it and knew v. little about it—in fact ‘ignorance, Madam, sheer ignorance’” (2:492).<sup>31</sup> His understanding of Christianity continued to grow. Soon he was pleased to experience yet another of his “delightful *vernal* periods when doctrines that have hitherto been only buried seeds begin actually to come up—like snowdrops or crocuses” (2:493; emphasis his). The doctrines, the beliefs, were coming to life in him. He often pointed out that as a new Christian he still had much to learn. For the rest of his life, he referred to himself as an “amateur theologian” and resisted systematizing his own thoughts.<sup>32</sup> Still, he dug right in, looking for answers, encouraging other believers, writing apologetics, and making personal (and often frustrating) efforts to become more Christlike. The path he traveled into Christianity had a profound impact on the rest of his journey.

Lewis's outlook should strike a responsive chord with Latter-day Saints who are admonished to seek "anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy" (Thirteenth Article of Faith), even in other religions. Lewis's experience-based understanding of religious conversion resonates strongly with Mormon views of the process.

### Conversion as a Process

Shortly after his conversion, Lewis remained reluctant to lay out any one specific path for discovering God given his own roundabout way. He believed God was very involved in the process, though He would not compel one to believe in Him through proof.<sup>33</sup> When author Sheldon Vanauken wrote Lewis about his own feeling of reluctant attraction to religion, Lewis teased: "I think you are already in the meshes of the net! The Holy Spirit is after you. I doubt if you'll get away!" (3:75-76)<sup>34</sup> Lewis was "chary" of defining the steps of religious conversion too narrowly because the individual is not the only one involved in the process; God plays a fundamental role in drawing people to Him without coercion. Thus, mapping out an "indispensable norm (or syllabus!) for all Christians" would be a mistake. "I think the ways in which God saves us are probably infinitely various," he wrote. "Anything which sets [the patient] saying 'Now . . . Stage II ought to be coming along . . . is this it?' I think bad and likely to lead some to presumption and others to despair. We must leave God to dress the wound and not keep on taking peeps under the bandage for ourselves" (2:914).

Was one saved by God's grace alone without any personal effort? Understanding that some Christians believe Paul made that argument, Lewis warned one questioner against "us[ing] an Apostle's teaching to contradict that of Our Lord's," which urged believers to do good works. Nevertheless, any Christian, Lewis said, "looking back on his own conversion must feel—and I am sure the feeling is in some sense true—'It is not *I* who have done this. I did not choose Christ: He chose me. It is all free grace, wh. I have done nothing to earn.'" Lewis's conversion was not a progressive struggle of his own efforts to achieve certainty about Christianity, but the grace of God filling his heart with surprising joy. It might feel natural to understand that feeling as a universal rule that all

people should expect such an experience, but that is “exactly what we must not do,” Lewis continued. He could not find a completely convincing formula regarding “the inter-relation between God’s omnipotence and Man’s freedom,” believing such a formula is beyond human reason. But Lewis added that we can be “quite sure that every kind act . . . will be accepted by Christ. Yet, equally, we all do feel sure that all the good in us comes from Grace. We have to leave it at that” (3:354–55).<sup>35</sup>

Reflecting on his own conversion, Lewis concluded that any number of beliefs could be a door in, or a door out—a path toward, or away from the truth. In 1934 Paul Elmer More published *The Sceptical Approach to Religion*<sup>36</sup> as an effort to reconcile faith and reason. Lewis was impressed by the book and wrote to congratulate More but also to raise a question countering More’s disapproval of Idealism.<sup>37</sup> More would understand Lewis’s lenience for idealism, Lewis insisted, had More traveled the same route as Lewis “from materialism to idealism . . . to pantheism . . . to theism to Christianity.” It was natural they should see things differently:

A field which seems a high place to one ascending the mountain, seems almost part of the valley to one descending.<sup>38</sup> Idealism is suspect to you as a door *out* of Christianity: for me it was the door *in*. Clearly a door, *ex vi termini* [by the force of the term] has this double aspect. I do not think I should be disrespectful in urging to you remember the “door *in*” aspect—to remember that in shutting the door to keep the faithful in, as you do so very firmly, you are inevitably, by the same act, shutting out those who might return. (2:145)<sup>39</sup>

Lewis said such tolerance resulted from “mere experience.” The door into Christianity would “always be dear” to him, though he thanked More for reminding him of the “door out” aspect which he had been overlooking (2:145–46).<sup>40</sup> Lewis uses similar metaphors to make the same point. For example, while critiquing Sartre, Buber, and Tillich, Lewis noted that “the road into the city [of God] and the road out of it are usually the same road: it all depends which direction one travels in!” (3:1,238) Why disparage the path when there were valuable lessons to be learned by the way? Lewis expressed this point to his friend Dom Bede Griffiths, who had experienced a similar journey from doubt to faith, although Griffiths wound up as a Catholic priest. He had corresponded with Lewis throughout their respective journeys.<sup>41</sup> “And

the result of the arrival is certainly not any ingratitude or contempt to the various signposts or hostelries that helped on the journey” (2:133). Lewis, like More and Griffiths, had found truth in surprising places and retained gratitude for their guiding signposts long after his conversion to Christianity.

Looking for truth wherever it can be found has been emphasized as a religious duty for Latter-day Saints who view themselves as taking part in a “restitution of all things” (Acts 3:21). However, Joseph Smith’s 1820 visitation from God and Christ included the troubling declaration that Christ told him to join none of the existing churches because their creeds were “an abomination” and their professors “corrupt” (JS—History 1:19).<sup>42</sup> Condemnation of an apostate Christendom is found in each of Joseph’s eight accounts of his vision. In the 1832 (earliest) version, the Lord tells Joseph that “the world lieth in sin and at this time and none doeth good no not one they have turned asside from the gospel and keep not <my> commandments[.]”<sup>43</sup> This declaration, however, was preceded by a personal moment described in only two of Joseph’s known accounts. The first words Joseph said he heard from the Lord were “Joseph <my son> *thy sins are forgiven thee. go thy <way> walk in my statutes and keep my commandments behold I am the Lord of glory I was crucified for the world that all those who believe on my name may have Eternal life.*”<sup>44</sup> This detail from the earliest account of the First Vision tempers descriptions of apostasy in the later accounts.<sup>45</sup> Joseph’s words about “abominable creeds” and “corrupt professors” should be considered in the light of these and other moderating statements. Church President Gordon B. Hinckley’s invitation for all non-Mormons to “bring all the good that you have and let us see if we can add to it” was not a recent development.<sup>46</sup> It was Joseph Smith who said, “We don’t ask people to throw away any good they have got; we only ask them to come and get more.”<sup>47</sup> “Truth” and “goodness” appear in relation, and there are truths to be found in many traditions.<sup>48</sup>

LDS philosopher David Paulsen argues that, while God directs the ongoing restoration, He expects “concurrent human initiative—not only in seeking and receiving direct revelation from God, but also in seeking, recognizing, and appropriating ‘truths’ from others, wherever found.”<sup>49</sup> Joseph’s First Vision helps demarcate the acceptable boundaries for Latter-day Saints with its



emphasis on Christ's mission to save the entire world rather than a few elect, the significance of authority, and the importance of sincerity in Christian behavior. A sincere and good person can be acceptable to God—even without authority or “orthodox” understanding—Joseph Smith and his First Vision serving as a case in point for Latter-day Saints. The vision came before the reception of priesthood authority and without a “true and living Church” yet on the earth (D&C 1:30).

Many of the same soteriological puzzles arose for the newly converted Lewis as did for Joseph Smith. Consider Lewis's answer to the question, “What happens to Jews who are still waiting for the Messiah?” (3:245 note 241). He responded, “I think that every prayer which is sincerely made even to a false god . . . is accepted by the true God and that Christ saves many who do not think they know Him. For He is (dimly) present in the *good* side of the inferior teachers they follow” (3:245; emphasis his).<sup>50</sup> For such statements, Lewis has been labeled a “dangerous false teacher” by some Christians who believe that Lewis is much too ecumenical.<sup>51</sup> But compare his words to Brigham Young's statement:

I do not believe for one moment that there has been a man or woman upon the face of the earth . . . who has not been enlightened, instructed, and taught by the revelations of Jesus Christ.

What! the ignorant heathen?

Yes, every human being who has possessed a sane mind. . . . No matter what the traditions of their fathers were, those who were honest before the Lord, and acted uprightly, according to the best knowledge they had, will have an opportunity to go into the kingdom of God.<sup>52</sup>

This is not to say that Lewis or Latter-day Saints preach an “anything goes” religion; there are certain boundaries. Nevertheless, it is difficult to negotiate between being “true to the faith” and the possibility of refusing new truths because they run counter to tradition.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, accepting truth from any source any time might create believers who never make a solid commitment. This was the difficulty Lewis saw with attempts to proselyte for Christianity in the East: “Your Hindus certainly sound delightful,” he wrote to a friend who was writing a book on Christian-Hindu dialogue: “But what do they deny? That's always been my trouble with Indians—to find any proposition they wd. pronounce false.



But truth must surely involve exclusions?” (3:704).<sup>54</sup> Both Lewis and Latter-day Saints have ultimate courts of appeal to help adjudicate what “truths” can be gathered in and what “exclusions” such truths involve. Lewis often fell back upon scripture, Christian tradition, the Early Church Fathers (see, e.g., 2:451), and the common ground between Christian denominations. “We are free to take out of Anthroposophy anything that suits us, provided it does not contradict the Nicene Creed,” he advised one questioner (3:199).<sup>55</sup> Joseph Smith would have rejected that stopping point: “I cannot believe in any of the creeds of the different denominations, because they all have some things in them I cannot subscribe to, though all of them have some truth. I want to come up into the presence of God, and learn all things; but the creeds set up stakes [limits], and say, ‘Hitherto shalt thou come, and no further’; which I cannot subscribe to.”<sup>56</sup> Joseph Smith lamented the rigidity of belief that Christian creeds posed: “I have tried for a number of years to get the minds of the Saints prepared to receive the things of God, but we frequently see some of them after suffering all they have for the work of God will fly to peaces like glass as soon as anything Comes that is Contrary to their traditions, they Cannot stand the fire at all.”<sup>57</sup>

Lewis understood this precarious position in his adroit description of the “double task of reconciling and converting”: “The activities are almost opposites, yet must go hand in hand. We have to hurl down false gods and also elicit the peculiar truth preserved in the worship of each” (3:1,300).

Despite Joseph’s dislike of the creeds, he too had limits. He declared that he had received authority directly from God: “No one [else] shall be appointed to receive revelations and commandments” for the Church until God “appoint[s] another in his stead” (D&C 28:2, 7). Lewis would likely have seen such revelations as unnecessary additions to biblical and Christian traditions. Joseph also taught that the path to exaltation required ordinances such as baptism by proper authority (D&C 20:73). Lewis declared such specific requirements superfluous if not too exclusionary. In one letter he advised: “As far as I know any baptism given in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, whoever gives it, is valid. But any instructed parson will tell you for sure” (3:490). His equivocation on authority is interesting in indicating Lewis’s def-

erence to some ordained ministers. Smith revealed new commandments adapted to contemporary circumstances, including the “Word of Wisdom,” which forbade coffee, tea, tobacco, and alcoholic drinks (D&C 89). Lewis, who enjoyed his pint of ale, “strongly object[ed] to the tyrannic [sic] and unscriptural insulence of anything that calls itself a Church and makes tee-totalism a condition of membership” (3:580).<sup>58</sup>

As these examples demonstrate, by appealing to different authorities, Latter-day Saints and Lewis have charted boundaries to prevent borderless relativism. While Latter-day Saints turn to priesthood, prophets, the scriptural canon, and personal revelation, Lewis turned to scripture, tradition, and Christian common ground.<sup>59</sup> Aside from these differences, Lewis and Latter-day Saints advocate reliance upon the guidance of the Holy Ghost (3:1,540). Despite believing that God wants all people to receive the ultimate truths (for Lewis, “mere Christianity,” for Latter-day Saints, “the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ,” each with different requirements), both leave open the possibility that spiritual experiences and guidance from God occur within different faith traditions. The personal religious experiences of others do not necessarily invalidate one’s own.<sup>60</sup> A correspondent named William P. Wylie wrote Lewis in 1958 with questions on how to reconcile his personal spiritual experiences with those of non-Christians. Lewis admitted that God could influence many outside of Christianity; such experiences are not always “mere fictions or delusions of individual charlatans or lunatics.” We are not under obligation, Lewis argued, to cast such things aside. They may represent: “(a.) Truths about the spiritual world omitted by Revelation because they are irrelevant to our redemption. (b.) Truths omitted because they are positively dangerous and noxious to us in our present condition. (c.) Real psychic facts of no particular importance (d.) Semi-rationalised—or philosophized—mythology (e.) Diabolical delusions. (f.) Straight quackery for catching flats” (3:928–29).

### **The Fate of the Virtuous Unbeliever**

As Lewis saw it, God may utilize different belief systems to lead His children back to Him. But “even if there are a thousand orders of beneficent being [sic] above us, still, the universe is a cheat unless at the back of them all there is the one God of Chris-

tianity” (2:108). What did Lewis think about those who would not accept that one God? Moreover, what about Latter-day Saints who believe Lewis may have missed his own opportunity to accept the “fulness of the restored gospel”? Some Latter-day Saints might emphasize this selection from the Book of Mormon:

For behold, this life is the time for men to prepare to meet God; yea, behold the day of this life is the day for men to perform their labors.

. . . I beseech of you that ye do not procrastinate the day of your repentance until the end; for after this day of life, which is given us to prepare for eternity, behold, if we do not improve our time while in this life, then cometh the night of darkness wherein there can be no labor performed. (Alma 34:32–33)<sup>61</sup>

Similarly, Lewis did not necessarily think unbelievers would have an eternal opportunity to turn to God. His 1940s radio broadcasts (later published as *Mere Christianity*) included a sense of urgency: “Now, today, this moment, is our chance to choose the right side. God is holding back to give us that chance. It will not last for ever. We must take it or leave it.”<sup>62</sup> Lewis explained this point elsewhere: “I mean that each individual only has [the chance] for a short time i.e. is only alive on this Earth for a short time” (2:776). Some LDS leaders have spoken against the possibility of a “second chance” at salvation. Elder Bruce R. McConkie listed the idea among his “Seven Deadly Heresies.” After paraphrasing from Alma 34, he declared: “For those who do not have an opportunity in this life, the first chance to gain salvation will come in the spirit world. . . . Those who reject the gospel in this life and then receive it in the spirit world go not to the celestial, but to the terrestrial kingdom.”<sup>63</sup> McConkie did not address how mortals are to know what actually constitutes an honest and true “chance” or who has actually received one. Church president Joseph Fielding Smith, McConkie’s father-in-law, expressed a similar view in interesting terms: “All who have not had the *privilege* of repentance and acceptance of the plan of salvation in this life will have that opportunity in the world of spirits. Those who repent there and believe when the message is declared to them are heirs of salvation and exaltation.” Still, he concluded: “It is the duty of all men who hear the gospel to repent. If they reject the gospel when it is declared to them here, then they are damned. The Sav-

ior has said it. If they receive and endure to the end, they shall receive the blessings. Every man has his agency.”<sup>64</sup>

Neither of these works is considered “official doctrine” of the LDS Church. Other LDS leaders have presented slightly more lenient views.<sup>65</sup> Joseph Smith’s own understanding adapted over time as he received further revelation. The Book of Mormon’s “night of darkness” (Alma 34:33)<sup>66</sup> was somewhat brightened in 1832 by Smith’s vision of the “three degrees of glory,” presenting a significant departure from a strict heaven/hell dichotomy with graded degrees of celestial, terrestrial, and telestial. This revelation appears to depict virtuous unbelievers as being incapable of reaching the highest (“celestial”) degree of glory. “Terrestrial” inhabitants “are they who died without law; Who received not the testimony of Jesus in the flesh, but afterwards received it. These are they who are honorable men of the earth, who were blinded by the craftiness of men. These are they who receive of his glory, but not of his fulness” (D&C 76:72–76). This revelation may have caused consternation for the Prophet, whose older brother Alvin died before being baptized.<sup>67</sup> However, in 1836 “the heavens were opened” again to Joseph in the Kirtland Temple. There he “beheld the celestial kingdom of God, and the glory thereof,” whose inhabitants included Adam and Eve, Abraham, Alvin, Joseph’s deceased father, and his still-living mother:

[I] marveled how it was that [Alvin] had obtained an inheritance in that kingdom, seeing that he had departed this life before the Lord had set his hand to gather Israel the second time, and had not been baptized for the remission of sins.

Thus came the voice of the Lord unto me, saying: All who have died without a knowledge of this gospel, who would have received it if they had been permitted to tarry, shall be heirs of the celestial kingdom of God;

Also all that shall die henceforth without a knowledge of it, *who would have received it* with all their hearts, shall be heirs of that kingdom;

For I, the Lord, will judge all men according to their works, according to the desire of their hearts. (D&C 137:5–7; emphasis mine)<sup>68</sup>

This doctrine seems foreshadowed in the Book of Mormon’s “plan of restoration,” whereby people would be judged by “intent

of heart” and the “law” under which they lived (Alma 41; Moro. 7:6–11).

This doctrine was vividly described in one of Brigham Young’s discourses, which told of one well-meaning—though particularly impatient—missionary:

I recollect . . . sending an Elder to Bristol, to open a door there, and see if anybody would believe. He had a little more than thirty miles to walk; he starts off one morning, and arrives at Bristol; he preached the Gospel to them, and sealed them all up to damnation, and was back next morning. He was just as good a man, too, as we had. It was want of knowledge caused him to do so. I go and preach to the people, and tell them at the end of every sermon, “he that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved; and he that believeth not, shall be damned.” I continue preaching there day after day . . . and yet nobody believes my testimony. . . .

“What shall I do in this case, if I am sent to preach there?” you may inquire. You must continue to preach there . . . [I would] continue to plead with them, until they bend their dispositions to the Gospel. Why?

Because I must be patient with them, as the Lord is patient with me; as the Lord is merciful to me, I will be merciful to others; as He continues to be merciful to me, consequently I must continue in long-suffering to be merciful to others—patiently waiting, with all diligence, until the people will believe, and until they are prepared to become heirs to a celestial kingdom, or angels to the devil.<sup>69</sup>

How can Young’s patient God be reconciled with scriptures describing the path to God’s kingdom as so “strait and narrow” that “few there be that find it”? (Matt. 7:14). This particular verse troubled Lewis enough that he brought it up during a weekly gathering of friends (the “Inklings”) to hash through its implications. It resulted in fireworks: “The occasion was a discussion of the most distressing text in the Bible (‘narrow is the way and few they be that find it’) and whether one really could believe in a universe where the majority were damned and also in the goodness of God. [Charles] Wrenn, of course, took the view that it mattered precisely nothing whether it conformed to your ideas of goodness or not” (2:283; see also 2:450–51, 1,008).

When Charles Williams disagreed, Wrenn was upset and “expressed a strong wish to burn Williams, or at least maintained that conversation with Williams enabled him to understand how inquisitors had felt it right to burn people” (2:283).<sup>70</sup> However,

Lewis concluded that “the general sense of the meeting was in favour of a view on the lines taken in *Pastor Pastorum*—that Our Lord’s replies are never straight answers and never gratify curiosity, and that whatever this one meant its purpose was certainly not statistical.” A decade later the verse still escaped Lewis’s grasp. He wondered: “Dare we gloss the text ‘Strait is the way and few there be that find it’ by adding ‘And that’s why most of you have to be hustled and badgered into it like sheep—and the sheep-dogs have to have pretty sharp teeth too!’ I hope so” (2:1,008).<sup>71</sup>

Lewis believed that all who are saved will be “saved by Christ whether His grace comes to us by way of the Natural Law” or through Christianity (3:23).<sup>72</sup> Aquinas saw natural law as “nothing other than the light of understanding placed in us by God; through it we know what we must do and what we must avoid. God has given this light or law at the creation.”<sup>73</sup> Latter-day Saints have a similar concept in the “Light of Christ” which is “given to every man, that he may know good from evil” (Moro. 7:16; see also Alma 12:9–11).<sup>74</sup> In order to separate the true from the false manifestations, proper living will increase one’s perception and possession of “light.” Truth is measured on a scale from darkness to light which can grow “brighter and brighter until the perfect day” (D&C 50:24; Prov. 4:18) through obedience, regardless of initial denomination or belief, and regardless of where various truths originated, or, as Lewis wrote to a recent Christian convert: “One can begin to try to be a disciple before one is a professed theologian. In fact they tell us, don’t they, that in these matters to act on the light one has is almost the only way to more light” (3:1,540). The key for conversion is not simply arriving at a correct understanding of the nature of God or agreeing on various other theological points. The key for what Lewis called the “virtuous unbeliever”<sup>75</sup> is *virtue*.

“Seriously,” Lewis wrote, “I don’t pretend to have any information on the fate of the virtuous unbeliever. I don’t suppose this question provided the solitary exception to the principle that actions on a false hypothesis lead to some less satisfactory result than actions on a true. That’s as far as I would go—beyond feeling that the believer is playing for higher stakes and incurring danger of something really nasty” (2:256).<sup>76</sup> He had wondered what “Christ’s descending into Hell and preaching to the dead” indicated;<sup>77</sup> and

when directly asked if people could receive “another chance after death” to accept the gospel, he hedged by referring the questioner to the views of a friend (Charles Williams) on purgatory. “Of course,” he added, “our anxiety about unbelievers is most usefully employed when it leads us not to speculation but to earnest prayer for them and the attempt to be in our own lives such good advertisements for Christianity as will make it attractive” (3:245–46).<sup>78</sup> Lewis did not believe the Bible was specific enough for him to take a definite stance on the issue: “I don’t think we know the details,” he wrote, “we must just stick to the view that (a.) All justice and mercy will be done, (b) But that nevertheless it is our duty to do all we can to convert unbelievers” (3:163).<sup>79</sup>

Borrowing from the parable of the sheep and the goats (Matt. 25), Lewis privileged orthopraxy over orthodoxy in his NARNIA series. At the end of *The Last Battle*, Emeth finds himself in the heavenly Narnia standing before Aslan. He feels out of place and ashamed, believing he had worshipped a false god, Tash, all his life:

“The Glorious One,” [Emeth] said, “bent down his golden head and touched my forehead with his tongue and said, Son, thou art welcome. But I said, Alas, Lord, I am no son of thine but the servant of Tash. He answered, Child, all the service thou has done to Tash, I account as service done to me. . . . Dost thou understand, Child? I said, Lord, thou knowest how much I understand. But I said also (for the truth constrained me), Yet I have been seeking Tash all my days. Beloved, said the Glorious One, unless thy desire had been for me thou shouldst not have sought so long and so truly. For all find what they truly seek.”<sup>80</sup>

Latter-day Saints similarly put more emphasis on what humans have become as a result of God’s grace, combined with the individual’s actions, more than what humans have intellectually assented to or believed in creedal declaration.<sup>81</sup> Some Christians have labeled such beliefs “damnable heresies.”<sup>82</sup> Others claim that such believers, including Latter-day Saints, merit eternal damnation because they disobey the first of Christ’s two great commandments by loving a “false” god. Claims by some counter-cult movements that Latter-day Saints worship a “different Jesus” are constructed largely on ontological foundations; that is, on LDS rejection of post-biblical creeds regarding the nature of



God.<sup>83</sup> However, there can be little doubt about the devotional direction of the *second* of the two great commandments: “love thy neighbor as thyself.” The Bible seems to depict obedience to the second as necessarily reflecting back on the first, a concept depicted in the parable of the sheep and the goats: “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me” (Matt. 25:40).<sup>84</sup> Loving one’s neighbor is like loving God. Lewis believed this parable “suggests that [virtuous unbelievers] have a very pleasant surprise coming to them.”<sup>85</sup> The way a person fulfills these two great commandments plays an important part in God’s final judgment of human souls, be they Latter-day Saint, Anglican, Buddhist, agnostic, or otherwise.

This ecumenical soteriology has carried through from Joseph Smith’s revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants to more recent LDS general conference addresses from members of the Quorum of the Twelve. Elder Dallin H. Oaks has urged Latter-day Saints to “never give up hope and loving associations with family members and friends whose fine qualities evidence their progress toward what a loving Father would have them become. . . . We should never give up on loved ones who now seem to be making many wrong choices.”<sup>86</sup> Rather than “judging and condemning” others not of one’s own faith without mercy, as “one portion of the human race” does, Joseph Smith said “the Great Parent of the universe looks upon the whole of the human family with a fatherly care and paternal regard; He views them as His offspring, and without any of those contracted feelings that influence the children of men.”<sup>87</sup> Citing Christ’s parable of the laborers in the vineyard (Matt. 20:1-16), Oaks emphasized that all workers, those who worked all day, half the day, and part of the day, received the same wage. One lesson from this parable is “that the Master’s reward in the Final Judgment will not be based on how long we have labored in the vineyard,” which Oaks likened to belonging to and participating in the LDS Church:

We do not obtain our heavenly reward by punching a time clock. What is essential is that our labors in the workplace of the Lord have caused us to *become* something. For some of us, this requires a longer time than for others. What is important in the end is what we have become by our labors. Many who come in the eleventh hour have been refined and prepared by the Lord in ways other than

formal employment in the vineyard. . . . [T]hese workers are in the same state of development and qualified to receive the same reward as those who have labored long in the vineyard.<sup>88</sup>

Again, as with Lewis, the emphasis is on orthopraxy.

### **Lewis as a “Virtuous Unbeliever”**

From an LDS standpoint, Lewis himself is viewed as a virtuous unbeliever since he was not baptized by the authority of the LDS Church. At the same time, his labors in God’s vineyard of the world have been recognized and enjoyed by many Latter-day Saints who believe that inspired words can come from those of different faith traditions.<sup>89</sup> Many Latter-day Saints would likely include Lewis in Oaks’s description of unbaptized workers who “are like the prepared dry mix to which it is only necessary to ‘add water’—the perfecting ordinance of baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost. With that addition—even in the eleventh hour—these workers are in the same state of development and qualified to receive the same reward as those who have labored long in the vineyard.”<sup>90</sup>

In the LDS view, exaltation is not out of reach for an individual like Lewis because the “eleventh hour” does not necessarily end at death.<sup>91</sup> The “fulness of the gospel” is being preached to the dead in the spirit world (D&C 124:29–39) and required ordinances like baptism can be administered by living proxies (D&C 138) on behalf of the deceased.<sup>92</sup> Latter-day Saints believe that individuals in the spirit world choose to accept or reject proxy ordinances performed on their behalf, thus preserving their agency.<sup>93</sup> This doctrine mercifully expands possibilities for the virtuous unbeliever while keeping the Christian conditions ultimately the same.<sup>94</sup> Latter-day Saints balance the necessity of Jesus Christ, the meaningful free will of humans, and the mercy and justice of God by recognizing that ultimately, in this life or after death, every person can choose to “become one” in Christ.

As described in the parable of the laborers in the vineyard, the actions and choices of virtuous unbelievers in their daily lives play a role in their ultimate destiny. God is teaching His children the lessons they need to learn even though they may not have heard specifically of Jesus Christ. For Latter-day Saints, as well as for Lewis, mortal life itself is structured to shape humans as God desires—providing opportunities to accept or reject the light. God

is working with all of His children on their own levels and in various religious traditions to bring them back home. Christianity asserts that through God all men and women can be born again.

In the eternal scheme of things as understood in Mormonism, justice and mercy work together to provide all with an opportunity to receive “the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,” to use Paul’s words (Eph. 4:13). Or as Latter-day Saints might say, to receive a “celestial glory” in the hereafter, without leaving the necessary ordinances behind. But the ordinances themselves are only one part of the process of conversion in Latter-day Saint thought, and they can come at the very tail end of the process if need be. For Lewis and Latter-day Saints, conversion is a process that is difficult, if not impossible, to pin down. It is not merely instantaneous, it might not appear on the outside to follow the same set path for everyone, but it is real. “Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again,” Christ explained. “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit” (John 3:7–8).

### Notes

1. C. S. Lewis, *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis*, 3 vols. edited by Walter Hooper (London: HarperCollins, 2004–6), Vol. 2: *Books, Broadcasts, and the War 1931–1949*, 670. Vol. 1 is subtitled *Family Letters 1905–1931*; Vol. 3 covers *Narnia, Cambridge and Joy 1950–1963*; hereafter cited parenthetically in the text by volume and page. Lewis, a voluminous correspondent, frequently abbreviated common words.

2. Joseph Smith Jr. et al., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, edited by B. H. Roberts, 2d ed. rev., 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1973 printing), 5:517. This particular sentence was added to the reconstruction of a Joseph Smith sermon on July 23, 1843, apparently in the handwriting of Jonathan Grimshaw, who may have been adding material recollected by George A. Smith. Grimshaw first wrote this: “Have the Presbyterians any truth? Embrace it. Have the Baptists, Methodists &c any truth? Embrace that. Get all the good in the world, and then you will come out a pure Mormon.”

3. Douglas LeBlanc, “Mere Mormonism: Journalist Richard Ostling Explores LDS Culture, Theology, and Fans of ‘Crypto-Mormon’ C. S. Lewis,” *Christianity Today*, February 7, 2000, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2000/february7/8.72.html> (accessed April 12, 2010). Ostling

also claims that Lewis “was aware of the LDS claims and totally rejected them,” which I believe is a significant overstatement. See Blair Dee Hodges, “C. S. Lewis: Crypto-Mormon? Part II: Lewis on Latter-day Saints,” <http://www.lifeongoldplates.com/2009/05/c-s-lewis-crypto-mormon-part-ii-lewis.html>, posted May 5, 2009. Ostling and his wife Joan co-wrote *Mormon America: The Power and the Promise* (New York: HarperOne, 1999).

4. Previous approaches have focused mainly on quotations from Lewis that resonate with an LDS audience. Often, Lewis is approved insofar as he is seen to agree with LDS perspectives. For instance, see Marianna Edwards Richardson and Christine Thackeray, *C. S. Lewis: Latter-Day Truths in Narnia* (Springville, Utah: Cedar Fort, 2008); Nathan Jensen, *The Restored Gospel According to C. S. Lewis* (Springville, Utah: Cedar Fort, 1998); Andrew C. Skinner and Robert L. Millet, eds., *C. S. Lewis: The Man and His Message* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1999). Exceptions include Mary Jane Woodger, “The Words of C. S. Lewis as Used by the Leadership of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,” *Harvest Magazine*, February, 2000 (discontinued), [crlamppost.org/woodger.htm](http://crlamppost.org/woodger.htm) (accessed May 3, 2010); Evan Stephenson, “The Last Battle: C. S. Lewis and Mormonism,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 30, no. 4 (Winter 1997): 43–69. The latter focuses mostly on areas of disagreement. My perspective differs only slightly from many of Stephenson’s conclusions.

5. See David Cloud, “C. S. Lewis and Evangelicals Today,” *Way of Life Literature*, August 12, 2008, <http://www.wayoflife.org/files/2e66ace0fe4b2b419ec7f916702eabf6-134.html> (accessed March 15, 2009); Trevor Thompson, “The Pervert, the Whip, and *The Chronicles of Narnia*,” *Simon Magazine*, December 14, 2005, [http://www.thesimon.com/magazine/articles/why\\_are\\_they\\_famous/01039\\_the\\_pervert\\_whip\\_the\\_chronicles\\_narnia.html](http://www.thesimon.com/magazine/articles/why_are_they_famous/01039_the_pervert_whip_the_chronicles_narnia.html) (accessed March 15, 2009). See also A. N. Wilson’s controversial biography, *C. S. Lewis: A Biography* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2002) and the reply by George Sayers, Lewis’s pupil and friend, “C. S. Lewis and Adultery,” in *We Remember C. S. Lewis: Essays and Memoirs*, edited by David Graham (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 97–103.

6. Lewis once explained to his father how “correspondence is unhappily no true parallel to conversation: and it is just when one would be most ready for a talk in the odd hour of the day when one shoves ones [sic] work from one and lights the pipe of peace, that one is least ready to sit down and write a letter. I often wonder,” he added, “how the born letter writers whose ‘works’ fill volumes, overcame this difficulty.” Lewis,

*Collected Letters*, 1:518. Lewis himself obviously overcame the difficulty. Even at three volumes, his letters are “collected” rather than “complete.”

7. Lewis, *Collected Letters*, 1:665. Lewis was corresponding with his father regarding *The Letters of Sir Walter Raleigh*. Later, while reading the letters of Robert Southey, Lewis noted how reading letters written throughout one’s life can make a happy life look grimmer than it likely was, an appraisal of the incompleteness of such a record. *Ibid.*, 2:421.

8. Lewis would be especially concerned that a student of journalism like me had written a paper using his letters, since he would not “hang a dog on a journalist’s evidence.” Lewis, *Collected Letters*, 2:849. Given Lewis’s frequent lambasting of journalists, the reader will have to take this paper for whatever it is worth. *Ibid.*, 2:53, 849; 3:63, 114, 252, 410–11, 667, 786.

9. *Ibid.*, 2:145. This overview of Lewis’s conversion is not comprehensive, for which the reader should see Roger Green and Walter Hooper, *C. S. Lewis: A Biography*, rev. ed. (New York: Harvest Books, 1994) and David C. Downing, *The Most Reluctant Convert: C. S. Lewis’s Journey to Faith* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2002), and Alan Jacobs, *The Narnian: The Life and Imagination of C. S. Lewis* (New York: HarperOne, 2005). Because I focus more on Lewis’s conversion as he understood it, I omit many important events in Lewis’s environment which deserve consideration, for example, the early death of his mother, estrangement from his father, early dislike of school, being injured as a soldier in World War I, losing friends in battle, a possible sexual relationship with an older woman, Mrs. Moore, and other influential experiences.

10. Sociologists and psychologists have attempted to craft various “stages of faith,” many of which tend to play favorites regarding *how* one should be converted and *to* what. For one example, see James Fowler, *Stages of Faith* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981). An interesting response to such efforts (which also informed my interpretation of Lewis’s conversion) is Susan Kwilecki, “A Scientific Approach to Religious Development: Proposals and a Case Illustration,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 27, no. 3 (September 1988): 307–25. Kwilecki is a professor of philosophy and religious studies at Radford University.

11. Kwilecki, “A Scientific Approach to Religious Development,” 310. In some faith traditions, such development is believed to be instantaneous; for example, some Evangelical Christians seek a vivid moment in which they are “saved” or “born again.”

12. George MacDonald (1824–1905), *Unspoken Sermons* (1867–89; rpt. Whitefish, Mont.: Kessinger Publishing, 2004), 102. Clive Staples Lewis, ed., *George MacDonald: An Anthology* (New York: Macmillan,

1946), 18, said he regarded MacDonald as his “master”: “My own debt to [*Unspoken Sermons*] is almost as great as one man can owe to another. . . . Indeed, I fancy I have never written a book in which I did not quote from him. But it has not seemed to me that those who have received my books kindly take even now sufficient notice of the affiliation.”

13. Upon reading these early letters years later, Lewis was most struck by their “egotism” and “priggery.” “I seem to be posturing and showing off in every letter. . . . How ironical that the very thing wh. I was proud of in my letters then should make the reading of them a humiliation to me now!” (1:973). This mortification seems to have carried over into his reading of *The Life and Letters of Lord Macaulay*. Perhaps there was something autobiographical in his remark: “One can see quite clearly that having so early acquired the *talk* [Macaulay] found he could go on quite comfortably for the rest of his life without bothering to notice the *things*. He was from the first clever enough to produce a readable and convincing slab of claptrap on any subject whether he understood it or not, and hence he never to his dying day discovered that there was such a thing as understanding” (1:815).

14. Lewis often quoted verses from both the Old and New Testaments. At times the quotations were straightforward with no positive or negative spin. His letters demonstrate an impressive early acquaintance with the Bible.

15. Lewis and Arthur were clearly bibliophiles, often discussing books in great detail, including their physical dimensions, construction, and quality. They favored “Everyman” editions, which could be ordered with a custom color binding. In the letter mentioning *Phantastes*, Lewis reported that he recently purchased a volume in the chocolate binding he used to dislike. “So you see I am gradually becoming converted to all your views,” he teased. “Perhaps one of these days you may even make a Christian of me” (1:170–71).

16. MacDonald greatly influenced Lewis’s later approach to writing fiction.

17. Lewis was reading books on William Morris and later viewed this stage of his belief as something like “pantheism” or other “sub-Xtian beliefs” (1:342 note 146; 2:702).

18. After his conversion, Lewis maintained that refuting should include replacing if possible. When Elizabeth Anscombe rebutted Lewis’s argument that “Naturalism is Self-Refuting,” he noted: “The lady is quite right to refute what she thinks bad theistic arguments, but does this not almost oblige her as a Christian to find good ones in their place: having obliterated me as an Apologist ought she not to *succeed* me?” (3:35).

19. Some biographers have pointed to Lewis’s early discomfort with

prayer as key in his loss of faith. See Downing, *The Most Reluctant Convert*, 44, 132. Significantly, Lewis later wrote a book on the subject: *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1964). Earlier, he had abandoned an effort to write this book (3:276, 428).

20. Anglican New Testament scholar N. T. Wright, "Simply Lewis," *Touchstone Magazine*, March 2007, complained: "I don't know whether it's Lewis or his republishers, but I am puzzled that such a great writer should have been so indiscriminate and seemingly muddled with his use of the colon and semi-colon." From the letters, I am confident Lewis was responsible.

21. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 160. Lewis felt "deserted" by his friends following their conversion. Several collected letters contain advice to recent converts struggling with unbelieving loved ones. This idea later informed Lewis's novel *Till We Have Faces* which he describes as "the story of every nice, affectionate agnostic whose dearest one suddenly 'gets religion'" (3:590; see also 2:482-83).

22. As an alternative to Madame Blavatsky's "Theosophy" movement, Rudolph Steiner founded the official Anthroposophy Society in 1912. Goetheanum, the school of spiritual science and current seat of the society near Basel, Switzerland, currently claims 150,000 annual visitors. For Steiner's works, see [rsarchive.org](http://rsarchive.org).

23. Lionel Adey, *C. S. Lewis's Great War with Owen Barfield* (Victoria, British Columbia: Ink Books, 2000).

24. Lewis told one worried writer to disregard charges that believers were suffering from a deluded "escapism," calling such people "Turnkey critics: people who want to keep the world in some ideological prison because a glimpse at any remote prospect wd. make their stuff seem less exclusively important" (3:418). Though not opposed to scientific investigation, Lewis was annoyed by "Scientocracy," glossing Shakespeare: "There are more things in heaven & earth than are dreamed of in your science" (3:1104, 623-24). Christians should be especially wary of twisting the gospel into "one more of their high brow fads" (2:134). Pining too much faith on any currently popular philosophical trend (in this case, Neo-scholasticism,) could be dangerous: "I mean, we have no abiding city even in philosophy: all passes, except the Word" (2:176).

25. G. K. Chesterton was one of the Christian writers who seems to have impacted Lewis most. Before his conversion, Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 216, viewed Chesterton as "the most sensible man alive 'apart from his Christianity.'" In 1947 after converting, he called Chesterton's *The Everlasting Man* "the v. best popular defence of the full Christian position" he knew (2:823; 3:72). He often listed it in letters when asked for recommendations (2:375, 941; 3:363, 652, 1,264, 1,353).



26. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 216.

27. Lewis later found some of the psalms troubling, especially those appearing to manifest vindictiveness and a “festering, gloating, undisguised” hatred. He wrote *Reflections on the Psalms* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1958), 1, 22, to help readers understand these troublesome aspects, though he insisted he was not writing as a Hebraist or higher critic.

28. Lewis would later urge patience with clergymen: “We have a very trying curate in our parish,” he explained. “Some say ‘the devil lives v. near the altar’, [and] I take it your Rector is just an instance of the brother one has to forgive unto seventy times seven.” He concluded, “If they have a bad priest they need good laity all the more” (3:463).

29. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 228–29. He noted that God’s willingness to accept him despite this attitude is a witness to God’s remarkable mercy. Notably, Lewis’s father passed away during this time.

30. Lewis could not date “the ride to Whipsnade” (3:996). According to Walter Hooper, Lewis’s brother recorded the date in his journal as September 28, 1931 (3:996; 1:972). This revelation took place days after a very influential late-night conversation with friends Hugo Dyson and J.R.R. Tolkien. As a theist, Lewis had been puzzled by the “whole doctrine of Redemption: in what sense the life and death of Christ ‘saved’ or ‘opened salvation to’ the world.” Dyson and Tolkien convinced Lewis to view the story of Christ as he viewed other similar myths involving death, sacrifice, and propitiation. Lewis realized that “the story of Christ is simply a true myth: a myth working on us in the same way as the others, but with this tremendous difference that it really happened . . . [.] the Pagan stories are God expressing Himself through what we call ‘real things’. Therefore it is true, not in the sense of being a ‘description’ of God (that no finite mind could take in) but in the sense of being the way in which God chooses to (or can) appear to our faculties. . . . Does this amount to a belief in Christianity?” (1:976–77).

31. He is quoting Boswell’s *Life of Samuel Johnson*, which Lewis claims is the only biography he ever enjoyed reading. He quoted from it often; the ‘ignorance’ line was something of a running gag (3:26).

32. See, e.g., 2:481, 975; 3:66, 562. In 1941 he thanked one reader for her kind letter, concluding, “Though I’m forty years old as a man I’m only about twelve as a Christian, so it would be a maternal act if you found time sometimes to mention me in your prayers” (2:263–64). To a priest who wrote Lewis in 1947 to ask for help in resolving denominational conflict, Lewis responded: “I am a layman, indeed the most lay of laymen, and least skilled in the deeper questions of sacred theology. I have tried to do the only thing that I think myself able to do: that is, to

leave completely aside the subtler questions about which the Roman Church and Protestants disagree among themselves . . . and in my own books to expound, rather, those things which still, by God's grace, after so many sins and errors, are shared by us" (2:801); translation from Lewis's Latin original, and hence his title for *Mere Christianity*.

33. Lewis quoted Alexander Pope: "His praise is lost who stays till all commend" (3:75).

34. Sheldon Vanauken (1914–96) was an American author whose autobiography discusses love, conversion, and tragedy. See Vanauken, *A Severe Mercy: C. S. Lewis and a Pagan Love Invaded by Christ, Told by One of the Lovers* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1977).

35. Seeming discrepancies between Paul's writings and the Gospels are being studied in light of the "new perspective on Paul." See, e.g., N. T. Wright, "New Perspectives on Paul," 10th Edinburgh Dogmatics Conference: August 25–28, 2003, [http://www.ntwrightpage.com/Wright\\_New\\_Perspectives.htm](http://www.ntwrightpage.com/Wright_New_Perspectives.htm) (accessed April 29, 2009). For a diverging interpretation of how Lewis understood the interplay of grace, faith, and works, see Will Vaus, *Mere Theology: A Guide to the Thought of C. S. Lewis* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2004), chaps. 4, 10.

36. According to Paul Kuntz, More was interested largely in dualism and concluded that "Spirit depends on matter and needs corporeal instruments, while matter adapts itself to spiritual purposes," Paul Grimley Kuntz, "The Dualism of Paul Elmer More," *Religious Studies* 16, no. 4 (December 1980): 400. More's thought has interesting similarities to Lewis's. For example, he believed that all humans will feel a "ubiquitous sense that somehow something is wrong with existence and that somehow the wrong can be, and ought to be, escaped." More, *The Catholic Faith* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1931), 8. Like Lewis he believed that truth and goodness could be found in many faith traditions; and although he believed Christianity was the "Truth," he borrowed thought from the East in Buddhism, Hinduism, and also from Western thought in Plato. The Dharma, as well as the Dialogues, was a "preface to the gospel," and Gautama Buddha and Plato "would have accepted Christ." "Kuntz, The Dualism of Paul Elmer More," 400. See the full article, *ibid.*, 389–411. Similarly, Lewis's Christianity could easily pick up where the Tao leaves off: "Have you read the *Analects* of Confucius? He ends up by saying 'This is the Tao. I do not know if any one has ever kept it.' That's significant: one can really go direct from there to the *Epistle to the Romans*" (3:72; 2:561).

37. For Lewis's understanding of Idealism, see *Surprised by Joy*, chap. 13.

38. Lewis's affinity with MacDonald can be seen in his use of meta-

phors like this one. MacDonald repeatedly used imagery of a mountain and valley to represent higher states of spiritual knowledge. For example, to explain why Christ didn't answer the young rich man more directly in Matthew 19, MacDonald reasoned: "To begin with [the ultimate answer] would be as sensible as to say to one asking how to reach the top of some mountain, 'Just set your foot on that shining snow-clad peak, high there in the blue, and you will at once be where you wish to go.'" MacDonald, *Unspoken Sermons*, 71. Whether Lewis was derivative here or whether the men simply reasoned alike deserves further exploration; when one quotes Lewis, who is Lewis quoting? Not likely many of his contemporaries. He often admitted his neglect of any "modern" theologians, poets, and writers. In 1955 he wrote: "I am v. ill acquainted with modern theological literature having seldom found it helpful. One book did a great deal for me: G. K. Chesterton's *The Everlasting Man*. But I can't give you such a list as you want" (3:652).

39. More traveled his own interesting path from Manichaeism into a dualism that attempted to reconcile spirit and matter in the paradox of Christ's incarnation. This path led through Hindu views to Platonic dualism to Christianity, among other places. Kuntz, "The Dualism of Paul Elmer More," 394.

40. Lewis, "Christianity and Culture," *Theology* 40 (March 1940): 177, commented: "Culture is not everyone's road into Jerusalem, and for some it is a road out" (2:332-33). Although the quotation is from Lewis, it is from an article, added as a transition between two letters.

41. Griffiths was one of the three theologians Lewis asked to critique his radio broadcasts before delivering them (2:496, 498, 502-3).

42. David Paulsen, "What Does It Mean to Be Christian? The Views of Joseph Smith and Søren Kierkegaard," *BYU Studies* 47, no. 4 (2008): 55-91, compares and contrasts Søren Kierkegaard and Joseph Smith's radical critiques of nineteenth-century Christian culture.

43. Quoted in Dean C. Jessee, "The Earliest Documented Accounts of Joseph Smith's First Vision," in *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations, 1820-1844*, edited by John W. Welch and Erick B. Carlson (Provo, Utah: BYU Press / Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2005), 1-33.

44. *Ibid.*; emphasis mine. See also John 3:17, which receives less attention than the preceding verse: "God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved." The references to apostasy in Joseph's First Vision accounts should be tempered by this information even as the First Vision story is understood in different contexts for different purposes. See James B. Allen, "The Significance of Joseph Smith's 'First Vision' in Mormon Thought," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 1, no. 3 (Fall 1966): 29-45. Inciden-

tally, the same contextual issues can be raised regarding Lewis, whose book (as noted above) could be called “suppressed by Jack” according to some friends. Lewis emphasizes different aspects of his conversion for different audiences and to different ends. But would this attention to his correspondent call into question the overall veracity of his experience?

45. James B. Allen discusses the various accounts considering different contexts and differing purposes in “Emergence of a Fundamental: The Expanding Role of Joseph Smith’s First Vision in Mormon Religious Thought,” *Journal of Mormon History* 7 (1980): 43.

46. Gordon B. Hinckley, “The BYU Experience,” *BYU Speeches*, November 4, 1997, <http://speeches.byu.edu/reader/reader.php?id=2973> (accessed April 2, 2010).

47. Joseph Smith, discourse, January 22, 1843, reported by Wilford Woodruff, in *History of the Church*, 5:259.

48. Rhetoric regarding the apostasy of Christendom was frequent in LDS missionary efforts. LDS views of the apostasy were more formally presented in works like Apostle James E. Talmage’s *The Great Apostasy* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1909) which closely followed Protestant narratives of Christian history. LDS scholarship on the apostasy has become more sophisticated and nuanced over time. A good example is Noel B. Reynolds, ed., *Early Christians in Disarray: Contemporary LDS Perspectives on the Christian Apostasy* (Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2005). In another effort to foster ecumenical outreach, a Mormon chapter of the Foundation for Interreligious Diplomacy was recently formed. “Mormon Diplomacy Chapter Created,” *Deseret News*, April 23, 2009, <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/705299039/Mormon-Times-briefing.html> (accessed April 24, 2009). This development is interesting, especially in light of past statements like that of Royden G. Derrick of the presidency of the First Quorum of the Seventy: “We cannot join any ecumenical movement, for if we do so, we will be required to compromise principles. We cannot do that, for the Lord has established the principles upon which his church is built, and we have no right to change them.” Derrick, “Valiance in the Drama of Life,” *Ensign*, May 1983, 23. The Church has not officially sanctioned the Foundation for Interreligious Diplomacy. Several BYU professors belong to the founding board. The Church has joined in various causes with other religions since 1983, most recently urging members to support and help finance California’s Proposition 8 (2008). “Protect-Marriage” was not an ecumenical movement but consisted of various faith traditions working toward a common goal. See [newsroom.lds.org/ldsnewsroom/eng/commentary/same-sex-marriage-and-proposition-8](http://newsroom.lds.org/ldsnewsroom/eng/commentary/same-sex-marriage-and-proposition-8) (accessed April 1, 2010).

49. David L. Paulsen, "The Search for Cultural Origins of Mormon Doctrines," in *Excavating Mormon Pasts: The New Historiography of the Last Half Century*, edited by Newell G. Bringhurst and Lavina Fielding Anderson (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2004), 50. Many Mormons have found such "truths" in Lewis's works.

50. Lewis says he "jolly well hope[s]" God sends "uncovenanted mercies. . . . After all[,] non-existent Gods, if appealed to with good heart, probably have done quite a lot: the real God, of His infinite courtesy, re-addresses the letters to Himself and they are dealt with like the rest of the mail" (3:478).

51. See, e.g., David Cloud, "Beware of C. S. Lewis," Fundamental Baptist Information Service, March 1, 2002; David J. Stewart, "C. S. Lewis: Exposed!", both [http://www.jesus-is-savior.com/Wolves/cs\\_lewis-exposed.htm](http://www.jesus-is-savior.com/Wolves/cs_lewis-exposed.htm) (accessed April 1, 2009). I suppose Lewis's declarations about "false gods" are not enough for some, though these comments would likely sound offensive to those worshipping *those* "gods." Lewis typically reserved harsher phraseology for personal correspondence. See note 55.

52. Brigham Young, December 3, 1854, *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (Liverpool and London: LDS Booksellers Depot, 1855–86), 2:139. Accepting truth wherever found was a recurring theme in Young's sermons: "It is our duty and calling, as ministers of the same salvation and Gospel, to gather every item of truth and reject every error. Whether a truth be found with professed infidels, or with the Universalists, or the Church of Rome, or the Methodists, the Church of England, the Presbyterians, the Baptists, the Quakers, the Shakers, or any other of the various and numerous different sects and parties, all of whom have more or less truth, it is the business of the Elders of this Church . . . to gather up all the truths in the world pertaining to life and salvation, to the Gospel we preach, to mechanism of every kind, to the sciences, and to philosophy, wherever it may be found in every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, and bring it to Zion. The people upon this earth have a great many errors, and they have also a great many truths. This statement is not only true of the nations termed civilized—those who profess to worship the true God, but is equally applicable to pagans of all countries, for in their religious rights [sic] and ceremonies may be found a great many truths which we will also gather home to Zion. All truth is for the salvation of the children of men—for their benefit and learning—for their furtherance in the principles of divine knowledge; and divine knowledge is any matter of fact—truth; and all truth pertains to divinity." Young, October 9, 1859, *ibid.*, 7:283–84. Future Church president John Taylor, June 12, 1853, 1:155, similarly stated: "I was going to say I am not a Universalist,

but I am, and I am also a Presbyterian, and a Roman Catholic, and a Methodist, in short, I believe in every true principle that is imbibed by any person or sect, and reject the false. If there is any truth in heaven, earth, or hell, I want to embrace it, I care not what shape it comes in to me, who brings it, or who believes in it, whether it is popular or unpopular. Truth, eternal truth, I wish to float in and enjoy." LDS emphasis on ecumenism has ebbed and flowed over time.

53. For thoughts on religious flexibility versus rigidity, see Richard D. Poll, "What the Church Means to People Like Me," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 2 (Winter 1967): 107–17, and his "Liahona and Iron Rod Revisited," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 16 (Summer 1983): 69–78.

54. Lewis often wondered how the Christian gospel could ever take hold in the East given the cultural disconnect (3:408).

55. When discussing whether it was "lawful for a Christian to bear arms," Lewis appealed to the New Testament, St. Augustine, and the "general agreement of all Christian communities except a few odd sects—who generally combine pacifism with other odd opinions" (2:233–34). Lewis, like some Latter-day Saints, was not always cordial in his comments about other faiths. Anthroposophy was mostly "nonsense" (3:199), Hindus undoubtedly worshipped "false gods" (3:1300), and he was not particularly welcoming to Catholic "papalism," theology of cremation, the "B.V.M." (Blessed Virgin Mary), and transubstantiation (2:358, 646–47).

56. *History of the Church*, 6:57, punctuation modernized, discourse by Joseph Smith, October 15, 1843. Joseph asserted that "the most prominent difference in sentiment between the Latter-day Saints and sectarians was, that the latter were all circumscribed by some particular creed, which deprived its members the privilege of believing anything not contained therein, whereas the Latter-day Saints have no creed, but are ready to believe all true principles that exist, as they are made manifest from time to time." *History of the Church*, 5:215; the sentence appears in this form in "History of the Church" Manuscript Book D-1, p. 1433, LDS Church History Library. Joseph also stated: "The first and fundamental principle of our holy religion is, that we believe that we have a right to embrace all, and every item of truth, without limitation or without being circumscribed or prohibited by the creeds or superstitious notions of men, or by the dominations of one another, when that truth is clearly demonstrated to our minds, and we have the highest degree of evidence of the same." Dean C. Jessee, ed., *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, rev. ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book/Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2002), 458.



57. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith* (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1980), 319. Coincidentally, Terryl L. Givens quotes C. S. Lewis soon after this same Joseph Smith quotation in his “Joseph Smith: Prophecy, Process, and Plentitude,” in *Joseph Smith: Reappraisals after Two Centuries*, edited by Reid L. Neilson and Terryl L. Givens (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 110, 112.

58. On this question, Lewis usually cited the fact that the Lord Himself drank wine (e.g., 3:608) and that “abstinence from liquor” was “unscriptural and erroneous doctrine” (3:1,126). The Word of Wisdom is predicated on the existence of new revelation through living prophets, an objectionable premise for those who grant final authority to the Bible, creeds, or Early Church Fathers.

59. Such an appeal to “common ground” is problematic, as there are still some significant differences between mainstream denominations who adhere to the Apostles’ and Nicene creeds. Lewis was aware of such divisions, telling one priest that “the schism in the Body of Christ is both a source of grief and a matter of prayers, being a most serious stumbling block to those coming in and one which makes even the faithful even weaker in repelling the common foe” (2:801). For this reason he often refused to engage in minor doctrinal squabbles: “When all is said (and truly said) about the divisions of Christendom, there remains, by God’s mercy, an enormous common ground.” He characterized his refusal to debate this particular point as “abstaining from one tree in the whole garden” (2:136).

60. Roger R. Keller, former minister and current professor of Church history at Brigham Young University, recounted his family’s spiritual experiences predating Mormonism in “Do I Know My Neighbor?,” *Ensign*, March 1991, 25–28: “We had been clearly shown a continuity between the Holy Ghost we knew as Presbyterians and the Holy Ghost we experienced as Latter-day Saints. Thus, we have never questioned whether we walked with God in our previous vocation of ministry or whether the Lord had led us to that ministry on our path to the fulness of the gospel. We had been shown clearly that there was definitely more to the Christian faith than we had previously known. It was, and still is, offensive to us that these sacred post-baptism experiences are construed by some as proving our superiority over family and friends who did not wish to join us in our decision. In order to avoid this doctrinally unfounded approach and better understand our relationship as Latter-day Saints to our other-denominational friends and neighbors, we need to be aware of their role in the Restoration. Above all, we need to acknowledge



the invaluable contributions our Christian neighbors have made, and continue to make, in furthering the Lord's work on the earth."

61. See also 2 Nephi 2:21: "And the days of the children of men were prolonged, according to the will of God, that they might repent while in the flesh; wherefore, their state became a state of probation, and their time was lengthened, according to the commandments which the Lord God gave unto the children of men." If the "night of darkness" is seen as beginning at mortal death, those who heard about the restored gospel during mortality but did not accept it are in danger of not reaching the highest advancement God offers.

62. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1977), 65–66.

63. Bruce R. McConkie, "The Seven Deadly Heresies," *Brigham Young University Devotional Speeches of the Year* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1981), <http://speeches.byu.edu/reader/reader.php?id=6770> (accessed February 10, 2010).

64. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, edited by Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1955 (1954–56), 2:134; emphasis mine. Other LDS leaders have emphasized the difficulty of repenting after death—but "difficult" is not "impossible." Elder Melvin J. Ballard, *Three Degrees of Glory* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1922), 14–15, stated: "We are sentencing ourselves to long periods of bondage, separating our spirits from our bodies, or we are shortening that period, according to the way in which we overcome and master ourselves." President Spencer W. Kimball quoted Ballard's statement, then added, "Clearly it is difficult to repent in the spirit world of sins involving physical habits and actions. There one has spirit and mind but not the physical power to overcome a physical habit." Kimball, *The Miracle of Forgiveness* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1969), 168. These quotations typically refer directly to Alma 34:32–35. Matthew Roper and John A. Tvedtnes provide another interpretation of these verses in "Scripture Insight: 'Do Not Procrastinate the Day of Your Repentance,'" *Insights* (FARMS newsletter) 20:10, n.d. <http://maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/publications/insights/?vol=20&num=10&id=160> (accessed March 29, 2010).

65. A more current view from a more "official" source is "Chapter 35: Redemption for the Dead," in the Relief Society/Priesthood instruction manual, *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Intellectual Reserve, 2007), 401–11. Parsing official from unofficial LDS doctrine is difficult. The Church's most recent statement is "Approaching Mormon Doctrine," LDS Newsroom, May 4, 2007, <http://newsroom.lds.org/ldsnewsroom/eng/commentary/approaching-mormon-doctrine> (accessed February 10, 2010).

66. This scripture demonstrates the difficulty of formulating a sys-

tematic theology using scriptural proof-texts. Because Latter-day Saints believe that God reveals His will “line upon line” in different dispensations and circumstances, taking a snapshot of any moment in scripture could mislead. This canonized flexibility is described in Alma 29:8: “For behold, the Lord doth grant unto all nations, of their own nation and tongue, to teach his word, yea, in wisdom, *all that he seeth fit that they should have*; therefore we see that the Lord doth counsel in wisdom, according to that which is just and true” (emphasis mine). Alma 40 discusses his own uncertainty about certain aspects of the afterlife, thus canonizing some prophetic speculation and uncertainty. Quoting *The Problem of Pain* as though it were Lewis’s final view would be a mistake considering the greater fluidity of his views in his letters.

67. Grant Underwood, “‘Saved or Damned’: Tracing a Persistent Protestantism in Early Mormon Thought,” *BYU Studies* 25, no. 3 (1985): 85–103, notes that Section 76 (“The Vision”) “was not initially appreciated for its revolutionary significance.” Even Joseph Smith seldom mentioned it. Early Mormon thought on the afterlife resembled Protestantism’s emphasis of salvation or damnation, heaven or hell. Brigham Young, June 21, 1874, *Journal of Discourses*, 18:247, recalled: “I was not prepared to say that I believed it, and I had to wait. What did I do? I handed this over to the Lord in my feelings, and said I, ‘I will wait until the Spirit of God manifests to me, for or against.’ I did not judge the matter, I did not argue against it, not in the least. I never argued the least against anything Joseph proposed, but if I could not see or understand it, I handed it over to the Lord.”

68. This section and Section 138 regarding missionary work in the spirit world were added to the Doctrine in Covenants in 1981. Robert J. Woodford, “Doctrine and Covenants Editions,” *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 4 vols. (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1992), 1:426.

69. Brigham Young, August 8, 1852, *Journal of Discourses*, 3:91. Early Mormons expected the Millennium to arrive quite soon. Underwood, “Saved or Damned,” 91.

70. Lewis joked that he and Tolkien agreed: “[J]ust] as some people at school . . . are eminently kickable, so Williams is eminently combustible” (2:283).

71. Over time LDS leaders have employed the same verse: (1) to justify few converts, (2) to underscore the “great apostasy” and consequent need for restored LDS authority, (3) to encourage missionaries discouraged by few converts, and (4) to create tension before explaining the doctrines of vicarious ordinances.

72. Lewis is quoting Dom Bede Griffiths, “Catholicism To-day,” *Pax: The Quarterly Review of the Benedictines of Prinknash*. Though Lewis

agreed with the sentiment, he thought Griffiths's argument needed further clarification: "All are saved by Christ or not at all, I agree. But I wonder ought you to make clearer what you mean by His Grace coming 'by way of the Natural Law'—or any other Law. *We are absolutely at one about the universality of the Nat. Law, and its objectivity, and its Divine origin.* But can one just leave out the whole endless Pauline reiteration of the doctrine that Law, as such, cannot be kept and serves in fact to make sin exceedingly sinful [Rom. 7:12–13]?" One could not be saved apart from Christ, in Lewis's view, whether His grace is received through the "Natural Law" or otherwise. In *Mere Christianity*, chaps. 1–5, Lewis appeals to the very existence of the natural law as indicating that something is behind it—namely, God. All are convicted by the natural law because no one perfectly obeys its moral demands. Lewis believed that the New Testament preaches repentance and forgiveness which "assumes an audience who already believe in the Law of Nature and know they have disobeyed it." He feared that "modern England" was quickly losing belief in natural law so most New Testament "apologetic begins a stage too far on. The first step is to create, or recover, the sense of guilt" (2:470).

73. Thomas Aquinas, *Collationes in Decem Praeceptis*, 1. From *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2006), 426; see also Rom. 2:14–15.

74. D&C 93:31–32: "Behold, here is the agency of man, and here is the condemnation of man; because that which was from the beginning is plainly manifest unto them, and they receive not the light. And every man whose spirit receiveth not the light is under condemnation."

75. The virtuous unbeliever is similar to the "Anonymous Christian" idea articulated by Karl Rahner, the Jesuit theologian who played an important role in the concept's becoming official Catholic doctrine during Vatican II. Karl Rahner, "Religious Inclusivism," *Philosophy of Religion: Selected Readings*, edited by Michael Peterson et al. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996). Thus to the catechism was added: "Those who through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or His Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience—those too may achieve eternal salvation." *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York: Burns & Oates, 2002), 196–97. Some view this addition as unbiblical and too inclusive while others see it as parochial and offensive to other faiths. See Stephen M. Clinton, "Peter, Paul and the Anonymous Christian: A Response to the Mission Theology of Karl Rahner and Vatican II," *Orlando Institute Leadership Forum*, November 1998, Evangelical Theological Society, [www.toi.edu/Resources/Anonomous2.pdf](http://www.toi.edu/Resources/Anonomous2.pdf) (accessed April 15, 2009).

76. Bruce R. Reichenbach, "Inclusivism and the Atonement," *Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers* 16, no. 1 (January 1999): 43–54, succinctly phrased this approach: "One can appropriate something subjectively without knowing how it is achieved objectively. . . . Salvation or liberation is possible [for people], though they do not know or have a mistaken notion of the exact circumstances whereby the merits of Christ's death are made available." John Sanders distinguishes the ontological versus the epistemological necessity of Christ's atonement in *No Other Name: An Investigation into the Destiny of the Fate of the Unevangelized* (1992; rpt., Eugene, Ore.: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 30. This book is an excellent overview of Christian thought on the fate of virtuous unbelievers from three main positions that he classifies as restrictivism, universalism, and "wider hope." Lewis receives a detailed treatment on 251–57. Unfortunately, Sanders overlooks LDS thought in this book.

77. Lewis added his own footnote to "Hell" in this letter, distinguishing "Hades, the land of the dead" from "Gehenna, the land of the lost" (3:163). D&C 19 describes hell as a place or condition that exists eternally but which will end for certain individuals.

78. Lewis also stated: "If the Church is Christ's body,—the thing he works through—then the more worried one is about the people outside, the more reason to get *inside* oneself where one can help—you are giving Him, as it were, a new finger" (2:499). Lewis had been working on the radio broadcasts at this time and uses the same example there. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 65.

79. There is a period after the "a" but not after the "b". Clinton, "Peter, Paul and the Anonymous Christian," 13 note 126, ends his critique of Rahner by appealing to a more concerted Christian missionary effort and declaring that the "anonymous Christian" idea is unbiblical and thus false.

80. C. S. Lewis, *The Last Battle*, Vol. 7 in THE CHRONICLES OF NARNIA (London: HarperCollins, 2001 printing), 757. Applying a coherent theory of the Atonement to the inclusivist approaches of Lewis and Latter-day Saints is beyond the scope of this paper. Reichenbach, "Inclusivism and the Atonement," discusses religious inclusivism's relation to sin and atonement theory. How are the effects of Christ's atonement actually available to someone who is ignorant of its occurrence? This problem exists for various atonement models (including the moral exemplar model); how can one follow an example or be encouraged or helped by something one never heard about? LDS thought posits a universal Light of Christ, posthumous missionary work, and proxy ordinances as part of the solution. Reichenbach concludes that if God truly discerns the hearts of His children, any person might employ *functionally* equivalent repentance techniques, though the concepts or language

they employ may seem foreign to Christians. For Atonement theories in LDS thought, see Blake T. Ostler, *The Problems with Theism and the Love of God*, Vol. 2 in EXPLORING MORMON THOUGHT (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2006).

81. The “grace and works” debate is beyond the scope of this article. The role of “intelligence” (not “intelligences”) in LDS soteriology should be kept in mind. Joseph Smith emphasized: “A man is saved no faster than he gets knowledge,” quoted by Wilford Woodruff, discourse, April 10, 1842, *History of the Church*, 4:588. This statement was canonized as: “And if a person gains more knowledge and intelligence in this life through his diligence and obedience than another, he will have so much the advantage in the world to come” (D&C 130:19). This scripture emphasizes diligence and obedience as methods of gaining knowledge. Ultimately, correct belief on less than “weightier matters” can be acquired even beyond the veil. Joseph Smith taught: “When you climb up a ladder, you must begin at the bottom, and ascend step by step, until you arrive at the top; and so it is with the principles of the Gospel—you must begin with the first, and go on until you learn all the principles of exaltation. But it will be a great while after you have passed through the veil before you will have learned them.” *History of the Church*, 6:306–7.

82. See Harvest Mission Ministries, [http://harvestgathering.org/page\\_83.html](http://harvestgathering.org/page_83.html) (accessed March 30, 2009). While discussing literary critics who have a similar narrow approach to anything that does not suit their fancy, Lewis quoted Alexander Pope: “Thus Wit, like Faith, by each man is applied / To one small sect, and all are damned beside” (2:734).

83. For the most comprehensive response to the charge that Mormons worship a “different Jesus,” see Daniel C. Peterson and Stephen D. Ricks, *Offenders for a Word: How Anti-Mormons Play Word Games to Attack the Latter-day Saints* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1998).

84. Mosiah 2:17: “When ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God.”

85. He added: “But in the main we are not told God’s plans about them in any detail” (2:499). Latter-day Saints believe that they have received additional revelation concerning their fate. (See below.) Lewis referred to the parable of the sheep and goats several times. For instance, when asked about the scripture “He who has not the Son has not the father” (1 John 5:12), he responded: “[It] must mean, I think, he who wholly lacks the Spirit of the Son. Those who do not recognize Him as the Son of God may nevertheless ‘have’ Him in a saving sense—as the ‘Sheep’ had in the parable of the sheep and goats” (3:1447; see also 3:163).

86. Dallin H. Oaks, “The Challenge to Become,” *Ensign*, November

2000, 32–34, <http://www.lds.org/conference/talk/display/0,5232,23-1-138-15,00.html> (accessed March 30, 2010).

87. Joseph Fielding Smith, comp. and ed., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (1938; Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1954 printing), 218.

88. Oaks, “The Challenge to Become.”

89. Blair Dee Hodges, “C. S. Lewis: Crypto-Mormon? Part I: Latter-day Saints on Lewis,” posted May 5, 2009, <http://www.lifeongoldplates.com/2009/04/c-s-lewis-crypto-mormon-part-i-latter.html>.

90. Oaks, “The Challenge to Become.”

91. Latter-day Saints often differentiate between “salvation” and “exaltation,” the former being granted in certain degrees to all of God’s children, the latter being predicated on accepting and living the gospel. Exaltation is granted to those in the celestial kingdom. Margaret McConkie Pope, “Exaltation,” *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 4 vols. (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1992), 2:479.

92. Lorenzo Snow, fifth LDS Church president, said: “Missionary work is more successful in spirit prison than on earth. A wonderful work is being accomplished in our temples in favor of the spirits in prison. I believe strongly, too, that when the gospel is preached to the spirits in prison, the success attending that preaching will be far greater than that attending the preaching of our elders in this life.” Quoted in Lorenzo Snow, *The Teachings of Lorenzo Snow*, edited by Clyde J. Williams (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1984), 98.

93. Elma Fugal, “Salvation of the Dead,” *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 4 vols. (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1992), 3:1257–59: “The performing of earthly ordinances by proxy for those who have died is as efficacious and vitalizing as if the deceased person had done them. That person, in turn, is free to accept or reject the ordinances in the spirit world.”

94. Vatican II’s acceptance of the idea resulted in the defection of the Society of St. Paul Pius X, which called such inclusion “a very grave doctrinal error because it declares personal justification as being already realized for every man without any participation of his will or free choice and, so, without any need of his conversion, faith, baptism or works.” Society of St. Pius X, Australian District, “Errors of Vatican II,” *Si Si No No*, No. 52 (May 2003), [http://www.sspxasia.com/Documents/SiSiNoNo/2003\\_May/errors\\_of\\_vatican\\_II.htm](http://www.sspxasia.com/Documents/SiSiNoNo/2003_May/errors_of_vatican_II.htm) (accessed March 30, 2010). The LDS view retains the necessity of ordinances and works coupled with Christ’s grace as requirements for all. Thus, the LDS position cuts through objections to Karl Rahner’s anonymous Christian concept.

# Creationism and Intelligent Design: Scientific and Theological Difficulties

*David H. Bailey*

Many religious believers today are comfortable with the notion of an evolutionary process over many millions of years as God's means for achieving the creation. In other words, they believe that, while God governed the creation in some sense, it proceeded largely by natural laws and processes that can be uncovered by diligent research. An open-ended philosophy of this sort is entirely consistent with modern scientific knowledge, and for many (myself included), the "war" between science and religion ends here.

A recent report by the National Academy of Science observed, "Science and religion are based on different aspects of human experience. . . . Attempts to pit science and religion against each other create controversy where none needs to exist." The report adds, "Scientists and theologians have written eloquently about their awe and wonder at the history of the universe and of life on this planet, explaining that they see no conflict between their faith in God and the evidence for evolution."<sup>1</sup> Among the notable and openly religious scientists cited in this report are Francis Collins (director of the U.S. National Institutes of Health and former director of the Human Genome Project), Kenneth Miller (a well-known biologist and co-author of a widely used biology textbook), and George Coyne (former director of the Vatican Observatory).

Others in modern society (often but not always associated with conservative religious movements) insist on a more traditional view of the creation. Many of these persons further believe



that there is scientific evidence to support such a view. In a 2004 poll, 45 percent of Americans agreed that “God created human beings pretty much in their present form at one time within the last 10,000 years or so.”<sup>2</sup> In a 2005 poll, 42 percent of Americans agreed that “humans and other living things have existed in their present form since the beginning of time.”<sup>3</sup> Such persons have been drawn to the Creationist movement and still are, although today the Intelligent Design (ID) movement has been growing in popularity.

Typical of recent Creationist literature is the declaration that “millions of years of evolution not only contradicts [sic] the clear teaching of Genesis and the rest of Scripture but also impugns [sic] the character of God.”<sup>4</sup> ID literature is more accepting of modern science but still holds that Darwinian evolution is scientifically faulty, and cannot be reconciled with Judeo-Christian theism.<sup>5</sup>

This article examines the Creationist and Intelligent Design movements from both a scientific and a theological perspective. This discussion is framed for adherents of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS), although much of this analysis is independent of any particular religious denomination.

I wish to emphasize that the terms “Creationism” and “Intelligent Design” are used here only to designate the two specific movements described above. As noted above, a suitably open-ended notion of “creation” and “design” is entirely consistent with both scientific knowledge and theology, and is recommended as a basis for those seeking harmony between science and religion.

### **Traditional Creationism and Intelligent Design**

The traditional Creationist movement, which has been termed “scientific Creationism” or “creation science” by its practitioners, originated with the publication of George McCready Price’s book *The New Geology* in 1923, and gained momentum in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s with works by John Whitcomb, Henry Morris, and Duane Gish.<sup>6</sup> These writers have attempted, by means of both scientific and theological arguments, to defend a highly literal (albeit somewhat selective) reading of Genesis: namely, that the Earth was created a few thousand years ago and that its fossil layers were deposited during a great flood at the time of Noah. Ef-

forts to promote this form of Creationism in public schools founded in 1982, when an Arkansas court ruled that Creationism is religious dogma, and lost more ground in 1987, when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that a Louisiana law requiring “equal time” for Creationism and evolution was unconstitutional.<sup>7</sup>

However, the Creationist movement continues to exert considerable influence in the United States and elsewhere. One indication of this influence is the popularity of the new Creation Museum in Petersburg, Kentucky (near Cincinnati, Ohio). This facility features a series of exhibits depicting, among other things, the creation in 4000 B.C., a global flood in 2350 B.C. that deposited all fossil layers, and humans and dinosaurs living together. Murals contrast “human reason” with “God’s Word.” In the two years since it opened in 2007, the museum has attracted over 700,000 visitors.<sup>8</sup>

In the early 1990s, a group of scholars formed the “Intelligent Design” (ID) movement. Unlike Creationists, these scholars, including Michael Behe, William Dembski, Phillip Johnson, and Jonathan Wells, have respectable academic credentials and generally accept the overall scientific account and timeline of the creation. However, they still insist that many features of life on earth are too complex to be explained by natural evolution. They generally acknowledge limited variations within basic “kinds” but insist that the individual kinds were separately formed or designed by an intelligent entity, utilizing means that may not be subject to human investigation.<sup>9</sup>

ID writers and their proponents take pains to distinguish themselves from traditional Creationists, but it is clear that both the Creationist and ID movements are connected to the Evangelical world. Each of the four prominent ID scholars mentioned above (except for Michael Behe, who is Catholic) is affiliated with an Evangelical denomination, and all have acknowledged that their religious beliefs are a principal motivation for their work. The ID-authored textbook *Of Pandas and People* is a lightly edited version of an earlier Creationist textbook, in which, among other things, the word “creation” has been replaced with “intelligent design.”<sup>10</sup> The Discovery Institute’s Center for Science and Culture, which is the umbrella organization and funding source for much of the ID work, is devoted “to defeat scientific materialism and its

destructive moral, cultural, and political legacies” and “to replace materialistic explanations with the theistic understanding that nature and human beings are created by God.” To this end, they have outlined a “wedge” strategy, which recommends that proponents proceed by degrees, first “teaching the controversy” of evolution, then promoting ID as an alternative theory to evolution, then edging out evolution in favor of biblical theism.<sup>11</sup>

Capitalizing on widespread popular support, various groups have attempted to require teaching of Creationism or ID in public schools, or at least to require some form of disclaimer of evolution. A Georgia suburban school district recently required stickers to be placed in textbooks emphasizing that evolution is “a theory, not a fact.”<sup>12</sup> The Kansas Board of Education approved a new science curriculum that requires challenges to evolution.<sup>13</sup> Both of these measures were later overturned by court rulings.

In one prominent case, the Dover Area School Board in Pennsylvania voted that “students will be made aware of gaps/problems in Darwin’s theory and of other theories of evolution including, but not limited to, intelligent design.” The school district then required that students be read a statement emphasizing that “the Theory [of evolution] is not a fact” and recommending the ID-authored text *Of Pandas and People* for student use. Several parents sued, and a widely publicized trial was held in October-November 2005.<sup>14</sup> In December, U.S. District Judge John E. Jones ruled that the school board’s policy was unconstitutional. He further found that ID is “a religious view, a mere re-labeling of creationism, and not a scientific theory,” and “ID cannot uncouple itself from its creationist, and thus religious, antecedents.”<sup>15</sup>

An initial attempt to influence the Utah School Board in September 2005 was not fruitful, but in January 2006 State Senator Chris Buttars introduced a bill to require that “instruction to students on any theory regarding the origins of life, or the origins or present state of the human race, shall stress that not all scientists agree on which theory is correct.”<sup>16</sup> This measure was modified several times, then defeated. However, attempts continue in other U.S. states and internationally.

### **Creationism, Intelligent Design, and the LDS Faith**

Like the Catholic Church and most large Protestant denomi-

nations, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in recent years has officially distanced itself from largely scientific issues such as evolution. Conventional scientific theories, including biology, evolution, and geology, are openly taught at Brigham Young University and BYU–Idaho, and a notable number of the scientific faculty members are well published in these fields. Students who inquire about the Church’s views on evolution are referred to “Origin of Man and Evolution,” a packet of information approved by the LDS First Presidency. The packet contains a 1909 First Presidency statement on human origins that speaks negatively of the notion that human beings developed from the lower orders of animals, but it is balanced by including the article on evolution from the 1992 *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*. This short article quotes a 1931 First Presidency letter saying, “Leave geology, biology, archaeology and anthropology, no one of which has to do with the salvation of the souls of mankind, to scientific research, while we magnify our calling in the realm of the Church.”<sup>17</sup>

Several books with a positive view of evolution have recently been published by LDS scientists.<sup>18</sup> Also of interest is *Mormonism and Evolution: The Authoritative LDS Statements*, a collection of articles and statements made by the First Presidency on evolution.<sup>19</sup>

Nonetheless, a Creationist worldview prevails in the hearts and minds of many LDS people. For example, a 2009 poll found that only 22 percent of American Latter-day Saints believe that evolution is the best explanation for human life—a figure that is lower than all other major religious denominations except for Jehovah’s Witnesses.<sup>20</sup> Creationist material has even appeared occasionally in LDS Church publications, although it is not clear that any of this material has official endorsement. In 1998 the *Ensign* published an article asserting that Noah’s flood covered the entire earth and destroyed all living things not aboard Noah’s ark.<sup>21</sup> In 2002 the *Ensign* reprinted the 1909 First Presidency statement, which has skeptical comments on humans developing from lower orders but failed to mention more recent updates that omit such language.<sup>22</sup> The current Old Testament manual for BYU and LDS Institutes of Religion presents a very negative view of evolution, quoting Joseph Fielding Smith’s 1952 statement: “You cannot believe in this theory of the origin of man, and at the same time accept the plan of salvation.” The manual also quotes

at length from the writings of Harold Coffin, a Seventh-day Adventist Creationist, and mentions speculations by Immanuel Velikovsky that worldwide catastrophes have occurred in recent times.<sup>23</sup> I have heard that many instructors ignore this material, which was written many years ago, although others continue to take it quite seriously.

Several recent books and articles by LDS writers have criticized evolution and science in general. For example, Joseph Fielding McConkie, a retired BYU religion professor, recently wrote, “We cannot overcome the irreconcilable differences between the theory of organic evolution and the doctrine of the Fall.”<sup>24</sup> Other examples include Clark A. Peterson, *Using the Book of Mormon to Combat Falsehoods in Organic Evolution* (Springville, Utah: Cedar Fort, 1992), and Webster Kehr, *Prophets or Evolution* (<http://www.prophetsorevolution.com>). The latter work argues that evolution coincides with the teachings of Korihor, a Book of Mormon anti-Christ figure, and further asserts that the scientific community is intentionally ignoring contrary evidence that nullifies the theory of evolution. While much more accepting of evolution, Richard Sherlock, professor of philosophy at Utah State University, nonetheless criticizes the 2005 Dover court decision, finds merit in some of the scientific arguments advanced by ID scholars, such as Behe’s “irreducible complexity,” and concludes that “Latter-day Saints and serious Christians generally should be sympathetic and supportive of intelligent design.”<sup>25</sup>

### Modern Scientific Evidence

The notions that the universe is at least 13 billion years old, that the Earth is at least 4 billion years old, and that life has developed through a branching evolutionary process over many millions of years, are all very firmly established in the scientific literature by extensive empirical data. The geological ages of various fossil layers are particularly well established, since these ages are based on multiple dating schemes that are securely grounded in fundamental laws of physics that have survived careful scrutiny for more than fifty years.<sup>26</sup>

In the past few years, modern genome sequencing and computer technology have placed enormous volumes of DNA data at the fingertips of researchers worldwide. These data strongly con-

**TABLE 1**  
**PERCENTAGE OF AGREEMENT BETWEEN BETA GLOBIN**  
**OF VARIOUS SPECIES**

|            | <i>Human</i> | <i>Chimp</i> | <i>Gorilla</i> | <i>Red Fox</i> | <i>Dog</i> | <i>Polar Bear</i> | <i>Horse</i> | <i>Rat</i> | <i>Chicken</i> | <i>Salmon</i> |
|------------|--------------|--------------|----------------|----------------|------------|-------------------|--------------|------------|----------------|---------------|
| Human      | 100.0        | 100.0        | 99.3           | 91.1           | 89.7       | 89.7              | 83.6         | 81.5       | 69.2           | 49.7          |
| Chimp      | 100.0        | 100.0        | 99.3           | 91.1           | 89.7       | 89.7              | 83.6         | 81.5       | 69.2           | 49.7          |
| Gorilla    | 99.3         | 99.3         | 100.0          | 91.8           | 90.4       | 90.4              | 82.9         | 80.8       | 68.5           | 49.0          |
| Red fox    | 91.1         | 91.1         | 91.8           | 100.0          | 98.6       | 95.2              | 80.8         | 80.1       | 72.6           | 49.7          |
| Dog        | 89.7         | 89.7         | 90.4           | 98.6           | 100.0      | 94.5              | 80.1         | 79.5       | 71.2           | 49.0          |
| Polar bear | 89.7         | 89.7         | 90.4           | 95.2           | 94.5       | 100.0             | 80.8         | 82.9       | 71.9           | 48.3          |
| Horse      | 83.6         | 83.6         | 82.9           | 80.8           | 80.1       | 80.8              | 100.0        | 76.0       | 67.8           | 46.3          |
| Rat        | 81.5         | 81.5         | 80.8           | 80.1           | 79.5       | 82.9              | 76.0         | 100.0      | 65.8           | 49.7          |
| Chicken    | 69.2         | 69.2         | 68.5           | 72.6           | 71.2       | 71.9              | 67.8         | 65.8       | 100.0          | 54.4          |
| Salmon     | 49.7         | 49.7         | 49.0           | 49.7           | 49.0       | 48.3              | 46.3         | 49.7       | 54.4           | 100.0         |

firm the evolutionary paradigm, including the hierarchical organization and common ancestry of all organisms, and the evolution of these organisms via incremental mutations and natural selection.<sup>27</sup> Data of this sort have already confirmed the “family tree” of species that was previously constructed based only on comparisons of anatomy and biological function. As LDS biologist Daniel Fairbanks observes, “The results of hundreds of large-scale experiments based on DNA analysis overwhelmingly confirm the reality of evolution.”<sup>28</sup>

One example of these data is Table 1, which compares the 146-unit amino acid sequences of beta globin (a component of hemoglobin) among various species of animals. Note that human beta globin is identical to that of chimpanzees, differs in only one location from that of gorillas, yet is increasingly distinct from that in red foxes, polar bears, horses, rats, chickens, and salmon.<sup>29</sup> The picture is the same if we examine any of thousands of other genes and proteins. For example, the gene that, when mutated, results in cystic fibrosis in humans is nearly identical to the corresponding gene in chimpanzees but is progressively dissimilar to

the corresponding gene in orangutans, baboons, marmosets, lemurs, mice, chickens, and puffer fish.<sup>30</sup> (See Table 1.)

DNA evidence has also dramatically confirmed some earlier conjectures. For example, scientists noted long ago that humans have only twenty-three pairs of chromosomes, whereas other great apes—chimpanzees, bonobos, gorillas, and orangutans—have twenty-four. Thus, they were led to conjecture that two of the human chromosomes have fused since the split between ancestral human and ape lineages. This hypothesis gained credence in 1982 when scientists found that chromosomes from humans, chimpanzees, gorillas, and orangutans are highly similar and can be aligned with one another, with human chromosome #2 corresponding to the slightly overlapped union of ape chromosomes 2A and 2B. The final confirmation came in 1991 from a detailed analysis of human DNA, which found two complementary telomeres (repeated sequences of a certain DNA string that appear at the end of a chromosome) spanning the exact spot of union.<sup>31</sup>

### Technical Issues

As mentioned above, ID writers generally have respectable academic credentials (although hardly any of their peer-reviewed articles deal directly with ID<sup>32</sup>) and, as mentioned earlier, they have approached the issue by acknowledging much of the standard scientific framework, including the “old earth” timeline. But like Creationists, ID scholars have not yet produced a solid body of quantitative, falsifiable scientific hypotheses of their own; instead they have focused their efforts on identifying weaknesses in the established evolutionary theory. Judge John E. Jones, ruling in the Dover case, noted one difficulty with this approach: “ID is at bottom premised upon a false dichotomy, namely, that to the extent evolutionary theory is discredited, ID is confirmed. . . . We do not find this false dichotomy any more availing to justify ID today than it was to justify creation science two decades ago.”<sup>33</sup>

Nonetheless, many are convinced that the Creationist and ID writers have identified substantive technical issues that call into question certain aspects of evolutionary theory. Since these issues are invariably raised whenever this topic is discussed, a few of these claims will be briefly mentioned here, together with the



consensus response of the scientific community. For more details, I invite readers to consult several recently published references.<sup>34</sup>

### *Gaps in the Fossil Record*

Both Creationist and ID writers have argued that there are significant gaps in the fossil record and that these gaps are evidence that the evolutionary model is wrong.<sup>35</sup> Scientists readily acknowledge that gaps exist in the fossil record but point out that large numbers of these gaps (including several gaps specifically highlighted by Creationist and ID writers) have been filled by transitional fossils found in the past few decades.<sup>36</sup> Examples include fossils spanning the transition between land and marine mammals (having exactly the expected combination of terrestrial and aquatic features that had been predicted)<sup>37</sup> and a long-sought intermediate fossil linking fish and early tetrapods (four-legged animals) discovered in 2004 on an island in the Canadian Arctic.<sup>38</sup>

One recent fossil discovery potentially relevant to human evolution is the “Ardi” skeleton, dating to 4.4 million years ago, not long after the split between the humans and chimpanzees.<sup>39</sup> Creationists have typically dealt with hominid fossils by assigning them to either “human” or “ape” categories, but they have failed to agree among themselves as to which hominids should be assigned to which category. Biologist Kenneth Miller observes, “Ironically, validation of our common ancestry with primates comes directly from those who are most critical of the idea.”<sup>40</sup>

### *Irreducibly Complex Systems*

ID scholar Michael Behe has argued that certain biological systems, such as bacterial flagella, blood-clotting processes, and the immune system, are “irreducibly complex.” They consist of multiple subsystems, the removal of any one of which would render the system nonfunctional. He argues that such systems must have been designed by an intelligent entity, because none of the components could have evolved in the absence of the others.<sup>41</sup>

Scientists counter that systems labeled as “irreducibly complex” by Behe can arise by natural evolution—that individual parts may arise separately, each useful in its own context, and then later be combined into a larger system. For example, researchers recently found that the DNA sequence of bacterial flagella is almost

identical to that of a “needle” that certain bacteria use to insert toxins.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, most of the proteins involved in blood clotting are genetically similar and are most likely the result of gene duplication.<sup>43</sup> With regard to the immune system, during the Dover trial fifty-eight peer-reviewed publications, nine books, and several textbook chapters were presented to the court summarizing research on immune system evolution. Facts such as these ultimately convinced Judge Jones to write in his decision, “We therefore find that Professor Behe’s claim for irreducible complexity has been refuted in peer-reviewed research papers and has been rejected by the scientific community at large.”<sup>44</sup>

### *Probability*

Both traditional Creationists and ID scholars have invoked probability arguments in criticisms of evolution. One typical argument goes like this: The human alpha globin molecule, a component of hemoglobin, is a protein chain based on a sequence of 141 amino acids. There are 20 different amino acids common in living systems, so the number of potential chains of length 141 is  $20^{141}$ , which is roughly  $10^{183}$  (i.e., a 1 followed by 183 zeroes). Thus, the probability of the specific human alpha globin molecule forming at random is so remote that even after billions of years, it is very unlikely that it would ever appear.<sup>45</sup>

But scientists point out that this calculation is faulty, because most of the 141 amino acids can be changed without altering the basic biological function. More importantly, this and other probability-based arguments suffer from the fatal fallacy of presuming that a structure such as alpha globin arises by a single all-at-once event (which, after all, is the Creationist theory, not the scientific theory, of their origin). Instead, available evidence suggests that alpha globin and other proteins arose as the end product of a long sequence of intermediate steps, each of which was biologically useful in an earlier context. Probability calculations such as the above, which do not take into account the process by which the structure came to be, are not meaningful and can easily mislead.

Along this line, scientists note that if one (erroneously) presumes that a snowflake arises by an all-at-once random assemblage of water molecules, instead of by known natural processes, then by analyzing symmetry one would calculate exceedingly

small probabilities for their formation, even more remote than the figures mentioned above for alpha globin. Yet no one insists that supernatural action is required to produce snowflakes.<sup>46</sup>

### *Information Theory*

ID writer William Dembski has invoked probability and information theory (the mathematical theory of information content) in arguments against Darwinism. But knowledgeable researchers who have examined Dembski's works in detail are sharply critical. Mathematician Jeffrey Shallit and biologist Wesley Elsberry conclude that Dembski's notion of "complex specified information" is incoherent and unworkable.<sup>47</sup> Richard Wein, in a review of Dembski's *No Free Lunch*, characterizes it as "pseudoscientific rhetoric."<sup>48</sup>

### *Biological Novelty*

Creationists and ID scholars have insisted that, whereas minor changes may occur within an established "kind," "random" evolution can never produce anything fundamentally new.<sup>49</sup> Biologists counter with examples such as a 1974 experiment, in which a gene in the bacterium *E. coli* that is responsible for metabolizing lactose was removed. Within twenty-four hours, the bacterium had re-evolved a capability to utilize lactose by means of a similar but distinct three-part biochemical pathway.<sup>50</sup>

Another example is a bacterial species discovered in Japan that has adapted to digest nylon waste (which did not exist until the twentieth century) as the result of a "frame shift" mutation.<sup>51</sup> As a third example, certain Italians, all descended from a single individual several generations back, possess a genetic mutation that results in measurably improved cardiovascular health.<sup>52</sup>

Perhaps the best-known examples, however, are the recent evolution of new strains of tuberculosis that are resistant to all known anti-TB drugs and drug-resistant strains of HIV that, in many cases, evolve within the body of a single patient.<sup>53</sup>

Along these lines, scientists note that computer programs mimicking the process of evolution have been utilized to construct computer algorithms and engineering designs that are superior, in many cases, to the best-known human efforts. Applications have been found in aerospace, chemistry, electrical engi-

neering, financial analysis, materials engineering, robotics, and others.<sup>54</sup>

### *Speciation*

Creationists and ID scholars often assert that the splitting of a species into two species has never been actually observed. Although speciation typically requires many thousands of years, biologists cite examples of present-day species that appear to be in the process of splitting.<sup>55</sup> One example is a certain salamander species in California, which is visibly different between one end of its habitat and the other. These differences are so extensive that, by established standards (such as failure to interbreed), specimens from the two ends would be classified as two distinct species.<sup>56</sup>

### *Origin of Life*

Scientists readily acknowledge that many questions regarding the evolution of life on earth remain to be resolved. The origin of life, for instance, is still not understood, although intriguing advances have been made recently.<sup>57</sup> In any event, it is not clear what is to be gained for the Creationist/ID cause by highlighting the remaining unknowns in the origin of life arena, since the evolution of living organisms after biogenesis is very well grounded experimentally, independent of how the first biomolecules formed.

In summary, the consensus of the vast majority of scientists who have examined these issues is that the arguments raised so far by the Creationist and ID communities are not genuinely substantive. For the most part, these questions were settled long ago in the scientific literature. They certainly do not threaten the foundations of the evolutionary paradigm. For additional discussion on the technical issues of creationism and intelligent design, see the papers I have prepared and posted at <http://www.sciencemeetsreligion.org/evolution>.

### **Scriptural Interpretations**

Passages in Genesis, as well as similar passages in other LDS scriptures such as the book of Moses and the book of Abraham, describe the process of the creation and Earth's early history. One key issue is how literally one should interpret these passages—for

example, what period of time was required for the creation, or whether Noah's flood was a local event or a global immersion. Along this line, it is worth noting that the book of Abraham account of the creation uses "time" instead of "day" to denote each creative period (e.g., Abr. 4:8).

As mentioned earlier, both the Creationist and ID movements are closely allied with Evangelical Christianity. Many (albeit not all) Evangelicals subscribe to the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, which declares: "Being wholly and verbally God-given, Scripture is without error or fault in all its teaching . . . in what it states about God's acts in creation, about the events of world history, and about its own literary origins under God."<sup>58</sup> Partly because of such beliefs, many in the Evangelical world (including the Discovery Institute that backs the ID movement) agree that Darwinian evolution is fundamentally incompatible with scripture and the Christian faith.<sup>59</sup> Ironically, this view is shared by some prominent modern-day atheists on the other end of the intellectual spectrum, who hold that modern science proves religion to be utterly false.<sup>60</sup>

In any event, most modern Bible scholars agree that an inerrant reading of the Bible is no longer defensible, in light of both textual and archaeological research.<sup>61</sup> This conclusion should not come as a surprise to LDS readers, since Mormonism was founded on a rejection of biblical inerrancy and completeness. Bible scholars also point out that an approach that fails to acknowledge the human element in the Bible makes it difficult to deal with passages that appear to endorse holy war, slavery, and the subjugation of women.<sup>62</sup> With respect to the creation scriptures, scholars have long concluded that these passages were written to reaffirm God's love for his people, not as a scientific discourse in the modern sense. Karen Armstrong, for instance, writes that the Genesis text "was emphatically not intended as a literal account of the physical origins of life."<sup>63</sup> LDS Apostle James E. Talmage made essentially the same point in 1931: "The opening chapters of Genesis, and scriptures related thereto, were never intended as a textbook of geology, archaeology, earth-science, or man-science. Holy Scripture will endure, while the conceptions of men change with new discoveries. We do not show reverence for the scriptures when we misapply them through faulty

interpretation.”<sup>64</sup> In this context, it is reasonable to ask why the creation scriptures should be read very literally, when no one insists that, for example, the passages below should be read literally:

1 Sam. 2:8. . . . for the pillars of the earth [are] the LORD’S, and he hath set the world upon them.

Psa. 93:1. . . . the world also is stablished, that it cannot be moved.

Psa. 104:5. [Who] laid the foundations of the earth, [that] it should not be removed for ever[?]

Eccl. 1:5. The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose.

These passages, among many others that could be listed, affirm the geocentric cosmology of antiquity: The Earth is flat with four corners, is set on a foundation of pillars, and remains stationary while the sun and other heavenly bodies move on transparent spheres above it. Such passages are not interpreted literally today, but they were the foundation of the persecution of Galileo and others over Copernican astronomy during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>65</sup>

### **Theological Difficulties**

ID scholar Phillip Johnson criticizes the assumption of “methodological naturalism” underlying the scientific enterprise, namely the notion that the universe is governed by natural and comprehensible laws. Johnson argues that this assumption unfairly rules out the hypothesis of a supernatural designer.<sup>66</sup> He also suggests that some questions regarding the creation of our world are “mysteries” beyond the realm of human investigation or understanding.<sup>67</sup> ID scholars Dembski and Behe have also criticized the naturalistic worldview. Behe has said that “design,” from his point of view, means beyond the laws of nature.<sup>68</sup>

Scientists acknowledge that methodological naturalism underlies their research but argue that they have no choice. As scientific philosopher Robert Pennock observes: “Once such supernatural explanations are permitted they could be used in chemistry and physics as easily as Creationists have used them in biology and geology. Indeed, all empirical investigation beyond the

purely descriptive could cease. . . . Methodological Naturalism is not a dogmatic ideology that simply is tacked on to the principles of the scientific method; it is essential for the basic standards of empirical evidence.”<sup>69</sup>

Theologians point out that Creationist and ID attempts to identify phenomena that cannot be explained by natural law lead directly to a “God of the gaps” theology—meaning that God’s influence is to be found in the gaps of what currently remains unexplained in science. This approach has been characterized as theological suicide, since many of those who have adopted it over the centuries have been disappointed as scientific knowledge has expanded.<sup>70</sup> This worldview also contrasts with LDS theology, which has traditionally viewed God as acting within the realm of eternal natural laws, thus effectively eliminating the need for warfare between science and religion. Here are some authoritative comments by Latter-day Saint leaders: President Brigham Young and Apostles John A. Widtsoe and Parley P. Pratt on this topic. Widtsoe was a scientist (a chemist), but the other two were not:

Brigham Young: Yet I will say with regard to miracles, there is no such thing save to the ignorant—that is, there never was a result wrought out by God or by any of His creatures without there being a cause for it. There may be results, the causes of which we do not see or understand, and what we call miracles are no more than this—they are the results or effects of causes hidden from our understandings.<sup>71</sup>

John A. Widtsoe: Just what forces were brought into operation, or what process was used, to organize the “elements” into an earth is not known. Latter-day Saints are inclined to hold that forces about us, known in part through common human experience, especially in the field of physical science, were employed in the formation of the earth. The progress of science may yet shed much light on the origin of the earth.<sup>72</sup>

Parley P. Pratt: Among the popular errors of modern times, an opinion prevails that miracles are events which transpire contrary to the laws of nature, that they are effects without a cause. If such is the fact, then, there never has been a miracle, and there never will be one. The laws of nature are the laws of truth. Truth is unchangeable, and independent in its own sphere. A law of nature never has been broken. And it is an absolute impossibility that such law ever should be broken.<sup>73</sup>



Some Creationist writers have acknowledged the evidence for an extremely old Earth, for instance, but offer the explanation that God created the world with an “appearance of age,” perhaps as a test of our faith.<sup>74</sup> ID scholars are more reserved in this regard, but Johnson’s notion that certain aspects of the creation are “mysteries” beyond the reach of human investigation and understanding is in this same general vein.<sup>75</sup> Needless to say, such precepts are at odds with the LDS notion of a rational, comprehensible God epitomized by the credo “The glory of God is intelligence, or, in other words, light and truth” (D&C 93:36). Writers from other religious traditions have also been sharply critical of the notion of a God who deliberately distorts evidence or withholds truth from humans. Catholic biologist Kenneth Miller writes, “In order to defend God against the challenge [Creationists] see from evolution, they have to make him into a schemer, a trickster, even a charlatan. Their version of God is one who intentionally plants misleading clues beneath our feet and in the heavens themselves. . . . To embrace that God, we must reject science and worship deception itself.”<sup>76</sup> The ID community’s notion that each individual species or “kind” has been meticulously designed presents severe theological problems in light of the many troublesome features of nature, such as pain, disease, violence, and the millions of species that have become extinct. For example, scientists have found twenty-two distinct species of elephants that arose and became extinct during the past six million years. Why did it take so many tries to design modern elephants?<sup>77</sup>

For that matter, certain features of the human body are highly troublesome from a “design” hypothesis in the above sense. Many persons suffer from back ailments, due to a skeletal design adapted from four-footed ancestors.<sup>78</sup> Most mammals generate their own vitamin C; but while we have the same biochemical machinery, it doesn’t work because mutations have inactivated a key final step. Evidently these mutations occurred after our ancestors adopted a diet rich in fruit, when it was no longer essential to generate vitamin C.<sup>79</sup> Thirty percent of the roughly one thousand human genes associated with the sense of smell are inoperable due to accumulated mutations.<sup>80</sup> In human eyes, the optic nerves emerge from the front of the retina, and then travel to the back, resulting in a blind spot. By contrast, mollusk eyes are designed

more logically with nerve connections on the back of the retina.<sup>81</sup> Each of these examples makes perfect sense from evolutionary history, but they are inexplicable as the product of meticulous design by a transcendent Being. Even worse, as noted tongue-in-cheek by Kenneth Miller, one could argue that the ID movement's designer is a plagiarist, because the DNA errors that have inactivated our ability to produce vitamin C have been copied into the genomes of three other primates.<sup>82</sup>

### **The “War” between Science and Religion**

Creationist and ID scholars have adopted a combative stance against the findings and theories of modern science, particularly evolution—indeed, they see science and religion pitched in mortal combat. But many other scientists and theologians fail to see the need for this “war.” As Kenneth Miller explained recently on PBS:

I think that faith and reason are both gifts from God. And if God is real, then faith and reason should complement each other rather than be in conflict. Science is the child of reason. Reason has given us the ability to establish the scientific method to investigate the world around us, and to show that the world and the universe in which we live are far vaster and far more complex, and I think far more wonderful, than anyone could have imagined 1,000 or 2,000 years ago.

Does that mean that scientific reason, by taking some of the mystery out of nature, has taken away faith? I don't think so. I think by revealing a world that is infinitely more complex and infinitely more varied and creative than we had ever believed before, in a way it deepens our faith and our appreciation for the author of that nature, the author of that physical universe. And to people of faith, that author is God.<sup>83</sup>

LDS biologist Daniel J. Fairbanks offered this advice:

Those who sincerely seek both scientific and spiritual understanding would do well to abandon the dichotomy [that one must choose between science and religion]. Denying the evidence of evolution, including human evolution, is honest only in ignorance. The incredible diversity of life on Earth, the many fossils unearthed, the varied yet similar anatomical features among species, the obvious hierarchical arrangement of life, and the literally millions of ancestral relics in our DNA—all undeniably attest to our common evolutionary origin with the rest of life. If someone can believe that all living organisms share the same creator, why not consider that all living or-

ganisms share a common genetic heritage? Indeed, we can find wonder, even comfort, in embracing our biological relationship with all living things. As Darwin understood, “[T]here is grandeur in this view of life.”<sup>84</sup>

In contrast to the highly negative view of evolution that one reads in the Creationist and ID literature, Catholic biologist Francisco Ayala argues that evolution can be seen in a positive light, as the solution to the “last prong” of the problem of suffering and evil: “As floods and drought were a necessary consequence of the fabric of the physical world, predators and parasites, dysfunctions and diseases were a consequence of the evolution of life. They were not a result of deficient or malevolent design.”<sup>85</sup> This statement is reminiscent of a comment made by LDS President David O. McKay in 1952, who argued that evolution could be seen as evidence that humankind is destined for eternal life:

For example, evolution’s beautiful theory of the creation of the world offers many perplexing problems to the inquiring mind. Inevitably, a teacher who denies divine agency in creation, who insists there is no intelligent purpose in it, will infest the student with the thought that all may be chance. I say, that no youth should be so led without a counterbalancing thought. Even the skeptic teacher should be fair enough to see that even Charles Darwin, when he faced this great question of annihilation, that the creation is dominated only by chance wrote: “It is an intolerable thought that man and all other sentient beings are doomed to complete annihilation after such long, continued slow progress.” And another good authority, Raymond West, said, “Why this vast [expenditure] of time and pain and blood?” Why should man come so far if he’s destined to go no farther? A creature that travels such distances and fought such battles and won such victories deserves what we are compelled to say, “To conquer death and rob the grave of its victory.”<sup>86</sup>

Catholic theologian John Haught adds the following:

If God were a magician or a dictator, then we might expect the universe to be finished all at once and remain eternally unchanged. If God insisted on being in total control of things, we might not expect the weird organisms of the Cambrian explosion, the later dinosaurs and reptiles, or the many other wild creatures that seem so exotic to us. We would want our divine magician to build the world along the lines of a narrowly human sense of clean perfection.

But what a pallid and impoverished world that would be. It would lack all the drama, diversity, adventure, and intense beauty

that evolution has in fact produced. A world of human design might have a listless harmony to it, and it might be a world devoid of pain and struggle, but it would have none of the novelty, contrast, danger, upheaval and grandeur that evolution has brought about over billions of years.

Fortunately, the God of our religion is not a magician but a creator. And we think this God is much more interested in promoting freedom and the adventure of evolution than in preserving the status quo.<sup>87</sup>

### Conclusion

There is nothing in the overall scientific picture of the creation that is fundamentally anti-religious. To the contrary, many stand in awe at the grandeur of life on earth and the universe's elegant, lawful construction. Further, as some authors cited above have argued, evolution can be seen as a solution to the problem of why suffering and evil exist in the world, and as evidence that humankind is destined for eternal life (as in the LDS doctrine of "eternal progression").

With regard to the scientific evidence, Carl Sagan observed that "extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence."<sup>88</sup> Most scientists (even those professing religious faith) who have examined the claims of the Creationist and ID movements agree that what these communities have produced so far is either negated by available scientific evidence or, at the very least, falls far short of the level required to challenge existing theories. These movements have also failed to formulate a body of quantitative, falsifiable hypotheses of their own that can withstand empirical testing and peer review.

With regard to theology, the Creationist and ID communities seek to identify phenomena that cannot be explained by natural laws, in an attempt to "prove" the hand of God, thus making faith unnecessary. Ironically, this approach implicitly affirms the materialist worldview of prominent atheists, who say that religion is false because of modern science. More importantly, this approach leads directly to a "God of the gaps" theology, which has left a legacy of disappointment through the years as science has filled many of the remaining gaps. Furthermore, as noted above, certain Creationist and ID writings have overtones of "God the Great Deceiver" theology—the notion that God has deliberately altered

physical evidence to give it the “appearance of age” or has withheld truth regarding the creation from humans. Such notions are inimical to the LDS tradition of a rational, comprehensible God who works within the realm of natural law.

Some have suggested that Creationist or ID scholarship might be useful to bolster the religious conviction of those who waver. But it seems highly unwise to base one’s personal faith on precepts that are questioned by many God-believing scientists. As Paul warned the Corinthians, “For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?” (1 Cor. 14:8).

In summary, it is not only futile to battle modern science, as the Creationist and ID communities have done, but it is also unnecessary. Most major religious denominations, including the LDS Church, have made peace with the scientific world, recognizing that science addresses very different questions and employs very different methods. Many leading scientists affirm a religious faith. And both scientists and nonscientists can stand in awe at the majesty of the universe, which is now known to be much vaster, more intricate, and more magnificent than ever before realized in human history.

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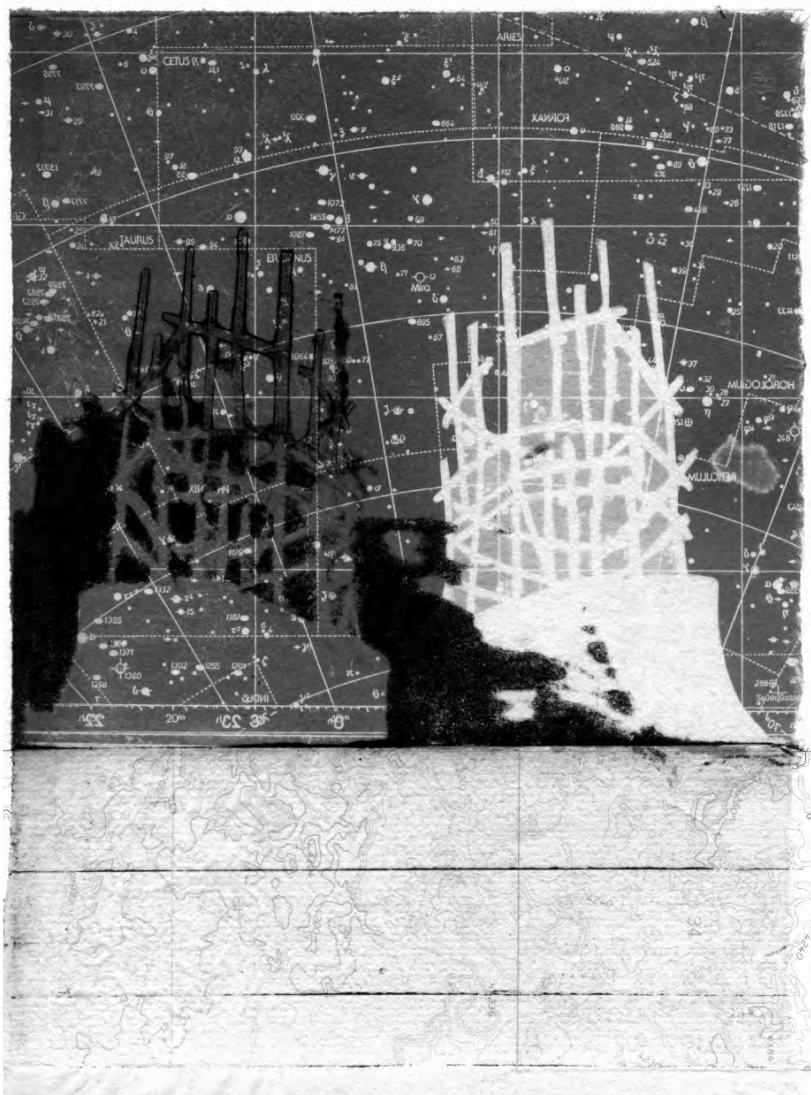
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## No Longer as Strangers

*Chase Kimball*

When I knelt down to pray with John, we were committing a crime. When we spoke about the Book of Mormon, we were cautious of who might be listening. We were brothers in the truest sense, yet we could not openly call each other “Brother.” This story is about my friend John, the Church, and China.

About four years ago I was living in the small town of Emmen in the northeast region of the Netherlands when I came into contact with a Chinese student, Zhan Yu Feng, whose English name was John. I was serving as a missionary at the time, and my companion and I had met John one evening while looking for another student with whom we had made an appointment who lived in the same dormitory. That student never showed up, but John was there. He wanted to know who we were and what we were doing. Naturally, we were pleased to tell him.

We started meeting with John regularly, and soon we could tell that his interest in our message and the Church extended beyond mere curiosity. Despite not being able to understand Dutch, he started coming to church regularly where we would translate the entire three-hour service into English for him. As we taught him, I felt privileged to witness his conversion, to watch him grow in understanding, to listen to him pray for the very first time—a young man who had hardly even heard of the idea of God before we met him. I grew to love him deeply as a friend, a brother, and even as something of a son.

John also had a delightful sense of humor, which, when combined with the occasional translation error, created a series of memorable lines. One time we taught him that the president of the Church, President Hinckley, was the only living prophet authorized to receive revelation on behalf of the entire earth. His response was, “Only one? So rare . . . like the panda!” Another time



a Sunday School teacher got very upset at church after an argument with another member. We were concerned that seeing this contention would turn John off the Church, but he seemed to understand and take it in stride: "That teacher's face didn't look very much like Jesus's face. His face looked all red and angry." Then there was the confusion, as John was preparing to be baptized, when we told him that he would be dressed all in white and immersed in water. We suggested that he bring an extra pair of white underwear. "White? But all my underwear is red," he said; and when we asked how this could be the case, he explained, "Well . . . it's the year of the Pig."

John did, in fact, get baptized. Later another friend of his, also a Chinese student, joined the Church after John introduced him to it. John was a loving and dedicated young man, and I saw firsthand how the gospel changed his life. He read the scriptures, he prayed, he fellowshiped with the other members of the Church. He had found a home far away from home, and most of all he had found his Heavenly Father. When it was time for me to leave and continue my service in a different city, he gave me an electronic wristwatch as a going-away present. "Here," he said, very solemnly and sincerely. "It was made in China."

John and I kept up occasional contact after I left Emmen. After working at a Chinese restaurant for some time where he was treated poorly and paid little, he eventually stopped his studies early and went back home to China. He got a job working at the Olympics, and more recently he has started a company that organizes nationwide singing contests—sort of like *American Idol* but not televised. Last spring I went to Beijing on a college seminar studying political economy; and for the first time in three years we were reunited.

We had a wonderful time seeing each other. On our first day together, we went out to lunch and then spent the rest of the afternoon at his apartment, playing on his karaoke machine. Another day he cooked lunch for me, complete with a side of frog legs, better than any restaurant meal I had had in Asia. It was a delight to eat with him, to catch up on his life, and meet his friends and roommates. But most of all I was keen on making sure that John reconnected with the Church, because, since his return to China, he had not known where to find it.



It is difficult finding the Church in China. Though it is established all over the world in every country where the government will allow us, Chinese regulations regarding the Church are very strict. Latter-day Saints are allowed to worship together, but they may not proselyte. The Church is not allowed to build formal meetinghouses in China, nor can there be any signage indicating where meetings are held. In Beijing, for example, the members meet inside an office building. I found the address on [mormon.org](http://mormon.org), but it took me an hour to find the actual building because I did not know what I was looking for. And then it was only because I ran into other Mormons along the way that I knew to take the elevator around the corner to the fourth floor and then turn right and go across the hall. Nowhere was any of this information posted.

And while Latter-day Saints are allowed to worship together, there are limits to this freedom. Specifically, foreign passport-holding members are not allowed to worship with Chinese nationals. Thus, in Beijing a branch of Chinese Saints meets in the same building as the two foreigner branches, but much later in the afternoon so as to prevent interaction and even the appearance of conspiracy. We read the same books and pray to the same God, but we may not discuss Him with each other. Here is the text printed on the back of every program of the foreigners' branch:

The branch presidency wishes to draw your attention to the following:

It is important for foreign members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints living in or visiting China to be aware of the unique restrictions on religious activities here. While China permits freedom of religious belief, it requires all religious activities in China to comply with relevant laws and regulations.

We would like to remind you of the following:

1. No active or passive proselyting is permitted among local nationals in China,
2. Only individuals who hold foreign passports, and their spouses, may attend meetings or other activities of this branch,
3. No foreign nationals are permitted to participate in activities of any kind with Chinese nationals who are members of our church, and
4. Religious materials may not be disseminated to Chinese nationals in China.

Your strict observance of these rules enables us to build a foun-

dition of trust with government authorities and enables us to continue to meet together as the government permits us to do so.

With all these obstacles, it was difficult getting John linked up with the Church.

The first time I tried, I brought John along with me to the foreigner branch I had been attending, but we were stopped at the door. The brother who stopped us was kind and sympathetic but had to remain firm in prohibiting John from worshipping with us. We understood, of course. One casual exception to the rule could turn into a pattern that would jeopardize the Church's ability to exist in China at all. It is in keeping with a common attitude throughout the Church that we patiently and diligently adhere to established rules and policies, whether from external forces or from the Church itself, even if the policies are painful, until such a time as we can truly change the regulation forever.

And so that first Sunday we did not enter the chapel. I apologized to John but then insisted that he stay with me in the foyer just a little longer. We waited outside, and eventually a man came out to us carrying the sacrament—those tokens of the blood and body of Christ. And John partook. For him it was the first time in two years.

The next Sunday I went to the foreigner service by myself but waited for several hours afterward for the Chinese service to begin. John showed up a few minutes before the first meeting began, and I took him by the hand and led him to the front of the chapel where the branch president was sitting. The entire congregation was already present, watching us, and I was conscious that I had to be brief, for every second I spent on that podium was in public violation of Chinese law. One of the branch president's counselors translated for me. I told them John was a member and that I was his missionary.

I put John's hand into the hand of the branch president and said, essentially, "Here. He is yours. Treat him like your son. Look out for him. Help him find family here." And then I gave John a hug and said good-bye.

The counselor shook my hand, looked into my eyes, and said, "Thank you."

"Thank you, brother," I said, "God bless you." And I left.

I walked across the hallway, turned left, and got into the elevator. As the doors closed I could hear the first few bars of the opening hymn. They were singing in Chinese, but I knew the words.

Now let us rejoice in the day of salvation.  
No longer as strangers on earth need we roam.  
Good tidings are sounding to us and each nation,  
And shortly the hour of redemption will come,  
When all that was promised the Saints will be given,  
And none will molest them from morn until ev'n,  
And earth will appear as the Garden of Eden,  
And Jesus will say to all Israel, "Come home."<sup>1</sup>

I took the elevator down four flights and walked through the main lobby. As I walked toward the door I saw a middle-aged Chinese woman dressed in her Sunday best, walking past me in the direction toward which I had just come. Our eyes met, and we smiled at each other briefly—just long enough to acknowledge that, though we do not know each other, though we cannot speak each other's language, and though we are forbidden from praying together, we are both children of the same covenant. Then we passed by and I walked out the door, still smiling.

#### Note

1. William W. Phelps, "Now Let Us Rejoice," *Hymns of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985), no. 3.

# An Excuse I've Been Working On for Awhile

*Joey Franklin*

I put bras in the dryer and forget to refill the toilet paper, and I left the milk on the counter this morning. Again. But I ask for directions and say “I love you,” and I almost never leave hair on the soap. Which means, I suppose, I’m not entirely without hope.

I wonder about the implication that most men are just hopeless. And I wonder more about manhood in general—that infernal euphemism: asserted, displayed, defended, envied—cut off in a jealous rage.

I am haunted by the myth and misogyny of “manhood.” Phallic shadows of who I’m “supposed” to be lurk everywhere: in a greeting card I once saw with a large control panel of buttons and levers on the cover labeled “her” and a single, red on/off switch on the inside of the card labeled “him.”

In the subtle frustration of the housewife, whoever she is, who first applied the name “Better than Sex” to chocolate cake.

In the advice that my wife, Melissa, received during our engagement: “The most important phrase you need to learn,” someone told her, “is ‘Not tonight, honey. I’ve got a headache.’”

What’s more horrifying is the possibility that the stereotypes are the truest thing about me, that the haunting shadow is my own, that Lauryn Hill underestimated the problem when she doo-whopped: “Some guys are only about that thing.”

Another euphemism: *that thing*. The track of one-track minds, the slime that fills the gutter, the be-all and end-all of Freudian masculinity—think prisons, frat parties, locker rooms—the play-

grounds of unleashed libido, the proving grounds of male sexual aggression, boys being boys.

I am kept up at night by that phrase—boys will be boys—not worrying, but washing dishes. It's the reason I don't own an Xbox, that I don't watch UFC on Pay-Per-View, that I try not to turn my head when the glint in the hair of an attractive woman catches my eye. It's also the reason I remember socks when I dress my two-year-old, the reason I jump up to change so many dirty diapers, and the reason I fold the towels in thirds the way Melissa wants them folded. On the weekends, it's the reason I leave the macaroni and cheese in the box and cook chicken masala, rosemary baguettes, and ginger-orange pork with cashew and sesame asparagus; and each night at bedtime it's the reason I sing off-key lullabies to our boys in the dusky light of their bedroom.

And, no, I'm not just trying to cut down on her headaches.

Though that's definitely part of it.

And perhaps that's why I feel guilty wanting a pat on the back. That, and the fact that whatever I do around the house in the morning, after work, and on the weekends feels like little more than a shrug of the shoulders, a sheepish apology for my unavoidable maleness. At worst, the blurring of traditional gender roles only reaffirms what I'm trying to subvert. I end up merely "pitching in" around my own house, helping with "her" work, confirming my own damning dominance while incurring the down-the-nose glances of some women who find my efforts quaint, even calculating.

If Melissa is gone for the evening, some of her friends wonder what I'll eat. When I take the boys to the grocery store, old women nod pleasantly and say things like, "Looks like you have your hands full without Mom." If I bake something for a dinner party, friends raise their eyebrows. "Wow, he cooks," they say, as if I'd not only learned to roll over and shake but to fetch the newspaper and play dead. At best I'm a permanent understudy, relief pitcher, babysitter to my own kids, sous-chef, second fiddle.

A guy at work finds out Melissa stays at home all day with the boys, and he says with wide eyes, "If I were her, I'd divorce your butt."

A woman at church hears me compliment Melissa, and she

says, "When my husband says something like that, I know he wants something."

I don't.

Not exactly.

I mean, I do.

Of course I do.

But it's more complicated than *that*. As a child, I saw enough of my own dad sitting around after dinner with a newspaper to know that I would wash dishes as a married man. I saw the way my mother folded her arms across her chest and looked at my father when he wasn't paying attention. I imagine how my mom must have felt working twelve-hour days and running a house with five kids and trying to be patient with a husband who seemed always sick and between jobs. To be a good husband, I concluded, was to not make extra work for your wife.

But their situation was so different from ours. Work for my mother was never a choice; we would have starved otherwise. For Melissa and me, it's a choice we've made. But it's a choice that seems unfair, and I'm afraid of making her feel used, put out, and exploited. No matter how much I do around the house or with our kids, I still get up in the morning and go to work to sit in my cubicle, feet on my desk, a half-eaten chocolate bar beside me, an endless supply of blank Word documents to keep me busy. Meanwhile, Melissa is at home cleaning macaroni and cheese out of the carpet, fending off telemarketers, scrubbing out the sink, and finishing the dishes from one meal just in time to start cooking the next. Her only intellectual stimulus? NPR playing in the background.

One evening, sitting on the couch after the boys had fallen asleep, Melissa turned to me and said something like, "My sister sings. My mother sews. You write. But what do I do?" We sat for a moment looking at each other. She continued: "Sometimes I feel like I don't know who I am." And so this is it. The heart of the problem—the reality that we must live with if we continue like this—is that any success of my own will come at the sacrifice of Melissa's interests and aspirations; every free minute for me is a minute stolen from her. Continue as we are, and I will progress in my career and she will stay at home, her world melding into a long blur of Sesame Street mornings, peanut butter and jelly after-

noons, and Oprah rerun evenings, sprinkled occasionally with visits to the supermarket and the pediatrician's office and the thrift store.

What can we do?

She could go to work. Though she says she doesn't want to. And since we don't want to put our kids in daycare, one of us has to stay at home.

I could do what my friend Matt has done.

Matt's wife, Linda, just started her third year as a Ph.D. candidate. Matt stays at home, does much of the cooking, the cleaning, and the grocery shopping, and homeschools their two boys while Linda teaches composition courses and works overload hours for the department. They both seem at ease with the situation. Matt relishes the time he gets with their boys, and Linda enjoys the community and recognition that come with academia. And I know a half-dozen other couples doing the same thing—modern dads, comfortable in their rejection of traditional gender roles, sensitive to millennia of sexism that have given them an unfair advantage over their wives, and liberated women free to explore and succeed in their chosen careers. At least that's what it looks like to me. I don't know if Matt pulls his hair out some mornings, wondering if the four walls of his home aren't closing in on his personality. And surely there are days when Linda would rather pitch her books out the window and head home to be with her boys than stand in front of another class of bored freshmen.

But it seems to me that their situation just reverses our own—one spouse acquiescing to the other. I'm frantic for some kind of middle ground where every dish I wash and diaper I change doesn't turn into an apology for being male, where I can buy Melissa flowers and rub her feet without feeling as if I'm buttering her up, where everyone gets some of what they want and the kids still get what they need. I don't think Linda feels guilty when she leaves in the morning, and I don't think she should. I don't think either of us should. The reality is that, if someone is to be at home with the children, it seems there *is* no middle ground.

So why do I still worry about it?

Because of my grandfather.



My mother shook her head at my father, but she raised her voice about my grandfather, her own father. He worked in metal and wood, yoke and plow, paint and gravel. Up before the sun, out before breakfast, and home after dark, he was, to my mother, the ideal male, the type of man she wishes she had married. In addition to working full time, running a small farm on the side, and leading a small Mormon congregation in Idaho, he took the time to teach my mother how to run a chainsaw, train dogs, repair fences, and dig ditches. Grandma cooked and canned and sewed and brooded over the children and, the way my mother describes it, waited every night to embrace my grandfather when he came through the door. The divisions of labor were simple, clear, and deep. There was no middle ground. There didn't need to be.

But I still wonder about a middle ground. This is not Idaho and the year is not 1950. I am not my grandfather and Melissa is not my grandmother.

So what if we both worked? Passed our boys back and forth? Hired some help?

My friend Jill, a Ph.D. candidate and young mother, once asked me what I do for childcare and then stopped herself. "Oh, I forgot about your wife," she said, not angry, but exasperated, not at me, but at her situation. She and her grad-student husband, Christian, pay top dollar for childcare and constantly juggle their own coursework with the needs of their eighteen-month-old daughter. Standing in the hall with an armful of books, bag over her shoulder, and a note from her babysitter in her hand, she furrows her brow. "I want a wife," she says, and sighs. "Where can I get a wife?"

Liz and Christian, Linda and Matt, Melissa and I—we're all approaching the questions of marriage and division of labor differently, and that may be the end of it. Regardless of the specter of social expectation and tradition, what works for Jill and Christian will work for Jill and Christian, and what works for Linda and Matt will work for Linda and Matt, and what works for Melissa and me will—

—well—

—it will continue making me feel guilty, and keep me chopping vegetables, vacuuming the living room, folding laundry, and

bringing her flowers for “no reason at all.” And when people ask, “What does your wife do?” I will never add “just” to “stays home with the kids.”

# Light in Darkness: Embracing the Opportunity of Climate Change

*Edwin Firmage Jr.*

*“I howl like a wolf and mourn like an owl.” (Micah 1:8)<sup>1</sup>*

Some readers of this article may know me as an environmental activist (my version of public and church service). A few may know me as an outdoor photographer (my day job). But here I'd like to put on another of my hats. Long before I took up cameras and activism, I was a student of the ancient Near East, with a special interest in Israel and the Bible. In this article, I propose to turn exegete once again and examine the biblical notion of Zion as a model for sustainable living in a world threatened on many fronts by the consequences of its own success. I do this with an appreciation of the irony involved, for Bible study was, at least indirectly, the beginning of the end of my active involvement in organized religion.<sup>2</sup> However, in part *because* of that crumbling of belief, my Bible study was the start of everything good that has followed, including the photography and the activism. What's more, although I now approach the Bible very differently than I did as a Mormon missionary thirty years ago, the Bible is, if anything, more significant to me now. For me, as I hope for readers of *Dialogue*, it remains a foundational cultural and spiritual document.

I begin, however, with a proposition that would seem to be far removed from the Bible and its concerns. Indeed, my proposition would seem to be at odds with typical notions of what *religion* is all about. My proposition is that the issue that should be at the top of our agenda isn't the defense of marriage, it isn't "values," it isn't

abortion. It isn't states' rights or the danger of socialism or Obamacare or any of the things that now preoccupy our neurotic, values-obsessed, and values-poor society. The central problem of our time is climate change, in comparison to which all other issues, even legitimate ones, shrink to insignificance. Climate change is the problem of problems. It is *the* ecological problem, *the* social and economic problem, *the* health problem, and *the* moral problem—and not just of our time but of all time.<sup>3</sup>

My proposition has an equally odd-sounding correlate: that churches have a uniquely important role to play in addressing this problem of problems. Indeed, it is in addressing this problem, I contend, that churches will find a moral purpose and a relevance that they have lacked now for many years. In the case of the LDS Church in particular, I believe that it is in embracing the opportunity for personal and societal transformation represented by climate change that we will rediscover Zion. Indeed, I would go further: the future material and spiritual success of the Church are tied, for better or worse, to how we respond to climate change, which is both litmus test and potential catalyst, stumbling block and keystone. Climate change is, for our time, what the political crisis of Isaiah's and Jeremiah's time was for ancient Israel: the ultimate moment of truth. With this preamble, I'd like now to consider what light the Bible, "that book so little read in so many places at so many times" (Thomas Greene), might shed on this issue for religious institutions that, in theory if not always in deed, honor the Bible as a foundational document.

Arise, shine, for thy light has come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.

For, behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee.

And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising. (Isa. 60:1-3 KJV)

The speaker of these words called himself Yesha'yahu, or Isaiah, and was the second or third of Israel's prophets to use that name. He wrote at the end of the biblical period and, as one of the last of the writers of the Bible, could look back over hundreds of years of thought and action inspired by Israel's unique faith. As one of the last of its prophets, he saw himself and his people at a

turning point when at last the promise of God's covenant with Israel would be mutually fulfilled.

If the Bible has a red thread, an organizing principle, it is certainly the concept of the covenant. What does this covenant mean? To understand, we must go back to the beginning of Israel's history, as Israel's priests did when they were putting the Torah in its present form. For them, the story began with God's creation of humankind, "Let us make mankind in our image, according to our likeness" (Gen. 1:26). For Israel's priests, the resemblance between God and human beings was both physical and spiritual. It was this resemblance that made it possible for God at a later date to tell Israel, "Holy *you* shall be, because I, Yahweh, your God, am holy" (Lev. 19:2). Without such a resemblance, such a requirement would be impossible. But even at the beginning of history, before ever saying a word to this effect, God expected people to model their behavior on His.

They didn't. God's first attempt to create a holy following failed. The descendants of Adam and Eve created a world filled with violence. Clearly, if people were going to become holy, God would have to do something more than simply turning them loose on their own recognizance. And so, after wiping out all life on earth except the beings saved in the ark, God gave humankind its first instructions on how to behave. He told Noah that people may not kill each other because they are the image of God. And He told Noah that, while people would now be allowed to eat animals as opposed to just plants for food, the life of these animals, as represented in their blood, belonged to God and to God alone.

This was the first simple statement of ethics and the first dietary law of the Bible (Gen. 9:3-6). Once more, however, humanity failed to live up to its promise and its obligation. Human beings again filled the earth with violence and even proposed to take heaven by storm by building a gigantic siege tower (Isa. 14:13-14: Babel and Babylon, the same city at different ends of history, define arrogance). God responded by scattering humanity to the winds and making it difficult for them to work together. Students of foreign languages will be forever grateful for this difficulty.

And so God made a third attempt. Again He singled out one good man and made him a promise that He had not made with

Noah or with Adam. God bound Himself to this man *as a friend*, with the promise that He would be a friend not only to the man but also to his offspring. In time, God took the descendants of His friend, Abraham, and set them down at the foot of Sinai for a lecture like no other in history. In painstaking and unprecedented detail, God laid out for the Israelites what it means to be holy. No aspect of life was too trivial for consideration. Diet, clothing, hygiene, behavior, governance—God spelled it all out for them so that there would be no room for excuses. This was Israel's Torah, the Teaching, the basis for the agreement between God and His people. If they would follow His Teaching and become a holy people, He would be their God and would dwell among them—literally. In Israelite thought, the giving of the Torah and the covenant at Sinai are the epitome of God's relations with humankind, for at Sinai God at last gave human beings the knowledge of how to become like God.<sup>4</sup>

Such is the vision of the Torah. But the biblical story of God's passionate involvement in the life of Israel of course does not end there. It continues in the prophets, whose theme is the failure of Israel to live up to this covenant responsibility. The tone of the prophetic message down the ages is set by Samuel, the first great prophet after Moses of whom we have any substantial record. Samuel rebukes Israel for its desire to have a king like the other nations, for Yahweh was its proper king (1 Sam. 8:10–22). Samuel also rebukes Saul, Israel's first king, for having saved some of the spoils of battle to make a grand sacrificial offering, despite Yahweh's command to destroy them. Samuel's response to Saul will echo through generations of prophecy, "Does Yahweh desire whole offerings and sacrifices as he desires that you hear him? To hear is better than sacrifice, and to listen better than the fat of rams" (1 Sam. 15:22).<sup>5</sup> If king and priest were the anointed executors of the divine will, the prophets were the guardians of it, a role that from the beginning put them at odds with the political and religious establishment. "So these men, the prophets, who mostly have no appointment but only a mission . . . stand and summon to justice the representatives on the royal throne for their treachery against YHVH and His commandments," wrote Martin Buber. "One after another they repeat God's words, 'I have anointed thee to be *melekh*,' or 'I have appointed thee *nagid*': Samuel to Saul (1

Sam. 15:17), Nathan to David (2 Sam. 12:7), Ahijah to Jeroboam (1 Kgs. 14:7). For four hundred years, they come one after the other and take their stand before the prince and reprove him because of the violated covenant, and finally Jeremiah (22:6ff), sometime after the disaster [the fall of Jerusalem], announces destruction for the king's house which had not been just, and therefore was no more justified."<sup>6</sup>

The conflict is tragic and deeply moving, as in the case of David, who is Yahweh's champion in war and a charismatic figure of enormous human depth and obvious faith. Even David, who, like Abraham, was promised that his dynasty would enjoy God's special favor forever (2 Sam. 7:16) and who was the model for and progenitor of the Messiah, does not escape prophetic censure. In contemporary pagan literature, kings were the subject of epic and hagiography. In Israel, they are the foils of the prophets, cautionary tales of the failure of even the greatest to live up to their responsibility. It's an extraordinary tale, without parallel in world literature, which perhaps is why many people today still read it, long after the royal propaganda has been relegated to the dustbin. I wonder, though, how many readers understand its message. No book in history sits less comfortably with the status quo than the book that has so widely become the icon of the status quo.

In the end, what the prophets look for and universally fail to find is the *transformation of a people*. In the view of the prophets, it is precisely the Lord's chosen people who are the most blind and deaf to God (Isa. 42:19–20, 43:8; Jer. 5:21, 6:10; Ezek. 12:2. See also Isa. 30:9; Jer. 6:17; Hos. 4:6, 16; 7:11), who do not understand God (Hos. 4:1 || lack of covenant loyalty; 4:6 || forgetting the Torah; Isa. 5:13; Jer. 22:16–17), and who are unclean (Isa. 64:6). The prophets therefore seek a national purification, a return to fundamental principles. In Hebrew to this day, the word for repentance is simply "return," *teshuvah*. Jeremiah tells Jerusalem, "Wash your heart of evil (*kabbesî mera'ah libbeka*) that you may be saved" (Jer. 4:14). "Circumcise yourself to the Lord, remove the foreskin of your hearts" (Jer. 4:4) so that you become in fact as well as in belief a holy *people* (Amos 5:14; Isa. 62:12; see also Jer. 2:3; Isa. 6:13).

The apparent resistance of the people to deep, wholesale, and permanent transformation provokes the prophets to anger and sorrow, for they see, as the people do not, the disparity between



what is and what could be, and between what is and what must be. In reality, the Israel of the prophets was probably not, for the most part, a society run amok, prophetic indictments notwithstanding, but an everyday kind of society with its “normal measure of daily sin.”<sup>7</sup> Hezekiah (715–687 BCE) and Josiah (640–609 BCE), for example, ruled for almost sixty years between them during a century of exceptional political turbulence and social change. Such longevity itself says something about the likely quality of their leadership. The Bible recognizes that they were, in fact, good kings who generally did right by God and by the people. Of Hezekiah, the author of 2 Kings says, “In Yahweh, the God of Israel, he put his trust. . . . There was nobody like him among all the kings of Judah who succeeded him or who had gone before him” (2 Kgs. 18:5). Josiah “did what was right in the eyes of the Yahweh, following in the footsteps of David, his ancestor, and deviating neither to the right nor to the left” (2 Kgs. 22:2). Jeremiah himself says of Josiah that “he upheld the cause of the lowly and the poor” (Jer. 22:15). And yet, it is during this same period that Isaiah and Jeremiah thunder against Israel, because there were also less-than-exemplary kings, less-than-exemplary ruling classes, and even less-than-exemplary poor. Jeremiah blankets them all with furious denunciation, “From the smallest to the greatest of them, all seek gain, from prophet to priest all deal falsely” (Jer. 6:13, 8:10).

In an ordinary society, notes Abraham Heschel, one of the greatest Jewish interpreters of the prophets, “Few are guilty, but all are responsible. . . . In a community not indifferent to suffering, uncompromisingly impatient with cruelty and falsehood, continually concerned for God and every man, crime would be infrequent rather than common.”<sup>8</sup> Israel had crime, and corruption, and poverty even at the best of times, like all societies before and since. But for a people under covenant to be holy, being ordinary—being like every other nation—was to fail God. The fact that crime and corruption and all of the ills of normal society had not disappeared demonstrated to the prophets that Israel’s commitment to the covenant was insufficient. In the end, while the prophets produced a long litany of the people’s offenses, what they really condemned Israel for was being ordinary.

The importance of this point cannot be overstated. Believing readers of the Bible today who suppose that Israel was punished

because it was *in fact* unusually wicked fundamentally miss the point, which is that the Israelites were probably just like most people in most ages, *and* the prophets condemned them. The prophets were not sociologists or moral statisticians. Their indictment of Israel was not compiled from an encyclopedic knowledge of the people's sins but rather from the observation of Israel as a whole and its self-evident failure to be something radically different. The prophetic indictment was therefore not subject to mitigation by the righteousness of some individuals. The prophets were no more concerned with individual righteousness than with individual wickedness. *Of course* individuals must be righteous. But if society as a whole cannot rise to the challenge, individual righteousness does not matter. The righteous and the wicked perish together. "To a person endowed with prophetic sight," Heschel continues, "everyone appears blind; to a person whose ear perceives God's voice, everyone else appears deaf. No one is just; no knowing is strong enough, no trust complete enough. The prophet hates the approximate, he shuns the middle of the road. . . . The prophet disdains those for whom God's presence is comfort and security; to him, it is a challenge, an incessant demand. . . . The prophet's word is a scream in the night. While the world is at ease and asleep, the prophet feels the blast from heaven."<sup>9</sup>

For the prophets, the transformation of the world—and their ultimate vision is of a transformed world modeled on Israel's holiness (Isa. 2:2–4, 42:6–7, 45:22, 49:6, 56:6–7, 66:18–22; Mic. 4:2; Jer. 3:17, 4:2, 12:16, 16:19; Zeph. 3:9–10; Zech. 2:15, 8:20–23; 14:16–21)—requires, first, that God's people take their divine mission to heart in a way that they have not yet done. Israel is the first fruits of God's harvest of the nations (Jer. 2:3). Thus, after chastising Israel for its failure to embrace its mission, God tells Jeremiah, "I will put my teaching (torah) inside them and write it on their heart, and I shall be their God and they shall be my people" (Jer. 31:33). In this last chapter in the story of God's relations with humankind, "they shall no longer teach each other, man and neighbor and man and brother, to 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest" (v. 34). Bringing the story full circle, Jeremiah reminds his people that the person telling them this is "the Lord, who gives the sun to light the day . . .

and who ordains the moon and the stars to light the night” (v. 35). Only at this point can God say of humankind, “It is good.”

The essence of biblical prophecy is not to see what will be but to see what is and what can be. The reality that the prophets saw is that, while the physical universe is all that God intended it to be, God’s masterpiece, humanity, “is still in the process of being created.”<sup>10</sup> And what God hopes to achieve with this part of His creation is an image of Himself. While God prohibits icons to Israel, He permits Himself one: Israel is God’s icon. Israel is God’s mate, His love, His passion. According to the Bible, God intends to create a nation that embodies His own holiness, His own righteousness. Thus, Isaiah in a striking image says, “But the Lord of hosts shall be exalted in justice, the Holy One of Israel sanctified in righteousness” (5:16). It is not in His omnipotence or His omniscience that God says He is distinguished, but in His righteousness. Omnipotence and omniscience are qualities that uniquely characterize God, yet in Isaiah’s vision these qualities are not what God chooses to dwell on. Rather, it is the quality that He shares with His human creation.<sup>11</sup>

What God seeks in humankind is the same overflowing of righteousness that exists within Himself, that seeks to fill and to transform the world. “Let justice flow like water, and righteousness like a stream” (Amos 5:24).<sup>12</sup> This righteousness is an irresistible, positive force, not the static balancing of interests or the maintenance of “law and order” that we associate with justice. In real-world justice and law and order, there are many ways, especially for the powerful, as the prophets knew only too well, to sidestep responsibility. Even in the midst of social order, therefore, injustice and inequity abound. Righteousness does not tolerate such a status quo. It seeks constantly to redeem the imperfect. “It is by justice that Zion shall be redeemed, and by righteousness her inhabitants” (Isa. 1:27). And the scope of the intended redemption is universal: government, religious life, and civil life as well as individual behavior must all be transformed.

As Amos’s metaphor illustrates, justice and righteousness in prophetic thinking are not principles that exist in the abstract. They are not morals or ethics but the *force* of goodness in action that emanates from God to human beings. In fact, they are important ultimately because—and only because—they bless human life,

for God Himself seeks fulfillment in human beings. Injustice, too, is a force that flows in the other direction. Thus, “injustice is condemned,” observes Heschel, “not because the law is broken, but because a person has been hurt,”<sup>13</sup> and God, too, feels that hurt. “You shall not afflict any widow or orphan. If you do afflict them, and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry . . . I will hear, for I am compassionate” (Ex. 22:22–23, 27).<sup>14</sup> Or as Jesus would later stress: Inasmuch as you do it to the least of these, you do it to me (Matt. 25:40).

There is no more profound expression of the human aspiration for goodness. Nor is there a more tragic appreciation of human reality, which expresses itself in the prophets as divine pathos. In nothing are the prophets as moving as in their sense of the disjunction between God’s desire to touch His people’s hearts and their unwillingness to be touched. “My land, my land, my land,” cries Jeremiah (22:29).

Go up and down the streets of Jerusalem. . . . Can you find anyone who acts justly, anyone who seeks the truth, that I may forgive that city?<sup>15</sup> People may swear by the life of the Lord, but in fact they perjure themselves. Lord . . . you punished them, but they took no heed; you pierced them to the heart, but they refused to listen. They made their faces harder than flint; they refused to repent. I said, “After all, these are the poor, these are folk without understanding, who do not know the way of the Lord . . . I shall go to the great ones and speak with them; for they will know the way of the Lord. . . .” But they too have broken the yoke and snapped their traces. (Jer. 5:1–5; NEB)

What the prophets hold out to Israel and see refused is the prospect of abundant life (see esp. Isa. 55). As Moses says at the beginning of Israelite history, “Life and death I have set before you, and blessing and cursing. Choose life” (Deut. 30:19; see also Amos 5:5–6). What Moses and his successors hold out is not simply a way of life that avoids imminent, nasty death. It is not a stay of execution. It is rather a *blessing*, a life of unimaginable possibility and radical freedom empowered by the presence of God Himself. Yet Israel, in the prophetic view, refuses it.

For the prophets, as Heschel observes, “The opposite of freedom is not determinism [an inability to act freely], but hardness of heart [a refusal to act rightly]. Freedom presupposes openness of heart, of mind, of eye and ear. . . . Hardening of the heart is the

suspension of freedom. Sin becomes compulsory and self-destructive. Guilt and punishment become one.”<sup>16</sup> Freedom is therefore more than the simple possibility of self-determination. It is the active opposite of all those qualities that characterize Israel in its refusal to be touched: stubbornness, hardness, and brazenness of heart (Deut. 29:18; Lam. 3:65; Ezek. 2:4), the willful refusal to see and hear reality (Isa. 42:19–20, 43:8; Jer. 5:21, 6:10; Ezek. 12:2; see also Isa. 30:9; Jer. 6:17; Hos. 4:6, 16, 7:11). To be free is to become all that one can become, not simply to make one’s way with God knows how many shackles holding you back (Isa. 5:18).

Despite their sorrow at Israel’s present rejection of freedom, the prophets to a man hold out the possibility that at some point things will change and Israel will at last embrace its mission. If the present scene is bleak, the ultimate outcome is a happy one. How could it be otherwise? If Israel’s refusal to become the image of God were to be the last word, then God’s creative purpose would come to nothing. By definition, such a frustration of creation cannot happen. Confidence in the human capacity to repent saves the prophets from despair.

Such is the paradigmatic, biblical story of God and his people from the creation to the fulfillment of creation in Zion. In the thinking of the Bible, the unity of God and His people at the end of time is what will inspire the rest of the world, the nations and their kings, to come knocking on Israel’s door in search of the same blessing. This is the biblical paradigm of Zion, the kingdom of God, the exemplary city on the hill that brings about the final transformation of humanity into the true image of God. This is the essential, unifying message of the Bible throughout its long history.

This is therefore the theme that Jesus, too, comes preaching. “Now after that John the Baptist was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel’” (Mark 1:14–15; KJV). Jesus’s gospel wasn’t new. He didn’t need to explain the kingdom to his fellow Jews, because they already knew what it meant. The gospel, the good news of Jesus of Nazareth, is the old priestly and prophetic ideal of the holy nation, the Zion society, that is built upon the premise that men and women are under a divine injunction to



*Holiness to the Lord, painted on the Ephraim Co-operative Mercantile Association, Ephraim, Utah, August 1999. Photograph by Edwin Firmage Jr.*

be holy, to realize in themselves the divine likeness that is theirs *in potentia*. In the Gospels, this ideal is personified in Jesus. It is an inner, individual reality, as all righteousness must be. Jesus's whole moral teaching underscores this point. But it is also a collective truth. For Jesus, or any other individual, to be the sole, essential, or isolated embodiment of the ideal renders the notion of a "kingdom" meaningless. Thus, Jesus can say, "The kingdom of God is *entos hymon*" (Luke 17:21) and mean both "among" and "within you."<sup>17</sup> To live up to this injunction is *the* biblical value.

There is in all of this long story of the Bible an astonishing integrity, as of a man's life that makes sense as he looks back on it in old age. Although what we now call the Bible, the so-called Old and New Testaments, was written by many hands over many centuries, it has meaning as a whole that unites the many disparate and not always mutually consistent parts. The same can be said of the history of "God's people" after the Bible. The Zion idea reaches into the Christian tradition of monasticism, which likewise sought to create a community of holiness that linked the mundane aspects of life with the spiritual quest. The Zion idea is in part the inspiration for the Puritan tradition and, through it, for not a little of the Ameri-

can religious experience, whose most extraordinary manifestation is the religion of the Latter-day Saints.

It was this ideal that brought my ancestors here to the Great Basin 150 years ago in what they believed was the end of time, the “latter days,” a turning point, like Yesha’yahu’s, when all of God’s purposes for humankind and the world would be fulfilled, those purposes that have inspired people wanting to call themselves saints since Yesha’yahu’s day and beyond.

For my ancestors, those would-be saints, as for their biblical role models, there was ultimately no distinction between the sacred and the profane.<sup>18</sup> All of life was encompassed by the injunction to be holy. From how you make your clothes to how you raise your food to how you make your living, absolutely everything was part of the gospel of the kingdom. Mormons would easily have agreed with Josephus: “Moses did not make religion a department of virtue, but the various virtues—I mean, justice, temperance, fortitude, and mutual harmony . . . —departments of religion. Religion governs all our actions and occupations and speech; none of these things did our lawgiver leave unexamined or indeterminate.”<sup>19</sup> The Mormon symbol for this all-encompassing mandate of holiness was the all-seeing eye above the beehive with its busy bees and the inscription “Holiness to the Lord.” Today, we see that inscription, though not that image, only on Mormon temples. But in earlier times, we might also have seen it on a warehouse or a ward house or a storefront; it didn’t matter. All were equally the province of God.

The critical question now is whether this biblical paradigm embraces *us*. For myself, the answer is an emphatic “Yes!” despite the fact that I haven’t worshipped in a Mormon chapel (or any other) for twenty-five years and despite the fact that I don’t even believe in God—at least not in the sense that my ancestors or my fellow Mormons today do.

What draws me, and I hope others, to the biblical tradition of Zion is that it is a defining, and, in some ways, definitive expression of the *human* search for goodness. It recommends itself, even imposes itself on us, not because it comes from an omnipotent, gray-bearded, cosmic tyrant, but because it is the summary of our own search for meaning and grounding in life. It is an expression of the human need, if not the divine imperative, to be sanctified.



And what is the sanctification that we seek? It is a comprehensive goodness, a life lived in accordance with principles of fairness, compassion, and community with others. It is a life based on the rejection of arrogance and superpower. *The* great biblical imperative is: “You shall have no other Gods before me.” In my secular interpretation, this is our way of warning ourselves against the idolatry of the self and the worship of our wants and desires.<sup>20</sup> The biblical paradigm of Zion is a way of life that knows contentment. It’s a way of life that is at peace with the world, in both the human and the physical senses of the word.

But it is not the American way today. We have been at war with the physical world—our own world, no less—since the day we set foot on Plymouth Rock. No nation in history has enjoyed such natural bounty or destroyed it so quickly. In just three centuries, we have consumed our way through a continent of resources, a continent of virgin hardwood forest that we simply burned, a continent of prairie that was an American Serengeti, a continent of wildlife where salmon were once so common they were called poor man’s hamburger. We brought the beaver to the edge of extinction. We slaughtered 60 million bison and left their carcasses to rot. We dammed almost every river and stream in America, destroying riparian ecosystems by the tens of thousands. We’ve scraped mountains to the ground. We’ve drained and developed wetlands. We’ve poisoned our air with acid and soot and our water with mercury. It’s not an exaggeration, therefore, or a metaphor, to say that we have waged war against our own world, just as we have waged war against the native human inhabitants of this world, with equally deadly results. And always, it has been a war without limits or compromise. We have insisted that the natural world must surrender to us unconditionally.<sup>21</sup>

Punctuating this perpetual natural war have been spasms of smaller-scale war instigated by us and directed at other people beyond our borders: Mexicans, Spaniards, Cubans, Koreans, Vietnamese, Cambodians, Laotians, Iranians, Grenadians, Panamanians, Iraqis, and Afghans. We also fought the large-scale and astronomically costly Cold War with the Soviet Union, which sent probably hundreds of thousands of innocent people to their death as “collateral damage” from proxy wars, political subversion and revolution, environmental destruction, economic depri-



*Baneberry “underground” nuclear test, December 18, 1970, Nevada Test Site.. Photograph by the U.S. Department of Energy.*

vation, and nuclear fallout. Although the Soviet Union never dropped a bomb on us, we exploded over 900 nuclear weapons on our own soil, 100 of them in the open air.<sup>22</sup> That’s fifty times as many as we dropped on our then-mortal enemy, Japan. We even contemplated the possibility of waging nuclear war at an “acceptable cost” of tens of millions and perhaps hundreds of millions of lives.

In saying that the biblical way embraces me, I am saying that I reject the American tradition of war. And I reject much of what we call the American dream, which has been the American night-

mare for uncountable billions of other living things that we have destroyed. Our way today seems to me to embody precisely that worship of the self and of the selfish that is *the* great sin in biblical thinking, and it seems to be tending toward the same sort of result that biblical arrogance did. If there is a Jungian archetype for cataclysmic, self-induced destruction, we are living it.

The more I think about the problems we face today, therefore, the more I find myself, infidel though I am, gravitating toward the way of life pioneered by my ancestors and their biblical models. Does the biblical tradition of Zion, or the Mormon tradition of Zion, have anything to say to us arrogant Americans today? At the heart of my emphatic “Yes!” is the notion that inspired Yesha’yahu 2,500 years ago: the idea of a community that embraces the principles of fairness, compassion, and dedication to the common cause against the worship of self and superpower.

*To be meaningful, the biblical ideal of righteousness, of goodness in action, must be embodied in community and not just in individuals.* As I’ve said, in the Hebrew Bible, the focus is almost entirely on community. What concerns priests and prophets alike is *Israel’s* righteousness, not that of isolated individuals. God’s promises and punishments therefore apply to the people as a whole. If they will be righteous, He will dwell among them and be their protector. If not, they will perish *en masse*. There is no promise to or concern with individuals as such.<sup>23</sup> This collective gospel continues in the post-biblical ideology of the Messiah, the royal descendant of David, who will lead God’s people in their ultimate resurgence.<sup>24</sup> The Messiah is not a personal but a national savior. In short, the Hebrew Bible is a teaching less for individuals than for a people. It is a handbook for creating a holy nation.

The early Mormons sensed this collective dimension of the Hebrew gospel intuitively if not explicitly. Unlike most of the rest of religious America and very much unlike other settlers of the American frontier, the Mormons thought from the beginning in collective terms. The heart and soul of early Mormonism was the sense of being called to build a new society, Zion. This objective of building Zion, or as Mormons sometimes called it, the City of Enoch, was what created the first Mormon communities in Kirtland, Ohio, Independence, Missouri, and Nauvoo, Illinois. From

the start, Mormons felt compelled to build a new community. They were not content with simply becoming converts to a new religion and living where and more or less how they had lived before, with just a change of ideology. They were not content to be so many independent selves trying to live righteously on their own. Thus, religion, as other Americans tended to practice it, held no interest for the Mormons. They weren't out simply to live a pious life but to create a new world. This mentality ultimately brought them west when it proved impossible to build their ideal community among other Christians. And, the Zion mentality was, in large measure, responsible for the success of the Mormon Saints in an environment that few thought inhabitable.

Common faith gave the communitarian Mormons what modern Communists lacked, a basis of voluntary but total commitment, of genuine and total passion.<sup>25</sup> Their common faith gave them something that frontier expedience, however great, also could not: It made their experience *meaningful*. It did this by putting their experience in a context that linked them in a common cause to each other and to generations past and future without end. It made their life a living sacrament.

Sacraments not only connect people to God but people to people. Sacraments are a treasured inheritance passed down from generation to generation. They are entered into with others in common worship. In a Mormon temple marriage, for example, bride and bridegroom kneel facing one another across the altar. Behind each of them is a mirror, and the two mirrors, reflecting one another, create a series of kneeling couples that stretch on in each direction into eternity. At the center of this procession of life is the couple being married now. Eternity ends and begins in this moment. It is in the nature of a sacrament to focus eternity in the present moment. To live sacramentally, therefore, as the early Mormons tried to do, is to act in each moment with the awareness of an eternity leading to and from this moment. It is to act with awareness and appreciation of those who have preceded us and who will follow us in the procession of life.

This sense of the sacramental in the everyday, this exaltation of the everyday, is what the religious worldview, and above all the

Zion worldview, offers, even if it is secularized as in my case, that no mere ideology can provide. My emphatic “Yes!” is therefore a cry to bring a kind of Zion to life in our time, a self-sufficient, morally driven, sacramental community that at least on essential points of first principles is, as Mormon scripture puts it, “of one heart and one mind” (Moses 7:18). In such a community, stewardship of the earth would top the list of first principles because, without a sustainable relationship with the earth, life itself is not possible. In such a community, responsibility for insuring that the procession of generations continues would be a first principle, and it would be a sacrament. In such a community, day-to-day decisions—like how we build our homes, how we raise our food, how we get about—are sacramental decisions, because they impinge on eternity. In 1857, Mormon apostle Heber C. Kimball addressed the Saints in Salt Lake City on the sacrament of life:

We dedicate and consecrate the wine or water that we partake of in the sacrament, and we also dedicate the bread to the Lord; and it should be just so with everything; it should all be dedicated to the Lord; and upon all that we do and put our hands unto, we should ask his blessings. We should never meddle with anything on this earth that we cannot lay our hands upon and bless and dedicate and consecrate to the Lord. . . .

Brethren, go out and dedicate your gardens, and when you get a tree that you want to set out, dedicate the ground, the root, and the elements that you are going to place around it, and ask God to fill it with warmth and with power to vegetate. Dedicate the seed that you are going to put into the earth, and then dedicate the earth, and nourish it when it springs forth . . . and do not say that it cannot be quickened, for I say it can. . . .

The Lord will now bless our labor; he will bless the fruits of the earth, he will bless our tanneries, he will bless our sheep, our flocks, and everything we undertake to handle and manage . . . and we will dedicate and consecrate them to God, and we will ask God to fill the earth with the resurrecting power; for life is the resurrecting power . . . and it is that power which brings forth vegetation; it is the same power which brings forth food and raiment; and by the same power we shall be brought forth in the morning of the resurrection.<sup>26</sup>

Is my hope for a Zion community in twenty-first-century Utah any more than the pipe dream of Yesha‘yahu or Jesus or St. Benedict or Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball? Probably not. We don’t seem to be able to stick with this vision long enough or with

sufficient dedication to build the new society that these followers of the biblical way had in mind. At the same time, I must also confess that I have even less hope for civilization as it stands, which seems to be on the brink of self-induced catastrophe. If there is any hope for our civilization, it is the hope that inspired the biblical tradition of Zion.

As the boy in the Passover Seder asks, How is this time different from all others? Why should there be any more hope now for the establishment of Zion than in the days of Yesha'yahu or Jesus or Brigham Young? The answer is that we, in ways that go beyond mere religious belief, really do live in the last days. If these aren't the last days of history or time, they are the last days of civilization as we know it. There is an apocalypse on our doorstep. It's called climate change.

Apocalypse is much more than an old-fashioned word for disaster. We do face disaster and on a scale beyond anything we have ever experienced. But we face apocalypse in the truer meaning of the word, which is literally "uncovering." The apocalypse of climate change is the uncovering of the fact that our present way of life is utterly—root and branch—unsustainable. Climate change is the coming together, the perfect storm, of the many different manifestations of our worship of self and superpower. Climate change is the result of the reckless pursuit of narrowly defined self-interest at others' expense. It's the result of the injustice of 6 percent of the world's population consuming a quarter of the world's fossil fuels and producing 20 percent of the world's greenhouse gas emissions. It's the result of the hypocrisy of this 6 percent wagging an admonitory finger at the Third World about emissions and doing nothing about its own. It's the result of a healthcare system that spends billions treating heart disease, obesity, and diabetes—the diseases of an indulgent lifestyle—while leaving the lifestyle in place. It's the result of the worship of consumption, in which no product is too inexpensive and no true cost too invisible. It's the result of an attitude that views living systems of all kinds, including our own bodies and minds, as mere resources to exploit for profit. Climate change isn't just another in a series of problems. It's the sum of all of the many problems that we have faced and failed to solve or refused to solve in our idolatry of the bottom line.

Standing against this tendency of our civilization is the biblical concept of Zion, the good society that embodies our deepest aspirations for individual and social transcendence. While these two aspects of our humanity have always been in conflict, they come to blows now as never before in the problem of climate change. The next few decades will either be the moment when humans at last take something like the path we imagined for ourselves three thousand years ago in ancient Palestine, or they will be our undoing. Climate change will be the catalyst for deep individual and societal transformation, or it will be our Deluge, our Babel, and our Exile. This is the moment when myth becomes history. We will create Zion or we will create the Apocalypse. The choice is ours.

In this endeavor, we will succeed together or fail together. Climate change is the result of systemic problems in our society, and it will be averted only by a systemic response. This fact means that, if all we can muster is random, individual transformation, then we will fail. If, for example, it's just "environmentalists" putting up solar panels and getting rid of their cars, we will fail. If it's just the wealthy doing the environmentally responsible thing, we will fail. If it's everyone acting on his or her own, we will fail. This is something that everyone must do and something that we must do together, with common purpose.

The change we need is as radical as it is universal. One of the paradoxical recent discoveries of climate science is that the piecemeal conservation that we have practiced thus far is actually contributing to climate change. When just a few people do all of the right things or a few more people do bits and pieces of the right things, all society as a whole gets is modestly improved efficiency. But a more efficient version of the present system is precisely what we do not want. A more efficient system that is still essentially devoted to utilizing earth's resources for profit is not progress. We need a complete turnaround, societal repentance, a new collective mind. With 6.5 billion people on earth, soon to be 9–12 billion, we must forever abandon the old way of doing things.

The good news, and really the only good news, is that crisis is the catalyst of change for individuals and for society. In my opinion, it is in our communities of faith that the transformation of individuals and society must begin. It is in communities that have

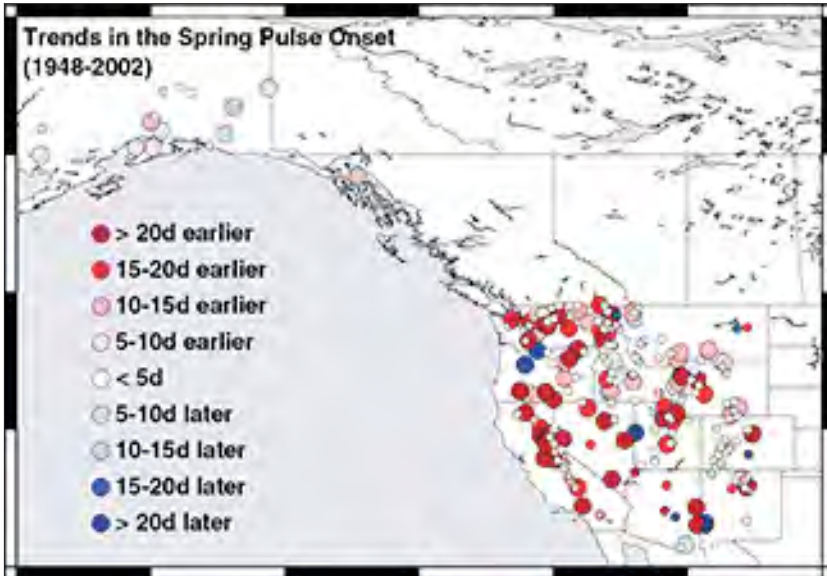


some understanding of and commitment to the biblical paradigm that this transformation can start, if it can start anywhere. I don't say that this is the only place where the transformation can happen. In any community deeply committed to the underlying principles of Zion lies hope for transformation. But transformation is not what our present American political system is committed to, nor is it what American business is committed to. Both of these are alike and interchangeably committed to profit and self-interest at all costs. Looking at American society, the only place I see communities that could rally around the idea of Zion is our churches.

The degree to which politics and business as usual have betrayed us became abundantly clear in Copenhagen. What happened, or rather didn't happen, in Copenhagen, even with Barack Obama in the White House and Democrats controlling both houses of Congress, is the truest expression of the degree to which American culture is in thrall to the darkness, the cosmic evil—and I do not speak in metaphor—that is today's American capitalism. Copenhagen was an apocalypse, a sneak preview of *the* Apocalypse that will surely come if people of faith do not stand up for the alternative.

By standing up, I don't simply mean vocal protest, though that in itself would be a step forward, for there is precious little protest in America right now. I mean, first and foremost, individual and collective commitment on the part of people of faith to *live* the principles of Zion here and now, and to live them radically. And to the age-old principles that Yesha'yahu would have known, we must now add a new one: carbon neutrality. Until every church and every member of every church is carbon-neutral, we Christians are not living the gospel that we profess.

The imperative for our time, as for Jesus's, is to repent. The Aramaic word for repentance that Jesus would have used means "to return," that is, to return to one's roots, to return to the covenant, to return to God, forsaking competing alternatives. Zion, the covenant community, is the result of such repentance. As long as such a community does not exist, people are, by definition, failing to live up to God's expectation. In my secular rendition, this means that we are failing to live up to our own sense of what we are capable of. The Greek word that Mark uses for Jesus's call to repentance is *metanoete*, literally, to get a new mind. Jesus invites those who would be his followers to realize that the



*Timing of the onset of spring runoff.* Source: Iris T. Stewart, “Changes in Snowpack and Snowmelt Runoff for Key Mountain Regions,” *Hydrological Processes* 23 (2009): 78–94.

world has changed and that a new order now governs how they should act. In Jesus’s teaching, the individual new mind and the new kingdom go hand in hand. Followers of this way are in fact the very temple of God (1 Cor. 3:16), the source from which the kingdom takes its strength. The news of Jesus’s kingdom is an invitation for people to believe that a radically different way of life is possible, a way that values people as a manifestation of God and not simply as human resources. Even I, as an unbeliever, can subscribe to this idea. I believe that we can become whatever we imagine we can become.

The central problem of climate change has nothing to do with the environment. Ours is not an environmental problem in the way that living in the desert or in the jungle is an environmental problem. Nothing we are experiencing as a result of climate change is dictated by factors outside our control. Not yet anyway. Ours is a problem of impoverished imagination and will. We cannot think outside of the desperately narrow little

boxes that we mentally and physically inhabit. And the manifestation of our loss of imagination is neurosis on a scale never before seen in history.<sup>27</sup> Our neurosis—indeed, I would call it psychosis—is so profound that we cannot even see that we *are* in crisis, despite the fact that evidence of the crisis is all around us in plain sight. The earlier onset of the spring run-off in the West is one such evidence.<sup>28</sup>

Climate change is for us what the threatened destruction of Israel was for the biblical prophets: a singular opportunity for people to look inward, to reexamine their lives at the deepest level. At least from the prophetic point of view, Israel failed to seize that opportunity. But its failure has been our gain, for it prompted the most extraordinary outpouring of radical ethics the world has ever seen. “Prophecy,” writes Heschel, “is a moment of unshrouding, an opening of the eyes, a lifting of the curtain. Such moments are rare in history.”<sup>29</sup>

It’s easy, especially for those of us who cannot call ourselves true believers, to dismiss the relevance of the prophets. But I can’t. In what Hugh Nibley called the long night of human history, there are precious few shining lights. I think of Mahatma Gandhi, Jesus, and the Buddha of Compassion. And I think of the prophets. What these men represent for me is the refusal to accept that the world we create for ourselves cannot be something dramatically better than what we have seen so far. For me, the significance of these visionaries lies not only in their moral outrage but also in their willingness to think and to do the unthinkable in the quest to transform their people. The prophets asserted, for example, that being God’s chosen people was no protection against folly and self-induced catastrophe. They proclaimed that worship was meaningless—indeed, offensive to God—if it was not accompanied by righteous living. They foretold the destruction of the temple, God’s own dwelling. They pummeled government officials, ecclesiastical leaders, business elites, and ordinary people. And they illustrated their message with outrageous acts guaranteed to shock. There was no idea so sacred, no person or institution so powerful, that the prophets were unwilling to attack it in their goal of shattering the people’s complacency. In the biblical view, to be a prophet is to be an iconoclast. But then, to build Zion, one has to be.

At some point, every society, if it is to thrive, must shatter its icons. These have their proper place. But mistaken for God, they become demonic. *Our* icons—consumption, growth, profit, extreme individualism, and superpower—now threaten life itself. To overcome these demons, we, like the prophets, must think the unthinkable and we must *do* it. As in Isaiah’s time, our fate depends on whether we act while there is still time to prevent catastrophe. What holds us back is our own success. As Heschel warns, politics, business, and religion—booming industries and vested interests all—are

. . . isolated, self-subsisting, self-indulgent. . . . The answers offered [are] unrelated to the problems, indifferent to . . . man’s suspended sensitivity in the face of stupendous challenge, indifferent to a situation in which good and evil [have become] irrelevant, in which man [is] increasingly callous to catastrophe and ready to suspend the principle of truth. . . . [T]he terms, motivations, and concerns which dominate our thinking may prove destructive of the roots of human responsibility and treasonable to the ultimate ground of human solidarity. The challenge we are all exposed to, and the dreadful shame that shatters our capacity for inner peace, defy the ways and patterns of our thinking. One is forced to admit that some of the causes and motives of our thinking have led our existence astray, that speculative [or any other] prosperity is not an answer to spiritual bankruptcy. . . .

The prophet was an individual who said No to his society, condemning its habits and assumptions, its complacency. . . .

Prophecy ceased; the prophets endure and can only be ignored at the risk of our own despair. It is for us to decide whether freedom is self-assertion or response to a demand; whether the ultimate situation is conflict or concern.<sup>30</sup>

As a catalyst for change, climate change is a godsend. It will challenge us like nothing else in history. It will be our doom or our finest hour. The choice is ours.

Each evening God takes his shining wares  
from the shop window—  
mystical chariots, covenant tablets, pearls of great price,  
luminous crosses and bells—  
and returns them to dark boxes  
inside and closes the shutters. “Again,  
not one prophet came to buy.”<sup>31</sup>

## Notes

1. Translation mine. Unless otherwise noted, all translations hereafter are also my own.

2. I relate the story of my loss of belief in “Historical Criticism and the Book of Mormon: A Personal Encounter” in *American Apocrypha: Essays on the Book of Mormon*, edited by Dan Vogel and Brent Metcalf (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2001), 1–16.

3. As a bald assertion, my proposition would be indefensible. I beg the reader to examine the evidence in Section 2 of the longer version of this article available in the blog section of my website. There I adduce not only the evidence for climate change but also the implications, which are nothing short of earth-changing.

4. In this reading of Israel’s prehistory, I follow Martin Buber, “Abraham the Seer,” in *On the Bible: Eighteen Studies*, edited Nahum Glatzer (New York: Schocken, 1968), 22–43. For the relevance of this primeval history to the Holiness Code, see my “Genesis 1 and the Priestly Agenda,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 82 (1999): 97–114; abbreviated audio version, presented at the 1998 Sunstone Symposium, available at [http://web.me.com/efirmage/Supporting\\_Documents/Scholarly\\_Works\\_files/Genesis%201%20and%20the%20Priestly%20Agenda.mp3](http://web.me.com/efirmage/Supporting_Documents/Scholarly_Works_files/Genesis%201%20and%20the%20Priestly%20Agenda.mp3). Obviously, this reading of the Torah is 180 degrees different from the traditional Mormon view. But it is the plain, holistic reading of the text, which is to say, the intent of its final compositors.

5. Generations of Sunday School lessons to free-spirited children notwithstanding, Samuel’s rebuke is not a sermon on obedience per se. It’s a statement about the hierarchy of values, an assertion that how you behave trumps how you worship. I’ve chosen to render *kishmoa’ beqôl YHWH* literally, because the injunction to “hear” is so rich in biblical echoes, as in the Shema: “Hear, Israel, the laws and statutes that I proclaim to you today. Learn them and observe them” (Deut. 5:1). Since “hearing” in this case obviously includes the internal work of understanding, mechanical obedience is as much out of the question as mechanical sacrifice. Yahweh does not want automata any more than he does zealous hypocrites. To suppose otherwise is to treat Yahweh himself as a machine, an idol.

6. Martin Buber, *The Prophetic Faith*, translated by Carlyle Witton-Davies (1949; rpt., New York: Harper, 1960), 68.

7. Yehezkel Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel*, translated by Moshe Greenberg (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1960), 421, (incidentally, the best general history of Israelite religion ever written).

8. Abraham Heschel, *The Prophets*, 2 vols. (1962; rpt., New York: Harper, 1975), 1:16.

9. *Ibid.*

10. *Ibid.*, 1:198.

11. See *ibid.*, 1:213—a particularly brilliant passage in a book that is notable for brilliance.

12. The image is of a permanent (*'etan*, KJV “mighty”) stream, i.e., one that never runs dry. Righteousness is to society what water is to the desert, the source and sustainer of life.

13. *Ibid.*, 261.

14. There are also positive formulations of such commandments (Isa. 1:17; Jer. 22:3; Deut. 14:28–29; 16:11, 14; 24:19; 26:12). Israel is to show kindness to the disenfranchised, because God Himself does so (Deut. 10:18–19). Righteousness thus goes beyond not oppressing the widow and orphan to being their advocate and aid, even though in strict “justice” they don’t “deserve” it.

15. Perhaps with Jeremiah in mind, Yehuda Amichai calls his home city, Jerusalem, the sister city of Sodom. “Jerusalem 1967, No. 22,” in *Poems of Jerusalem and Love Poems* (Riverdale-on-Hudson, N.Y.: Sheep Meadow Press, 1992), 61. So it seems always to be with cities of those who should be saints.

16. Heschel, *The Prophets*, 191.

17. For a good, critical discussion of the range of meanings, see Joseph Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke X-XXIV*, Anchor Bible 28A (New York: Doubleday, 1985), s.v.

18. With regard to the Hebrew Bible, in the strictest of priestly terms, there was, of course, a distinction between the holy objects of the sanctuary and the profane world outside, as there was between the borrowed holiness of the priests and the non-holy world of the people. But this technical distinction is obscured by the overarching notion of the mandate for the people to become holy and by the fact that their trespasses—their violations of the code of holiness—directly affected the purity of the sanctuary. In other words, like the priests, the people also had obligations of holiness and would suffer real-world consequences for their failure to live up to them. The most serious of these consequences was God’s total withdrawal from their midst. For God to dwell anywhere among human beings required a general setting of holiness. What makes biblical religion unique among its ancient peers is the degree to which it blankets the everyday “secular” life of the people at large. This tendency continues into the post-biblical and rabbinic periods, as the Pharisees (and, following them, the rabbis) extend the reach of the requirements of holiness ever further and deeper into

daily life. Orthodox Judaism is the outgrowth of this tendency. On the Pharisees, see G. F. Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1955), 1:60–62. In general, see E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief 63, BCE–66 CE* (Philadelphia: SCM Press, 1992).

19. Josephus, *Against Apion*, 2:170–73, quoted in Sanders, *Judaism*, 51.

20. The history of Israel, as viewed by its prophetic chroniclers, is a drama about the effects of violating this wisdom. As Israel's ancient tribal god, Yahweh was never in danger of being formally replaced by other gods, prophetic rhetoric notwithstanding. The real danger was turning Yahweh into one of the other gods. It wasn't Baal as rival, for example, but Baal as image of Yahweh that was dangerous. Israel's God forbade icons of himself to insure that the people's *image* of Him never displaced *Him*. When, despite this warning, Yahweh became assimilated into the religious mainstream represented by Baal, Asherah, fertility cults, and the like and when, instead of being the aniconic challenge to the norm, Yahweh became its figurehead, He ceased to be Yahweh. Yahweh protests, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my way. . . . As high as heaven is above the earth, so is my way above your ways and my thoughts above your thoughts" (Isa. 55:8–9). In my secular midrash, this reminder is the inherited wisdom of generations warning us against elevating our ideas of the sacred above the sacred and, in the end, replacing the sacred with mere ideas about it. Map, as they say, is not territory. Religion is a map of the sacred, nothing more. The moment we forget that, as we seem to do regularly, we effectively begin worshipping ourselves. The history of religions generally, Judaism and Christianity included, is largely the story of successive idolatries. What makes Judeo-Christian idolatry particularly dangerous is that we elevate not a cross-section of life but one narrow view of it. Monotheism becomes monolatry, following the path toward monoculture that appears to be our universal destiny.

21. Incidentally but not coincidentally, the same story plays out with the Mormons. In the battle over polygamy, the U.S. government waged all-out war on the Mormons. Gilded Age America tolerated no alternatives.

22. See [http://www.nv.doe.gov/library/publications/historical/DOENV\\_209\\_REV15.pdf](http://www.nv.doe.gov/library/publications/historical/DOENV_209_REV15.pdf). The total breaks down as follows: 17 tests at American sites (Colorado, New Mexico, Arkansas, Michigan, Nevada) outside the Nevada Test Site (NTS), 904 at NTS, three in the South Atlantic, 106 in the Pacific, and twenty-four tests conducted in conjunction with the United Kingdom for a total of 1,054. Of the 904 at NTS, 100 were above ground. The Baneberry *underground* test (see photograph) was a ten-kiloton bomb the size of President George W. Bush's proposed



“bunker buster” weapons. It was buried 900 feet below ground but still resulted in a radioactive release that reached more than 10,000 feet into the atmosphere. In 2003, I wrote about the dangers of Bush’s “bunker busters.” See “Oppose Nuclear Testing: Plan Threatens National Security and the Environment,” [http://web.me.com/efirmage/Supporting\\_Documents/Writing\\_on\\_the\\_Environment\\_files/Oppose%20Nuclear%20Weapons.pdf](http://web.me.com/efirmage/Supporting_Documents/Writing_on_the_Environment_files/Oppose%20Nuclear%20Weapons.pdf).

23. The focus on the individual, and especially on the salvation of the individual, that is characteristic of modern manifestations of the Judeo-Christian tradition emerges from the Greco-Roman period. For an excellent treatment, see A. D. Nock, *Conversion* (1933; rpt., Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1972). Jesus is thus a transitional figure. He comes announcing the kingdom of God, but his teaching focuses on the individual.

24. The post-biblical Messiah was, of course, modeled on the biblical king of Israel, who was God’s *mashîah*, or anointed representative (see, e.g., 1 Sam. 9:16; Ps. 2:2, etc.). But it was not until Israel lost its independence as a nation that its future king (more correctly, its divinely appointed regent) began to take on the character of the Messiah.

25. For a brief resumé of the subject, see Carrol Firmage, “Pre-serves,” in this issue.

26. Heber C. Kimball, December 27, 1857, *Journal of Discourses* (London and Liverpool: LDS Booksellers Depot, 1855–86), 6:187, 189–90.

27. In linking neurosis with the loss of imagination, I follow psychologist Thomas Moore, *The Care of the Soul* (New York: Harper, 2006), 26–35.

28. The earlier onset of spring runoff is one of many obvious indications of a warming planet. I list and discuss others in the fuller essay from which this excerpt is taken. See the blog section of [www.edwinfirmage.com](http://www.edwinfirmage.com). Also in the blog is an online version of a slide presentation, “Western Water: The Coming Crisis” that discusses in even greater detail the implications of current climate trends for water in Utah and the western United States. Earlier spring runoff, decreased snowpack extent and snowpack depth, declining stream flows, longer and more intense fire seasons, and infestations of pine beetles once kept in check by colder winters are just a few of the facts of present climate change that are independent of assumptions about and forecasts of future climate change. Climate change is not just a future possibility but a present reality to which we close our eyes at our peril.

29. Heschel, *The Prophets*, 1:193.

30. *Ibid.*, 1:xiv–xv.

31. Amichai, “Poems of the Land of Zion and Jerusalem,” in *Poems of*

*Jerusalem and Love*, 85; translation mine. I've taken a small liberty with *pnînîm yaphôt*, literally "beautiful pearls," that I hope LDS readers will appreciate.

*[This essay is the first part of a larger work which can be viewed and downloaded at [dialoguejournal.com](http://dialoguejournal.com), along with additional full-color images.]*

# Preserves

*Carrol Firmage*

*What we owe the future  
is not a new start, for we can only begin  
with what has happened. We owe the future  
the past, the long knowledge  
that is the potency of time to come.*

*—Wendell J. Berry<sup>1</sup>*

## **Part I**

### **Blossom As the Rose**

Apples! Bags and boxes of apples! So many of them lined the perimeter of our garage that the car hardly fit. It was mid-October, and I stood there counting the apples picked from our three backyard trees and asked myself how long it would take to deal with all of them. This year I was determined not to let any go to waste. I've always made applesauce from our apples; but sometimes, when the apples and the other items on my agenda were particularly abundant, I had just thrown many of them away. This year we harvested a respectable 113 pounds of Red and Golden Delicious apples. In my naive optimism, I calculated that in two weeks they would all be gone. Thankfully, apples don't spoil quickly because it was Thanksgiving weekend when they finally disappeared from the garage.

This year was different because our family has been trying to supply from our own backyard more of our table food. The apples are part of a bigger move toward greater self-reliance, and not an insignificant part.<sup>2</sup> So I wanted to try ways of preserving our harvest other than applesauce. The first thing I did was to buy a water-sipping steam canner that would allow me to bottle produce from our apple trees and vegetable garden. Because this was something I had never done before, I had visions of my kitchen becoming a sweatshop. Thankfully, it didn't.



*Elijah Cutler Behunin and Tabitha Jane Behunin and eleven of their thirteen children, ca. 1896. Photo courtesy of Capitol Reef Natural History Association.*

I also borrowed a food dehydrator. Drying fruit preserves more of the nutrients than cooking and is therefore a great way to store fruit. As I discovered, however, it also takes longer because the apples have to be cut into thin pieces and laid out on trays to dry. If the tedium of peeling and cooking the fruit for applesauce seemed to take a long time, then this took forever—about three hours per dehydrator load of apples. My then-ten-year-old daughter Victoria helped by laying out the slices on the trays.

It still took ages, but what a great result! The dried apples were tasty and easy to pack in lunches or backpacks for snacks. I also wanted to try apple leather, so I cut, peeled, and cooked the apples as I did for applesauce, then put them in the blender and poured the mixture onto dehydrator trays. This became our favorite way to eat stored apples. As it turns out, homemade apple leather has exceptional trade value during school lunch.

Apples weren't the only fruit that my three kids and I preserved this year. Not entirely by accident, we were visiting Capitol Reef National Park on a photo trip during the peach and pear harvest in August. Capitol Reef is an oddity among Utah's national parks in



*Waterfall, Fremont River, Capitol Reef National Park, Utah. Photo by Edwin Firmage Jr., 2008.*

that it maintains orchards from the original pioneer settlement. Among its unusual staff are two full-time horticulturists, who keep this oasis in good trim despite 130 years and many tree generations from its founding. Modern-day visitors are allowed to pick fruit for a nominal charge, so we spent an afternoon picking peaches and pears. Hot and sweaty, we wanted a shower. Since my husband, Ed, knew of a swimming hole at the bottom of a small waterfall in the Fremont River, we decided that a dip in the river would be our shower. This particular natural facility had the added benefit of being a worthy place to photograph. While we were there, only two other people came to swim. We had the silence of the canyon and the music of the falls to ourselves.

Swimming in the desert and fruit in the desert! We contemplated these miracles with our bodies, getting sticky in the orchards and washing off in the river. The little Fremont has made possible not only the remarkable human community of Fruita and its or-

chards, but also a uniquely beautiful landscape of sandstone canyons in and outside the park. After it leaves Capitol Reef, the Fremont joins Muddy Creek, one of many shapers of the spectacular San Rafael Swell. For our family, both of these rivers are rich not only with pioneer history and scenic beauty, but also with personal associations. Capitol Reef and nearby Torrey were our first love among Utah's redrock retreats. The San Rafael Swell was our second. Muddy Creek flows past the aptly named Hidden Splendor Road, which takes the traveler to the spectacular exit from the narrows of the San Rafael Reef. It flows past Factory Butte, Goblin Valley, and Little Wild Horse Canyon, which have been our haunts since before our two youngest children were born. This land is luminous with history and sparse desert beauty.

The evening after our swim we visited the Behunin cabin on the main road, just a little southwest of the waterfall. We thought of the people who had lived in that beautiful spot. The Behunin family was so large (thirteen children) and their cabin so small (one room) that the kitchen table was, for the most part, kept outside. The older girls had to sleep in the wagon, and the boys slept in a cave in the nearby sandstone wall. We spent some time trying to figure out which cavern behind the cabin would have suited the boys best. I don't know if we got it right or not. But we felt closer to our pioneer predecessors after a day of doing much the same thing that they must have done on August afternoons.

The Waterpocket Fold, the geologic formation that makes Capitol Reef National Park, was one of the last places explored by white settlers in the region. The semi-nomadic Fremont culture had occupied this area in prehistoric times, but it was mostly Utes and Paiutes who used the area until whites arrived. After the Blackhawk War (1865–72),<sup>3</sup> the last gasp of Native American resistance to settlement, whites began to move into the region in earnest. Nels Johnson was the first to establish a homestead on the confluence of Sulphur Creek and the Fremont River in 1880. Others quickly followed, clearing an area of about 300 acres. The spot, it turns out, is ideal for fruit trees, unlike the nearby high open valleys. As George Davidson says in *Red Rock Eden*, "This junction of two perennial waterflows was 2,000 feet lower than Rabbit Valley and had a longer growing season. Settlers found that the canyon walls reflected heat to the good soil below. Smallish Fruita may not

have been well suited for the grain economy of the high valleys, but it was ideal for one product in great demand on the frontier—fresh fruit.”<sup>4</sup> In contrast to today when sugar is cheap and plentiful, the frontier home had only one source of inexpensive and readily available sweetener—fruit. So, they planted apple, peach, pear, plum, walnut, and almond trees. Later on, they also had grapes, which became the basis for a thriving (especially during Prohibition) wine industry.<sup>5</sup> Today, about 2,700 cherry, apricot, plum, mulberry, and nut trees flourish in the Fruita orchards.<sup>6</sup>

Once the orchards started producing, a harvest-time trek to Fruita became a yearly event for those in nearby communities. Sarah Williams Stringham, who was born in Teasdale, recalled: “In the summertime we often went to Fruita, about twenty miles away, for peaches and grapes. Teasdale was higher and colder than Fruita and we couldn’t grow these fruits. We would go in the afternoon, camp overnight, pick the fruit in the morning and come home again. Sometimes three or four cousins would go and stay about two weeks. They would pick, cut and dry fruit for the owner of the orchard. As pay for this work the owner would give them as much fresh fruit as they had picked and dried for him.”<sup>7</sup>

Those first occupants seemed close indeed to us. Even though our modern lives are quite different in many respects, the yearly cycle of picking and preserving fruit links us. It is something we have done in Fruita as well as in our own yard, but we vowed to make the Fruita trek a yearly tradition.

Since our three apple trees were already established in our yard when we bought our house in 1993, I had taken them for granted. But growing fruit in Utah is not something that can be done just anywhere. Several factors determine whether an area can grow fruit: topography, water, elevation, and latitude. In Fruita, the main factor is elevation. Fruita sits at 5,436 feet. Torrey and Loa just a few miles away are 7,000 feet high. This extra elevation makes agriculture difficult, so livestock—cattle and sheep—have been the main commodities. But Fruita’s lower altitude, coupled with the protective walls of the Waterpocket Fold and consistent water, allow a few acres of fruit to thrive. The influence of elevation even this far south in Utah is dramatic. Loa has a 20 percent chance of frost as late as June 20. Fruita’s 20 percent chance is May 1. Loa has a 30 percent chance of a fall frost on September





*Schoolhouse, built in  
1896, Fruita, Utah.  
Photo by Edwin Firmage  
Jr., 2008.*

1, but not until October 20 in Fruita.<sup>8</sup> Only about twenty-five miles separate these two towns, but the difference is startling—two to three more months in the growing season.

These aren't the only closely connected places in Utah that show dramatic differences in the ability to grow fruit. Take Brigham City and Corinne in northern Utah. Here the elevations are about the same. Corinne lies at 4,230 feet and Brigham City six miles to the east at 4,436. Corinne has a 60 percent chance of a freeze on October 1, but in Brigham City the probability is just 20 percent.<sup>9</sup> The difference here lies in the fact that cold air sinks. The slight difference in elevation is not enough to make Brigham City substantially colder as Loa is when compared with Fruita. But the slightly higher elevation of Brigham City allows it to sit above the cold air that sinks into the bottoms of Utah's intermontane valleys. Brigham City today is still known for its excellent fruit, especially peaches. It celebrates a peach festival every September, the second oldest such festival in the country.<sup>10</sup>

In fact, in the core of Mormon settlement, the Wasatch Front, fruit grows well only in a surprisingly narrow and short band that stretches along the valley benches from Brigham City to Santaquin. Without knowing it, Apostle Heber C. Kimball identified

the importance of the benches in a sermon delivered on December 27, 1857, in the Salt Lake Tabernacle. He recalled the skepticism of mountain man Jim Bridger, who said that he would pay \$1,000 for the first ear of corn raised in the Salt Lake Valley. Ten fruitful years later, Kimball chided the Saints for behaving like Bridger and not exercising the faith to plant gardens, and in particular to plant fruit trees.

The individuals who believed that it was not possible to raise fruit here have no curr[a]nt bushes, no apples trees, no apricot trees, no peach trees, no plum trees; in fact they have not got any fruit at all, from the fact that they did not believe that fruit could be raised; and their works have shown their faith. . . .

Those same individuals now believe that we can raise fruit up here in brother Brigham's garden, and brother Heber's, and brother [Albert] Carrington's, and those men that live up here on the poorest land there is in the valleys. . . .

If you say you cannot raise fruit on [the] low land, I wish to say to you that I know better. And the reason why they have not raised fruit in the lower parts of the city is because they have not planted the trees. . . .

You can have fruit on the low land as well as on the high; you can have fruit at San Pete as well as here.<sup>11</sup>

We can pardon Heber's audience for their suspicion that he and Brigham had it a little easier than he lets on, for in fact, at least as far as horticulture was concerned, Heber and Brigham and Brother Carrington sat not on the dregs of the land as they supposed but on some of the finest fruit-growing soil in North America.

Beyond this favored bench land in northern Utah, orchards of any consequence are found only in small, isolated pockets such as Fruita, where accidents of topography mimic the ideal conditions of the Brigham City-Santaquin corridor. Generally speaking, Utah's high desert valleys either lack adequate water or lack a growing season long enough for fruit. The only other region notable for fruit is the St. George-Toquerville-Hurricane triangle. As lovers of Utah's cherries can still attest, horticulture also flourished in Utah's Dixie due to a combination of warm temperatures, sandy soil, and relatively abundant water below the 11,000-foot Pine Valley Mountains and the banks of the Virgin River.<sup>12</sup>

After climate and water, the most important factor in horticulture is soil. Fruit trees grow well in sandy, gravelly, or loamy

ground.<sup>13</sup> Good drainage is also essential. Northern Utah's valley benches, remnants of the sandy shoreline of ancient Lake Bonneville, and desert oases such as Fruita and the St. George-Hurricane strip, possess such characteristics. In fact, and not entirely by accident, the Mormons occupied a desert Eden where fruit could grow in abundance. Sam Edgecomb, formerly head of Utah State University's Department of Horticulture, said that "no other place that he had seen in his wide experience in Canada and the United States offered the opportunities for fruit production that were offered here."<sup>14</sup>

Learning how to use their natural endowment exacted enormous effort, time, and money from the Mormons. Since fruit trees are not native to the Intermountain West, they had to be imported. The story of Lorenzo Young is not atypical of what the first settlers were up against in their attempt to make the desert blossom. In 1848, a year after arriving in the Salt Lake Valley, Young planted seeds for 40,000 fruit trees! That year, crickets, in the first of several waves that would plague the pioneers until the crickets themselves became a casualty of human settlement, ate all but seventeen of the young trees that sprouted.<sup>15</sup> In 1850, determined to get a jump on the crickets, Young returned to Missouri and bought two hundred saplings, which he planted in six inches of soil in a covered wagon. By the time he reached Salt Lake City, all but three of the saplings had perished.<sup>16</sup>

Nor were fruit trees the only imports necessary for successful horticulture. North America has no native honeybees, so these too had to be imported and cultivated. Early Utah magazines such as the *Intermountain Horticulturist* (1890–91) spend as much time giving advice about bees as trees.<sup>17</sup>

Yet despite their unpromising beginning, fruit trees became a commonplace. Describing his visit to Salt Lake City on his way to California in 1860, Mark Twain wrote:

Next day we strolled about everywhere through the broad, straight, level streets and enjoyed the pleasant strangeness of a city of fifteen thousand inhabitants with no loafers perceptible in it . . . a limpid stream rippling and dancing through every street in place of a filthy gutter; block after block of trim dwellings, built of "frame" and sunburned brick—a great thriving orchard and garden behind every one of them, apparently—branches from the street stream

winding and sparkling among the garden beds and fruit trees—and a grand general air of neatness, repair, thrift and comfort, around and about and over the whole.<sup>18</sup>

That same year (1860), the famous and uncommonly sympathetic explorer Sir Richard Francis Burton came to Utah and visited Brigham Young's garden, among many other sites. After observing that a vineyard was being planted on the hillside near Brigham Young's downtown compound and that the family anticipated homemade wine soon (see below), Burton describes Young's orchard and garden:

Pomology is carefully cultivated; one hundred varieties of apples have been imported, and of these ninety-one are found to thrive as seedlings: in good seasons their branches are bowed down by fruit and must be propped up. . . . The peaches were in all cases unpruned: upon this important point opinions are greatly divided. . . . Besides grapes and apples, there were walnuts, apricots and quinces, cherries and plums, currants, raspberries, and gooseberries. The principal vegetables were the Irish and sweet potato, squashes, peas—excellent—cabbages, beets, cauliflowers, lettuce, and broccoli; a little rhubarb is cultivated, but it requires too much expensive sugar for general use, and white celery has lately been introduced.<sup>19</sup>

In fact, in less than twenty years, an extraordinary fruit industry had developed in Utah. Fifteen years after Burton's visit, the fruit census of 1875 shows 358,277 apple trees, 330,535 peach trees, 44,169 apricot trees, 43,585 plum trees, 10,569 pear trees, and 4,661 cherry trees.<sup>20</sup> At the peak of production in 1920, Utah boasted 806,775 apple trees, 582,753 peach trees, 120,341 cherry trees, 60,291 pear trees, and tens of thousands of assorted plum, apricot, and nut trees. As late as 1965, long after the real estate boom that began with the end of World War II had claimed thousands of acres of orchards, Utah Valley, the state's fruit capital, was still home to an estimated 682,677 fruit trees, the Brigham City-Perry-Willard corridor to 208,566, Weber County to 107,414, and Washington County to 46,950.<sup>21</sup> Little Fruita hardly rates mention with these fruit giants, but is prized among desert rats such as our family for being what it is where it is.

The interest shown by early Mormons in horticulture leads naturally to the question, "What did they do with all that fruit?" Like the Firmage family, early growers dried their crop or made it

into preserves of one sort or another. Pioneer diaries like that of Patty Bartlett Sessions frequently refer to these forms of preservation.<sup>22</sup> Nineteenth-century technology for preserving fruit, however, was limited. Practical home canning technology did not become common until the early twentieth century.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, some essential ingredients for making preserves on a large scale were not available or affordable until the twentieth century. From the beginning, for example, people have sweetened preserves with lots of sugar to make them more palatable. But sugar was neither readily available nor cheap in pioneer Utah.<sup>24</sup> As I discuss below, the Mormons made herculean efforts to remedy this problem. But it was not until the twentieth century when, thanks to sugarbeet-growing Mormon farmers and Utah & Idaho Sugar, sugar became a cheap, everyday commodity in the state. Pectin, the gelling agent that makes jam and jelly preserves possible, was also not available as an off-the-shelf ingredient for preserves until the early twentieth century.<sup>25</sup> Thus, for pioneer families in Utah, preserves, whether in the form of whole fruit or processed jams and jellies, would have been luxuries, as they were for frugal households everywhere in nineteenth-century America. Lydia Child, author of a popular homemaking guide first published in 1833, captures this reality: “Economical people will seldom use preserves except for sickness. They are unhealthy, expensive, and useless to those who are well.”<sup>26</sup> Smuckers (founded in 1897, and made possible only by advances in glassmaking, a new energy source called natural gas, and industrially made pectin) was a possibility that Lydia had not envisioned.<sup>27</sup>

Apples, which were and are Utah’s dominant fruit, unlike their juicier cousins the peach and the plum, can, like potatoes and parsnips, also be stored during the winter in a root cellar. This practice continues even into our own time. Apples could therefore be saved without special processing. In fact, it seems likely that apples were the dominant fruit at least in part *because* they could be easily stored. And what couldn’t be stored could be dried.

But apples were not, for the most part, stored to be eaten fresh. The fate of the typical apple in the nineteenth century was to become hard cider. Other fruits had a similar fate. Pears were turned into perry, and peaches into mobby and brandy. Utah during the territorial period was far from “dry.” In fact starting in the

1850s, it was known for a locally produced form of moonshine (in this case, wheat whiskey) known as “Valley Tan” that drew applause from visitors like Twain and Burton.<sup>28</sup> No IDs were needed then, and having a temple recommend was not necessarily a reason not to imbibe on occasion.<sup>29</sup>

Clearly, although Young preferred that the Saints not use these products, he did not take a hard line against them, nor, significantly, did he even mention the Word of Wisdom in this context or reprimand the Saints for not adhering to scripture.<sup>30</sup> In the making of alcoholic refreshment, as in everything else, LDS leaders set the example for members. Brigham Young, among his many commercial ventures, owned a turning mill on City Creek in downtown Salt Lake City to process apples from his own orchard.<sup>31</sup> Turning apples into cider was, in fact, typical of American practice before refrigeration. According to historian Michael Pollan,

Up until Prohibition, an apple grown in America was far less likely to be eaten than to wind up in a barrel of cider. (“Hard” cider is a twentieth-century term, redundant before then, since virtually all cider was hard until modern refrigeration allowed people to keep sweet cider sweet). . . . In rural areas, cider took the place not only of wine and beer but of coffee and tea, juice, and even water. Indeed, in many places, cider was consumed more freely than water, even by children, since it was arguably the healthier—because more sanitary—beverage. . . .

The reason people . . . wanted John Chapman [Johnny Appleseed] to stay and plant a nursery was the same reason he would soon be welcome in every cabin in Ohio: Johnny Appleseed was bringing the gift of alcohol to the frontier.<sup>32</sup>

So the first Mormon settlers preserved their fruit—dried it, put it up in jams and jellies, bottled it whole, turned it into booze, or just kept it in a dark cellar. We who raise fruit here today inherit, sometimes unwittingly, some of the wisdom they gained in the school of hard knocks.

When the Mormon pioneers first arrived in the Great Basin, their challenge was to determine how to make a living in an environment that was alien to all of them, as it was to nearly all white Americans. How to do this was something that had to be discovered by trial and error. There were no climate charts or geological data for determining what areas were optimal for growing food. Produce such as apples, which seem at first glance so utterly out

of place in this desert, turn out to be well-suited to parts of it, so much so that Utahns today take them for granted. But their presence in our life is the result of many trials for those early settlers. They are the last in a line of improbable events that start with the decision of the Mormons to move here, their perseverance in getting here and bringing the seeds of a new beginning with them, and their determination to make those seeds blossom.

In adjusting to their new environment and creating a blooming desert, the Mormons rediscovered and developed irrigation agriculture to a degree and level of expertise previously unknown in the New World. In the years since Brigham Young, the Church has parlayed its hard-won investments in agricultural know-how into modern agribusiness empires, academic dynasties of astonishing influence in fields such as agronomy and soil physics, and political influence in Western American water policy as administered by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation.<sup>33</sup> Ironically, it was the Church's success as much as the invasion of Gentiles that set the stage for the destruction of Brigham Young's Great Basin kingdom and its orchards

For Brigham Young and his followers, the purpose of the move west was to find autonomy, and the purpose of the autonomy was to build the kingdom of God. Unlike mountain men, miners, and homesteaders, the Mormons migrated as a community with the intent of building an even more unique form of community in a land that no one else wanted. Here they would reinvent society and build a place that God himself would be willing to inhabit. In the Mormon view, the heavenly Jerusalem cannot return to earth—earth, not outer space is viewed as the ultimate location for the kingdom of heaven—until there is an earthly city that is its match. As Moses 7:62–64 puts it:

And righteousness will I send down out of heaven . . . and righteousness and truth will I cause to sweep the earth . . . to gather out mine elect . . . unto a place which I shall prepare, an Holy City . . . and it shall be called Zion. . . .

And the Lord said unto Enoch: Then shalt thou and all thy city meet them there . . . and we will fall upon their necks, and they shall fall upon our necks, and we will kiss each other;

And there shall be mine abode.

Enoch is the prophetic leader of a city that became so righteous



*Ephraim Co-operative  
Mercantile Association,  
Ephraim, Utah.  
Photo by Edwin  
Firmage Jr., 1999.*



that God removed it from the earth, keeping it for himself until such time as other people are ready to embrace it. This city—Zion—operates on principles entirely different from those of the present world. “And the Lord called his people Zion, because they were of one heart and one mind, and dwelt in righteousness; and there were no poor among them” (Moses 7:18).

Building this holy community required a total rethinking of how society worked. American society, for example, prized profit. Brigham Young rejected the profit motive altogether.<sup>34</sup> American society prized individuality, but Brigham Young preached community.<sup>35</sup> Perhaps no other factor was more important in the ultimate survival of the Mormon people than their sense of collective identity, a sense of belonging to a community so distinctive that it borders on ethnicity. Lowry Nelson, son of Mormon homesteaders in Ferron, Utah, and later professor of sociology at the University of Minnesota, wrote a pioneering study of the Mormon village, based on settlement records of towns such as Escalante, Ephraim, American Fork, and Cardston, in which he identifies at-

tributes of the typical early Mormon community. The following eight are perhaps the most crucial:<sup>36</sup>

1. Land in the new settlement was distributed equally by lot, with no preference being given on the basis of ecclesiastical or social rank.

2. Holdings were small, usually less than twenty-five acres, so that all members of the community could own land.

3. The Mormon pattern of settlement was unique in the West and especially unusual among farming communities because it distributed three types of land: (a) an in-town lot (typically 1.25 acres) for a residence, vegetable garden, and orchard; (b) about five acres outside the town for raising animals and grain. In Salt Lake City, this outlying agricultural area was known as the "Big Field"; and (c) common grazing land still farther beyond the town to which everyone in the community had rights.

This pattern of land use encouraged the development of tightly knit communities in which people associated with one another daily in town, a marked contrast to much of the frontier West where homes were located on separate farms or ranches, miles from each another and in which the town functioned largely as a market area with occasional religious and social gatherings and school for the children. The premise of fundamental equality among the residents of a Mormon town was taken at times to strange lengths. For example, in Ephraim, Utah, to insure equal access to harvesting hay on common land, residents mandated that no one could cut that hay before July 25. On that date, the town would hold a dance to which everyone was invited. Only afterward could people go out and stake a temporary "claim" to a portion of the commons. In this way, everyone literally started from the same point with equal odds of access to any part of the commons. Farmers were allowed to claim only what they could cut in one day. After that, the commons was thrown open so that anyone could take what they needed.<sup>37</sup>

4. Residents were jointly responsible for building and maintaining public works and buildings such as forts, roads, irrigation ditches, schools, and meetinghouses.

5. In larger towns, Brigham Young issued orders for the establishment of cooperative wholesale stores to provide a market for exchange. They were not conventional commercial stores in the

usual sense. Their intent was to prepare the Saints for the “United Order of Enoch,” a strongly communitarian effort. Charles Smith recorded in his diary on October 11, 1868, after attending an organizational meeting:

Bro A[mos] M[ilton] Musser and G[eorge] Q Cannon occupied the time. They spoke upon this matter of our trading with those who are not of us. He shewed the advantages from our cooperating putting our means together . . . This movement was intended to make us more united to bring us closer together, according to the pattern of the Gospel. Bro Cannon Said it was very evident that men were Seeking to get rich and build themselves up, and to form that distinction of class in society, which thing was an abomination in the sight of God. He referred to the Nephites shewing that when they began to get rich they Drew off in Classes and despised the poor. This matter to which our attention was now being called would bring about good results, and would prepare the minds of the people, to receive further those principles that pertained to the order of Enoch. . . . At the close of the meeting subscriptions were handed in to carry forward the movement of a cooperative Wholesale Store.<sup>38</sup>

6. Agriculture, which formed the basis for all Mormon communities, though it became in time a business, was first and foremost a matter of subsistence and self-sufficiency, an attitude that continued well into the twentieth century. Arvil Stark, former secretary of the Utah State Horticultural Society, observed in 1947, “In general, the commercial orchards are small, averaging less than 5 acres in size and the fruit crop is usually associated with other kinds of agriculture to make a diversified agriculture. In other words, farming in Utah is usually a way of life rather than the highly specialized business characteristic of some other areas.”<sup>39</sup>

7. In most cases, towns were not created helter-skelter by individuals seeking their own place to settle down. Instead, the Church would “call” people—that is, assign them, to settle an area to promote Mormon control of that region. Members of each “mission” were often chosen for specialized skills so that they collectively had the basis for self-sustaining communities. Personal empire building was subordinated to building the kingdom of God. Not infrequently, settlers called to one area would, a few years later, be called to move to another.

8. The United Order (or United Order of Enoch) was the high point of the Mormon communitarian experiment, a heroic, if

short-lived, attempt at true religious communalism. In this system, heads of households signed over their property to the Church, usually represented by the local bishop, and received back a “stewardship” on which they were to live. All surplus was distributed within the community. This form of communalism was never universally practiced, nor was it mandatory even in places where it was attempted. Nonetheless, the attempt itself indicates the existence of this community ideal in nineteenth-century Utah.<sup>40</sup>

Leonard Arrington describes how no detail was too mundane for consideration in Brigham Young’s United Order, because the order, as the truest manifestation of the gospel, encompassed all aspects of life, even the trivial, as it ennobled them by putting them in the context of the bigger objective toward which the Saints were striving.

Instead of having every woman getting up in the morning and fussing around a cookstove . . . for two or three or half a dozen persons, [Young] said, he would have a village dining hall a hundred feet long with a cooking room and bakery attached. This would mean that most of the women could spend their time profitably making bonnets, hats, and clothing, or working in factories. Confusion in the dining hall could be avoided by installing a system by which each person could telegraph his order to the kitchen, and this order would be conveyed to him by a little railway under the table. “And when they have all eaten, the dishes are piled together, slipped under the table, and run back to the ones who wash them.” . . . In order to remove the laborious burden of big family washings, he suggested they have cooperative laundries. These would not only relieve the women from drudgery, but would also “save the husbands from steamy walls, soap suds, and ill-temper.”

The community would eat together, pray together, and work together. . . . “Half the labor necessary to make the people moderately comfortable” under their present arrangements, he said, would make them “independently rich under this system. A society like this,” he concluded, “would never have to buy anything; they would always make and raise all they would eat, drink and wear.”<sup>41</sup>

Part beer hall, part chapel, Brigham’s dining room and its miniature railroad illustrate the degree to which he was willing to rethink every aspect of conventional life, especially when it came to the family. This vision of a Mormon communal utopia, though conceived with an entirely different purpose in mind, anticipates

the longer-lived, but also only partly successful, experiment of the Israeli kibbutz (literally, “collective”).

To these attributes of the Mormon village, I would add one more. Not unlike the kibbutzniks, but modeling themselves on a much older Palestinian paradigm, the Mormons were also bound to their *land* in a way that was, in theory at least and often in reality, quite different from that of other Americans. To begin with, Mormons viewed themselves as players in a sacred drama, in which the land and their relationship to it are defined by scriptural precedent. They thought of themselves quite literally as the children of Israel, descendants of the twelve tribes being gathered in at the end of time. To this day, Mormons receive patriarchal blessings in which they are told the tribe of Israel from which they descend. Their persecution in Illinois was necessary to separate these children of Israel from “the world” (the flesh pots of Egypt, etc.). Their journey westward was the analogue of Israel’s exodus, the Great Basin was their promised land, and Brigham Young their Moses. And here in the Great Basin, they would not only settle and at last enjoy freedom from persecution but would also build the kingdom of God. This was no mundane search for a home but a mission imposed on them by God. The city of the Saints—or rather, the cities of the Saints—were no ordinary settlements but rather outposts of Zion. Like the Israelites, the early Mormons believed that their occupation of this land was by divine concession and therefore subject at all times to God’s pleasure. Failure to live up to their part of the covenant with God would jeopardize their entitlement to the land.

But the sense that God had called them to settle here also had a more immediate justification, for, as I’ve noted, many were in fact called by their Church leaders to settle specific areas. And those who were not called to settle an area may have had reason, nonetheless, to regard their presence there as a sort of divine test. As a result, many original settlers and their descendants remained even when conditions deteriorated to the point of disaster. Describing the extraordinarily challenging years of the Dust Bowl in Utah’s marginal areas, Brian Q. Cannon writes:

Decades following his removal from the town of Widtsoe, one farmer recalled a promise made by Mormon apostle Melvin J.

Ballard to the community's residents. The valley would be a Garden of Eden if its inhabitants kept God's commandments and stayed out of debt, Ballard had prophesied. If they did not do so, it would be taken from them. Ballard's words had infused the land with sacred meaning, rendering the valley a symbolic link between the area's residents and God. Remembering that promise, the people clung to their land as long as they physically could. To move away was to admit spiritual as well as temporal failure. Although all but two families eventually moved away, some former residents of the area still remember that promise, speak of their valley reverently, make annual pilgrimages to it, and speculate that it may one day blossom.<sup>42</sup>

In these ways and in the equally radical attempt to redefine marriage, early Mormonism was the antithesis of what we would now call the American dream. While 1950s-style living is, of course, something Brigham could not have dreamed of, he did attack, and quite pointedly, the shopkeeper mentality that is the basis of modern consumer society. Brigham stigmatized them as generally a low class of people who put their faith in the power of the profit motive and the free market, all at the expense of the common good. "I never could, the poorest day I ever saw in my life, descend so low as to stand behind a counter. Taking that class of men as a whole, I think they are of extremely low caliber."<sup>43</sup> No sharper contrast can be imagined than that which existed between the Mormonism of the United Order period and its contemporaneous American counterpart, the Gilded Age. At the very point in time when capitalism and not-so-enlightened self-interest were transforming America into an industrial and commercial paradise (if that isn't a contradiction in terms), Brigham Young was preaching sermons such as the following:

Let the calicoes be on the shelves and rot, I would rather build buildings every day and burn them down at night, than have traders here communing with our enemies outside and keeping up a hell all the time and raising devils to keep it going. . . . We can have enough [hell] of our own, without their help. . . . We sincerely hope that the time is not far distant when the people will supply their own wants and manufacture their own supplies; then and not until then will we become independent of our enemies.<sup>44</sup>

Brigham's chief enemy was capitalism, and his kingdom would be its ultimate victim.

In no other place in the West did Europeans create such a leg-





*Class of 1935, Fruita School, Utah. Courtesy of Capitol Reef Natural History Association.*

acy of sustainable community. As my husband, Ed, is fond of saying, with only slight exaggeration, there are no Mormon ghost towns. The Mormons came to stay. They are the West's ultimate "stickers," as Stegner felicitously called them. In the years before World War II, even with the encroachments of capitalist America, Utah had achieved a high degree of the self-sufficiency that Brigham Young so earnestly sought. The state produced, for example, enough food of all types to meet its needs and more.<sup>45</sup> And despite being the second-driest state in the nation, it had developed water resources more than sufficient for its needs, without the help of the Bureau of Reclamation. Indeed, the bureau's efforts by comparison are a colossal failure. The Mormons actually accomplished what the bureau never did, despite its mandate to do so: reclamation of desert lands for small-scale farmers. Writing in 1947, John A. Widtsoe, Mormonism's great exponent of desert agriculture, expressed the opinion that "the people who have descended from the pioneers still cherish the thought that the majority of the members of the Church are farmers and hope that it may ever be so. . . . The earnest belief in farming as the ce-



menting element in all social and economic progress is one of the major contributions to the world of the people who settled the Western American deserts.”<sup>46</sup>

That earnest belief died with Widtsoe. In the years following World War II and the transformation it wrought in America generally and Mormon Utah specifically, the self-sustaining garden paradise that Mormons built for themselves in preparation for the kingdom of God rapidly gave way to strip malls and urban sprawl distinguishable from those in the rest of America only in being entirely free of any notion of restraint. The tradition of home gardens and local agriculture has largely disappeared, as have the ward and stake farms that still existed in my childhood. Today, the trend is to put a large home on a small lot, not a small home in a big garden. We not only fail to preserve the hard-won knowledge of our predecessors but we do not even know what we have lost. Ironically and sadly, the orchards and gardens and knowledge of the early Mormon settlers are vanishing almost as completely as the native landscape and knowledge that they replaced in 1847.

According to the Bible, God instructed Israel, “When in the course of war you lay siege to a town . . . do not destroy its trees . . . for they provide you with food. . . . The trees of the field are not people that you should besiege them” (Deut. 20:19).<sup>47</sup> Even in the total war of the ancient world, self-interest, if not restraint before the sacred, dictated that you leave food sources intact unless your intent was, in fact, to render the land uninhabitable.<sup>48</sup> What contemporary Utahns, most of them descendants of Mormon settlers, have done and excused in the name of “growth” and “development” is something that their putative Israelite role models were commanded not to do even in all-out war: They’ve made war on the food-shed, *their* food-shed.

When the Mormons arrived in Utah, they began a permanent transformation of the land. They were not the first to do so. Native Americans had also been active in altering this land. Both groups adapted the land to their needs. But the native tribes appear to have done so with the most sustainable consequences. Despite having used the land for centuries, they left grass, forest, clean water, rich soil, and wildlife in abundance.<sup>49</sup> The Mormon settlement has had more mixed results. On the one hand, it has

given us pleasant and formerly self-sustaining towns and the miracle of desert fruit. On the other, it has given us urban sprawl and air pollution. Utah's Mormons have cut down the orchards themselves. And in Utah's West Desert, we have created a wasteland, for which, appropriately, we now find no other use but to store deadly waste, mostly other people's.

The path we Utahns are taking now is not the one blazed by Brigham Young, Parley P. Pratt, and John A. Widtsoe. Ours is the heedlessness of take-no-prisoners American capitalism. It's a path that no land can sustain, least of all the fragile desert. Although I no longer count myself an active member of the fold, I still long for Zion. I am a daughter of Jerusalem exiled in Babylon.

As I contemplate our dying desert and our disappearing orchards, I recall the poem of Paul Verlaine:

This is the feast of bread, the feast of wheat,  
in these spots seen again, beloved of old!  
Man and nature are busy where the light beats  
so white it turns the shadows rosy gold.

The yellow straw sinks to the whistling flight  
of scythes whose lightning smites, gleams, strikes again.  
Teeming with labor, all the distant plain  
changes each instant, now austere, now bright.

All is breathless straining and a stir  
under the sun, calm ripener of wheat,  
impassive and eternal laborer  
who plumps the sour grapes and makes them sweet.

Work, old sun, work for the bread and wine,  
feed man with the milk of earth, and pour  
the honest glass in which laughs the divine  
oblivion. Harvesters, vintners, this is your hour!

From the wine's fire and the virtue of the grain,  
from the fruit of man's strength spread to earth's far posts,  
God reaps, gathers the vintage, and ordains  
to his ends Blood for the chalice, Flesh for the host!<sup>50</sup>

My apple trees have taught me that there is indeed something sacramental about working the land, something that is ultimately and permanently meaningful, something that opens a gateway to transcendence. To work the land is a sacrament of continuity and caring that links past, present, and future. It's a sacrament in part because it is the preservation of a living link to ancestors. Farming, even if it's just the backyard variety that I currently practice, is a kind of ancestor worship. In it, we use know-how such as grafting that has been handed down, along with other sacred knowledge—religion and agriculture go hand in hand—from parents to children since the Chalcolithic, when the first olives, vines, and fruit trees were domesticated. In many cases, the very seeds we plant and the twigs we graft are hand-me-downs, descendants of descendants of the first tamed natives.

Working the land is also a sacrament because it is a living link, a potentially eternal link, to offspring, an expression of hope that our children will know more of the pleasure and independence that comes from raising their own food and that they will know less of that desperate dependence that is the hallmark of today's global so-called village. In the Middle East, people say that you plant an olive tree for your old age or for your children. Our family's fruit trees aren't an investment in the future on that scale; but since my husband and I are now fifty-one, they are an investment in our children nonetheless.

Finally, our work with the land, which includes our taking care of it as well as the reverse, is sacred because the land itself is sacred. It's the source of life, Earth Mother, matrix of mysteries. It takes perhaps a millennium for Mother Earth to give birth to a single inch of topsoil. In spite of our science, we can't make soil any more than we can manufacture babies. Soil must be grown just like babies. And the real mother in each case is Earth. The real mother is Life. We women are just her handmaids, like Bilhah and Zilpah, giving birth to children who belong to another, nurturing seeds that came from our parents, who received them from their parents from time out of mind. In any economy of true value, the Earth, like our children, wouldn't be for sale at any price. Like our children, it would be something we nurture and are nurtured by. Next to our genes, of all the things passed—preserved—from generation to generation, good earth in which to grow our food is the

most precious. My ancestors understood the life-giving power of earth. I'm beginning to.

## Part II

### **Life on the Plateau: Of Cows and Corn, Wasting a Desert Once in Bloom**

Settlement of the Colorado Plateau took place during the late 1870s and early 1880s. This was the last area of present-day Utah to be settled by Mormon pioneers due to remote and almost impenetrable geography, Indian presence, and questionable agricultural potential. Until the 1870s, the Mormons had had to insure that the settlement core—what is now the I-15 and Highway 89 corridors—was secure. By the mid-1870s, however, concerns had begun to arise about non-Mormon encroachment from mining and ranching operations coming out of Colorado. The Mormons therefore decided to get a jump on the competition.

As noted, Fruita was established in 1880, and was part of expansion throughout the area. Escalante was founded in 1876, Green River in 1878, Hanksville in 1882, Loa in 1878, Bicknell in 1875, and Bluff in 1880, to name just a few.<sup>51</sup>

Bluff, deep in the southeast corner of Utah, is the most remote of these settlements. With 250 men, women, and children, eighty wagons, and a thousand head of cattle, they set off in September 1879 from Parowan on a largely unexplored “shortcut” to their destination of Montezuma Creek. They estimated that the journey would take six weeks. When they reached the Colorado River just above the confluence with the San Juan in late November 1879, only halfway to their goal, they met the first of several epic obstacles. The only way forward was down a 1,200-foot-high gap in the cliff, the “Hole in the Rock.” It took them six weeks to cut their way down through a forty-foot drop at the top of the gap, move huge boulders, level high spots, fill depressions, and widen crevice walls. At the bottom, they were obliged to build a section of wooden road supported by stakes fitted into holes drilled in the narrow ledge. Once down this obstacle, the settlers had to cross the 300-foot-wide river and travel more than a hundred miles over virgin red rock until they reached the site of Bluff on April 6, 1880, ten grueling weeks after leaving Hole in the Rock. At this

point they stopped, as, in the words of one of the party, “We were too tired to go on and it was too far to go back.”

They had just traveled by wagon through some of the most difficult terrain in North America. Many inclines were so steep that seven spans of horses were needed to pull the heavily laden wagons up. Remarkably, during the six-month journey, two babies were born and no one died.<sup>52</sup> It is a story of exceptional tenacity.

Unfortunately, as was the case in several Mormon settlements, it is not a story with an entirely happy ending. In establishing their new home on the San Juan, these hardy pioneers cut down the native cottonwoods to build homes, fences, and barns. Their large cattle herd destroyed much of the natural riverbank and the willows lining it. As a result, when spring floods came, they wiped out irrigation canals, ditches, and crops. This pattern happened repeatedly, and eventually many settlers moved north out of the flood plain, to create the towns of Blanding and Monticello.

The consequences of settlement—and above all of intensive grazing that made life in Bluff difficult—were not limited to Bluff. Flooding was a constant problem for settlers along the Virgin River, for example. Here, they cut cottonwoods just to make ash for soap!<sup>53</sup> Along with the degradation of riparian areas, another early and ubiquitous result of Mormon settlement was the destruction of the area’s vast grass prairie. Few, even native, Utahns know that tall-grass prairie once covered the intermontane valleys of northern and western Utah, the piedmont and mesas of the Arizona Strip, and much of the flatland of eastern Utah where today one hardly supposes prairie could have existed.

An especially startling example of the transformation of Utah landscape that occurred after the Mormons arrived is the little settlement of Pipe Springs, south of Kanab, where Mormons established the unlikeliest of desert operations, a dairy farm. They chose to build a dairy at Pipe Springs in what is now a sparse scrubland of piñon, juniper, and sage. But when they first arrived, it was, in the words of a park ranger familiar with the pioneer sources, a prairie of “grass belly high to a horse.”<sup>54</sup>

So, here they built their dairy mission and tithing office—the Mormon equivalent of a commercial center and trading post—in 1863. Within less than twenty years, the grass was gone, and the

area began to take on its present look of rocky juniper desert. The grassland at Pipe Springs was even more short-lived than in most other places in Utah, as Texas cattle barons moved in in the late 1870s, replacing the Mormons and overgrazing the ecosystem to complete destruction.<sup>55</sup>

The Colorado Plateau was far from the only place to suffer from overgrazing. Virtually *none* of Utah's grassland survived the nineteenth century. In Mountain Meadows, another grassy Utah paradise, notable now only for the human tragedy that occurred there in 1857, but known to early travelers as one of the prettiest and most welcome stops on the journey through Utah, the prairie also lasted just twenty years after settlement. John C. Frémont wrote the first description of the area in 1842: "We found here an extensive mountain meadow, rich in bunch grass, and fresh with numerous springs of clear water, all refreshing and delightful to look upon."<sup>56</sup>

In the valleys, virtually nothing "native" survived. Utah's mountains, which were used as summer range for cattle and sheep, were also heavily overgrazed, and the resulting damage in this case was not restricted to the range. Towns up and down the Wasatch Front experienced floods from mountainsides whose ground cover had been obliterated. Local water supplies were also fouled by feces and carcasses, leading one resident of Cache Valley to say that he would drink whiskey in the future for lack of decent drinking water.<sup>57</sup> Damage to the range and its downstream effects eventually moved locals to join with national conservation advocates in calling for the creation of federally managed forests. Parley P. Pratt described the area as it appeared in 1851:

This little mountain paradise was . . . altogether the most beautiful place in all the route. Some thousand or fifteen hundred acres of bottom, or meadow lands were spread out before us like a green carpet richly clothed with a variety of grasses, and possessing a soil both black, rich and quick—being a mixture of sand, gravel and clayey loam. . . . It was everywhere moistened with springs and would produce potatoes, vegetables and small grains in abundance without watering. The surrounding hills were abrupt, but rounded off, presenting a variety of beautiful landscapes, and everywhere richly clothed with the choicest kind of bunch grass and bordered in their higher eminences with cedar and nut pine sufficient for fuel.<sup>58</sup>



*Pioneer wagon, Capitol Reef National Park. Photo by Edwin Firmage Jr., 2000.*

Even though damage was done by pioneer companies such as the Baker-Fancher party traveling to California, whose train included 400 head of cattle, it wasn't until after permanent settlement began in 1862 that this lush meadow was destroyed. By 1884, the meadow had largely disappeared. In that year, a massive flash flood swept through the overgrazed valley and created a gully that drained it permanently. Of the valley at the time of John D. Lee's execution there on March 23, 1877, Bancroft, referencing Lee's remarks to one of his guards, says aptly, "The luxuriant herbage that clothed it twenty years before had disappeared; the springs were dry and wasted, and now there was neither grass nor any green thing save here and there a copse of sage brush or scrub oak that served but to make its desolation still more desolate."<sup>59</sup>

In valley after valley, prairie niche after prairie niche, the story is repeated. An area is overgrazed, stream and river beds are trampled, river bottom cottonwoods and willows damaged. Drought and flood finish off what the cows and sheep have left behind.

White people were not the first to inhabit this area. Valleys such as Fruita and Mountain Meadows were used by native tribes as well. They too changed the landscape, and not always for good. But they did not usually wipe out entire ecosystems. Many were enhanced through the stewardship of native tribes.<sup>60</sup>





*Anasazi cliff dwelling, San Juan River, San Juan County, Utah. Photo by Carrol Firmage, 2008.*

The difference between the two patterns of settlement was brought home to me when I visited an ancient cliff dwelling during a trip down the San Juan River with Terry Tempest Williams's "Ecology of Residency" class in June 2008. The inhabitants had constructed their homes out of adobe, not wood. They built them high in the cliff for protection not only from other people but also from floods. The cultivated land, where they grew corn, beans, and squash, was in the river plain; but they had left intact the natural barriers to flooding—the river banks, the trees, and other native plants. Most importantly, these people did not have cattle and sheep.

Shortly after this trip, I was exploring other Anasazi ruins on Cedar Mesa west of Bluff with my family. Here we came across a small home built deftly into the cliff. At first glance, it looked like part of the canyon wall. Inside, we found prehistoric corncobs, about an eighth the size of the corn we grew in our backyard. That's probably about the difference in our overall ecological footprint. We pondered the life that those people led long ago, a life very different from ours. We thought also of the similarities, the most important being that we and they live in the desert and love it. The question we found ourselves asking, then as now, is how we can live sustainably and in harmony with this fragile environment.

There's a dark side to Mormon settlement in Utah. Despite real success in irrigation agriculture, Mormon practice has always been to pack too many people into too little land with too little

management in areas that require a completely different mode of use. John Wesley Powell saw at once that patterns of land use that had existed in the East would not work in the arid West.<sup>61</sup> The standard homestead of 160 acres was, in Powell's view, virtually guaranteed to fail. In areas that had abundant water, 160 acres was more than a family needed to sustain itself. In areas where water was scarce, thousands of acres might be needed. Powell therefore suggested that land be tied to water. If a fixed allocation of 160 acres wouldn't work, neither would the Mormon five, although it might meet the needs of the best-watered few on the Wasatch Front. The history of the West since white settlement shows the results of ignoring Powell. And this is as true of the Mormon experience as of any other.

One hears much of how the desert was made to "blossom as the rose." But what of the barren waste that once was a desert in bloom?<sup>62</sup> "Truly," as Walter Cottam laments, "the fathers' sins against the land are visited upon their children for generations to come, especially when the children continue in the same transgressions."<sup>63</sup>

### Notes

1. Wendell J. Berry, "At a Country Funeral," in his *Selected Poems* (Washington D.C.: Counterpoint, 1998), 92.

2. For a summary of some early efforts, see [http://web.me.com/efirmage/Supporting\\_Documents/Writing\\_on\\_the\\_Environment\\_files/Toward%20Sustainability.pdf](http://web.me.com/efirmage/Supporting_Documents/Writing_on_the_Environment_files/Toward%20Sustainability.pdf).

3. John Alton Peterson, *Utah's Blackhawk War* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah, 1998).

4. George E. Davidson, *Red Rock Eden: The Story of Fruita* (Capitol Reef, Utah: Capitol Reef Natural History Association, 1986), 18.

5. *Ibid.*

6. See Capitol Reef National Park website: <http://www.nps.gov/care/historyculture/orchardscms.htm> (accessed March 6, 2009).

7. Davidson, *Red Rock Eden*, 22.

8. See "Spring and Fall Freeze Probabilities," links at Western Regional Climate Center website, <http://www.wrcc.dri.edu/cgi-bin/cliMAIN.pl?ut3046> (accessed January 14, 2009). Loa's probabilities are <http://www.wrcc.dri.edu/cgi-bin/cliMAIN.pl?ut5148> (accessed January 14, 2009).

9. See Brigham City probabilities: <http://www.wrcc.dri.edu/cgi-bin/>

cliMAIN.pl?ut0924, and Corinne, <http://www.wrcc.dri.edu/cgi-bin/cliMAIN.pl?ut1731>. At least two other pairs of Utah towns (Richmond/Trenton and Oak City/Delta) also exhibit significantly different growing seasons despite virtually identical locations, except for location being on and off the valley bench. Those few feet in altitude make all the difference in agriculture.

10. [www.bcareachamber.com/pages/peach-days-schedule](http://www.bcareachamber.com/pages/peach-days-schedule) (accessed April 30, 2010).

11. Heber C. Kimball, December 27, 1857, *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (London and Liverpool: LDS Booksellers Depot, 1855–86), 6:186, 188.

12. In Toquerville, settled in 1861, fruit quickly turned out to be the main crop. Here early residents were able to grow grapes, peaches, and even figs of excellent quality. Andrew Karl Larson, *"I Was Called to Dixie": The Virgin River Basin, Unique Experiences in Mormon Pioneering* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1961), 33. By 1866, one third of Toquerville's total acreage under cultivation was in orchards and vineyards. Just to the west in Santa Clara, settlers grew apples, apricots, nectarines, plums, pears, quinces, almonds, figs, English walnuts, gooseberries, currants, and three varieties of grapes: Catawba, Esebella, and California. In the fall of 1861, just six years after planting, the town produced 1,000 bushels of peaches. *Ibid.*, 43. Success with a few products such as oranges, olives, and black pepper remained elusive.

13. Clarence Ashton, "Recent Developments in Utah County's Fruit Industry and Its Future Possibilities" in *Utah Fruit Tree Survey 1965*, edited by Eleanor Bishop (Salt Lake City: Utah State Department of Agriculture, 1965), 28. Ashton was professor of horticulture at BYU.

14. Sam Edgecomb, quoted in *ibid.*, 28.

15. Anson B. Call, "Some History of Utah Horticulture" in *Utah Fruit Tree Survey 1965*, edited by Eleanor Bishop (Salt Lake City: Utah State Department of Agriculture, 1965), 51. No proper study of the Mormon cricket has been done, but there is a fascinating work on its cousin, the Rocky Mountain locust: Jeffrey Lockwood, *Locust: The Devastating Rise and Mysterious Disappearance of the Insect That Shaped the American Frontier* (New York: Basic Books, 2004).

16. Call, "Some History of Utah Horticulture," 51.

17. Issues of *Intermountain Horticulturist* (1890–91), a short-lived, but fascinating publication, in Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City.

18. Mark Twain, *Roughing It* (1860), available in Project Gutenberg, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/3177/3177.txt> (accessed April 30, 2010).

19. Sir Richard F. Burton, *City of the Saints* (1862 American edition; rpt., Niwot: University Press of Colorado, 1984), 269–70.

20. Call, “Some History of Utah Horticulture,” 48–66.

21. Alton R. Larson, Agricultural Statistician at large, reports figures by county in Bishop, *Utah Fruit Tree Survey, 1965*, 5–25. The breakdown of the figures by county and city is exactly along the lines one would predict on the basis of the climate data noted above. Thus, in 1965, Box Elder County, consisting chiefly of the three bench cities—Brigham City, Perry, and Willard—counted 208,566 trees, while all of Beaver County, located at 6,000 feet or more, had a mere 1,940. Utah County had 682,677, with Orem alone accounting for 223,302, while Cedar City, at 5,846 feet, had 3,330. In the north, Cache County, which is at much the same elevation as Box Elder County but which enjoys a much shorter growing season due to its different geography, had just 26,638. Outside the Wasatch Front and southern Utah, most counties had no more than a few thousand trees.

22. Donna Toland Smart, ed., *Mormon Midwife: The 1846–1888 Diaries of Patty Bartlett Sessions* (Logan: Utah State University, 1997), 220, 249, 260, 261, 270. The scope of this activity can be judged from Heber C. Kimball, *Journal of Discourses*, 21:186: “Do you think I have got any dried peaches? Yes, I have got enough to last me two years, and I presume that brother Brigham has, and a great many others” (186). To put away fruit on this scale was often the work not just of individual families but of the community. For peach preserving, “men made scaffolds for drying the peaches at certain propitious places about the town. A crowd of young people [would gather] at one of the scaffolds to set out peaches, until an entire crop of peaches had been pitted and set out to dry. Various races were run to see who could cut and set out the most peaches in a given time, and, as often as not, the winner of such a race was permitted to kiss all the young ladies present.” William A. Wilson, “The Folklore of Dixie—Past and Present,” *Utah Historical Quarterly* 74, no. 3 (Summer 2006): 206. In their peach parties, the Mormons were doing what close-knit communities around America had done for decades, the fruit equivalent of a barn raising. For example, St. Jean de Crèvecoeur, a French settler in New York at the end of the eighteenth century, wrote that for half of the year, supper for him and his wife consisted of apple pie made from dried apples put up earlier in the year in slicing and drying parties that might involve a whole neighborhood of women. Quoted in Alice A. Martin, *All about Apples* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1976), 19.

23. The famous Mason jar, patented in 1858, was still made by hand, [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mason\\_jar](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mason_jar). The Ball jar, the first to be machine-produced on a large scale, appeared in 1884, [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/)

Ball\_Corp. The *Ball Blue Book*, which is still the Bible of home canning, debuted in 1909. Ball's principal competition, Kerr Glass Manufacturing, was founded in 1903 ([www.pickyourrown.org/canningjars.htm](http://www.pickyourrown.org/canningjars.htm) (all accessed May 2, 2010)).

24. Burton, *City of the Saints*, 320, notes that sugar, which cost 6 cents a pound "in the United States" sold for 37½ to 45 cents in Utah. Sessions, *Mormon Midwife*, 288, recorded on September 2, 1861, buying twenty-five pounds of sugar for eight dollars (32 cents a pound) shortly before she began putting up preserves.

25. Pectin, a natural fiber that gives fresh fruit firmness and helps to bind the water that makes fruit juicy, was chemically isolated in 1825 by Henri Braconnot, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pectin> and [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henri\\_Braconnot](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henri_Braconnot) (accessed May 2, 2010). However, it had been understood since the beginning of jam- and jelly-making in the eighteenth century that certain fruits such as apples, currants, and quinces, which were, as it turned out, rich in pectin, helped to give preserves body. Accordingly, these fruits were added to strawberries and raspberries, fruits that are low in pectin and therefore reluctant to set without assistance. [http://www.ippa.info/history\\_of\\_pectin.htm](http://www.ippa.info/history_of_pectin.htm) (accessed May 2, 2010).

26. Lydia Child, *The American Frugal Housewife*, 12th ed. (Boston: Carter, Hendee, and Co., 1833), 81, gave the rule for preserves as a pound of sugar for a pound of fruit, a proportion that seems high by our standards. My mother-in-law (an avid canner) and I, for example, use about two-thirds to one cup of sugar for six to eight cups of fruit. Still, because sugar had to be paid for in cash and freighted across the plains until the railroad was completed in 1869, it was a luxury. Another substantial expense was that of the glass container until mass-produced bottles began to appear at the end of the nineteenth century. Thus, Child cautions her readers to save vials and bottles (14) but commends them for bottling cider or beer, not food.

27. The absence of ready-made supplies for canning did not, of course, stop people from putting up, or trying to put up, a few jars of preserves. Early Utahns used glazed pottery in which to store their fruit. An early potter was John Eardley, a Mormon immigrant from England. Eardley came to the United States in 1854 and worked for a while in Ohio, New Jersey, and Massachusetts. In Boston, he met missionary George Q. Cannon, who urged him to come to Salt Lake City, which he did in 1862. John lost no time in trying out the local clays and glazes. After seeing his work, Cannon urged Eardley to take his wares to Brigham Young, who was so impressed that he assumed they were not made locally. After learning that Eardley had been in Salt Lake City only three

weeks, Young exclaimed, "Go to work and make some more. You have done more in three weeks than the Church did in three years and it cost us \$17,000." Larson, *"I Was Called to Dixie,"* 273. Eardley was called to St. George in 1868 to provide vessels for the region using the local clays to produce artistic yet functional pieces. As a boy in Washington, Utah, Karl Larson, born in 1899, remembered watching his mother bottle fruit in Eardley jars. She preserved the fruit by boiling it with molasses (later sugar), poured it scalding hot into jars, sealed them with thick brown paper, then covered the paper with cloth which was tied around the jar's neck. The containers were stored in the fruit cellar until late winter or spring. By then, a layer of mold would have formed on top of the fruit but could be carefully removed, leaving the rest of the contents edible.

28. According to Burton, *City of the Saints*, 320, "This Valley Tan, being generally pure, is better than the alcohol one part water and one part, colored with burnt sugar and flavored with green tea, which is sold under the name of Cognac." Twain, *Roughing It*, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/3177/3177.txt> (accessed May 10, 2010), wrote: "Valley tan (or, at least, one form of valley tan) is a kind of whisky, or first cousin to it; is of Mormon invention and manufactured only in Utah. Tradition says it is made of (imported) fire and brimstone. If I remember rightly no public drinking saloons were allowed in the kingdom by Brigham Young, and no private drinking permitted among the faithful, except they confined themselves to 'valley tan'." Ken Sanders, "A Thirst in the Desert" *Salt Lake Magazine*, December 2008, [www.saltlakemagazine.com/Salt-Lake-Magazine/December-2008/A-thirst-in-the-desert](http://www.saltlakemagazine.com/Salt-Lake-Magazine/December-2008/A-thirst-in-the-desert) (accessed May 10, 2010), notes that Valley Tan was created by C. E. Johnson, a pharmacist, who also developed Valley Tan Remedy, a patented medicine. Alcohol was the main ingredient of this remedy, and it was supposedly a favorite cure of Brigham Young. Both of these products were sold, along with beer, wine, and other hard liquors at ZCMI, which had its own label.

29. Abundant sources document that adherence to the Word of Wisdom, a revelation to Joseph Smith which includes the proscription of alcohol and tobacco and which is a defining characteristic of Mormon life, was often observed in the breach until the early twentieth century. Brigham Young ordered settlers in Utah's Dixie to "cheerfully contribute their efforts to supply the Territory with cotton, sugar, grapes, tobacco, figs, almonds, olive oil, and such other useful articles as the Lord has given us the places for garden spots in the south to produce." Young, Letter to Orson Hyde, October 13, 1861, quoted in Leonard J. Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom: An Economic History of the Latter-day Saints, 1830-1900* (1958; rpt., Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), 216. Mor-



mon vineyards in southern Utah produced 3,000 gallons of high-quality wines and brandies per year, an industry that lasted until Church leaders ordered the vines pulled in the St. George area in the late nineteenth century due to too much success. *Ibid.*, 222. This ruling coincided with the 1892 instructions to consistently use water rather than wine for the Mormon “sacrament” or eucharist. Nels Anderson, *Desert Saints: The Mormon Frontier in Utah* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1966), 446 note 11; see also his brief description of southern Utah’s wine industry (373–74). Heber C. Kimball, December 27, 1857, *Journal of Discourses*, 6:187, commented: “We dedicate and consecrate the wine or water that we partake of in the sacrament.”

Utah Mormons followed much the same trajectory in their use of tea and tobacco. Eighteen years after reaching the Salt Lake Valley and four years before the completion of the transcontinental railroad, Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*: 10:226–27, remarked, “This community has not yet concluded to entirely dispense with the use of tobacco, and great quantities have been imported into our Territory. The silver and gold which we have paid out for this article alone, since we first came into Utah, would have built several extensive cotton and woolen factories and filled them with machinery. . . . Instead of buying it in a foreign market and importing it over a thousand miles, why not raise it in our own country or do without it? True principles of domestic and political economy would suggest the production at home of every article of home consumption for herein lies the basis of wealth and independence for any people. . . . Tea is in great demand in Utah and anything under that name sells readily at an extravagant price. This article opens a wide drain for the escape of much of our circulating medium. . . . Tea can be produced in this Territory in sufficient quantities for home consumption. . . . If we do not raise it, I would suggest that we do without it.” Two years later, Young announced that he would prefer that the Saints not spend money on tea and tobacco and instead put it towards the Perpetual Emigrating Fund. *Journal History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (chronological scrapbook of typed entries and newspaper clippings, 1830–present), April 1, 1867, LDS Church History Library.

30. For a brief survey of the Word of Wisdom’s migration from counsel to commandment, see *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 14, no. 3 (Fall 1981): (1) Lester E. Bush Jr., “The Word of Wisdom in Early Nineteenth-Century Perspective,” 47–65; (2) Robert J. McCue, “Did the Word of Wisdom Become a Commandment in 1851,” 66–77; and (3) Thomas G. Alexander, “The Word of Wisdom: From Principle to Requirement,” 78–88.

31. Asa R. Bowthorpe, “Pioneer Sawmills and Canyons of Salt Lake



Valley,” 1961, typescript, 2, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah.

32. Michael Pollan, *The Botany of Desire: A Plant's-Eye View of the World* (New York: Random House, 2001), 21–22, 9. He continues, “Allowed to ferment for a few weeks, pressed apple juice yields a mildly alcoholic beverage with about half the strength of wine. For something stronger, the cider can then be distilled into brandy or simply frozen; the intensely alcoholic liquid that refuses to ice is called applejack. Hard cider frozen to thirty degrees below zero yields an applejack of 66 proof” (22). Fearing the loss of revenue as boozier uses of the apple were curtailed, growers in the early twentieth century came up with “an apple a day keeps the doctor away.” In fact, what it kept away was the bogeyman of temperance. I might also note here that other fruits might be stored in fermented form. Lydia Child, *The American Frugal Housewife*, 86, recommends beer as “a good family drink” and making currant wine at home (86). Sessions, *Mormon Midwife*, 279, made currant wine in Davis County, Utah.

33. Mormons, who quickly became the country’s experts in irrigation, naturally assumed senior roles in the Reclamation Service, later U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, when it was formed in 1902. Marc Reisner, *Cadillac Desert: The American West and Its Disappearing Water* (New York: Penguin, 1993), 2. Among early bureau strategists was John A. Widtsoe, who had come to Utah as an eleven-year-old convert from Norway. After working his way through school in Utah, Widtsoe studied at Harvard University, then the University of Göttingen, Germany, where he received a Ph.D in chemistry (1899). In Utah, he directed Utah State University’s Agricultural Experiment Station from 1900 to 1905, then taught agriculture at Brigham Young University, where he was instrumental in founding the College of Biology and Agriculture. He served as president of the University of Utah (1915–21) until he became an LDS apostle. While an apostle, he served on an important strategy committee (the “Fact Finder’s Commission”) that created the vision for the renamed and reenergized Bureau of Reclamation (1923). In addition to theology, Widtsoe authored agricultural works: *Dry Farming: A System of Agriculture for Countries under a Low Rainfall* (New York: Macmillan, 1910), *Principles of Irrigation Practice* (New York: Macmillan, 1914), and *How the Desert Was Tamed* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1947). Widtsoe and his students had an astonishing impact on agronomy and soil science, not only in the United States, but internationally. Leonard J. Arrington and Davis Bitton, *The Mormon Experience: A History of the Latter-day Saints* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), 310–19. On Mormon ranching, see Kent Larsen, “Biggest Rancher in the East,” *Mormon News*, January 3, 2002, <http://www.mormonstoday.com/020104/B1DeseretRnch01.US.FL.Orl.shtml> (accessed March 11, 2009).

These details underscore the degree to which agriculture and Mormonism became intertwined.

34. Brigham Young's ideas on economics were focused on the community rather than the individual. In his opinion, a businessman should work for the kingdom of God, not his own profit. This attitude was completely opposite from the emphasis on an individual's bottom line that was the focus of the rest of American society at the time. He stated his position in a December 1853 sermon: "In reality, we should only have one mess chest, one place of deposit, one storehouse, one 'pile,' and that is the kingdom of God upon the earth; it is the only store-house there is for Saints, it is the only 'pile,' the only safe place of deposit, the only place to invest our capital. . . . All who contend for an individual interest, a personal 'pile,' independent of the kingdom of God, will be destroyed. . . . The gold, the silver, the wheat, the fine flour, buffalo, the deer, and the cattle on a thousand hills, are all His, and He turns them whithersoever He will." Quoted in Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom*, 130.

35. "Men may think . . . that we have a right to work for ourselves, but I say that we have no time to do that in the narrow, selfish sense." Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*, 14:101. For more on Brigham Young's decidedly un-American attitudes, see Hugh Nibley, "Educating the Saints," in *Nibley on the Timely and the Timeless* (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1978), 229–60.

36. Lowry Nelson, *The Mormon Village: A Pattern and Technique of Land Settlement* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1952). Though these points may not apply to every town, such as Salt Lake City, for instance, they were generally followed.

37. *Ibid.*, 138–39.

38. Charles Smith, Diary, October 11, 1868, typescript, quoted in Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom*, 298. Punctuation as per typescript.

39. Arvil Stark, "History of Growing Fruit in Utah," in *Utah: A Centennial History*, edited by Wain Sutton, 3 vols. (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing, 1949), 1:114.

40. An even briefer experiment with Mormon communalism in Missouri failed when the Saints were ejected from Jackson County in 1833. The standard account of this interesting experiment is Leonard J. Arrington, Feramorz Y. Fox, and Dean L. May, *Building the City of God: Community and Cooperation among the Mormons* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976). The most literary treatment is Wallace Stegner, *Mormon Country* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1942), one of the most evocative depictions of Mormon life before World War II. John Taylor, Brigham Young's successor, was not in favor of the united orders; and coupled with intensi-

fying federal pressure against polygamy after Young's death in 1877, these experiments soon withered.

41. Brigham Young, October 9, 1872, paraphrased and quoted in Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom*, 326.

42. Brian Q. Cannon, "Struggle against Great Odds: Challenges in Utah's Marginal Agricultural Areas, 1925–1939," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 54, no. 4 (Fall 1986): 320.

43. *Journal of Discourses*, 9:189.

44. Brigham Young, Letter to Horace S. Eldredge, November 20, 1858, quoted in Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom*, 196.

45. Herbert Howe Bancroft, *History of Utah* (1889; rpt., Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1964), 720.

46. Widtsoe, *How the Desert Was Tamed*, 18, 20.

47. New English Bible and most modern scholars: *lo' ka'adam 'ets hasadeh*.

48. As 2 Kings 3:19, 25 suggests, the Israelites probably practiced scorched-earth tactics, which were universal among states of the time. For Assyrian examples, see Daniel David Luckenbill, *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia*, 2 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1926–27), 1:§§480, 620; 2:§§164, 165. For Egyptian examples, see James B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1969), 228, 239, 240. Thus, the injunction in Deuteronomy looks more like an idealized prescription than a statement of law operative in historical Israel and is perhaps best viewed as a protest against contemporary behavior.

49. As environmental historians and biologists are increasingly aware, Native Americans sometimes changed their landscape in fundamental ways and employed unsustainable practices.

50. Paul Verlaine, "Sagesse XX," in *Paul Verlaine: Selected Poems*, translated by C. F. MacIntyre, bilingual edition (Berkeley: University of California, 1976), 169.

51. Tom Wharton, Brett Prettyman, and Craig Hansell. *One Day in . . .* (Salt Lake City: Salt Lake Tribune, n.d.), 89, 123, 125, 167, 25, 31.

52. David E. Miller, *Hole-in-the-Rock: An Epic in the Colonization of the Great American West* (1959; rpt., Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1966).

53. "The people of the upper Virgin area, especially at Virgin, burnt the cottonwoods that grew in abundance along the river and on North Creek, gathered up the ashes, and took them north to trade for other necessities. Cottonwood ashes were used as a water-softener in laundering clothes and in making soft soap." Larson, "I Was Called to Dixie," 265–66.

54. My interview with Park Service personnel, August 2006.

55. Kathleen McKoy, *Pipe Spring: Culture at a Crossroads*, [http://www.nps.gov/pisp/historyculture/upload/PISP\\_adhi.pdf](http://www.nps.gov/pisp/historyculture/upload/PISP_adhi.pdf) (accessed March 9, 2009).

56. Quoted in Walter Cottam, "Man as a Biotic Factor Illustrated by Recent Floristic and Physiographic Changes at the Mountain Meadows, Washington County, Utah," *Ecology* 10, no. 4 (October 1929): 361–63. I've used Mountain Meadows and Pipe Springs as examples, but it's clear from inventories cited in the following articles that abundant grass was available in many of Utah's valleys and on mesas such as the Kaiparowits and Paria plateaus where today no grass is found and where one might suppose that grasses had never existed. See also George Stewart, W. P. Cottam, and Selar Hutchings, "Influence of Unrestricted Grazing on Northern Salt Desert Plant Associations in Western Utah," *Journal of Agricultural Research* 60 (1940): 289–316; George Stewart, "Historic Records Bearing on Agricultural and Grazing Ecology in Utah," *Journal of Forestry* 39 (1941): 362–75; W. P. Cottam and George Stewart, "Plant Succession as a Result of Grazing and of Meadow Desiccation by Erosion since Settlement in 1862," *Journal of Forestry* 38 no. 8, 1 August (1940): 613–26; Walter Cottam, *The Impact of Man on the Flora of the Bonneville Basin*, in *Advancement of Learning Series monographs* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah, February 20, 1961).

In addition to these examples of overgrazing, see A. J. Simmonds, *On the Big Range: A Centennial History of Cornish and Trenton, Cache County, Utah, 1870–1970* (Logan: Utah State University, 1970). The "Big Range," a former grassland of some 30,000 acres, extends for about fifteen miles from the big bend of the Bear River on the south to Weston Creek on the north, and from the Bear River on the east to the foothills on the west. In pre-settlement times, buffalo grass stood shoulder high in August. As late as 1876, a patch of sagebrush was unusual enough to merit mention by a surveying party. By 1888, following fifteen years of intensive grazing, the foothills and much of the flats were covered with sage. The prairie was exhausted, and the exceptionally cold winter of 1888 effectively ended the heyday of ranching on the Big Range. In its pre-Mormon splendor, this valley was a thriving ecosystem that included a multitude of grizzly bears and a vigorous Native American population, now known chiefly as the victims of the 1863 Bear River Massacre. The destruction of the former went hand in hand with the latter, both alike being "necessary" to give white settlers their *Lebensraum*.

57. Michael W. Johnson, "Whiskey or Water: A Brief History of the Cache National Forest," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 73, no. 4 (2005): 329–45. The quotation from the prospective whisky-drinker is on p. 330.

58. Parley P. Pratt, quoted in Cottam, "Man as a Biotic Factor," 361–62.

59. Bancroft, *History of Utah*, 569.

60. As much as 40 percent of the Amazon rain forest, for example, may be the result of human activity. See Charles C. Mann, *1491: New Revelations of the Americas before Columbus* (New York: Vintage, 2006), 337–44. The impact of human activity in the American West is no less astonishing. As early as 1951, Omer Stewart, "Burning and Natural Vegetation in the U.S.," *Geographical Review* 41, no. 2 (April 1951): 317, had suggested that the Great Plains were, to some degree and perhaps entirely, the result of the selective use of fire by native tribes. See also Omer Stewart, "Why the Great Plains Are Treeless," *Colorado Quarterly* 2 (1953): 40; and Henry T. Lewis and M. Kat Anderson, eds., *Forgotten Fires: Native Americans and the Transient Wilderness* (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 2003; published posthumously). Something similar may have happened here in Utah's valleys. Describing Utah Valley, Father Escalante says, "We found the grass of the plains where we came recently burned over and others burning, from which we inferred that these Indians had thought us Comanches, or other enemies; and as they had probably seen that we were bringing animals, it had been their intention to destroy the pasturage along our way." Quoted in Cottam, "Historic Records," 369. In fact, what they were witnessing was likely the regular burning of the prairie, an activity by which local tribes also cultivated the growth of grassland. The result was, as Father Escalante observed, that "there is everywhere good and abundant pasturage, and in some parts flax and hemp grown in such abundance that it seems to have been planted." *Ibid.*

61. Wallace Stegner, *Beyond the Hundredth Meridian: John Wesley Powell and the Second Opening of the West* (1954; rpt., New York: Penguin, 1992), 203ff. For detailed discussions of the effects of the universal refusal to acknowledge the aridity and limitations of the West, see the articles by Cottam, Stewart, and Brian Cannon cited above. As Cannon so movingly illustrates, the consequences for human well-being have been almost as tragic as those for the land.

62. Larson, "I Was Called to Dixie," 248.

63. Walter Cottam, "Is Utah Sahara Bound?" Reynolds Lecture, University of Utah, February 19, 1947, *Bulletin of the University of Utah* 37 (1947): 21.



Bret Hanson,  
*Interior*,  
acrylic on paper, 48"x 48",  
2008.

## POETRY

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### Ripple Rock

*Shawn P. Bailey*

This is where my mind wanders,  
Behind this desk, bathed in soft  
Monitor light. This is where  
I levitate, oscillate, and glide  
On five plastic wheels, a pneumatic column,  
Lumbar support and everything.  
This is where I pour yesterday's lukewarm  
Water bottle on my mother-in-law's tongue.  
This is where I push buttons  
And pile up symbols and consider  
The crust of the earth.  
This is where my mind  
Wanders: How it is thin,  
Not a walnut shell or even a cantaloupe rind  
But an apple peel,  
Three to five miles thick under  
Oceans, continents, under twenty-five,  
Thin and pregnant and implacable,  
Always sending up new mountains,  
Earthquakes and volcanoes,  
Always pulling high places down.  
This is where I concentrate.  
Maybe I'm reading something  
Or taking a call. I reach  
For the rock on the edge  
Of my desk, deep red,  
The size of a cheap paperback,  
Something I picked up last summer  
Hiking a shale bowl with my head down,  
A bucktoothed puzzle piece, a million  
Particles of dust that came to rest  
On the floor of an ancient sea.  
My hand runs over the ripples  
And shallow waves pull me back.



## Sisyphus

*Shawn P. Bailey*

The escalator broken again  
We climb the adjacent stairs  
In wingtips and houndstooth slacks.  
I peer into the guts of the silent machine.  
It is always the same guy,  
Crouched over, sweat on his face,  
Wielding a flashlight and cursing,  
Pushing the same stubborn rock  
Up the same hill. Maybe  
It wouldn't be that bad;  
With any luck, your hill has some trees,  
A view of a lake. A breeze  
kicks up and you suck your lungs  
full of mountain air. Your arms  
have grown strong and the rock  
in your hands feels heavy,  
satisfying. It is permanent.  
Its weight reminds you of its path  
Down the face of the ridge,  
Rolling all the way to your feet.  
It could be a sculpture.  
There is already one in there, probably,  
Waiting for the right set of hands.  
Over lunch you wonder why  
The stone needs pushing anyway  
And you notice it is almost one o'clock  
And you need to get pushing again  
If you're going to beat the traffic tonight  
And you feel your hands reaching for the flashlight,  
Sweat on your face—cursing the escalator.

## In This Version of Autumn

*Dixie Partridge*

It's as if the fields of five decades  
have been broomed clean—dry as straw.  
But in the border woods, ground holds scent:  
leaf-humus and pine,  
an after-hint of smoke, or ash.

Evening: you feel sky distancing itself,  
no breeze; hammered gold barely trembles  
in the shrunken lake.  
Two leaves alight—red wings.

In the dawn: white breath  
and a tracery of frost along the edge stones . . .  
beauty in change that comes  
almost to pain.  
Stilled water will begin to freeze  
from the top down, long prism needles  
or cloudy patches closing, slow cataracts  
beneath a vellum light.

Maybe this is the year you'll walk  
where you have never walked.  
The lake will freeze.  
Stepping out upon it  
you will feel your pulse  
scud quickly across your life.

Words spilt now must troll deeper  
than the surface cold. Over lake's center,  
faint fog rises. A Rorschach of roots  
holds the shore together where you stand;  
curls lift and cry their names.

## Time Being

Lakeside, after Leaving Our Youngest at College

*Dixie Partridge*

Again the curlew calls its name.  
Where we've camped over years,  
the sky has already distanced itself  
from the heat press of summer,  
the lakeshore fluent  
with ridges only seasons of water can scroll.

What brims toward voice between us  
does not verge yet into spill.  
The quiet grows . . . less hollow  
in mountains than home on the plateau.  
The shift of shoreline along the north  
is coded by wind and currents  
hidden as the braille undersides of fern.  
As always the forecast will call for  
our own weather of acclimation.

We've not been here in fall.  
The water flares with beauty  
edged in iron. Whatever cue  
the leaves receive, who can tell what will come  
from their turn toward true colors.  
Our own veined arms sense  
we might not come again to this spot  
where now in slant autumn light  
what we most notice is a curlew's cry.

As dusk begins to spread  
from beneath the trees, we watch  
a wide-spanned falcon with no wing movement  
vanish into the next scene.

## Things Missed

*Simon Peter Eggersen*

Every now and then I make it a point to go  
without knowing to these places, try to discover  
a view of my own, be surprised, have  
an experience uncluttered by history or the facts.  
I try to imagine my way to a bit of truth or the  
answer to some awkward childhood riddle.

I went to Giza once this way, entered the wind-dusted  
space, dodged the thronging hawkers, slid sideways  
past the harried shirtsleeve tugs of the pleading guides,  
as they offered to sell me a day or two of knowing.

I lingered at Cheop's boat, counted the oars,  
thought of his trip to the longer side of eternity.  
I measured step by step the footprint of the pyramids  
and climbed on a few of the metered blocks—  
wondered how long they'd been there,  
how much longer they would stand.  
I considered the angles and the sides, tried  
to recall their geometry and physics, as explained  
by Mrs. de Jong at Brigham Young Junior High.

With my shoe I shuffled the underside of the sand.  
I exchanged smiles with the camels, complained  
with them about our thirst. I curled my lips,  
bared my teeth, made a low bellow as they do,  
and thought of the crumpled, sepia portrait  
of my grandparents riding theirs fifty years before.  
Then, I squinted into the west-leaning sun  
as the day began telling me to leave.  
I went to Giza once this way and failed to find  
the nose-broken Sphinx haunching coyly  
just beyond the brown edge of the afternoon  
shadows there, a little down and to the left  
of where ignorance had taken me that day.

# The Canyon That Is Not a Canyon

*Ryan McIlvain*

This is Dagan on the day after a 4 A.M. porn binge. Another. The third in as many weeks. He drifts into the living room in late afternoon, sees Tam at his computer, freezes. He pictures her neck-deep in his browser history.

And this is Tam, looking up at her husband now. The feel of a tight wincing smile on her face. She stands up from the sofa, balancing the laptop on her upturned palm. The computer like a waitress's platter, or a shot put. Tam turns the screen out to Dagan: a naked woman, leering.

Get a good look? Tam says, and hurls the computer across the room. It lands in the kitchen, breaks apart on the hard linoleum floor.

Dagan, still standing at the threshold of the room. He looks at Tam, at the computer, then back at Tam. A few minutes ago he was still asleep. Now this: his cleft computer, his wife's mouth a slit in her face.

You thought I was joking last time? Tam says. This is it, I told you. This is it, this is it . . .

She starts to lose it, covers her face. Taking courage, Dagan crosses the room and sits her back down on the sofa. Beside her, he tries to take her hands but she jerks them away. Don't touch me, she says. Her voice falters.

Dagan slides closer to her, says, Shhh. Shhh. He puts his arm around her shoulders. It's okay, he says. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

Tam pulls free of Dagan and moves to the other end of the sofa. She wipes at her eyes with the back of her hand. I'm divorcing you, she says, her voice hard again, regrouped. You can move in with Cory until we get things straightened out. I keep the car

and the furniture. I keep the dishes and the TV. I keep pretty much everything except your stupid baseball collection. Tam motions to the glass case on top of the hutch.

That juvenilia eyesore, she says.

The glass case on the hutch contains several signed baseballs: a Manny Ramirez, a David Ortiz, a pre-defection Johnny Damon. Before moving out to Utah for Tam to get her master's, Dagan attended Red Sox home games with his uncle Max. Uncle Max covered sports for the *Globe*, got Dagan into games for free, and sometimes, after a round of post-game interviews, emerged from the locker room with a signed ball or two.

On the sofa, Dagan smiles, says, That eyesore's not going anywhere, and neither's this one. He tries once more to hold Tam's hands. She thrusts them beneath her thighs, violently, rocks forward with the movement, drives her forehead into his nose.

Damn it! Dagan says.

His eyes flare in that familiar way. Tam starts back, a little scared. She says, It was an accident, I'm sorry. Then after a pause: And don't talk to me like that!

I'm not going anywhere, Dagan repeats, feeling his nose. You need to calm down.

I am calm, Tam says, and I am going to divorce you.

Dagan, still feeling his nose, says, Sweets, you're not going to divorce me, okay? You don't dislike me that much. Am I bleeding?

Tam starts to say how yes, she does dislike him that much, precisely that much. She hears herself moving into discourse mode now, the way she gets with her Intro to Literature students, a little cold, maybe, but zealous to analyze. She starts to say how marriage is a zero-sum game, or no, not a game, forget the game. Let him imagine instead a simple proposition in which one could walk away with a thousand dollars, sure thing, or one could flip a coin, a fifty-fifty shot, for ten thousand dollars, heads wins everything, tails loses everything, and what do most people do? Most people take the thousand bucks and content themselves with it. They buy a month of steak dinners, a Louis Vuitton purse, a flat-screen TV. Tam starts to say how she's different, though, how she wants out of the marriage more than she's ever wanted anything and how she isn't so cynical as to write off true love, that fifty-fifty coin toss, or maybe fifty-to-one, she doesn't care. She

starts to say how now, right now, where things stand at the moment, she'd gladly give up the thousand dollars for a chance at something better. That's divorce, she starts to say. That's sucking out the marrow, basic Walden, she starts to say, tries to say, but Dagan is yelling. Yelling like a car alarm. Louder and louder. And when she keeps talking, keeps raising her voice, Dagan jumps off the sofa and into the air. He jumps up and down and pumps his knees in the air and yells again, furiously, a barbaric yell (yawp? she catches herself thinking), and then a smart quick smack on the center of his own forehead. Dagan takes the butt of his palm and brings it savagely to his forehead, a loud thudding smack, and another, and another, and now Tam stops talking and reaches in for his hand, tries to stop its heavy progress back up to his forehead, now red, now bearing the imprint of a palm line, a narrow crescent of stigmata, Ash Wednesday, Annunciation, and look what wondrous things the Lord God hath done. Hath done, Tam thinks, before smack, and smack, and *smack*, and down he goes.

\* \* \*

Dagan, coming to in the car some time later, raising his head to look out the window. A silo, a fallow field, an exit sign, slip past in the gloaming. Tam looks down at him from the driver's seat. Quit slouching, she says. You're fine. And then: I figured we needed to get away awhile.

Dagan reaches up to his forehead, feels the tender goose egg growing there. He flips down the vanity mirror and cranes his head up for a better look. A goose egg all right, and dried blood from his nose. This is comical, Dagan thinks. This is comical is what this is. He lets out a guffaw, says, Look at me. Look what you did to me, sweets.

You mean what you did to yourself? Tam says.

Dagan says, Fair enough, fair enough. He says, Where are we going anyway?

I don't know. To the woods. To Bryce maybe.

Bryce Canyon?

You know another Bryce? They say it's beautiful in the winter. And no big crowds to deal with.

Dagan thinks this over, tests his goose egg again. That's a plus, he says. Fewer Californians.



Outside, the last holdouts of evening leave the sky. The towns along I-15 south start to shrink. Smaller, more agrarian, more steeped in the Mormon past. And Dagan now, oddly, feeling closer to home. Raised in a small town north of Price—too small for Dagan—he sought out the coal crowd. Or the coal crowd's troubled sons anyway. Into drugs as a teen, slashing tires during Sunday services, until his folks, desperate, shipped him off to Uncle Max—Uncle Max the Massachusetts liberal, Uncle Max the disciplinarian à la Teddy Kennedy. To Babylon for reform, then: what irony of ironies. But reform Dagan did, and God is surely an ironic God. After high school, Dagan enrolled at UMass Amherst. He met Tammy there—Tammy who went strictly by Tam, Tam the new-shine Mormon, lately poached from Catholicism. At Amherst you could count the Mormons on two hands. Tam, Dagan decided, was by far the best. He proposed on the day they both graduated cum laude.

Three years on, then, in the weathered Volvo, and his wife now driving into full-on darkness. And Dagan saying, So, wait, you dragged me out to the car? Is that what happened?

Dagan, still slouching a touch, sunk down in the bucket seat like a sack of loose bones.

Tam looks at him, like, Oh please. Then she says it: It wasn't that difficult. Don't flatter yourself.

She flashes a quick, disappearing smile. Here one minute. Gone the next. Like a minnow.

Dagan turns on the radio. Tam glares at him, turns it off. Dagan raises his hands like the victim in a stick-up. Several minutes of silence follow, or several minutes of what passes for silence: the hum of the engine, the laboring heater, the many ticks and kinks indigenous to an '86 Volvo. Then Dagan clears his throat theatrically, says, A proposition. And no, not that kind. You're disappointed?

His wife looks straight ahead at the road, and Dagan, smiling now, sitting up, says, How about a game of the Alphabet Game instead? And do forgive the redundancy, professor.

Tam, holding her silence like a vigil.

The question wasn't rhetorical, Dagan says at length, but he knows it may as well have been, and starts in on the game alone:

an a from Mona; b from Applebee's (its neon sign just visible from the highway); c from Scipio; d, e, f from Holden/Fillmore (a mile-age sign); a g from Gas & Food at Exit 167; and so on and so forth, ad nauseum, even for Dagan.

But three hours later, miraculously, he keeps on, having cycled through some ten times over the alphabet of rural Utah signage: o from Orton Tire (on Panguitch's Main Street); p from Panguitch Queen Bee Restaurant (also on Main); q from aforementioned Panguitch Queen Bee Restaurant; as well as r and s and t and u (It's a gold mine! Dagan shouts), but no v. Panguitch is bereft of v's. Dagan has to wait until a sign for Tropic announces RV parks, and another lists restaurants ahead, including Wendy's, at Exit 6, an exit that also announces Bryce Canyon National Park and, if those y's weren't enough, Ruby's Inn, where Tam and Dagan decide to stop for the night.

At the hotel check-in counter, in a move that fairly shocks him, his wife pays twenty dollars extra for a room with separate beds. Dagan can't help but scoff his surprise. This is Tam of the yellow-let-it-mellow belief, after all, Tam who sends off for ten-dollar rebates, Tam who squeezes the subatomic from a tube of toothpaste. Tam, paying extra for a room with separate beds. She does it for Dagan, of course, to prove how much she dislikes him: enough to divorce him or, failing that, twenty dollars' worth.

\* \* \*

Tam, an hour and a half later, lying in her separate bed in the dark. She speaks to her husband for the first time in hours, answers his murmured repeated phrase, Talk to me, Tam, talk to me. Like a mantra. Talk to me, Tam, Talk to me, Tam . . .

Tam: What did you want me to talk about?

Dagan:

Tam: Well?

Dagan: Well, I'm just saying. If we came down here to talk, we should talk. Isn't that why we're here?

Tam: Around Nephi I started having second thoughts, actually, about this whole weekend getaway idea. I kept having second thoughts until about Beaver, when I decided it was definitely a bad idea. But we'd come all that way, you know?

Dagan: Huh.

Tam:

Dagan: Well, thank you for that vast improvement over silence.

Tam: You asked, I answered.

Dagan: I asked, you answered.

Tam: One of us needs to be honest. That's what I'm getting at.

Dagan: Fine. Then let me be as honest as I possibly can. Deep breath. Here we go. I love you and I'm sorry. I'm being honest about that. When I'm with you I'm happy most of the time, which is more than I can say of most people. I'm being honest about that. I know what I did makes you upset, and I won't—

Tam: What you do.

Dagan: What?

Tam: Not what you did, what you do. It's a pattern, Dagan.

Dagan: I wasn't finished, Tam. Can I finish?

Tam:

Dagan: I know what I do makes you upset, and I'm sorry, and I'll never do it again. I'm being honest about that, too.

Tam: Dagan, listen, I really do think we should just divorce. Cut our losses at three years. They've been good ones, I think.

Dagan: And if I'm still being honest? I think you're overreacting. I mean, I didn't have an affair. You do realize that, right?

Tam: Call me old-fashioned for believing in the slippery slope. Or fidelity in deed and in thought, for that matter. How passé! How idealistic of me! Grow up, Tam. Your husband didn't have an affair, he just wants to have one. He's not with another woman, he just wants to be with another woman.

Dagan: I don't want to be with another . . . Oh, sweets. Sweets, are you crying? Look, I know this sounds awful, but it's just glands. It means nothing. It's an itch and I scratch it. But I'll stop, okay? I'm seriously gonna stop this time. I promise.

Tam:

Dagan: Tam? Come on, Tam, keep talking, this is good for us.

Tam:

Dagan: Sweets, please say something.

Tam: Good night.

Dagan: No, not that. You know what I mean. This doesn't work unless both of us want it.

Tam:

Dagan: Tam?

Tam:

Dagan: Tam!

Tam:

\* \* \*

Dagan and Tam, on a Ranger-guided tour the next morning. Dagan, turning on the charm for Tam, feeling good somehow, willing optimism. Though sometimes it backfires. For example: as the young Ranger schools the group in a bit of the local geology. The Ranger, all in olive green, his hat brimming out to the east and west, and under it, a Smile with a face camped on the periphery. He explains how Bryce Canyon isn't actually a canyon. What carved the place was repeated freezing and thawing, not a river. Whereupon Dagan leans in close to Tam, says softly in her ear, The canyon that is not a canyon. Hmmm. Sounds sort of Zen, don't you think?

Tam, in the same half whisper: Like the marriage that isn't a marriage, you mean?

Or for example: the group stops at a high promontory overlooking the hoodoos, those great uneven smokestacks of stone, those rickety fingers grown up from the amphitheater floor, a few snow patches purchasing on cracks and ridges. And Dagan leaning in again and whispering to Tam, How do you like this, huh? Phalluses as far as the eye can see.

Be quiet, she says. I'm trying to hear this.

The Ranger is into the history now. In 1875 Ebenezer Bryce settled Tropic at Brigham Young's command. He set to farming, irrigating, built a Mormon chapel, built a life. And the thousands of alien stone towers in his backyard? Well, said Bryce, it's a hell of a place to lose a cow.

Dagan chuckles along with the rest of the group, but he also thinks, What pragmatism, what admirable pioneer spirit! Ebenezer Bryce could be his great-great-grandfather. Why can't Dagan be more normal? Well-mannered, banal. Folksy. Why not folksy? Here, a view people drive hundreds of miles to see and Dagan cracks a penis joke. Why not Beautiful, isn't it? Why not Breathtaking! Spectacular! Why not My, will you look at God's handiwork!

Dagan, resolving to talk more like a pamphlet. Or a preacher.

Or some combination of the two. The tour starts to move again as he says, A geologic wonder of God's creation, isn't it? Tam nods without looking at him. Dagan follows behind her. The group moves away from the railed path and into a stand of woods. Speckled snowdrifts cling grimly to tree roots, to shaded ground, and even these are not long for the world. It's warm for February. The Ranger leads the group into a dry, sunny clearing. He stops, turns around, waits for the stragglers. Presently he begins, One of the wonders of Bryce is its ecological diversity. He gives a Vanna White sweep of his hand. A broad smile. We're only a few hundred meters from the rim now, he continues, but already we've moved into an entirely different ecosystem. This swath of grassland we're standing in—and he motions behind him at the long, treeless corridor—is the result of what we call a prescribed burn. It's not a controlled burn, remember. Some people use that term, but who can really control fire, am I right? So we call this a prescribed burn. Does anyone know why we did it?

A man wearing a red flannel jacket and an earflap hat raises his hand. He says, To get rid of excess tinder? The woman next to him offers, Or maybe to clear out some grazing space for wildlife?

Right and right, the Ranger says, smiling. In fact, one of the rarer species, one of the endangered species we try to accommodate here, is the Utah prairie dog. Where we're standing right now is one of the last habitats for Utah prairie dogs. An open stretch of grassland like this is exactly what they need to survive. They poke up out of their little burrows and canvass the landscape for predators. And though the prairie dogs might disagree with me on this, a predator like, say, a Cooper's hawk is a very important thing. An essential part of a healthy population. Here at Bryce we're lucky because we can conserve the population in a natural environment. In other places with threatened prairie dog populations—say in Boulder, Colorado, where I'm from—you can get a bunch of very aggressive preservationists, with very aggressive tactics, but in the end there's only so much you can do. In urban areas like Boulder, you can pass laws setting aside land for dog colonies, like they've done, but you can't make the predators come back. You can't impose that balance again. What's happening in Boulder is that they're protecting the prairie dogs, but there's no natural predators anymore, so the population ex-

plodes, gets out of balance. I think eventually they'll have to poison a good many of them to get things under control, and I don't think my hometown will take too kindly to that. Unfortunately it's just another example of what our carelessness can do. You come into an area and build and build and build, and pretty soon you've tainted the place, and you can never get it back to how it was.

The Ranger finishes, his eyes downcast. His bit of ecologizing seems to have sobered him, and everybody else. Silence settles on the group like fallout, and nobody talks for what seems like a long while. Then Tam clicks her tongue. Rather loudly, Dagan thinks. People are morons, she mutters. And clicks her tongue again.

And Dagan, wondering how many people heard her.

\* \* \*

Tam and Dagan, on the road that night, after dinner at Panguitch Queen Bee Restaurant. Tam drives, keeps quiet until Dagan says, An a from Alpine Village, here we go!

No! Tam says. No more of that. I'll veer into oncoming traffic, I swear.

Dagan says, I thought that just might work. So, what do you want to talk about?

Tam:

Dagan:

Tam: It's getting dark later now. I guess spring's not too far off.

Dagan: It still gets too dark too early for my tastes. Did you get to see everything in the park you wanted, sweets?

Tam: Basically.

Dagan: Mission accomplished then. Marriage saved. Right?

Tam:

Dagan: I shouldn't be flippant about it. I'm sorry. I really did enjoy myself today. And listen, I was thinking I might see a counselor or something? Would that help things, do you think?

Tam: We don't have to talk about it now, okay? Let's just watch the scenery.

Dagan:

Tam:

Dagan: Fine by me.

Tam:

She scans the landscape through the windshield. The scene is vast and burnished red, as if it's baking on low heat: the sun already sunk down below the horizon and the big slab of desert sky somewhere between medium and medium rare. Tam smiles at the thought. Who knows if the Apocalypse won't look this pretty. The sun turned to blood, and setting for the last time, and taking down every last color in the world with it, a blaze of unspeakable, terrible beauty.

Tam keeps driving, keeps watching the sky. She tries to anticipate the moment when the color will drain from it, when the sky will go black and the world in front of her will shrink to a pair of lighted cones, but somehow the moment comes and goes without her marking it. A strange disappointment attends this failure.

Dagan's head lolls against the seat-back beside her. He is breathing out slow, ponderous breaths. Tam turns her attention back to the road. The tracks of glowing asphalt running homeward like conveyor belts.

Miles off to the east and west, little farm towns, little spreading squares of light, float on the darkness beyond the highway. The towns slide by, and occasionally a power plant, and they put Tam in mind of far-off cruise ships gliding along on a moonless sea.

Tam, picturing the people on the ships, picturing them all at a midnight ball. On the top deck. Under mounted lights. The women's hair lifting gently in the breeze. And their tans. And their smiles. And their bright, bleached faces.



# Eternal Misfit

*Roger Terry*

*For some reason I can't explain,  
I know Saint Peter won't call my name.  
—Coldplay<sup>1</sup>*

*Some of the functions in the celestial body will not appear in the terrestrial body, neither in the telestial body, and the power of procreation will be removed. I take it that men and women will, in these kingdoms, be just what the so-called Christian world expects us all to be—neither man nor woman, merely immortal beings having received the resurrection —Joseph Fielding Smith<sup>2</sup>*

Kim had been in the terrestrial kingdom for five thousand thirty-six years, two months, and seventeen days when it occurred to him that he<sup>3</sup> was bored. He was in the library, perusing a treatise on monarchic democracy written by a senator on the fourth planet from the star Sigma Draconis, when he quite suddenly lost interest in, well, everything. He rolled up the parchment scroll, returned it to the retrieval system, and walked out into the perfect sunshine.

When Kim reached his home, he was surprised to realize he wanted to go into a bedroom and lie down; but since terrestrial beings do not need sleep, he did not have a bedroom. So he went to the sofa in the parlor and stretched out. He took a deep breath and sighed.

“What’s wrong with me?” he wondered aloud.

No answer came.

He lay there for a long time. How could anything be wrong? The terrestrial kingdom was like Utopia, Shangri-la, the Garden of Eden, and Camelot all wrapped into one. The weather was mostly sunny and warm, with a slight breeze to caress the nerve

endings and an occasional rain shower to refresh the plant life. Social order and perfect peace reigned. A hunger for learning permeated the very atmosphere, and the resources to facilitate learning were endless. There was no sickness; in fact, terrestrial bodies were not only incorruptible and indestructible, they were endowed with remarkable spiritual and physical senses. The geography of the terrestrial world was remarkable as well—rugged, snow-capped mountains; fertile valleys; lush, sprawling forests; pure, pristine lakes and streams; deep-blue oceans with white, sandy beaches; magnificent sandstone formations; but no wasteland. During his mortal probation, Kim had lived in Utah. He knew wasteland. On drives through Nevada, he had marveled at how dull and mind-numbing certain tracts of the Earth's surface could be. But there was no Nevada here, and certainly no Sin City, because there was no sin. The inhabitants of the terrestrial kingdom were not perfect, but there was no intentional evil, let alone gambling; in fact, there was no money. Who needed money when everything was free?

Kim wondered what was wrong. For over five thousand years he had been contentedly blissful. Oh, he knew that the terrestrial kingdom was technically a sort of damnation, but the terrestrial world was the degree of glory he had earned—it was where Kim belonged. The Lord's judgment, he knew, was merciful. When he had stood before Jesus at the end of his stay in the spirit world, he recognized that he wasn't fit for the celestial kingdom where he would have been miserable among all those who had lived a more consecrated life. The terrestrial world was the one he had sought out all the mediocre days of his mortal probation.

Kim's sole regret was that he had let Julie down. She had always lived for celestial glory and had cried tears of sorrow at their eternal separation. Though she had been given to another, she had visited him from time to time during the first thousand years. Eventually, however, her visits had ceased. They had precious little to talk about. Whatever they had shared in mortality had been silenced by their diverse resurrections—hers to a degree of feminine perfection unimagined to mere mortals, and his to a neutered, sexless physicality that left him without the passions that made marriage not only possible but intensely desirable. He was incapable of feeling for her now what he had felt in mortality, let

alone arousing in her those same feelings. Of course, in mortality he hadn't been all that successful at arousing feelings in her either. And the irony wasn't lost on him that back then she had been the one largely uninterested in intimacy. Go figure.

But this one regret had been mostly washed away by the pleasures and relative perfections of this terrestrial paradise. For over five thousand years, the Spirit had brought him peace and contentment, light and truth, and eternal learning. Here, memory was complete and perfect: so perfect, in fact, that Kim had taken it for granted for a long, long time. Why dwell on the past when it was there for perfect recall at any instant? But now he did turn his mind to the past, his past, and he wondered.

Kim had met Julie at the BYU Twenty-third Ward's opening social in September 1977. He was a newly minted RM, fresh off the plane from Copenhagen. She was a twenty-year-old English major struggling her way through Shakespeare and Dickens and Henry Adams. They somehow ended up together after the party, walking around the block again and again and again, talking and talking and talking. Finally they got tired of walking and stopped at the old Joaquin School, where they sat on the swings in the playground until three in the morning.

"Tell me about your family," Julie said.

"Oh," Kim answered, "there's not much to tell. My family's been in the Church since pioneer days, both sides. My parents are pretty ordinary Mormons. And I've got three sisters."

"Do they tease you?"

"Endlessly," Kim laughed. "But I can dish it out too."

"I'll remember that," Julie said, flashing her best smile. "But tell me, what do you want to do with your life?"

"Sheesh," Kim exclaimed, "you ask easy questions, don't you? To tell you the truth, I'm not sure. I mean, of course I want to get married and raise a family, but I don't even know what to major in. I've thought about accounting. My dad says it's a ticket to a good job."

"Sounds boring," Julie suggested.

"Well, yeah, I suppose it does. But I don't really have strong feelings about anything else. I guess the worst I could do is prepare for a decent job. Why did you choose English?"

"Because I love literature."

“So, do you want to teach?”

“Maybe.”

“I can’t imagine myself as a teacher,” Kim answered. “But I wouldn’t mind marrying one.”

They stared into each other’s eyes under the starlit Provo skies, and something ignited there that was never extinguished. Well, at least not until Judgment Day.

Kim had graduated from BYU in accounting the year after Julie earned her English degree and two years after they married in the Provo Temple. He landed a job with WordPerfect, made a decent salary, moved to Novell when it bought the carcass of WordPerfect, then bounced around from one high-tech startup to another after Novell laid him off. In the meantime, he fathered three kids, attended soccer and basketball games, track meets and tennis matches, piano recitals and parades. And somewhere along the way, the fire that had been kindled while he was knocking doors in Denmark burned low. He stayed active in the Church, but a certain spiritual urgency was gone. While Julie became more devout and spent countless hours fulfilling Church callings, Kim floated from one low-visibility position to another, making a negligible impact in people’s lives. But he didn’t mind. He didn’t have any need for either the emotional burden or the time commitment of leadership.

After the kids were gone, Kim came to the conclusion that accounting really was boring. He toyed with the dream of writing a novel, but it always remained a dream. Though he read a lot of fiction—not the light-weight stories most Mormons preferred, and also not the sort of novels one might call fine literature—he couldn’t find either his own voice or a story that simply had to be told.

And now, more than six thousand years later, he remembered that dream, and he no longer wondered what was wrong. He had his answer.

\* \* \*

Later that day, Kim arranged a trip to the East Sea, where the weather was perfect and the ocean view from the dunes spectacular. He sat on the beach for hours watching the waves slap the shore, but the sound wasn’t as soothing as he’d hoped.

Back at his cottage, Kim pulled out a portable keyboard and

started typing. He tried to begin a novel about life in the terrestrial kingdom; but just as in mortality, he had writer's block. This time, however, it wasn't because of his own limitations: There simply was no story to tell.

He pushed the keyboard away, leaned back, and put his feet on the tabletop. He thought about the library in Caldora, his city. One whole floor was devoted to fiction. The greatest novels in the galaxy were collected there. But to his knowledge none of them had been written in the terrestrial kingdom. All were composed by mortal authors.

"So," Kim said to the wall, "what is it that makes a great novel?"

The wall didn't answer, so he did. "Lots of pages and a great plot?" He laughed grimly.

"Right, and what makes a great plot?"

"Suspense, adventure, conflict, good and evil, personal weakness, sin, violence, natural disasters, irony. And romance." He laughed again. "Guess what we don't have here?"

"No wonder nobody's writing great fiction."

It then occurred to him that no one was writing history in the terrestrial kingdom, either. Of course, with perfect memories, the inhabitants of the terrestrial world didn't need a record to remind them of what had happened. But events aren't history. History requires interpretation, the carving of meaning out of a series of events. And without the drama of power struggles, wars, natural catastrophes, or social upheavals, the events of the terrestrial world didn't seem worth interpreting at all.

"Nothing matters here," Kim muttered.

And there in the solitude of the cottage, he made a decision. He didn't know where it would lead him, but he knew he had to do it.

That night he packed up his things and returned to Caldora.

The next day, Kim went to the Caldora library and climbed the stairs to the music archives on the fifth floor. He had narrowed down his choices to three: Beethoven's *Symphony No. 9*, *Claire de Lune* by Debussy, and a rock song his daughter had played back when Kim was in his fifties. He pulled all three music spheres from their respective shelves and stared at them in turn. They were primitive and unsophisticated compared with the com-

plex but emotionally sterile music of terrestrial composers, but all three had a yearning, aching passion that was missing from the music of Kim's world. Finally Kim decided on a sphere and carried it to the mammoth central hall of the library, where hundreds of tables and desks were scattered out among the bookshelves beneath a cavernous ceiling that glowed like the full moon.

Kim found a table near the middle of the hall and set down the sphere. He touched a light spot on one side, and a line appeared. He slid his finger along the line from left to right, then touched a black arrow that appeared beneath the line. Suddenly staccato strings filled the air, joined by vocals harsher than any terrestrial voice could produce. In a place that had known only hushed, studied silence for more than five thousand years, the singer's aching lament about ruling the world, only to end up sweeping streets and sleeping alone, was shocking. Patrons stood up from their tables and desks and craned their necks to see what was happening. Kim leaned back in his chair, closed his eyes, and let their scrutiny wash over him. A hint of passion stirred inside, something he hadn't felt since mortality.

The music ended, and still all the eyes in the hall were staring. Kim left the sphere sitting on the table, stood up, smiled to himself, and walked out of the library. As he reached the exit, the rapt silence was broken by a rush of whispered exclamations. He kept walking.

\* \* \*

The next day Kim received a visit from three officials: Kay, the director of the library; Marn, city administrator of Caldora; and Alma, high priest of the local synagogue.

"Kim," Marn began, "may we ask you what you were trying to achieve yesterday?"

"Yes," Kim answered. "You may ask." He smiled disarmingly.

"Well, we are asking."

"What do you think?" Kim asked in return.

"We have no idea," Kay answered. "Nothing like this has ever happened in the long existence of the library."

"No, I don't suppose it has."

"We don't understand," said Alma. "Could you enlighten us?"

“Probably not.”

“We’re concerned,” said Marn. “There are rules of appropriate behavior, as you know.”

“I’m not acquainted with a specific rule that prohibits music in the Great Hall of the library.”

“These rules are understood,” Marn answered.

“Maybe I don’t understand them.”

“Well,” said Kay, attempting to be kind and stern at the same time, “you will not do this again.”

“You’re right,” said Kim.

“We’re glad you understand,” Kay nodded.

“I’ll probably do something different next time.”

His three visitors sat in stunned consternation for several seconds. Finally Alma spoke. “Such as?”

“I have no idea.” Kim held his hands out, palms up. “It depends on what I wish to learn.”

Alma opened his mouth as if to speak but then changed his mind.

“Can I be of further assistance?” Kim asked.

His three visitors looked at each other silently. Finally they stood and excused themselves. Kim saw them to the door and invited them to return whenever they wished.

After they had gone, he walked back inside and sat down on the sofa. He had never had any sort of official dealings with the authorities. He knew they were there behind the scenes, but he had never really spoken with any of them. He figured he was in trouble, but he also figured the authorities weren’t quite sure what kind of trouble he was in. This was virgin territory, and he himself wasn’t sure where he was headed.

After a half hour, Kim walked outside and wandered into town with no particular destination in mind. He felt different somehow, but nobody else seemed to notice. Several friends passed and greeted him as usual. Just when Kim was wondering if the visit by the authorities had been a gross overreaction, a citizen he didn’t know stopped him on the street.

“You’re the one who played ‘Viva la Vida’ yesterday in the library.”

“I suppose I am.”



"I'm sorry. I don't believe we know each other," he said. "My name is Cory."

"I'm Kim."

"I don't know why you did it," Cory continued, "but I'm glad you did."

"You are?" Kim was genuinely pleased.

"Yes. It reminded me of something."

"What?" Kim asked.

"I don't know. Maybe a purpose."

"Passion?"

"Yes, that's it."

They stood in silence for a time. Finally Kim spoke.

"Cory, I live in Woodland Court. Please come visit me sometime, if you'd like."

"Maybe tomorrow?"

"Why not? I'll be home in the afternoon."

Kim walked on but was stopped again soon by an acquaintance named Leslie. By the time he returned home, he had been stopped twenty times and had issued that many invitations for the following day. He had an unusual feeling, which he recognized as satisfaction over his newfound fame. Of course he knew the dangers, but he liked the feeling anyway.

The next afternoon Kim had a houseful of guests, including Tracy, a good friend he had invited simply because he felt he needed someone there who would give him an honest assessment of the meeting after it ended. He wasn't quite sure what to do, but a rousing discussion started more or less spontaneously. It kicked off with someone mentioning the music in the Great Hall, but the conversation ranged far and wide. The participants hadn't had a discussion like this in five thousand years.

"I've been thinking about something," Kim said after a couple of hours. "In mortality our greatest works of art were often created not by the sensible and ordinary people, but by the disturbed and irrational ones. How many great artists were addicts? Depressed? Neurotic? Tormented? Violent?"

"Van Gogh?" Cory suggested.

"Hemingway?" said Ronny.

"Mozart?" Kelly added.

“Yes,” said Kim, “and thousands of others, millions probably, if you look at all the worlds in the galaxy.”

“So, what’s the connection to us?” asked Leslie.

“I’m not sure, but it may be that great art can only spring from great adversity and maybe great contradiction. How many great novels, for instance, were written by authors who spent their days as accountants or engineers and their evenings and weekends as model parents? Most of the truly creative geniuses in mortality were dysfunctional in some way.”

“Or in lots of ways,” Ronny added.

“And how many of those individuals ended up here in the terrestrial kingdom?” Cory observed.

“None,” Ronny nodded. “By definition, we’re the boring people. We weren’t ‘valiant,’ but we were good, decent people. No murderers or adulterers or liars ended up here. We’re the ones who weren’t very interesting in mortality. We weren’t passionate about anything, good or evil.”

“So, are there great works of art or music or literature coming from the celestial kingdom?” Kim asked.

“I’ve been there a few times to visit my kids,” said Leslie. “No, they’re pretty much like us now—content and peaceful and dull.”

“If you were going to write a history of our world,” Kim asked, “what would you write about?”

“Doesn’t matter,” Cory answered. “Nobody would want to read it.”

“Nothing ever happens here,” Ronny concluded. “Nothing interesting.”

“Not yet,” mused Kim. “Not yet.”

“What are you suggesting?” asked Cory.

“I don’t know. Yet.”

Eventually the conversation lulled, and people started filtering out a few at a time. At the end, Tracy was the only guest still there. She hadn’t said a word the whole time, which worried Kim a little.

“So,” he said when they were alone, “what did you think?”

Tracy scrunched her lips together for a few seconds. “It won’t work.”

“What won’t work?”

“Whatever it is you’re aiming to stir up.”

“What if I’m not aiming to ‘stir’ anything up?”

“You are.” She paused. “You’re bored, and so are they. But what can you do about it?”

“Create a little history worth writing about maybe?”

“Creating history has always been—shall we say—dangerous,” warned Tracy.

“I suppose you’re right. But what can they do to me, kill me?”

Tracy laughed. “We both know there are things worse than death.”

The group met again the next day, but this time they brought friends. Thirty friends.

After a few minutes, Leslie spoke up. “Ever since we met yesterday, I’ve been seeing things in a new way. I can’t get an image out of my mind: I feel like I’m in one of those funhouse mirror rooms. Everywhere I look, it seems like I see a reflection of myself. And there’s no way out.”

“I’ve noticed it too,” said Ronny. “We’re all just so much the same. Do any of the rest of you feel that way?”

“Yes, exactly,” Kim answered. “Do you remember the passage in the Book of Mormon about needing opposition in all things? That’s what’s missing here: opposition. No sin, so there’s really no righteousness. No sickness, so health has no meaning. No death, so life is rather flat. There are also no rich or poor, bond or free, male or female. What’s our purpose? What are we going to do about this?”

“Well,” said Leslie, “we can’t do much about death, or about sickness.”

“No,” said Kim, “but we can create a bit more opposition, make life a bit more meaningful.”

“Sin?” asked Ronny.

“No,” answered Kim, smiling. “Sports!”

“Sports?”

“Competition.”

There was a moment of silence, then someone yelled out, “Cool!”

Kim had wondered at times why there were no sports in the terrestrial world. Resurrected bodies were flawless and indestructible, of course, but they weren’t identical or equal. Some were taller, some shorter, some faster, some slower, some more coordi-

nated. He supposed it was because competition led to contention, and there was to be no contention in the terrestrial world.

“But what kind of sport?” asked Leslie.

“Well, we’ve got a little problem,” Kim stated. “We have no equipment, no balls, bats, hoops, goals, nothing.”

“I know where I can get a soccer ball made,” offered a newcomer named Mandy.

“And I know someone who could make us a couple of goals,” said Cory.

“I’ve read about soccer,” said Ronny, “but I’ve never played. I lived in the thirteenth century. We didn’t have much opportunity for sport.”

“Don’t worry,” Leslie assured him. “You’ll pick it up easily.”

“Can I ask something?” said another newcomer named Pat. “We’ve been taught that we’re not supposed to try to excel one above another. How do you reconcile sports with that commandment?”

“Sometimes two worthy goals find themselves in conflict,” Kim answered. “We have to decide which is more important. Is creating meaning in our lives through opposition more important than the risk that we’ll try to excel?”

Heads started nodding, although no one spoke.

Two weeks later the group met at Kolob Park where there was enough grass to play soccer. They set out some markers, and several of them set up the collapsible goals. Mandy had brought a fair replica of a twentieth-century Earth soccer ball. For his part, Kim had brought a pair of scissors.

“I guess if we’re going to play soccer,” he said, “we’ll have to have to modify our robes a bit.”

He cut the skirts of his robe off at the knee. “There,” he said, “our world’s first fashion statement. And it only took five thousand years.” Everybody laughed, then took the scissors one after another and made their own modifications.

They reviewed the rules and divided up into two teams. Scoring a goal was about as infrequent as in a mortal soccer match. Their bodies were quicker and more coordinated than mortal bodies, but that gave the defense just as much advantage as the offense. The biggest difference was that none of them got tired. After four hours, they called it a day. Kim’s team lost 6–5.

As they sat around afterward in the shade of a spreading mulberry, Kim came to a startling realization.

"You know, everybody," he said, "I'm having a very strange feeling right now."

"I know," said Cory, "it's the exhilaration of competing. I haven't competed at anything since I died."

"No," answered Kim, "it's more than that. And I don't think you *can* understand, Cory, because your team won. What I'm feeling is this intense disappointment about losing. Do you realize that I haven't lost at anything in several millennia? It's incredible. I wouldn't trade this feeling for anything."

Several other players on Kim's team were nodding. A peculiar light was in their eyes.

"When should we play again?" Kim asked everyone.

"A week from today?" Leslie suggested.

"Yeah," said Cory, "and maybe my team can lose next week." He laughed, then added, "But I doubt it."

"We'll see," said Kim. "Now that I've become reacquainted with what it feels like to lose, I'd like to try winning."

"What about getting together to talk some more?" asked Logan, rolling over and propping herself up on her elbows. They had met three times since the first two get-togethers.

"How about two days from now, at my house?" suggested Cory.

The group met twice before they gathered at the park again. The second soccer game was even more intense; at one point, Ronny got in Logan's face and they stared each other down. Leslie laughed at them and broke it up. A couple of hours into the game, Kim looked over to the side of the field and noticed two people watching: Marn and Alma. They were not smiling. After another hour, the players decided to take a break. As they lounged around in the shade, Marn and Alma approached.

"This activity is not permitted," Marn announced.

"What, soccer?" Kim asked. "Why?"

"Competition is not spiritually healthy," Alma offered in a quiet voice.

"It's harmless," said Ronny.

"Actually, it's a lot better than harmless," Cory exclaimed. "It's

invigorating, spiritually and physically. Really. You ought to try it.”

“No, thank you,” replied Marn with a grim face.

“And your robes are immodest,” added Alma.

Kim laughed. “How is that possible? We have terrestrial bodies, Alma. There’s not much to hide anymore. And besides, you can’t expect us to play soccer in long robes.”

“I can expect you to not play soccer.” He folded his arms and cocked his head to one side.

“What are you going to do to stop us?” asked Kim. “Lock us up?”

“You know there are no jails in the terrestrial world,” answered Marn.

“No,” said Kim with sudden earnestness, “there aren’t. And that’s part of the problem.”

“The lack of jails is a problem?” Alma’s eyebrows rose a notch.

“A couple of weeks ago,” Kim replied, “we discussed a verse in the Book of Mormon that talks about the need for opposition in all things. If there aren’t opposites, then ‘it must needs have been created for a thing of naught; wherefore there would have been no purpose in the end of its creation.’”

Alma just stared at him but didn’t respond.

“You’re a thing of naught, Alma. And so am I.” The truth of his own words almost took Kim’s breath away.

“I am striving with all my heart to live a life of joy,” Alma replied softly.

“But you’re failing. And so am I. Or at least I was until we started playing soccer.”

Alma shook his head slowly. “But soccer isn’t enough, is it?”

Kim’s eyes narrowed. “It’s just a game,” he admitted.

“And nobody wants to spend an eternity in which the most meaningful thing in life is a soccer game.”

Now Kim regarded Alma silently.

“This will lead to evil,” Alma declared.

“Or great good.”

“What good do you think you can accomplish with this competition?”

“I’m making it possible for you to acquire new virtues,” Kim answered.

“*New* virtues?” Alma looked genuinely surprised.

“Patience, for one,” said Kim. “And how about mercy? Or what about forgiveness? We’re commanded to be forgiving, but how can we be forgiving if nobody does us any wrong? Or maybe you can learn to be a peacemaker. You can’t be a peacemaker if there is no conflict. We’re creating some conflict. Maybe next week we’ll figure out a way to help you develop generosity. You’re not generous, Alma, because nobody in this world needs anything.”

The high priest merely shook his head disapprovingly.

Kim stood up. “Halftime’s over,” he shouted to the group. “Will you join us, Alma?”

Alma looked at Marn, who in turn looked bewildered. “Not today,” he answered. “Not today.”

“Your loss,” Kim said as he ran back onto the field.

\* \* \*

The next day fifty people gathered at Kim’s house. A few new faces were there simply out of curiosity, but others had heard about the soccer and the discussions and wanted to learn about Kim’s changes.

After giving the group a few minutes to visit, Kim tapped a crystal goblet with a spoon to get their attention.

“Let me get to the point,” he said. “Alma was right yesterday. Soccer isn’t enough. If we want our lives to be meaningful, if we want a purpose that can sustain us for an eternity, we need more opposition, more conflict.”

“What are you thinking of?” asked Leslie.

“We can’t do much to cause physical pain or illness or even poverty, and we don’t have any natural disasters here. I’ve thought recently that what we need in the terrestrial world is a massive forest fire. We need a little Nevada here to help us appreciate all the beauty. Unfortunately, our trees are as eternal and indestructible as we are. And we can’t cause a drought or an earthquake or a hurricane. So what we’re left with is what we *can* control.”

“What would that be?” asked Ronny.

“We can create inequality.”

Kim looked around and saw puzzled expressions. Everyone in the room could remember inequality, of course, but none of them had experienced it since the resurrection.



“Inequality creates tension,” Kim explained, “and tension creates conflict, and conflict gives people opportunities to rise or fall, to conquer or surrender. In all of mortal history, the goal was always to overcome conflict and create a peaceful, prosperous society. Mortals achieved this ideal state only a handful of times; but when they did, they tended to stagnate. That’s why Adam and Eve had to leave the Garden of Eden. It was nice, but it was a sort of damnation for them. As it is for us. There’s something about inequality and conflict and adversity that pushes people to improve. If there is no conflict, there can be no victory. And Alma was right—soccer is just a surrogate conflict, so it can’t produce a genuine victory. Or a meaningful defeat.”

“Just how do you propose we create this inequality?” asked Cory. “We all have everything we need.”

“Maybe we’ll create money,” Kim answered. “Money is the seedbed of inequality.”

“But what could we buy or sell? And who would buy it?”

“We start accumulating things we don’t need.”

“Such as?” Leslie asked.

“For starters, I’m going to take a surname. Nobody in this entire world uses a surname. So from now on I want you all to call me Kim Contra.”

Cory laughed. “People will just think you’re vain.”

“Good. That’s a start. And next, we’ll start charging people to watch our soccer games and listen to us speak about our plans for a more unequal society.”

“But what will we use for money?” asked Ronny.

“Jewelry, polished stones, bottles of colored sand, whatever. Money is just a symbol. On Earth we used paper, which was only worth something because of what it symbolized. Or maybe we can have our spectators pay with a contract to serve us in some way.”

“But why would anyone want to watch us play soccer, let alone pay for the privilege?” asked Leslie.

“Because it is forbidden.” Kim flashed a devious grin.

After everyone left, Kim was lying on the sofa when a strange thing happened: He fell asleep. And he dreamed. He was standing in a field of rocky soil and tiny corn plants, holding a crude hoe made of a carved wooden shaft and a flat rock. He was trying to keep the weeds from strangling his corn crop. Kim marveled.

He hadn't seen a weed in over six thousand years. A cow was lowing softly in the distance, and the clucking of nearby chickens almost drowned out the cow's complaints. A wooden fence separated the corn from several squat buildings made of rough wood and adobe with thatched roofs.

"Sam," a voice called from somewhere near the buildings. "Sam!"

"Over here," he yelled, not even wondering why he answered to the name Sam.

A woman came from behind one of the buildings, a genuine woman, leading a black and white spotted cow behind her on a braided rope.

"Sam, Melba has gotten into my garden again. You need to mend that fence."

"I'll get to it this afternoon, Nori," he said. Somehow he not only knew her name but knew that she was his wife.

"No, you'll get to it right now. I can't have Melba eating my peas. Your weeding will wait."

"Yes, dear," he said with just a hint of impatience, and yet inside he felt a zest for life and a bond to Nori that was as tangible as the hoe he held in his hands.

He was tired. He was always tired, and his body ached from hard work, but it felt good. He leaned the hoe against the fence and walked toward Nori with a broad grin on his face. He took her in his arms, and then suddenly he was awake.

His heart was pounding, a physical reaction even four hours of soccer had not produced.

\* \* \*

Their next meeting was at Ronny's house. When the others found out about Kim's dream, they were both jealous and nervous.

"Why did it happen?" asked Leslie. "It's not normal."

"What we're doing is not normal," answered Kim. "I think it's a sign."

"Of what?" asked Ronny.

"That we're doing something right. We're changing things."

"What's next?" asked Cory.

"We need to create some real opposition in this world."

“What do you have in mind?” asked Pat, looking concerned.

“Well, without evil in this world, there is no real virtue. And because there is neither good nor evil, we have no stories here worth telling or history worth writing. If people here are to be virtuous or creative, there must be something for them to oppose, to rise up against. There must be evil. And if no one else will provide it, then I will.”

A collective gasp escaped the group.

“You can’t be serious,” said Ronny.

“Of course I am. Where do you think this little experiment has been heading all along, Ronny? An eternal soccer league? I’m bored. You’re all bored, too. We’re all stagnant here. Do you want that for eternity? Do you think anybody does—even Alma? Of course not. But nobody is willing to give us opposition, so I have to. I am willing to make that sacrifice for the good of all. You can join me if you like.”

“But no unclean thing can dwell in the kingdoms of God,” said Cory. “That’s an eternal truth. It’s the condition for our staying here. If we rebel, we’ll be cast out.”

“Then let them cast me out,” Kim stated defiantly. “Because I don’t want to live here if there is nothing to fight for, nothing worth losing everything over.”

He stared at the group, but only a handful dared look him in the eye. Everyone knew the meeting was over, and slowly, most of them slipped away. Eventually only five remained.

“Well, there goes our soccer league,” said Leslie with a wry grin.

Kim laughed. “There will be more. But we have work to do. Go home and think about this. If you’re committed, then come to my house tomorrow at noon. If not, I’ll understand.”

He turned away and walked home.

Later that evening Alma stopped by.

“Some of your former disciples came to see me, Kim *Contra*,” he said. Kim thought he heard a hint of sarcasm in Alma’s voice.

“They’re not my disciples. They’re my friends.”

“Not any more.”

“Maybe they don’t consider me their friend, but I consider them mine.”

“Whatever,” Alma shrugged. “They told me what you want to do.”

“Have to do,” Kim corrected him.

“This is unprecedented, you know,” Alma said. “Creating evil intentionally so that others can achieve genuine goodness. Admireable, but misguided.”

“I’m amazed it took me over five thousand years. And I’m amazed I was the first to reach this conclusion.”

“Don’t flatter yourself.”

“There have been others?” Kim asked, genuinely surprised.

Alma shrugged. “Not in Caldora.”

“Not anywhere else either, I’d wager.”

“The terrestrial world isn’t exactly a hotbed of former revolutionaries,” Alma conceded. “All the creative geniuses and real leaders from Earth ended up in either the celestial kingdom or the telestial. We’re the ones who were unwilling to pay the price.”

“Maybe we’re just slow,” Kim offered.

“Maybe.”

“So, have you come to try to talk me out of my heretical plans?”

“Oh no, not at all.”

“You want to join me?” Kim grinned.

Now Alma smiled too. “Not that either.”

“Then why are you here?”

“When your disappointed disciples left me, I made contact with the authorities.”

“I’m too big of a problem for you and Marn?”

“Quite frankly, yes,” replied Alma. “I told them what you’ve been doing and what you’re planning.”

“And?”

“You’ll be receiving a guest tomorrow.”

“From the capital?”

“No, from the celestial world.”

“Then I’d better clean the place up.”

“Good luck, Kim.”

Alma turned and walked out.

Kim didn’t bother cleaning. He sat alone and wondered what the authorities would do. No one had ever been imprisoned in the terrestrial world. And no one had ever been banished. It had

been a point of doctrinal discussion on Earth whether there was advancement from lower to higher kingdoms in the hereafter; but after the resurrection, no one needed to ask. The nature of resurrected bodies in the various kingdoms rendered all discussion moot. But now Kim pondered the opposite question. Was it possible for a person to regress, to be demoted from a higher kingdom to a lower one, or even to outer darkness? This last thought chilled his soul, but he knew he couldn't turn back.

Sometime in the middle of the night Kim heard, and ignored, a knock at the door. After a minute or so, Cory and Leslie walked in.

"We talked with Alma," said Cory. "He told us what's happening."

"You're here because you're curious? You want to see what happens to me?"

"No," Leslie replied. "We're here because we're your friends. And we support you."

"What if I'm no longer fit to stay in this world?"

"Then we'll leave with you."

"What if I'm sent to outer darkness?"

"They can't do that to you," said Cory

"How do you know?"

"Because you're not trying to do anything wrong."

"Sure I am. I'm rebelling. I want to create evil."

"No, you're trying to create opposition, which people need, even if they don't realize it."

"Maybe I'm wrong. Maybe people don't need it. Maybe it's just me. Maybe I don't belong here."

"Then we don't either."

"Thanks for your support," Kim said. "But I think I need to be alone until they come."

"We understand," Leslie offered. "We just wanted you to know we're with you."

Kim nodded, and his two friends left.

The next day at exactly noon the celestial visitor arrived.

Kim had limited experience with celestial beings, but the light streaming from this one was so intense he had to shield his eyes.

Kim motioned toward the sofa. "Please sit down." The being

did not sit, but planted himself squarely before Kim and looked down on him with both compassion and curiosity.

“Kim,” he said, “I am Raphael. Do you know why I am here?”

“I think so.”

“We have been aware of your little movement here. I’m afraid you have reached the point of no return. You cannot stay in the terrestrial world any longer.”

Kim’s head drooped. This is what he had feared.

“So, where are you sending me? The telestial world? Outer darkness? A planet where I will spend eternity all alone? How do you handle cases like mine?”

“Fortunately,” Raphael answered, “there are few cases like yours. But we have a special program that you might find interesting.”

“What do you do with eternal misfits like me? I don’t really belong anywhere, except maybe mortality.” Kim sighed. “I guess I’m trying to finish finding the purpose I couldn’t figure out on Earth.”

“Yes, you are right. So that is what we offer you.”

“Go back to mortality?”

“Yes.”

“But I’m immortal. The resurrection is permanent.”

“Maybe not as permanent as you think.”

Kim squinted into the bright celestial light and stared at his visitor.

“There is a fruit,” Raphael stated. “You know this, but you have never made the connection. It is a fruit with the power to change an immortal body back into a mortal one, but it does not grow in this world.”

“The tree of the knowledge of good and evil,” Kim whispered. “I don’t understand.”

“When we people a new world, we need two first parents who are immortal and are willing to fall.”

“But I have a terrestrial body. I can’t very well procreate, you know.”

“The fruit is very potent.” Raphael’s expression was serious, but his voice betrayed mild amusement. “What do you say?”

“Do I have a choice?” Kim asked.

“Not really. We know what you will choose.”

Suddenly a light went on in Kim's mind. "And where will Nori come from?"

Now Raphael smiled openly. "Her name at present is Leslie."

"And what will happen to Cory and the others?"

"If they follow in your footsteps, they will also partake of the fruit."

"And if I find a greater purpose than I did in my first try at mortality?"

"Then you will lead your posterity into a celestial world."

"And Julie?"

"You know the answer."

"Yes, I do. And I know it will be hard."

"Then shall we go?"

Kim nodded.

"Take my hand."

As Kim touched the celestial flesh, a calm came over him, and then a subtle breeze that shook him to the core, and suddenly he could remember nothing.

"Come, Sam," said Raphael. "There is much you need to learn before we place you in the Garden."

### Notes

1. Coldplay, "Viva la Vida," *Viva la Vida or Death and All His Friends* (New York: Capitol Records, 2008).

2. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation: Sermons and Writings of Joseph Fielding Smith*, compiled by Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954-56), 2:288.

3. Since inhabitants of the terrestrial kingdom are sexless, their language includes a pronoun to reflect this condition. Unfortunately, English does not include a gender-free pronoun, so I have chosen to describe the characters in this story according to the gender identities they possessed in mortality.



### **The Philosophy of Religion Reconsidered**

Beverley Clack and Brian R. Clack. *The Philosophy of Religion: A Critical Introduction*. Cambridge, England: Polity Press, 2008. ix+190 pp. Paper: \$24.95. ISBN 13: 978-07456-3868-3

*Reviewed by Tony Clark*

This introduction to the philosophy of religion, originally published in 1998, is fully revised and updated in the 2008 edition. The authors, Beverly Clack and Brian R. Clack are, respectively, reader in theology, philosophy and culture at Oxford Brooks University in the United Kingdom, and assistant professor of philosophy at the University of San Diego. This clearly written text is published in the United Kingdom and targeted at “sixth-formers and undergraduates” (vii), which translates to high school seniors and undergraduates in the American educational system. It is well pitched for an introductory college class. The authors make one reference to cricket terminology, but this need not unduly perturb the American reader!

The authors open with a discussion of the nature of religion, warning against the danger of focusing on the culturally dominant religion. They quote the words of the eminent religion scholar Ninian Smart: “We are not confronted in fact by some monolithic object, namely religion. We are confronted by *religions*. And each religion has its own style, its own inner dynamic, its own special meanings, its uniqueness” (5). This is an important point to which I will return.

In the first chapter, a basic conviction of the book emerges: “Religion is a *human* phenomenon” (7; emphasis mine). While many traditional theists do embrace this claim, it becomes clear that the Clacks propose an exclusively humanistic view of religion. These revisionist beliefs play a significant role throughout, and the reader will need to bear them in mind.

The substantive themes that the book addresses are largely conventional. Chapter 2 surveys arguments for the existence of God and responds to them with refreshing lucidity, although there is no discussion of Intelligent Design, a surprising omission given the heat of the contemporary debate. The chapter proceeds

with a discussion of divine attributes. Here the authors stress that, despite the traditional practice, “philosophy of religion must proceed via an explicit engagement with the existential ‘phenomena of human life’” (71). This emphasis assumes that one cannot speak of religion without also speaking of the human condition. Indeed, for the authors, “God-talk” is, at root, an indirect way of speaking about humanity.

Chapter 3 considers a variety of challenges to theism. Its critical discussion of theodicy considers a number of traditional and revisionist proposals. The authors conclude that it is simply incoherent to speak of an omnipotent, good God. “The fact of evil clearly undermines the Christian’s speculative claim that God is all-powerful and all-loving” (109). This familiar line of reasoning presupposes a *direct identification* of the will of God with all contingent events. But this isn’t the only possibility. A plausible alternative is to attribute agency to evil forces which are temporal but real and which sustain opposition to God’s loving purposes. God permits their existence for a time. The pinnacle of salvation history will be God’s final eschatological victory over all such evil. This approach is powerfully expressed, for example, in David Bentley Hart’s *The Doors of the Sea: Where Was God in the Tsunami?* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. Eerdmans Publishing, 2005). Hart’s argument lends support to a more traditional theodicy, and it is unfortunate that this robust position, with considerable warrant in terms of the Christian scriptures, is not represented in this book.

Chapter 3 continues with an examination of natural histories of religion, including succinct expositions of the thought of David Hume, Ludwig Feuerbach, Karl Marx, Émile Durkheim, and Sigmund Freud on religion. Characterizing religious commitment variously as mistake, projection, illusion, opiate, and neurosis, these thinkers offer substantial critiques of religion. In a fascinating treatment of religious language, which relies largely on the work of the early Ludwig Wittgenstein, A. J. Ayer, and Antony Flew, the authors call into question the very possibility of “God-talk” as meaningful discourse.

The first two sections of Chapter 4 consider a number of revisionary, anti-realist accounts that reject the idea of God as a personal being, ontologically distinct from human beings. A brief exposition of the work of Don Cupitt and Stewart Sutherland pre-

cedes a lengthier engagement with the earlier and later work of Wittgenstein. The final part of the chapter offers an account of feminist critiques of religion. In this context, the authors question whether the ideas associated with “rationality” are, as discourse about the philosophy of religion usually assumes, of “general applicability” (128). The Clacks explain that, for feminists, “such an approach is highly problematic, not least because their concern has been to draw attention to the way in which the ideas that human beings develop about their world invariably reflect their own individual experience and social placing” (128).

It is curious that they herald this feminist insight—that the contours of rational thought are conditioned by contingent factors—as a radical departure from the Anglo-American analytic tradition. In contemporary analytic philosophical discourse, the predominant concern is not to establish a rational grounding for beliefs (the foundationalist imperative), but to analyze the nature and implications of beliefs that one finds oneself holding. Such a task requires a self-critical evaluation of one’s personal beliefs, and it also requires consideration of the beliefs of others. Nicholas Wolterstorff in *Justice: Rights and Wrongs* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2008) claims: “In place of the old foundationalist picture, the picture of the academic enterprise now being taken for granted by philosophers in the analytic tradition is what I call *dialogic pluralism*” (xi; emphasis his).

In the final chapter—and here the significance of the new edition comes to the fore—the authors question the conclusions of the book’s earlier edition in which “we accepted the broad thrust of the secularization thesis, according to which religion in secular societies has lost its social significance and power” (168). They explain: “World events have made us review this perspective, for recent years have revealed the continuing power of religion to shape the way in which human beings engage with the world” (169). The rise of religiously motivated terror now casts the debate about the place of religion in society in a new light. What appeared to be a fading influence has reemerged as a dangerous force. Why should this be? Their answer is that this phenomenon is rooted in the perpetrators’ supernaturalism allied to a desire for religious certainty. What is required, therefore, is the promotion of human-

istic forms of religion which are free of supernaturalism and the need for certitude.

The Clacks have written what is, in many respects, a commendably clear book, and one can gain much from it. However, at least one aspect of the book must be challenged. Despite the points made in the discussion of feminist approaches to the philosophy of religion and other occasional protestations to the contrary, the authors' fundamental *modus operandi* is to approach religion in terms of "religious ideas" ("the existence of God," "miracle," "evil," etc.) which they presuppose are essentially generic. It is surprising, especially given their knowledge of Wittgenstein's later work, that the Clacks do not acknowledge the fact that such ideas, and the words used to articulate them, cannot be properly understood aside from the ways of life and practices of the faith communities in which they are used. The effect of this approach is, inevitably, to efface the distinctions—some subtle and some not-so-subtle—in how different communities use these ideas and words. I offer this criticism of the Clacks' book, aware that it has broader implications for the philosophy of religion as a discipline.

Finally, if—as the authors claim—the recent upsurge in religiously motivated terror is facilitated by the alliance of supernaturalism and the desire for certainty, one can understand their revisionist, humanistic tendencies. But to suggest that "it might be possible to develop a form of religiosity that is not about providing answers to the problems of life, but that emanates from the human engagement with the world" (184) implies that "our human engagement with the world" is, essentially, a "given" to which religion must respond. This will make little sense to those who regard their religious commitment as the means by which their engagement with the world is transformed. Such people will require a profoundly different diagnosis of the problem of religious violence.

## Re-Creating the Bible

William C. Bishop, B. G. Christensen, Samantha Larsen Hastings, Sarah Jenkins, Eric W. Jepson, Ryan McIlvain, Danny Nelson, and Arwen Taylor. *The Fob Bible*. Illustrations by Paul Gustave Doré.

Book Design: Elizabeth Beeton. Kansas City, Mo.: Peculiar Pages, 2009. 265 pp. Hardcover: \$39.99. Paper: \$23.99. ISBN: 978-0-9817696-9-1

*Reviewed by Dallas Robbins*

Lately the Bible has been getting a bum rap. Christopher Hitchens calls it “a nightmare”<sup>1</sup> and blames it for much of humanity’s suffering—everything from sexism to genocide. At the same time, literalist approaches to the Bible have produced narrow theology and tendentious, unscientific speculation. With these sorts of extremes touted by reductionist pundits and preachers, people are left with a false dichotomy of biblical proportions. Historian of religion Karen Armstrong reminds contemporary readers that “many modern assumptions about the Bible are incorrect. The Bible did not encourage slavish conformity. . . . From the first, the Biblical authors contradicted each other and their conflicting visions were all included by the editors in the final text.”<sup>2</sup>

Consequently, the Bible remains a sturdy and elusive text that withstands pretentious punditry. It is not an infallible guide to the history and future of humanity any more than it is the origin of all the world’s ills. It is a contradictory, literary, and illuminating text, filled with tales, parables, letters, narratives, wisdom, philosophy, and poetry of lamentation and desire. By seeing the Bible whole, we are reminded that it is a literary epic on a par with the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, or the *Aeneid*. And like those ancient sources, it has inspired writers from Chaucer and Milton to James Joyce and Cormac McCarthy, among countless others.

Among those influenced are an up-and-coming group of LDS writers who call themselves The Friends of Ben (or Fob for short). Having found each other through classes and conferences, these friends organized a writing group in 2002, which “from the beginning was a meeting of misfits, a place for those who felt somehow outside the day-to-day realities of modern pragmatics” (ii).

The group includes B. G. (“Ben” himself) Christensen, who organized the first meeting, and his “Friends”: Kari Ambrose, William C. Bishop, Matthew Evans, Samantha Larsen Hastings, Sarah E. Jenkins, Eric W. Jepson (also writing under the nom de plume Theric Jepson), Alex Liberato, Ryan McIlvain, Chris

Mohar, Danny Nelson, Hannah Pritchett, Christian Sorenson, Arwen Taylor, Sarah Jane Thomas, Josh Weed, and Jeff Windsor.

While discussing their projects and writing ambitions, it was “not puzzling, given the Mormon heritage of the group, that they would have an urge to reexamine fundamental assertions of their culture—some from positions of orthodoxy and others from points far removed” (ii). The “Fob” turned to the Bible in pursuit of these reexaminations, which “often flowered into creative works” (ii), resulting in *The Fob Bible*.

On opening *The Fob Bible*, the reader encounters a family tree filled out with the authors’ names, with room to add more. Facing it is an extended title page, with the title of this creative scripture in large ornate letters, followed by the statement “A Quotidian Book of Scripture . . . containing, but not limited to, the juiciest portions of the Old Testament . . . translated through means of memory and nightmare . . .” The title page goes on with little jokes and ironic asides, promising that this “Fully Authorized Fob Version,” may be “of a feminist bent in places, with far too many references to behemoths and leviathans.” By contrasting “quotidian” with “memory and nightmare,” or juxtaposing mythical creatures alongside feminism, the extended title page encapsulates the contradictory, even paradoxical nature of scripture, explored in a spirit of play.

In addition to the title page and following written selections, care has been paid to design and illustration. Each piece is preceded by an illustration, usually by Gustave Doré, along with a caption. Each selection, with no authorial attribution, is then introduced by a quotation from scripture, setting the stage for a creative examination of biblical storytelling. The lack of authorial attribution in the Fob Bible heightens the sense of play within and between the various contributions, reproducing the complexity of the Bible’s wildly varied and ambiguously interrelated texts. An appendix identifies which “Friend of Ben” wrote which individual pieces.

And like the Bible, the *Fob Bible* comprises a variety of forms: short stories, poems, a play, and other prose forms that cover all kinds of major characters, such as Abraham, Isaac, Esau, Moses, Ezekiel, Solomon, Daniel, even Jeremiah. Many minor biblical characters are given major play by the Fob—Job’s wife, Baal’s secre-

tary, Gomer, Heber's wife, and even Maher-shalal-hash-baz make more than cameo appearances. There are too many stories to cover in this review, and each one could be discussed in depth, but let me give you a taste of what to expect.

"How to Get Over It, a public service message" is a running series throughout the book in which familiar tales are recounted with deadpan delivery. One is "The Joseph Method," which begins, "Joseph, who later would use the stage name 'Joseph of Egypt' (and, much, much later, 'Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat'), was sold into slavery by his brothers—to a bunch of hairy Ishmaelites no less" (65). It reminds one more of the "Shouts and Murmurs" section of the *New Yorker*, than of any sort of biblical fiction one might find at Deseret Book.

Another prose piece I particularly enjoyed was "Ezra's Inbox," an interaction between priests, prophets, and kings via email exchange, in which King Sanballat, governor of Samaria, complains to Nehemiah, "How do you plan on building a temple? You're not Solomon! I'm way more Solomon than you are!" (133). The humor is infectious, without being too hip for its own good.

Poetry ranges from serious to silly, including lighthearted verses inspired by the rhyming sounds of Ogden Nash. An enjoyable and pithy lyric that gives a brief taste of one of the many kinds of verse a reader will encounter is, "The Love Song of Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar," about Job's "loyal" friends:

If you are sad, we'll come to you,  
if you are sick, we'll bear you up,  
if you have pain, we'll sit with you  
and help you drink the bitter cup.

You'll never find more loyal friends,  
not under heaven's arching vault!  
In trio, we will pass the time  
reminding you *it's all your fault*.  
(161; emphasis theirs)

I suspect that the title of the poem is an intentional reference to the "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" by T. S. Eliot, which the rest of the poem probably has little to do with. But like the "loyal



friend” of the poem, allusions in *The Fob Bible* are frequently deceptive or ironic.

Another favorite selection, “Blood-Red Fruit,” is a fictional philosophical dialogue between Satan and the serpent. It is partly inspired by the accompanying Doré illustration, depicting a scene from Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, in which Satan contemplates what form to take while looking upon a snake, “The Serpent sleeping, in whose mazy folds / To hide me, and the dark intent I bring.”<sup>3</sup> Here’s an excerpt, with Satan beginning the conversation:

“You are very beautiful,” he said.

The snake stirred, blinking. “How can you know what beauty is?” she asked. Her voice was low, and modulated. “Only the gods know that.”

Satan shrugged. “I don’t know how I know, snake. I only know that I know—and you are very beautiful.”

“Are you a god, then?” Her voice was cool and musical, like a brook, and she regarded Satan with cool eyes.

He laughed, leaning back into his wings and grabbing his knees. “Do I look like a god to you?”

“You look like half a bat,” said the snake as she eased down from the tree. “The other half might be monkey, might be man. You have more hair than the other two-legs in this part of the tree-place.”

“Not a god though. That’s a relief,” said Satan. He leaned forward slightly and studied her as she moved from under the shadows of the trees. “You are beautiful—look at you in the sunlight. You’re like a living bruise.”

“What part of creation is a bruise?” asked the snake.

“A very beautiful part.” Satan’s mouth twitched into a smile. (15–16)

And this story is just one of the many beautiful parts of this collection, which is no less delightful for the occasional misstep in the dance, where back stories and side stories—only hinted at in the Bible—are filled in by the Fob writers with a sense of pure pleasure.

Though many of these stories have strong elements of entertainment and humor, seemingly done with ironic glee, they also present challenging experiments that remind the reader of what makes the Bible unique. While much religious fiction based on biblical stories tries to water down the inherent strangeness of the Old Testament for the sake of a commercial audience, *The Fob Bible* foregrounds the strangeness. By juxtaposing the strangeness

with various literary forms and contemporary approaches, it creates a type of meta-scripture, in which literary truth is exalted over doctrinal correctness.

*The Fob Bible* reminds us of the literary heritage and strangeness that the Bible contains. It is compelling reading, making one reexamine assumptions about familiar ideas, stories, and characters, discovering that they are neither plain nor precious. *The Fob Bible* may drive you back into the scriptures, to experience again why the Good Book not only holds religious sway but literary prowess as well.

### Notes

1. Christopher Hitchens, *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (New York: Twelve, 2007), 97.

2. Karen Armstrong, *The Bible: A Biography* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2007), 222.

3. John Milton, "Paradise Lost," Book IX, lls. 161–62, in *Complete Poems and Major Plays*, edited with notes and introduction by Merritt Y. Hughes (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett Publishing, 2003), 382.

## Characters to Care About

Jonathan Langford. *No Going Back*. Provo, Utah: Zarahemla Books, 2009. 302 pp. Author's note, epilogue. Paper: \$16.95. ISBN: 978-0-9787971-9-5

*Reviewed by Christian Harrison*

Google "gay" and "Mormon" these days, and you'll be flung—head first—into a veritable deluge of vitriol and sanctimony. Of course, it didn't start with California's Proposition 8. No, that river's path pushes back, through the '90s and the Church's involvement with the matter of gay marriage in Hawaii, to the experiences of gay men at BYU in the '70s and '80s, and then deeper, into the mists of Castro District folklore and out into the broad plains of popular culture—the play *Angels in America*, the film *Latter Days*, and the recent calendars featuring smarmy, shirtless, returned missionaries. It's a cultural crossroads that feeds the

American media juggernaut and promises years of eye-catching, gut-wrenching headlines to come.

As an out, gay man who is also a faithful and active Latter-day Saint, I have a front-row seat to a show I never asked to see. I'm fortunate, though. The *Sturm und Drang* on stage only occasionally breaks through its own din to touch me personally, as I do what I can to lead a life filled with self-respect and charity.

In that respect, I'm a lot like Paul Ficklin—the protagonist in Jonathan Langford's *No Going Back*—a young Latter-day Saint, furtively feeling out what it means to be both Mormon and gay. Yet the book sat on my bedside table for a couple of weeks before I picked it up. The awkward cover art, melodramatic title, and sensitive subject matter—it was all just a little daunting. Was I in for a tongue lashing? Perhaps a passive aggressive religious tract? Or maybe something else entirely . . . Would it inspire hope? Despair? Or would it just make me vaguely uneasy—like watching a comedian or musician bomb on stage?

There was only one way to know.

So early one morning, I reached for the book before slipping out of bed. Five hours later, I was still there, wrapped up in a story both familiar and foreign—each character flawed yet sympathetic, and the whole story infused with a gentle warmth. I could tell Langford loves his characters.

The story opens in a suburb of Portland, Oregon. It's 2003, and Paul's a sophomore in high school. He and his best friend, Chad, are working their way through the briar patch of Mormon male adolescence—homework, school politics, merit badges, first crushes, and priesthood advancement. Paul's a handsome kid, wholesome—but a bit nerdy. Chad's that kid we remember from seminary. You know, the one with the rough edges—who wanted to be good, but for whom “good” didn't come easy. Langford doesn't just put his cast in a real place and time but surrounds them with actual events and everyday brands—gracing the story with a certain authenticity. And it doesn't end with references to video games and rainy weather. It's in the sometimes-awkward teenage dialogue—and the different, yet somehow still imperfect dialogue of the grown-ups. It's this candor, I suspect, that will give the story a solid shelf life.

*No Going Back* could easily be a story about teen pregnancy, a

crisis of faith, or any number of other, equally delicate, subjects. But Langford wastes no time in outing Paul—placing him squarely on the inexorable path out of the closet.

Along that path, Paul encounters the usual cast of characters in a teen's life, each on his or her own path. Langford drapes them in flesh and sympathy, giving us peeks into their individual lives and motivations. It's not a common approach. Most authors take exactly what's needed from the cast of second-string characters, pouring their lives through a fine-meshed sieve. When it's over, all we really remember is the main character sitting on the plate framed by a colorful coulee of tasty background. But Langford uses a chef's knife, instead—giving us more of a composed salad. Each of the characters, distinct and sacred, plays his or her part in the story without compromising their true selves or the lives they live beyond the pages of the book.

While describing these characters in a brief review would do them and the book violence, I think one passage illustrates the delicate interplay Langford has achieved. It happens early in the book, soon after Paul tells Chad, his best friend, he's gay:

Down in the family room, the smile melted off of Richard's face as he settled onto the couch and closed his eyes.

I remember back when Chad was this easy kid to listen to and understand. Now he's like a stone. An angry, sullen stone. Half the time we talk, it seems like it turns into another argument. And then he comes out with this gay question—

. . . Someday maybe he'd find out what had been behind Chad's question tonight. He just hoped it wouldn't be one of those conversations parent have nightmares about. "Dad, I'm gay." "Dad, I got a girl pregnant." "Dad, I blew up the school." He shook his head. . . . At least his son had good friends. (13)

Richard—Paul's bishop and Chad's father—could have been a convenient literary device. Instead, he's a father worrying about his son. Soon, though, Richard isn't just worrying about work and home, but the very weighty issues Paul sets at his feet:

Richard remembered that the last couple of Sundays, Paul had assigned other boys to prepare the sacrament but hadn't helped himself. Now he knew why. . . . Richard contemplated the young man who sat before him. Paul's hands were shaking slightly, he realized. He hadn't noticed it before.

And suddenly, in his mind's eye, he saw a different scene. Paul,

head still down, shaking the bishop's hand and walking out of his office. Paul going into the house where he and his mother lived. Paul opening the medicine cabinet in the bathroom, pouring pills from a bottle into his open hand, swallowing again and again—

. . . “Paul.” [Richard] stood and held out his arms. “Come here.” Paul stood, but hesitated. Richard took a step toward him. With a gasp, Paul flung himself forward and clung to Richard as if he were a much younger boy. “Paul,” Richard said again, his arms wrapped around the boy's shoulders, which were shaking now with sobs. “Heavenly Father loves you. And so do I.” (127–28)

In the Author's Note (unpaginated), Langford says he didn't try to “depict any (mythical) typical experience” but instead attempted to create characters who were “mostly well-meaning.” He hoped, in the end, that we'd “come to like and feel for those characters.” And on both fronts, Langford was successful. I certainly didn't agree with the choices of all the characters or even some of the doctrine discussed; but I cared about each of them and cared deeply for a few.

All of this isn't to say the book is perfect. The dialogue could use a final, gentle polishing, and the cover is a mess. But like some literary *wabi sabi*, the book's imperfection only reinforces its authenticity. The book is neither a missionary tract nor a political broadside. It's a window—and a smudged one at that. Every reader will likely take something different away from the book. But each, I suspect, will leave feeling a little more hopeful. And if they're anything like me, they'll also have wept a little more than they're willing to admit.

So. Back to that deluge . . .

In the tumult of he-said-she-said and they-did-we-did, it's easy to forget that behind, beneath, and beyond it all are real people with real needs—living lives that are rich and meaningful, and sometimes fraught with pain and anguish. If we can remember that, then we can move past the shouting and into real dialogue. This book, I think, is part of that dialogue. As are efforts like Equality Utah's Common Ground Initiative and the LDS Church's recent—and ringing—endorsement of Salt Lake City's ordinance protecting gays from discrimination in housing and employment. Each, in its own way, reminds us of our own humanity and the imperative of treading carefully. Each, I pray, is a sign of calmer seas ahead.

I guess you could say Jonathan Langford's book isn't so much about going back as it is about going forward. And that's a good thing.

## Too Long Ignored

Ronald G. Watt. *The Mormon Passage of George D. Watt: First British Convert, Scribe for Zion*. Logan: Utah State University Press, 2009. 293 pp. Photographs, maps, notes, index. Cloth: \$39.95; ISBN: 978-0-87421-756-8

*Reviewed by Polly Aird*

Although George Darling Watt (1812–81) is perhaps best known in the LDS Church as the first convert in the British Isles, he also recorded Brigham Young's sermons in shorthand for more than sixteen years, preserving them as key historical and theological resources. And yet, after feeling bullied by Young, Watt left the church he had loved, associated with the Godbeites, and became a spiritualist. Ronald G. Watt, George's descendent, has made it his life's work to bring his ancestor back into the light of day. The result is a flawed but significant biography.

George Watt had a childhood and youth of almost Dickensian poverty and illiteracy. When he was fourteen, his stepfather ejected him from the family home and onto the streets of Manchester. Some months later, a woman, perhaps his mother, found him and took him to a government workhouse where he was essentially imprisoned. There a fellow inmate finally taught him to read and write. The contrast between these beginnings and his later life are dramatic, but Ronald Watt moves through these years quickly, pausing to develop a more rounded picture only with Watt's conversion to Mormonism in 1837 at age twenty-five.

From then on, though still poor, he had something to live for—not only religious belief but a significant social position, for he was quickly ordained a priest and then an elder and missionary. When assigned to the mission in Scotland, he studied shorthand in Edinburgh. In September 1842, he sailed for New Orleans with his wife, Molly (whom he had married in 1835), and

their two young sons. They arrived in Nauvoo early in 1843. After the death of Joseph Smith and while Watt was still in Nauvoo, his finances were even lower than his usual poverty. Willard Richards suggested that Watt record Church leaders' addresses and also teach shorthand classes. Brigham Young employed him, gave him a desk in his office, provided a lot, and had a house built for him and his family. Mentorship by both Richards and Young was significant but not consistent.

In spite of his unpromising beginnings, Watt became a graceful and lucid writer, and the narrative uses quotations to good advantage. For example, in 1851 aboard the *Ellen Maria* when George and Molly Watt were returning to America from a mission in Great Britain, he wrote of a storm: "Outside the wind is heard raging on like the voices of a thousand malignant spirits screaming the requiem of some distant wreck" (87). And during another storm on the same crossing, "Two water bottles that had not been tied the night before took a notion to dance a reel. A little brown one leaped from its place and danced over the deck. Its large brown neighbor seeing this decided to join in the dance, rolling and tumbling over the deck. Then a provision box introduced its four corners into the reel" (89).

Ronald G. Watt has structured the book to give an overview of George Watt's life in the introduction, which is then recapitulated in depth in the chapters that follow. This arrangement is dramatically unsatisfying as it precludes a compelling narrative of the building tensions that led to his leaving the Church. The book lacks a bibliography, making future research more difficult. Nevertheless, Ronald Watt has accomplished a remarkable archival feat in unearthing every known letter, diary, or other writing by George Watt to reveal the man's life and character.

The chapter on Watt's life in Great Britain is the weakest. I would have liked a discussion of millennialism—a belief common in Great Britain at that time—and how the Mormons understood it, which would have added context to Watt's instant attraction to Mormonism. This chapter also contains some errors of fact, including that marriage banns were related to the couple's poverty (18 note 44) (they were not; all couples were required to have banns posted to see if there was any impediment to the marriage); that Glasgow is "a seacoast city" (62) (it is on the River Clyde, not



the coast); that the census was taken in 1840 (62) (it was in 1841); that the Church of Scotland collected tithes (63) (it did not collect from the working classes, from which the Mormons drew their converts; it was the landed aristocracy that mostly supported the church); and finally, the term “whiskey” (67-68) when referring to Scotch should be spelled without an “e.” Although minor, these errors, plus others scattered throughout the book, indicate a lack of attention to detail.

Watt’s diary of the family’s first overland journey ended three days before they reached Fort Laramie, and Ronald Watt summarizes the rest of the trip in just over a page. This briskness perhaps reflects his decision to include only those events in which we hear George Watt’s voice, but it results in a false impression of the overland trek, for Fort Laramie was only the halfway point. From then on, the pioneers experienced the greatest hardships in crossing the Rocky Mountains and running short of food. A number of extant diaries by Watt’s fellow travelers chronicle the journey to Salt Lake City, including that of the eloquent Jean Rio Baker (whose diary Ronald Watt uses in describing New Orleans, St. Louis, and Kaneshville), and the John Brown Company journal and Elias Smith journal (both used several times). They could have been employed to complete and give balance to the description of the journey.

As the company approached the Sweetwater River, they met ninety Snake Indians on their way to sign the 1851 Fort Laramie Treaty with government representatives, one of the landmark events of U.S. western history. Ten thousand Plains Indians gathered at Fort Laramie and agreed to keep the peace among the tribes and to allow emigrants safe passage on the overland trail in exchange for an annual annuity. Noting the importance of this treaty—which enabled Mormon pioneers to travel without Indian interference for years to come—would have brought Watt’s trail experience into the broader American emigration story. Ronald Watt’s decision not to mention the significance of this treaty strikes me as a missed opportunity. Although its omission does not affect the story of George Watt himself, it lessens the stature of the book.

The six middle chapters in the book, covering Watt’s life in Salt Lake City, are treated thematically rather than chronologi-

cally: a chapter on Mormon history in Utah between 1847 and 1867, executed with broad brush strokes and with Watt's voice appearing only in regard to his experience in the Utah War; one on Watt as a reporter for the newspaper and then for the Church; one on his part in creating the Deseret Alphabet; one on Watt's plural marriages (five) and his family life in Salt Lake City; one on his intellectual pursuits; and one that combines an account of his travels accompanying Brigham Young with a description of his last trip to England. Although this topical approach highlights different aspects of Watt's life, the resulting chronological shifts can be disorienting to the reader.

Watt experienced two critical turning points in his life in Utah, both involving arguments with leaders he perceived as overbearing and autocratic. The first was with Willard Richards, Watt's temple-sealed adopted father, editor of the *Deseret News*, and second counselor to President Brigham Young. A twelve-day epistolary conflict between Watt and Richards in September 1852 centered on Richards's failure to pay George Watt for the sermons he had transcribed for the *News*. Their arguments give a unique and fascinating glimpse into Mormon thought of the time. Watt ended the exchange with, "You can lead me but you cannot intimidate me. . . . My attachment to you is unchanging, and am ready to fulfil all your wishes that do not cut off the possibility of my providing the reasonable comforts of life for my family" (4, 125, 128–33). They finally reconciled eleven months later.

The second argument jump-started Watt's doubts about Mormonism. In 1868 when he was working for Brigham Young as a clerk and stenographer, continually recording Young's and other leaders' sermons and discourses, he felt justified in asking for a raise. Ronald Watt writes: "Feeling desperate about the financial pressures of his suffering family, Watt was asking for \$5.00 a day, a raise of \$1.50. The labor-management discussion rapidly turned heated. Young grudgingly guessed he would have to pay Watt what he demanded but thought that he did not deserve it. As far as Young was concerned, no one in the office worked hard enough for the pay he received. Watt felt that was tantamount to an accusation of stealing. He was outraged and wounded" (1, 229–30). Watt donned his hat and left Young's office for good.

Ten years later in 1878, the year after Brigham Young died,

Watt wrote to the new president, John Taylor: "I was suddenly and unexpectedly crushed, by a public charge of meanness and sly robbery, by one against whose affirmation I had no appeal. I could only see my character as an honest man gone among my friends and brethren, my future efforts to do good defeated, over thirty years of labor and struggle a blank, and branded as a scoundrel to the end of my life" (1, 260). Ronald Watt, in his vivid portrayal of this argument, does not gloss over Young's domineering, bullying character as Watt experienced it, his stinginess about Watt's salary, and his denigration of Watt and his work. The unsparring description is one of the strengths of the book.

After leaving Young's office, Watt joined with two partners to open a general store in Salt Lake City. Their efforts collided with President Young's initiation of the Zion's Cooperative Mercantile Institution (ZCMI). Watt and his partners demonstrated that they could sell goods more cheaply than ZCMI, but they had not anticipated Young's call for a boycott of non-ZCMI merchants. Young thus undermined Watt and his partners' business, and they quickly went bankrupt, resulting in Watt's loss of all his properties in Salt Lake City. Once again thwarted in supporting his family, Watt left the Church and retreated to his farm in Davis County.

Ronald Watt's interest is in George Watt's life as a Mormon; and as a result, he describes him in the introduction as a person who "let his faith fail," then continues, "This should have been a biography of an ancestor that his Mormon descendants would be proud of" (8). The chapters themselves, however, reveal Watt not as a simple backslider, but as a complex character changing over time as the result of his experiences. That Watt was bitter about Young's treatment of him and that he left the Church, became a spiritualist, and associated with the Godbeites need not have been treated as an embarrassment. The Godbeites were mostly British intellectuals, men of good will and integrity, who wanted to reform the Church and retain whatever they found good in Mormonism. Watt, though never fully one of them, shared their background and views and came to truly believe in spiritualism. While Ronald Watt may be distressed that George Watt's story fails as a devotional example, he has fortunately limited his disappointment to the preface and introduction, allowing a more complex reality to emerge in the course of the biography. Despite its flaws,

this book marks a major milestone in bringing to life the narrative of an amazing and honorable man.

More remains to be done to give Watt his full due: to see Watt's accomplishments in terms of his bleak beginnings in a British workhouse, to consider how he could overcome those beginnings to become something of an intellectual in early Utah, to wonder if Young's poor treatment of him stemmed from some kind of jealousy, to admire Watt's refusal to be crushed by powerful men. And perhaps there is still a larger story to be told about Watt's place in the practice of shorthand in the United States, in his desire to create a pure language, or in the economics of agriculture he developed in later years.

## Hidden Treasures

*Dana Haight Cattani*

*Note: Dana delivered this sacrament meeting talk, a welcome to new students, in the University Ward of the Bloomington Indiana Stake, on August 17, 2008.*

Shortly after my family and I moved to Bloomington, Indiana, three years ago, my six-year-old son invited a neighbor boy over to play. The neighbor asked if they could go geode hunting in the wooded creek behind our house. I did not know what geodes were or what kind of artillery might be required to hunt them, but I sent the boys out with my blessing, hoping they could not get into too much trouble. A little while later, I saw them staggering out of the woods, splattered with mud and clay. They were carrying a heavy rounded rock, which they dumped unceremoniously on the porch.

“It’s a geode,” our neighbor said. “See the crystals?”

Sure enough. The rough, dull-colored rock had been split, perhaps by the freeze-thaw cycle of too many Midwest winters, and in the hollow were beautiful crystal formations. Before coming to Indiana, I had never seen anything quite like it. It was a hidden treasure, and it was right in my backyard.

As we settled in, I began finding my way around town and locating the services that my family wanted and needed. One of the resources we discovered was the Monroe County Public Library bookmobile. This outreach van has its own books, and I can request materials online from the main library, then pick them up at a stop within walking distance of my house. I have requested all kinds of books: fiction, history, and biography, but also physical and mental health, parenting, and psychology.

The librarian who helps me every week has never speculated on why I might want to read a particular book or what circumstance in my life prompted this interest. Like a good butler, he is

impeccably discreet and refrains from comment, but he knows a lot—and not just about me. He overhears travel plans, layoff news, homework woes, and school gossip. When I said to the elderly mother of one of my neighbors, “It’s so good that you can be here to help after the surgery,” the librarian stopped scanning bar codes momentarily. Then he gave the woman her books, a bag to carry them, and help out the door. A librarian is a witness to life, and this one makes eye contact and nods empathically. Best of all, he no longer asks me to produce an actual library card, which makes me feel like some kind of VIP patron.

After the library, I needed to find the post office. An older gentleman with a dapper white moustache often waits on me there. One morning as he weighed my packages, he said, “I’m in a good mood; I have meatloaf for lunch today.” I smiled and said something affirming. He took this as encouragement and said, “I love meatloaf. My wife doesn’t like it, so she makes it just for me. And the next day, I get the leftovers for lunch.” From that moment, he was endeared to me as one who appreciates small pleasures—like cold meatloaf—and the bigger ones, like a wife who cooks for him and sometimes fills his wishes at the expense of her own. How often are we served by a truly happy employee, especially at the post office? I let other people go ahead of me in line just so I can go to his window. When I hand him the money I owe, I feel I have brushed against deep contentment, and I carry some of that gold dust away on my fingertips.

These are a few of the people in my neighborhood. They have foibles, I’m sure, but they are regularly friendly and helpful to me. (As an aside, not everyone in Bloomington is. I am thinking of the allergist who said that my husband Kyle’s asthma would be greatly relieved if our house were thoroughly vacuumed at least twice a week, but—and this is the kicker—never by Kyle. Now what kind of medicine is that?)

All of us are probably familiar with the story in Genesis 18 of Sodom and Gomorrah. After the Lord threatened to destroy these cities for wickedness and general recalcitrance, Abraham negotiated for a reprieve if he could find fifty or thirty or even ten righteous people. When he could not, the Lord rained fire and brimstone upon them.

In Jewish lore, there is a similar story but with a twist. In this

version, the Lord promises that he will allow the fallen world to continue as long as there are at least thirty-six good people in it, people who brighten their corner of the world with kindness and compassion and cheer. If that number ever drops below thirty-six, the world will end. But here's the rub: only the Lord knows who these thirty-six people are. None of us knows. They do not even know themselves that the world's survival hangs on their behavior. So they cannot act with compassion in order to fulfill a duty or meet someone's expectations. They act with compassion only because they are moved to it by someone's suffering or loneliness or loss.<sup>1</sup>

As the story goes, since we have no way of recognizing these thirty-six people, each of us must act as if we might be numbered among them, because we might be. Further, we must treat all the people we meet as if they might be among them. Whether they are or we are, strictly speaking, among the all-important thirty-six good people, does not really matter in the end. If we act as if we are, we make ourselves into human treasures, people for whom the world could more justly be preserved. That, of course, is the point. A merciful and somewhat cagey God holds his mysteries close, not disclosing relevant information about our identities in hopes that each of us will be motivated to be our best selves without artificial ceilings on what we can or will do.

I believe I have met some of these thirty-six people. I figure there should be about six of them per continent, if you exclude Antarctica. Given this distribution, a surprising number of them live and work in south-central Indiana. On good days, I aspire to be one of them; and on not-so-good days, I just hope to cross their paths. In Bloomington, I often do.

For three seasons, a firefighter named Paul has helped to coach my younger son's baseball team. Paul praises every player, even when the errors outnumber the hits. Since his shifts at the fire station are twenty-four hours on duty, and then forty-eight hours off, he inevitably cannot attend every game. But he tries. I often volunteer to operate the scoreboard so I can sit in the tower where it is shady and where there are ceiling fans. From up high, I sometimes see a shiny red hook-and-ladder drive into the parking lot. Paul and three colleagues hop out in their crisp blue uniforms with pagers on their belts. They hustle in, as if they were late to



the World Series, to see a bunch of seven- and eight-year-olds play coach-pitch baseball.

Last May, my older son's sixth-grade class did a physics activity. The students were to design a container in which a raw egg could be dropped to the ground and not break. They made prototypes and practiced standing on chairs and dropping eggs. The final event in this unit was an egg drop from the top of a fire truck. Paul happened to be the firefighter who stood on top of the fully extended hook-and-ladder, seven stories above the parking lot, and dropped the eggs. He carefully released each one as if it were a baby bird. My son had placed his egg inside a box stuffed with crumpled tissue and attached to a plastic grocery sack parachute. It was a good design, rendered excellent by Paul, who from the top of the ladder made certain the all-important parachute deployed. He is a human geode, ordinary in every way but one: his core is full of hidden treasure, unexpected and without price. I always cheer loudly for his son at baseball games.

In the Gospel of John, we can read a story about a man who was blind from his birth. When Jesus passed by, his disciples queried:

Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?

Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him . . .

When [Jesus] had thus spoken, he spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and he anointed the eyes of the blind man with clay,

And said unto him, Go, wash in the pool of Siloam. . . . [The blind man] went his way therefore, and washed, and came [back] seeing. (John 9:2-3, 6-7)

Common clay, perhaps not unlike the kind in my garden, is the medium of this miracle. Surely Jesus did not need clay to restore this man's sight. So why the theatrics of spitting and making a paste and washing it away? I am sure he wanted the man to exercise some faith, to invest himself in his own healing, to be a participant in the miracle. The clay—ordinary dirt Jesus would later wash off the disciples' feet at the Last Supper—is an unlikely ointment. There is nothing special, nothing holy, about it. Its treasure is hidden until called forth by the Savior.

Moses learned a thing or two about treasure hidden in rocks while he traveled in the wilderness with the children of Israel. When they were hungry, the Lord provided manna. When they were thirsty, the Lord gave them water, but not in bottles. Instead, Moses struck a rock in Horeb, and drinkable water gushed out. It must have been more precious than rubies in that dusty, dry climate.

Then there is the story of the brother of Jared, who built barges to carry his people to the promised land. The barges had no source of light, and the brother of Jared knew that the journey would be frightening and oppressive in such a close, dark space. So he gathered sixteen small stones, that were “white and clear, even as transparent glass” (Ether 3:1) and asked the Lord to touch them so that they would shine forth in the darkness. When the finger of the Lord did, the ordinary stones were illuminated, preventing the Jaredites from having to make this journey in the dark. These glass stones were not geodes, but they certainly carried the treasure and comfort of light within them.

The finger of the Lord might touch the stones in our lives, too, bringing us comfort on the sometimes dimly lit journey of mortality. More likely, his finger might touch the shoulder of one of those good people who keep the world from imploding. His touch might prompt them to compassion on the bookmobile, appreciation at the post office, encouragement at the baseball diamond, or exquisite care at the sixth-grade egg drop. His touch might remind us to be one of those people for someone else. It might split the rock of our lives so that the unexpected inner sparkle becomes visible.

Some of us might be like the brother of Jared’s glass stones, illuminating and comforting in a dark time and place. Some of us might be like the rock in Horeb, helping someone obtain the thing she needs most, like water in the desert. Some of us might be like the common clay that, when mixed with holy spittle, becomes a healing salve. Some of us might be like the geodes that are native to these parts, with an ancient void inside that we fill with hidden treasure of forgiveness and hope rather than bitterness or gall. As Isaiah noted, “We are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand” (Isa. 64:8).

I think Isaiah must have liked geology, as he also recorded these words:

I will lay thy stones with fair colors, and lay thy foundations with sapphires.

And I will make thy windows of agates, and thy gates of carbuncles, and thy borders of pleasant stones.

And all thy children shall be taught of the Lord; and great shall be the peace of thy children. (Isa. 54:11–13)

This scripture calls to my mind a great rock garden full of an endless variety of geologic treasures, no two alike. It is a place of order and beauty and peace. It is a place where people can learn to sing the songs of Zion, even in a foreign land of geodes and limestone and clay. It is place where the finger of the Lord may tap us on the shoulder, where we might serve one another and strive to be among those for whom the world might more justly be renewed. It is a place of hidden treasures, of quartz crystals tucked inside rough-hewn rocks like you and me.

#### Note

1. Rachel Naomi Remen, *My Grandfather's Blessings: Stories of Strength, Refuge, and Belonging* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2000), 8–9.

## CONTRIBUTORS

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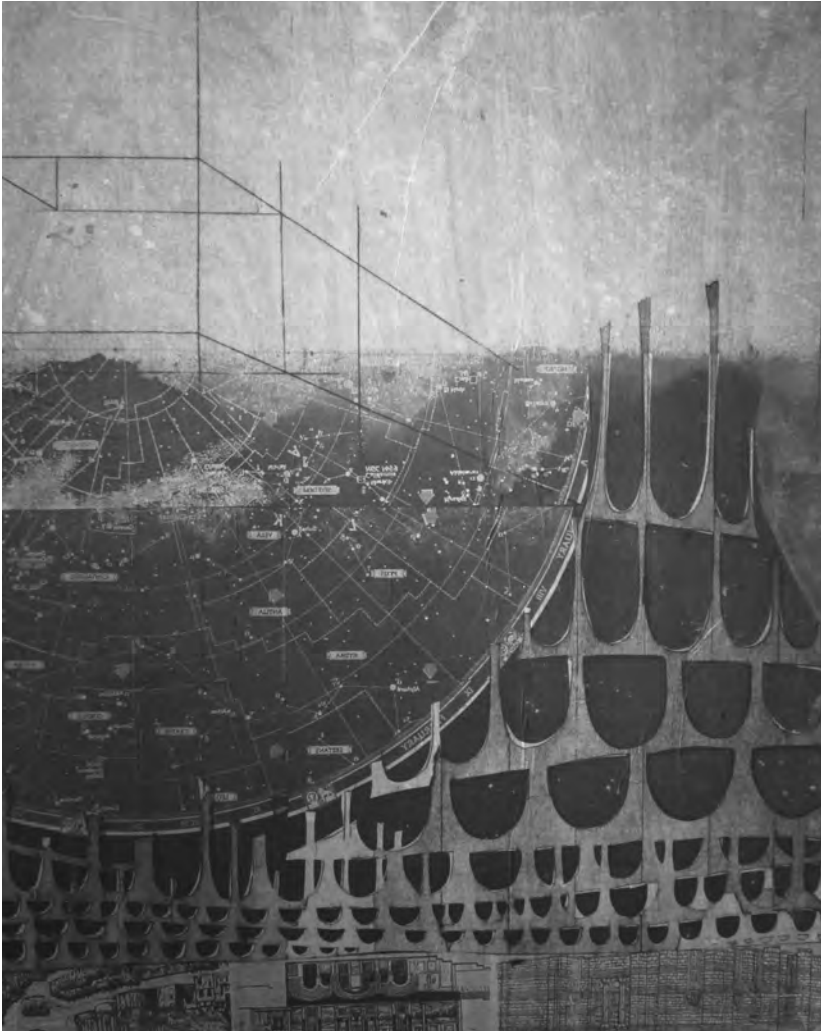
lumbia River in Washington, where their six children grew, always savoring ties and excursions to the farm in Wyoming.

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ROGER TERRY {rkt56@byu.edu} is senior associate editor at *BYU Studies*. He spent seven years as a senior editor at LDS Church Magazines and nine years on the faculty of BYU's Marriott School. He has written five books, including *God's Executioner* (Springville, Utah: Cedar Fort, 2005) and *Economic Insanity: How Growth-Driven Capitalism Is Devouring the American Dream* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 1995). He and his wife, Sheri, live in Orem, Utah, and have four children.





Bret Hanson,  
*Underworld*,  
cyanotype, drypoint, 24"x 32",  
2008.

## ABOUT THE ARTIST

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I [Bret Hanson] was born in Blackfoot, Idaho, and raised in a religious home. Both the physical and spiritual landscapes of my youth have an impact on my work. Stars in the night sky, flat farmland, and the Rocky Mountains nearby all helped shape the way I interpret my surroundings. I was fascinated with space and flight and wanted to be a pilot and transcend this world. There has always been a strong sense of striving to return to God's presence and navigate through the trials of this life to achieve eternal life.

Religious symbolism plays a prominent role in my thought process as a Mormon artist. The architecture of Mormonism, such as our church house and temples, was also important to me. Temples are adorned with symbols of the cosmos as well as compasses and squares, which symbolize keeping one's life in order and charting a path towards God.

Geometry has been historically tied to spirituality. The Star of David consists of two triangles, one pointing upwards and the other pointing down. This is symbolic of God's interaction with human beings and our attempt to become more like God. The triangle can also symbolize a mountain, which in turn is a symbol of the Lord's temple.

Imagery such as star-maps and constellations are used to reference the cosmos as well as ideas of creation and spiritual navigation. The cyanotype technique is used as a visual metaphor for the concepts of design and invention, which include supreme design as well as human beings' potential for innovation and creation. The blue color of the star chart also reads as the sky, so that the map of the sky becomes the thing for which it is a symbol. The color also references the backgrounds of Byzantine mosaics (and frescos).

Flat paintings and props employ our imagination to convince our minds of actual spaces. Stage sets are symbolic representations of larger spaces. There is also play between the ideas of negative and positive spaces. Embracing the ironies of positive/negative, and flat/voluminous spaces creates visual tension and interest. Arranging visual elements in this way turns the process of printmaking into a form of collage. Overlapping layers of transparent ink and paper allow me to create content in which the sum of all the parts transcends any of the individual ones, much like

the way that tracks are mixed on a musical record. It is a sort of visual alchemy.

In this work, I have been striving to create a new mapping system, a way to synthesize map-like language into a visual record of my life. By extracting certain lines and shapes from maps and architecture, I can reference both of those worlds, but fragment them enough that the result is that of a more personal mapping language. The fragmentation of imagery also adds to the content as a reflection of the image-saturated, multi-media world in which we live. As a counter-balance, there are empty, quiet spaces that allow room for reflection and personal interpretation.

I am creating a channel that enables the movement through space and time. The spaces I deal with are the plates on which I carve or the papers on which I print. Each mark that is engraved or imprinted becomes a visual record of my time here. In this way, the prints become maps of the spaces in my mind, documentation of my life, and a way for the viewer to share in my journeys.

I received a BFA in fine arts (printmaking) from Utah State University in 2004 and an MFA in fine arts (printmaking) from the University of New Mexico in 2008.



Bret Hanson,  
*Neither Here nor There*,  
cyanotype, collagraph and chin-colle,  
11"x 9",  
2008.