

# DIALOGUE

a journal of mormon thought



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# DIALOGUE

a journal of mormon thought

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## LETTERS

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### *Edwin Firmage Responds*

I appreciate Kate Holbrook's willingness to give a serious reading ("A Sacrament of Stewardship," 43, no. 4 [Winter 2010]: vi–xii) to the articles by me and by my wife, Carrol ("Light in Darkness: Embracing the Opportunity of Climate Change" and "Preserves," 43, no. 3 [Fall 2010]: 100–127, 128–66). She raises several interesting issues, which, in another context, might be worth debating.

For me, though, and I think also for Carrol, only one thing really matters. Each of our pieces tries to evoke a sense of what the LDS Church has lost in its headlong rush to assimilate into the capitalist American mainstream. Chief among the casualties has been the commitment to building Zion in anything but ideological terms. For most Church members today, I believe, building Zion is synonymous with growing the Church. But these two concepts are *not* synonymous, as life in Utah demonstrates. Nowhere else is there a similar concentration of LDS population and power. And yet Utah does not lead the nation or the world in any of those dimensions of life that could be counted as essential steps toward a Zion society. This discrepancy lies at the heart of my article on the prophetic Zion ideal; and unfortunately, I don't think I really got this point across.

One of my most important assertions is that the key to building Zion in our time is a timely and appropriate response to climate change, which, if it is anything like what the science is telling us, *is* the biggest moral issue of all time and, therefore, an issue on which

the Church, if it is serious about building a moral society, must take a bold and vocal stance. In doing so, the Church will necessarily take other steps that are the kinds of steps we must take anyway if we are serious about building Zion. These steps include a radical reappraisal of how we relate to the environment and to each other.

I can only lament that *Dialogue* chose not to publish my entire article. In the sections that are available only online (see the blog section at <http://www.edwinfirmage.com>), I illustrate the gargantuan nature of the challenge we face with climate change and offer some correspondingly bold suggestions for what the Church could do to help prevent it. Given the scope and depth of these recommendations about climate change and environmental stewardship, Holbrook's mention that Brigham Young University includes an hour-long devotional each week in its academic schedule (ix) is beside the point.

I'll be impressed by the Church's commitment to stewardship of the earth when every Mormon building and business runs on clean power generated on-site. It is true that the Church, on April 27, 2010, announced a pilot project of four solar-powered chapels in Farmington and Eagle Mountain, Utah; Apache Junction, Arizona; and Logandale and Pahrump, Nevada ("Solar-Powered Construction Design Gets 'Green' Light from Church Leaders," [—  
v](http://newsroom.lds.org/ldsnewsroom/eng/news-releases-stories/solar-</a></p></div><div data-bbox=)

powered-construction-design-gets-green-light-from-church-leaders [accessed February 6, 2011]). But characteristically, the Church is rolling out its solar agenda in a quiet, measured way that will take too long and that misses the chance to speak about the *gospel* of solar power to people in Utah who still don't even believe that climate change is real.

Holbrook raises other points about the social gospel that are essential to Zion. Again, my reaction is similar. I'll be impressed, for example, by the Church's commitment to equality when it launches a national campaign to eliminate minimum wage in favor of a living wage and when it militantly defends the right of workers to organize and equally militantly attacks the employers that exploit them.

On these and many other issues central to the moral gospel, the Church could make dramatic statements and take dramatic action without in any way violating its mandate as a nonpolitical, religious institution. Instead, it invariably chooses the quiet, evolutionary way (if it chooses to say or do anything). And, of course, it continues largely with business—and I do mean business—as usual. While the earth desperately needs governments and businesses to invest massively in clean energy, the Church has chosen instead to invest what is reputed to be \$1.5 *billion* on a downtown shopping center. The Church's Downtown Rising project is certainly a dramatic statement, but not against the excesses of capitalism or for social justice and certainly not about climate change. The disparity between the principles

of gospel teaching and Church practice could not be better illustrated.

Kate Holbrook's response to our articles was thoughtful, kind, and soft-spoken. I appreciate these qualities in academic discourse, but my piece is not an academic exercise. Like my life at this point, it is unabashedly activist. Those qualities of deliberateness and softspokenness, otherwise so appealing, now drive me up the wall.

I find myself increasingly frustrated by the lack of urgency, especially in circles such as our universities and churches where activist energy should be electric and world-changing. During the 1960s, America's universities and churches were in an uproar over the war in Vietnam. The uproar was warranted. In climate change, we face a challenge that makes the Vietnam War vanish into insignificance; but our churches and universities are largely silent as centers of activism.

Climate change is the biggest and most urgent problem in human history. Addressing it appropriately will take the biggest, most concerted, and most urgent effort in history. And for the Church at least, the way to focus this effort is to reembrace the Zion ideal. If my piece inspires others to think and, most importantly, to act along this line, then it will have accomplished its purpose. If not, nothing else anyone has to say about it matters.

Edwin Firmage Jr.  
Salt Lake City



*Editor's Note:*

Regrettably, a typographical error appeared in a crucial symbol in Eugene Kovalenko's "Mind-Changing Fall Issue," *Dialogue* 44, no. 1 (Spring 2011): ix–x. The relevant portion should read:

Experience is one thing; explaining it is another. And I couldn't help thinking in terms of a corollary to

Heisenberg's celebrated uncertainty principle:  $\Delta\Sigma \bullet \Delta E \approx K$ , where  $\Delta$  = uncertainty,  $\Sigma$  = experience,  $E$  = explanation, and  $K$  = some kind of Kairos (not chronos) constant. This means that, if one must explain something *exactly* (i.e., no uncertainty or  $\Delta E = 0$ ), it will be done at the expense of *any* experience (i.e.,  $\Delta\Sigma = \infty$ ).



Mary Toscano,  
*A Light*,  
graphite, watercolor and gesso on  
paper, 22"x 30",  
2010.

# Why Nature Matters: A Special Issue of *Dialogue* on Mormonism and the Environment

*Steven L. Peck*

I became active in the Church while I was serving in the U.S. Army, stationed in Germany in the late 1970s. I was just starting to feel my way around the gospel and had come to the German Alps to attend a single adult conference. The conference was a powerful reorientation into the Church; but one day, I decided to dodge a few sessions because I wanted to hike a trail someone had recommended. It was supposed to be lovely—winding through high alpine meadows and meandering through dense forests still fairy-tale dark and old. And it was. The woods were quiet and serene, capturing a mood of stillness. A reverence. I passed few people, but I did not feel alone. A presence was with me, sheltering me, being in attendance with me, sharing something that seemed to fill the air with promise. I felt contented and happy.

Through the forest I climbed; and finally as I rounded a corner, a landscape opened before me that can only be described, lamely, as breathtaking. But it was. My sense of awe and wonder stole the air from my lungs. Meadows, patches of forest, craggy peaks covered in glaciers and moraine—all disclosed themselves suddenly and forcefully, overwhelming me. Shrinking me and at the same time enlarging me. The presence I had felt in the forest seemed to swell and fill and expand. I felt the presence of God in ways I had never felt before. And there was no doubt in my mind that it was He. Gratitude bubbled up. I felt the need to pray for-

mally, not recognizing that I was already praying in real and significant ways at that moment. I scrambled off the trail, knelt behind some small shrubs and forbs, and communed with that Deity who had just made Himself known to me in powerful, new ways. Mostly, however, I struggled to express thanks.

On the way down I ran into some people, who recommended I take a different trail back. It would lead me into another village from which I could catch a bus back to the city where I was staying. I was still feeling buoyant from my experience on the mountain. As I strode down the trail, I happened to see a wrapper of some sort on the ground. I picked it up. It did not belong there. As I went farther, I picked up a few more. It seemed strange to me that I was finding so many items. What a bunch of litter-bugs had been slouching up this trail! My handful had become an armful, and I was growing concerned. There was just too much trash. In the last hundred yards or so, I had picked up a lot! Then I rounded a corner, not unlike the corner I had rounded a few hours ago, except with the opposite effect. I was dumped into a local trash heap. Garbage was everywhere—maybe a foot deep and fifty yards square. Again I was overwhelmed and breathless, but in a different way. All the trash I had picked up fell from my arms. I fled into the village, my joy and gratitude shattered into irate, fetid rancor. How could they ruin my experience so completely? I wondered.

I think it was the contrast between these two experiences that indelibly wrote on my mind the connection between nature and God with a double underscore that our awareness of Him can be conditioned on how we treat and honor the earth we have been given. We need nature. Our physical bodies emerged from deep natural processes, derived through long and profound ecological interactions. Our spirits joined with physicality for a purpose. This physicality. This ecologically embedded physicality. I refuse to believe that it was just the particular shape that was important to these bodies, as if the spirit merely needed a three-dimensional matter contour. Our physical body goes all the way down and includes a rich evolutionary history that has stamped it with this earth's way of being in the universe. Likewise, I think this particular physicality is necessary to our eternal way of being. I also believe that the natural world matters in ways beyond just providing a source of the raw material we need to grind through our physi-

cal existence. The creatures and processes are not just a means to an end but are part of who God is and what He wants us to become.

John H. Walton, an Evangelical scholar who teaches Bible studies at Wheaton College, has written that the ancient Israelites did not understand the Genesis account of creation as a story about material creation but rather as a functional description of God's setting up a temple. In essence, the creation story was an account of God's taking possession of a temple. Walton argues that the prophet writing Genesis 1 would have understood the seventh-day activities, in which God "rests," not as a well-deserved break, but as the final act of the temple dedication ceremony when God proclaims His temple acceptable and takes possession of it as His own.<sup>1</sup> Something about that view rings true in my LDS soul. However, if the earth is a temple, what obligations of respect and care does that understanding impose on us?

As I write these reflections in the early twenty-first century, we are facing daunting ecological uncertainties. Scientists are documenting global changes in the earth's climate and projecting models that consistently show that things will get worse. As an ecologist, I feel that most frightening are the changes we are seeing on the ground in almost every ecosystem—from alpine regions to oceanic systems. It is hard not to feel bent by pessimism. Currently, at least in the United States, I sense little awareness or concern about this ecological crisis, in part, I suppose, because we are isolated from ecologies. Even though they undergird all of our support systems, from the great scales of regional weather patterns that affect our ability to grow crops, to the small scales of coral reef organisms, ecologies are changing. What this means for future generations no one can say. I wonder what someone reading this a hundred years from now will think of us.

But I am not without hope. Religions have always created a sense that our future matters. They have given us the impetus to look beyond our selfish and short-term obsessions and desires toward broader and more eternal horizons. Mormonism is rich in its doctrines, scriptures, and perspectives that reveal the importance of nature and our place in it. In this issue, multiple authors explore the Mormon/environmental landscape. I'm excited that this conversation is taking place.

George Handley's noteworthy and timely paper, "Faith and the Ethics of Climate Change," explores both the science and some of the implications of climate change. Handley is one of Mormonism's most gifted environmental thinkers. In his article for this issue, he explores how ideology has confused and confounded the conversation about climate change: "It behooves us then to identify the kinds of stories, beliefs, and theologies within religious culture that can attend to the contingencies and chaos that lie at the heart of our current environmental crisis," Handley argues. And he does just that in a convincing and well-thought out proposal for LDS engagement. Central to his paper is reading the Book of Moses from the Pearl of Great Price with an eye to how deeply our LDS scriptures ask us to dig down in considering our obligations to nature and all of creation. Rod Fergus reviews Handley's new book, *Home Waters: A Year of Recompenses on the Provo River*, in this issue, while Adam S. Miller writes a personal meditation responding to the same book.

Craig Galli, in "Enoch's Vision and Gaia," compares the Enoch tradition with modern environmental discourse about looking at the earth as a whole. While not demanding that Latter-day Saints embrace the Gaia hypothesis, he sensitively appraises its claim—that the earth is a complex living organism—in the context of LDS theological understandings and commitments. What if the earth is an animated living thing, as LDS scriptures and prophetic discourse seems to suggest? What obligations of stewardship does that suggest?

Bryan V. Wallis, in "Flexibility in the Ecology of Ideas," examines the work of anthropologist Gregory Bateson and argues that LDS theology has always been grounded in an epistemology that is "flexible and constantly evolving." Wallis draws on Bateson's work to point out that, among the hallmarks of a thriving and living theology, are continual modifications and updates in how people engage with the world. In contrast, systems that privilege inflexibility and rigidity create brittleness and are easily broken.

Jason M. Brown in "Whither Mormon Environmental Theology?" steers a course between two modalities that have tended to shape LDS discourse: that the earth is either a supermarket—there just to fulfill human needs—or that it is a scenic backdrop for the real theatrical event. In this paper, he critically examines both the



“stewardship” tradition and the “vitalistic tradition,” each with its proponents among past and current LDS General Authorities and scholars. He argues that the vitalistic tradition has much to offer in framing LDS theological commitments and providing a morality of the environment.

Bart H. Welling explores the critical ethical demands imposed by Mormon theology and history about “the question of the animal,” particularly the conflict between seeing nature as a “peaceable kingdom” and a “howling wilderness.” Welling’s contextualization of the Mormon example in the larger cultural context defines a particularly fruitful field for exploration and new understandings.

Poet and writer Patricia Gunter Karamesines’s “Why Joseph Went to the Woods” issues a call for deeper engagement in nature. She asks: Where is the Mormon nature writing?—all the while providing a stunning example of it in this piece. She reminds us how often nature has played a role in prophetic discourse and in LDS experience. Often the Spirit is revealed and disclosed in the midst of natural settings and engagement, and these revelatory insights are perhaps most at home in poetry and other creative forms.

So take this issue outside. Sit down under a tree. And read. There are lots of important things to consider and act on. The future of your grandchildren may depend on it.

### Note

1. John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downer’s Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 72–78.

# Faith and the Ethics of Climate Change

*George B. Handley*

*We can only be ethical in relation to something we can see, feel, understand, love, or otherwise have faith in. —Aldo Leopold<sup>1</sup>*

The reach of environmental problems today urges us to consider more carefully how interdependent we are with one another and with the entirety of ecological processes across the globe. Environmental degradation has reached a scale that the otherwise forward-thinking conservationist Aldo Leopold had not yet imagined in 1949, making his call for a land ethic even more urgent to heed. However, we can only see, feel, understand, love, or otherwise have faith in those things that our experiences, culture, and values have taught us are real—or at least that help stimulate our minds to imagine.

History shows that human communities often fail to think in global terms because it brings unwanted complexity, uncertainty, and responsibility. In religious communities, such attitudes end up compromising religion's universal and cosmological reach because believers forego the needed expansion of their imagined sphere of responsibility. Climate change tests our culture's capacity to imagine the remote and often unseen threads of inter-connectivity that knit all human communities together and that make social and environmental concerns inseparable. This requirement, of course, means we need deep environmental awareness stimulated by direct experience as well as by a truly planetary imagination that acknowledges realities that lie beyond our lives. Moreover, climate change requires faith in our unique human capacity to live morally in the context of uncertainty that a newly expanded sense of community has created. What is needed, then, to

cultivate an ethics adequate to the problems we face is a restored sense of what it means to be a human being in the broadest of biological contexts and concomitant reinvigorated faith to consider the well-being of the entire human family and of the planet itself.

### **Learning to See the Unseen**

As a complex phenomenon that implicates all human communities and that has begun to drive the climate globally, anthropogenic climate change is unprecedented in human history and unprecedented in the demand it makes of us to be answerable to unseen, complex, and global processes of degradation.<sup>2</sup> Although all religions attempt to imagine and explain the correlation between human behavior and climate conditions, earlier assumptions about the environmental manifestations of this relationship were often understood as local, not global. Moreover, climate changes that resulted from human behavior were traditionally directly attributed to God, not humankind.

And culturally speaking, human populations were not aware until relatively recently in human history of the reach of the planet and its diversity of cultures and geographies. Even today in the age of satellites, aeronautical travel, and world geography, the human mind's capacity to assimilate the diversity of the world's peoples and climates remains a major obstacle to global ethics. For example, it is not uncommon for people to gauge their reaction to climate change politics merely on the basis of their own local experience, even though this is scientifically absurd. Consider, for example, that the Intermountain West in 2010 experienced an unseasonably cool summer in the midst of the most scorching summer recorded globally since records have been kept.<sup>3</sup> While the bumper sticker adage adjures us to "Think globally. Act locally," our capacity to imagine the global often derives from and rarely extends beyond the conditions of local experience.

Thus, it is not surprising that climate change has been relatively easy to deny or ignore altogether as a problem. Even the kind of heightened environmental awareness of one's home and region that Leopold hoped would stimulate a land ethic might not provide sufficient evidence or impetus to respond to the problems that climate change is causing. Modern life over the last 150 years has provided the means for a fortunate fraction of the

world's population to enjoy an unprecedented level of comfort, with increased mobility, larger shelters of controlled climates, and an extraordinary diversity of foodstuffs available at the modern grocery store. These circumstances have had no small influence on the way its beneficiaries have come to see their lives compartmentally, as a distinct reality, sheltered from the ravages of nature and separated from the deprivations of the world's poor. The modern citizen of the developed world, in Leopold's terms, is able to see, feel, and touch the humanmade world that is his or her home, but perhaps less likely to have interest or faith in social, geographical, or ecological realities that lie beyond the reassuring appearance of the comforts that modernity provides, especially when those realities challenge the perception that all is well.

The irony, of course, is that we are arguably more connected as a human family—affecting and being affected by communities across the globe—than at any point in human history, because the home economy has been globalized by industrialization, international trade, massification of production, and increased reliance on technology. Quality of life for any one individual, group, or nation has become inseparable from questions concerning the whole of the planet and the entirety of humanity. Moreover, because the modern way of life has compromised the atmosphere itself and thus destabilized the climate across the planet, it requires faith to believe in this complex web of interdependency that often seems invisible, intangible, or at least unreliably measurable.

Despite these narrowing tendencies in our ethics, globalization and climate change present a unique opportunity to resist the spiritually deadening effects of modernity and restore our values and faith to their original potency. If we are more capable of affecting large-scale damage to the planet, we are also called upon more than ever before to act collectively and on principle on behalf of the human family. Perhaps no Christian religion today offers a more direct scriptural account of the mandate to imagine our place in a world of unknown diversity. We read a direct condemnation of geographical chauvinism in the Book of Mormon when Christ chastises his Old World disciples for their “iniquity” in failing to understand that the “other sheep” not only included the Gentiles of the Old World but the millions of inhabitants of

the New World who were at the time entirely unknown to the Old World (3 Ne. 15:15–24). If it seems unfair to describe a people's capacity to imagine the unknown as a form of "iniquity," consider what it means in our Information Age to fail to concern ourselves with the millions of the earth's poor who live in close proximity to vulnerable coastlines, in drought zones, and in other areas already dramatically affected by climate change. To imagine, even insist, on ideological grounds that our consumption of natural resources cannot possibly be relevant to the well-being of others on the planet ignores the very foundation of the law of consecration.<sup>4</sup> What kind of imagination is required to conceptualize problems of unseen complexity and to act responsibly in the face of the challenge they present? To answer this trenchant question, we must examine the roots of climate change skepticism.

### **Political Ideology as Obstacle to Faith**

First, it is important to distinguish between principled and honest questioning and ideological and dogmatic denial. While the former is vital to the ongoing process of scientific discovery and of moral judgment and leads to dialogue, the latter is an enemy to learning and leads to self-confident mockery. Moreover, the latter position is motivated more by ideological and lifestyle preference than by deeply considered religious principles. Consider, for example, the profoundly irreligious confidence many have cultivated in progress and technology, which in turns inspires apathy or denial about the relationship between excess luxury and the plight of the poor or between wasteful living and the often remote or delayed environmental consequences of our way of life. Inspired by philosopher Hannah Arendt, ethicist Michael Northcott has argued that environmental apathy is at its root caused by the fact that we "defer [our] capacities for moral and political deliberation to the autonomous procedures of the market"<sup>5</sup> and to the promise of the next advance in technology. To the degree that we have ignored our responsibility to the world as a whole or have shrunk from the challenges that such responsibility poses to our modern values and way of life, we have not only lost touch with the earth but also with religious principles; we have, in other words, preferred ideology to theology and the arm of flesh to the arm of God.

In a way, this attitude is understandable. The material benefits of industrialization are patently and tangibly obvious, while its environmental costs are often delayed or remote enough to deny or ignore, at least for those who enjoy its benefits. Indeed, the denial of the connection between the burning of fossil fuels and the warming of the planet has arguably been most adamant in the world's most developed nation and greatest producer of carbon in the atmosphere—the United States. Several authors have documented a devastating and long history in this country of obfuscating scientific fact in the interest of maintaining the economic status quo.<sup>6</sup> Addiction to the idea of unlimited growth without restraint, an idea that took firm grasp of the American mind following the devastations of the Great Depression and World War II, is nurtured today by think tanks devoted to fabricating reasonable doubt about climate change and other evidence of the consequences of growth. This doubt, however, has not taken root in the developing world where the consequences of climate change are patently obvious to populations whose sustainability is vulnerable to local shifts in climate patterns.

Just to sketch the vulnerability I'm talking about, consider that 60 percent of the world's population lives within 100 kilometers of the ocean. In Bangladesh alone, the population is 140 million, 120 million of whom live near or on waterways vulnerable to floods. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) predicts that a mere 40 centimeter rise—a likely occurrence in the next century due to global warming—will see an increase in the number of people worldwide whose lands will be annually flooded from 13 to 94 million, almost 60 million in South Asia alone. Further, 1.3 billion people live in areas affected by glacial retreat; they are likely to experience increased flooding at first and then increased water shortages. About 50 million people will be subject to starvation with a 2.5 centigrade increase in temperature, which is a reasonable expectation by century's end if we do not make significant changes in our dependence on fossil fuels. An estimated 150,000 people are already dying every year due to climate change, not to mention the thousands who have been displaced by increased weather extremes.<sup>7</sup> The fact that the developed world is primarily responsible for the increase in carbon emissions, resulting in disproportionate suffering for the world's



poor, has led many theologians and religious leaders to conclude that improving access to renewable and clean energy sources and reducing our carbon footprint have moral urgency.<sup>8</sup>

Of course, the claim to moral urgency falls apart if we can convince ourselves that climate change perhaps doesn't exist, that it is immeasurably slow and therefore harmless, that it would be too expensive to do anything about it, or at least that there is no definitively proven link between fossil fuels and climate change. Or does it?<sup>9</sup> If climate change suggests the need for more modest and conservative consumption of natural resources and if it suggests the need for more creative and innovative use of all of the world's energy sources, then why the resistance to mitigation efforts?

If our addiction to fossil fuels is directly linked to what Thomas Friedman aptly calls "petrodictators"<sup>10</sup> across the world and to increased political instability, why is it not a form of patriotism to embrace the opportunity to make the world safer, cleaner, and more sustainable? A recent case in Kansas shows that people don't need a belief in climate change to be motivated to act in a way consistent with reducing the human carbon footprint. Instead, community leaders focused on "thrift, patriotism, spiritual conviction and economic prosperity" and thus motivated changes in behavior known to reduce contributions to greenhouse gases without saying a word about climate change.<sup>11</sup> In other words, much of what can be done to fight climate change is consistent with traditional Christian values of good stewardship and modest living. To the degree that we prefer to debate, yet again and ad nauseam, the comparative values of conservative and liberal approaches to governing instead of doing the hard work of living up to our environmental stewardship, we allow ideology to trump religious principle.<sup>12</sup>

Since the Kansas case reminds us that politically conservative values are not inconsistent with the theological principles of environmental stewardship, we might wonder what kind of theology we are using when we convince ourselves that the very possibility of something like anthropogenic climate change is absurd or of no concern. I can think of three main objections. First, some might say: "Worrying about human-caused climate change is absurd because we can always have confidence in unlimited growth and in the further development of technology as an answer to all

of our environmental problems. Stop moralizing about the market or trying to move it in any particular direction.” As indicated earlier, according to Michael Northcott, this is a symptom of a misplaced faith in the superstructures of liberal democracies, which have “[given] up on deliberation over ends, or on what kinds of taking up with the world make for a good society. Technological modernization sustains the illusion that it is possible to create procedures and policies that ensure that such good ends as justice or prudence can be achieved without the people being good.”<sup>13</sup>

This argument, in essence, claims that it is more important to advocate and live in unfettered freedom than to articulate and live up to responsibility. Not only do such attitudes ignore the many ways in which markets are already subject to incentives intended to maintain the status quo, but they also give carte blanche to its consequences. It is hard to reconcile such confidence in an invisible mechanism of the economy with the consistent moral critique of the human economy offered by Old Testament prophets who repeatedly decry civilizations that ignore the created world or abandon the vulnerable and the poor. Indeed, if we allow the market to be free of moral restraint, we abdicate responsibilities to deliberate about how or why the economy grows and what its impact on the poor and on the earth might be. We pretend that economics isn’t about human choices and human consequences. In other words, we have imagined our fate and well-being as radically separate from the well-being of others, as if no conditions of interconnectivity brought us together as part of the same community.

A second, equally theologically specious, kind of reasoning justifies inaction with a very different attitude. This reaction insists: “This is a problem of such complexity I can only throw up my hands and exonerate myself of any responsibility to do anything about it. God doesn’t expect me to be worrying about global problems and will forgive me for ignoring something I couldn’t have done much about anyway. It is not fair that driving my son to his soccer practices is somehow connected to the suffering of the world. Besides, to worry too much about it shows a lack of faith in God’s plan. Who am I to doubt His purposes?” Indeed, I have heard some ask: “If the earth is going to die anyway, why should I bother taking care of it?” This apathy and insistence on inaction is

akin to urging “eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we resurrect.” It is utter nihilism offered in the name of religion.<sup>14</sup> Large, complex events have the feeling of inevitability about them, but they do not obligate us to accept them, especially if it is apparent that they harm the vulnerable. Jesus warned: “It must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!” (Matt. 18:7).

It takes faith to act on principle, even—and especially when—there is no tangible or immediate evidence that we are making a difference, which is to say that if we were collectively committed and proactively working to alleviate poverty and to care for the creation, our differing views of the proper role of government, or of the United Nations, Al Gore, and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change would not have the power to stop principled and faith-based action. Faith is relevant here because, if climate change proves to be false or vastly overstated as many skeptics hope, and if the current unanimous view of every major scientific organization in the world on anthropogenic climate change proves to be based on massive and widespread error, we will have at least acted on good principle. That’s a wager that seems far more religiously principled and far less reckless than the leap of faith it takes to actively dismiss every corroborating fact across the globe and across the wide spectrum of the sciences to retain dogmatic confidence that the theory of human-caused climate change is a colossal mistake.

I have also heard some say: “Why would God allow something like that to happen?” This is a bad application of a good theological question. Spontaneous abortions, sudden infant death, and birth defects happen, to name just three examples, and are much more challenging to consider theologically, so it hardly seems rational to dismiss a human-caused problem on theological grounds. Some Mormons might wonder why the very technologies that allow the prophet to travel across the world or missionary work to go forward must now be considered harmful. The horse and buggy made progress possible in their own day, but now we have also seen the wisdom of no longer putting manure in our streets. The fact that fossil fuels still exist is not a theological mandate to continue to make use of them. While the abundance of cheap fossil fuels has made modern life possible, are there not

also abundant supplies of geothermal energy, sunshine, and wind? Why are they also not considered God-given for our use?

What we should not be ashamed to admit—and what religion certainly can stand behind—is the idea that we need to repent of our excess consumption and our luxury uses of fossil fuels. Again, a comparison between the ideological and materialistic values that justify doing nothing and the Christian faith to live according to values of modest living, concern for the poor, and respect and care for the created world shows clearly that there is little room or need for dogmatic denial.

I have occasionally heard fellow LDS members wonder why, if climate change is such a big problem, we haven't heard more from Church leaders on the question. While the silence of the LDS Church on this question is perplexing, it would be looking beyond the mark to conclude that this means climate change is not a serious issue that should concern members. The Church made no formal announcement that we should worry about what was happening in Darfur, for example, but that was not an excuse to remain ignorant or indifferent. No statement was read over the pulpit when the Church acted on behalf of flood victims in Pakistan. What should be our inspiration is the fact that doctrines throughout the restored gospel point us to careful stewardship over natural resources and that the Church has taken revolutionary steps recently to green its architecture, putting it in the very vanguard of religious institutional action on behalf of climate change.<sup>15</sup> As modern revelation reminds us, "It is not meet that I [the Lord] should command in all things" (D&C 58:26).

I do not mean to suggest that it is our religious duty to believe that climate change is real and human-caused, but it is our duty to inform ourselves as honestly and as carefully as we can and to respect those who act out of deep concern for the issue. One of the first clues that religious-minded skeptics are allowing ideology and not religious principle to be their guide is how often they employ nouns such as "alarmist" and "extremist" to describe—and hence to dismiss—as if by definition, anyone crazy enough to believe that climate change is human caused. If we insist that anthropogenic climate change can't be real simply because in our minds it can't be possible, we will never be in a position to assess data rationally. Moreover, if we can't make a reasonable distinc-

tion between an alarmist and a concerned citizen, then the charge of alarmism is meaningless.

It seems rational and within the realm of theologically defined responsibility to disagree about policy matters or about which end of the spectrum of possible outcomes is worth our greatest attention, but to dismiss the science outright because it conflicts with or presents complications for a worldview that has largely been shaped by economic, partisan, or ideological values is neither religious nor ethical.

### **The Dialectic of Faith**

Perhaps part of the problem in mustering faith sufficient to respond to global climate change is a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of faith itself. Faith acquires meaning in a dialectic relationship to uncertainty. If we stipulate that climate change calls for a capacity to imagine the known world as part of a much broader whole that is not yet visible or accessible by direct experience but one that we are answerable to, then we might describe faith as a poetic capacity, one that allows us to see our place in the world humbly, as contingent upon a greater and as yet still unknown whole of interdependent relationships. Moral action similarly acquires meaning in a dialectic relationship to uncertainty and in the context of interdependence.

Moral action is, by definition, courageous because it is a genuinely free choice to take the risk of faith; it shows a willingness to act, even and especially when we don't have guarantees about the outcomes of our action, because we feel answerable to a broader, though not perfectly comprehended, set of relationships. As Leopold noted, "All ethics so far evolved rest upon a single premise: that the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts."<sup>16</sup> This is one reason why religious faith is not only compatible with dealing with a problem like climate change, but indispensable in doing so, since it is in the business of cultivating this kind of morality. Religious faith is no guarantee that we cannot be wrong about the world, as evidenced by Christ's chastisement of his Old World disciples, but this risk is not sufficient reason to dismiss religion's relevance or to categorize religion as the opiate of the deluded. It is not less religion that we need, but deeper and more

careful consideration of our contingent understandings of the world which faith asks us to learn to live with.

To have faith is to inhabit that space between what we know and what we might know at some future point; it is not an expression of human certitude but an expression of trust in God's knowledge. It is to accept, as King Benjamin puts it simply, that "man doth not comprehend all the things which the Lord can comprehend" (Mosiah 4:9), which may be one reason why continual revelation is necessary. Similarly, novelist and essayist Marilynne Robinson posits that religious faith cannot be reduced to a system of assertions about ultimate realities; instead it is a trust in an ultimacy that remains beyond our full cognitive grasp but that nevertheless generates a rigorous rethinking, rereading, and reconsideration of our most basic impulses and assumptions. In an interview, she described faith as "trying to understand at a level that almost absents you from what you were trying to understand."<sup>17</sup> She further argues that, in its addiction to a secular and materialist confidence in progress, our civilization has lost such faith. Because of the seductions of modernity, civilization fails to value distrust, self-chastening, or confessions of ignorance, all of which are fundamental to religion. The result has been increasing levels of epistemological certainty about the nature of the world and of our humanity, what Stanley Fish calls "a naive and untenable positivism."<sup>18</sup> Religious faith can offer in the stead of radical certitude such principles and values as modesty, humility, mercy, justice, and stewardship that can guide us meaningfully through a complex and sometimes uncertain universe.

Jeremiads of moral certitude are, of course, not uncommon for environmental writers who see stakes so high that only a browbeating from a loin-clothed prophet will do. However, if environmentalism does not also have room for the kind of profound self-questioning that religion motivates, it closes the door on its own moral argument. Such problems as global warming or species extinction are moral issues precisely because there is a margin of uncertainty in what the science presents; they require the *risk* of judgment to determine and assess the comparative effects of our choices, which means that they also require us to rely on religious principles and values. If the picture is so clear that no judgment is required, then environmentalism is reduced to mere rhe-



torical battles about information and regulations and nothing more. We then encourage a perpetual circulation of the same wholly redundant information and diminish the chances for genuine learning.

When environmentalism is offered as a form of radical certainty about the world, it becomes just another form of “technology” that provides solutions to human problems through mechanized means, obviating the need for honest deliberation. This means that climate change can be rhetorically debunked with even the slightest hint of inconsistency or contradiction in the science. Such debunkings belie the fact that science is by nature a process of investigation; its findings are myriad and complex and must always be placed in contingent context. If we demand that science provide radical certainty, there will never be enough evidence to motivate any change and we fall back on ideological preference.<sup>19</sup> As a society, we are no longer in the habit of learning about and responding to new empirical realities, since information is increasingly mediated and disseminated by partisan factions. And if we have abdicated the responsibility to honestly investigate and deliberate about an issue by surrendering our thinking to packaged ideologies, we will be tempted to believe that we are already in possession of a complete picture, on the one hand, or that we can never have enough information before we act, on the other. The inevitable result is a morass of uninformed inaction and angry certitude that compromises the health of democracy.

It is imperative to understand that ecosystems are not machines and human actions are not the equivalent of coins dropped in their slot to get our bag of chips. An inherently harmonious and knowable structure in nature was initially what ecology seemed to offer. Donald Worster has suggested that, whereas ecology was “basically a study of equilibrium, harmony, and order” in its beginnings, now “it has become a study of disturbance, disharmony, and chaos.” Initially, the notion of ecosystems suggested the idea of a “superorganism” and the promise of meaning and manageability if we could but learn to live in balance and cooperation with natural laws. But as we observe the operations of complexly interconnected systems, he continues, we are learning that “change is without any determinable direction and goes on forever, never reaching a point of stability.” The world appears to be

asking us to act in faith, without foreknowledge or the assurance of predictability. As Worster remarks, "If there is order in the universe—and there will no longer be any science if all faith in order vanishes—it is going to be much more difficult to locate and describe than we thought."<sup>20</sup>

Environmentalism and religious faith alike must avoid unwarranted certainty about an inevitable trajectory of increasing degradation for humanity. Because our knowledge is always evolving, we may never be absolutely certain which actions restore the world and which actions ruin it. This caution does not mean that we should abandon the hard work of identifying the best course of action. Quite the contrary: It implies that working for a particularly desired end is, ultimately, an act of faith. Catholic ecotheologian John Haught has argued, for example, that understanding nature as "unfinished" and creation as ongoing and moving toward a promised future fulfillment and perfection with God makes us answerable to its telos. "The cosmos itself," he writes, "is an installment of the future, and for that reason deserves neither neglect nor worship, but simply the kind of care proportionate to the treasuring of a promise."<sup>21</sup> Eschatology can be a form of trust in the lawful way of the world without becoming a justification for asserting that we are in full possession of such knowledge or in full control of the process. Excessive and ideologically driven confidence in destiny often inspires indifference in the face of the world's suffering. It does not require judgment or the hard work of moral risk-taking; it appeals only to the panglossian mind that has grown tired of its own freedom and inspires acquiescence to the status quo.

Instead of offering faith as a dialectic that calls us to self-questioning and self-distrust and thus makes judgment a necessary risk, religion has sometimes seemed to offer the allure of radical certitude, even though this attitude negates life's requirement for moral judgment. As I suggested earlier, the existence of a moral universe requires that choices matter despite outcome, and that judgment must be exercised even (or especially) if we are not in possession of complete information. The notions of salvation and of condemnation can help to motivate an ethic that pertains to here and now; but too often religion, particularly the more superficial conceptions of Christianity, can offer eschatological visions

of the end of times that leave believers uninterested in the hard work of assuming responsibility for the direction of civilization.

In this way, religion has proven at times to be a major obstacle to good environmental behavior, but more hopefully, it has recently begun to provide powerful impetus for change. The sociological research on the role of religion in shaping environmental behavior remains mixed, however. Some studies suggest that there is a strong correlation between religious belief and anti-environmental sentiment. The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, for example, reports that 47 percent of all Americans believe global warming is real and human-caused. Fifty-eight percent of Americans who are unaffiliated with any religion, however, hold this belief. White mainline Protestants are on a par with the national average, but black Protestants and white Evangelicals show a precipitous decline—a mere 39 percent and 34 percent respectively. Despite these trends, we have seen a significant shift in rhetoric, tone, and attitude toward environmentalism within religious communities in recent years, with most religious communities showing some effort to improve institutional practice, religious leaders declaring the moral principles of sustainable living, and important and numerous publications, conferences, and forums in ecotheology.<sup>22</sup> While the record is still unclear about how much this official concern affects believers' practices and politics, signs seem to indicate an improvement. It is no longer the case, if it ever was, that environmentalists and believers represent two distinct groups.

It behooves us then to identify the kinds of stories, beliefs, and theologies in religious culture that can attend to the contingencies and chaos that lie at the heart of our current environmental crisis. As science has begun to describe our human impact on those workings in empirical language, we have also come to expect that science can provide an equally empirical map of where to go from here. We have what Daniel Sarewitz has called an "excess of objectivity" where we have grown accustomed to eschewing policies or philosophies that "favor adaptation and resilience over control and rigidity."<sup>23</sup> And as Michael Northcott adds, the supreme value placed on certainty only "obviate[s] the need for reasoned debate about probabilities and particular cases in moral deliberation."<sup>24</sup>

If secularization means that we forsake the need to act in uncertainty, to act with a suspension of disbelief, or what in religion is simply called faith, we will not have the means to act meaningfully and ethically in response to global climate change. Strict materialist atheism and religious fundamentalism are both attitudes of superstition, not forms of knowledge, since they presume to hold fast to a form of knowledge that is without the stains of an evolving, contingent, and incomplete human history.

What is now necessary is what Michel Serres calls a “diligent religion of the world,” an epistemology that refuses the specialization and balkanization of knowledge that secularism has created. The word “religion,” he reminds us, means to “assemble, gather, lift up, traverse or reread,” implying that if religion will prove helpful to our current environmental crisis, it must be a principle-oriented gathering of knowledge from any relevant epistemologies in the ethical interest of renewing the world.<sup>25</sup> Religion has to rethink its role and resist the balkanization that has become its refuge, which is one reason why a religious mind ought also to be a scientific one. Science, politics and current events, international affairs, human suffering, and environmental degradation raise an enormously wide range of questions that can bring out the very best in religious belief and practice if we are willing to treat them as religious questions.

While it might be assumed that making religion more relevant to the world requires relaxing the orthodox and universalist claims of religion to obtain a more open and secular outlook, faith is still necessary because it seeks to do the hopeful and hard work of binding together all knowledge. Faith, however, is irrelevant if it only wants the triumph of epistemological certainty or if it means that we can satisfy the demands of truth simply by assuming that, when doctrine and empirical reality seem to conflict, it can only mean that our interpretation of empirical reality is wrong. The same scrutiny should be brought to bear on our interpretation of doctrine, as Galileo’s case famously showed. Religiosity means taking all available information seriously, as potentially of moral import and therefore deserving of reverent and careful rereading, as the word “religion” implies. It means allowing religious principle to guide our catholic and interdisciplinary learning.

The real religious heresy is when believers become so lazy that they feel confident they can dismiss secular knowledge categorically and in knee-jerk fashion as mere falsehoods. While secularism has had a heyday criticizing religious fanatics as flat-earthers, for example, believers must make the religious case that such dogmatic attitudes are inherently irreverent, uncharitable, and irresponsible. By failing to make a religious case for openness to learning, religion becomes a scaffold to uphold our desire to be right instead of a ladder to motivate our aspiration to become good; and it seems unlikely that it will ever have the power to motivate social, political, and environmental transformation. So this is a problem within religion that needs to be fixed because, as I have been insisting, the crisis of global climate change is not only a crisis of the environment but also a crisis of culture that the ambitious and cosmic claims of a religion robustly interested in learning are well suited to redress. The complexity of the problem requires that the solutions we offer must meet the depth and range of the problems; they must be global, they must reach into the very marrow of how we define ourselves as human beings, into what we believe to be our place on this planet, and what, ultimately, is the meaning and nature of death, of dying, and of our biology. This is certainly too much to ask of capitalism, politics, science, and technology, but it certainly shouldn't be too much to ask of religion.

To the degree that religion remains resistant to the claims of science and other secular epistemologies, it calcifies in its claims of absolute knowledge and simultaneously turns its attention away from this world and toward another one beyond it. And to the degree that secular knowledge ignores religion or insists on a categorical differentiation between the sacred and the secular, it calcifies in its claims to absolute reliability but cannot explain why we should want to make one choice as opposed to any other or choose one end as opposed to any other. In this scenario, both religion and scientific knowledge are rendered ineffective in addressing the problems that confront us. What is needed, then, is a reading of religion that is informed by the questions that scientific findings raise about the workings of the world. In what follows, I hope to model such a reading.

### The Dialectic of Human Significance in LDS Belief

In the greening of various academic and religious fields that pertain to contemporary culture that has occurred over the last four decades—including philosophy, literary criticism, history, psychology, anthropology, and theology—what has emerged is a sustained and sobering discussion of the human place in the physical world. Much of this thought has focused on the first part of Leopold’s formula—seeking ways to increase human awareness of the physical and tangible presence and even the subjectivity of the more-than-human realm. The environmental argument of the past several decades has been that cultures which imagine human experience in the world as an *intersubjective* phenomenon are more likely to treat nature as a presence, not as an unfeeling object.<sup>26</sup> This approach has raised doubts about whether we can afford any longer to believe in the exceptionalism of humanity—that is, to see the world anthropocentrically or human-centered. Consequently, the push has been for worldviews that would teach our connection to and equality with all of creation—in a word, for a biocentric cosmology.

But in the rush to find antidotes to human hubris, our suspicion that we are unique and special within the created world has never entirely left us, since even the most hardened critic of humanity’s environmental failings has to acknowledge that we are at least unique in our capacity for destruction and, most importantly, in our capacity to deliberate about the morality of this fact. Since I suppose it isn’t a serious proposition of most environmentalists to convert the world to a doctrine of animism, it behooves the monotheistic traditions in the world to find sufficient reasons to trust in the living presence of the vast creation to temper our anthropocentric tendencies and thereby act responsibly. To the extent that some environmentalists reject human exceptionalism, environmentalism has become increasingly incapable of articulating the moral reasons for responsible stewardship, a fact that has sometimes alienated believers. In their attempt to reconcile the environmental aims of a biocentric philosophy with the most ancient and vital claims of religion about human exceptionalism, environmentally minded religious thinkers have begun to articulate a dialectic of human significance that I wish to argue, by way of conclusion, is con-

sistent with the LDS account of the creation. Indeed, it would seem that few, if any, religious traditions offer such a satisfactory dialectic between the experience of human nothingness that nature provides and the faith in human significance and responsibility that emerges from such experience.

The Mormon account offered in the Book of Moses and echoed in the temple makes it simultaneously clear that human beings are special, even unique, in the Creation and yet are also part of a vast and endless universe of planets and almost inconceivable biodiversity that should temper any hubris that the divine origins and destiny of humanity might inspire. The LDS account of the creation, then, seems to resist the polemics of choosing between a strictly anthropocentric or strictly biocentric account of humankind; it instead points us to a theocentric universe in which humanity plays a vital role in a web of biological complexity that teaches both the reasons for our profound humility and for our special moral responsibilities. LDS theology does not privilege spirit over body, heaven over earth, eternity over this moment in time, individuality over collectivity, transcendence over immanence but rather produces an ambiguous commingling of these categories—spirit and body, heaven *on* earth, eternity in an hour, the individual within the collective, and so on. We cannot designate concern for the well-being of the earth, of the body, and of animals, plants, and watersheds as irrelevant to our pursuit of salvation.

The idea of an embodied God stresses the centrality of earthly physical life. While Genesis teaches that we are created in the image of God, the Book of Moses states more explicitly that we are created in the image of the Savior. In Moses 1:6, the Lord tells Moses, “Thou art in the similitude of mine Only Begotten” and amplifies Genesis 1:27 with: “. . . in the image of mine only Begotten created I them” (Moses 2:27). We are created, in other words, in the image of a son of God who would take upon Him flesh to become the incarnate God. This distinction, though subtle, is important, since it points to the central idea that the human condition is a combination of the body and spirit, of the divine and the earthly, and that this combination is, indeed, the very nature and sphere of the Creator Himself, a being of flesh and bone, familiar with the intricacies of the Creation as well as with the sufferings



of the earthly condition. Of course, Mormon doctrine stipulates a Father of flesh and bone in any case, but these verses seem to clarify that our model is the same God who created the earth, assumed a body here, and suffered and sanctified the life of the body, perhaps culminating in that remarkable moment when Jesus eats fish and honeycomb with his disciples in a resurrected body (Luke 24:42).

Of course, it has often been assumed that this doctrine is incompatible with the story of evolution. Without getting into this important debate, suffice it to say that to exist in the body and to be in the image of God is not, in these verses, incompatible with the concept of being kin with the rest of creation. Because Mormon doctrine consistently asserts the holiness of the physical realm and the centrality of the body and of the earth to the divine destiny of humanity, it doesn't seem necessary to dismiss the evolutionary account out of hand, especially since it teaches the inherent complexity, diversity, and kinship of all living things. That the human mandate to reproduce is later echoed in God's commands to the rest of the earth's life forms suggests that the specialness of humanity is contextualized by biology's reminder of our belonging with all creation and the inherent value of all life forms. Moses 2:22, which echoes Genesis, reads: "And I, God, bless [every living creature that moveth]: Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the sea; and let fowl multiply in the earth." This divine command implies that biodiversity is its own good end. That the temple additionally suggests all living things' inherent right to joy in posterity advances an ethic of protecting biodiversity.

The diversity and immensity of creation, which by implication goes beyond even what Moses sees, is a cause for the most profound humility. Almost in the same moment that Moses learns of his divine parentage, he learns that God's creations are "without end" and that "no man can behold all my works, except he behold all my glory; and no man can behold all my glory, and afterwards remain in the flesh on the earth" (Moses 1:4, 5). In other words, as long as we are in the body and on the earth, even with the aid of the revelations that God grants to his prophet here, we can never comprehend the whole of God's creations. Our understanding of the specialness of our role must be couched within this broader,

imagined cosmos, an imagination which is the fruit of faith. God allows Moses to witness “the world and the ends thereof,” an experience of a global consciousness about which “he greatly marveled and wondered” (Moses 1:8).

The account further provides the clearest doctrinal basis for a kind of intersubjectivity we can experience in the physical world that neither denigrates the specialness of humanity nor the strangeness and diversity of the world. The cause of Moses’s wonder appears to be the extent and diversity of the created world but is also the deep intersection between the body and the spirit that runs through all creation. As Moses learns, “I, the Lord God, created all things, of which I have spoken, spiritually, before they were naturally upon the face of the earth” (Moses 3:5). Spiritual creation means that all living things—human beings, animals, and plants—are all “living souls.” This designation implies a kind of spiritual continuum or kinship that undergirds all life forms. Granted, it does not compromise the specialness of the human condition (created in the image of God), but it does suggest that the specialness of humanity is not categorical or all pervasive. It is an ambiguous specialness, and that ambiguity seems important to ethics. Precisely because we do not know exactly on what grounds we are equal to animal and plant life and on what grounds we are distinct, it seems we are placed in a constant state of wonder, a kind of uncanny spirituality, as if by looking into the mirror of nature, now we see ourselves, now we don’t.

We learn that the created world is designed, in part, for our aesthetic response and that appreciation for the strangeness and beauty of the created world should form the basis of human culture and should temper any tendencies toward unrighteous dominion. Before the fall, God commanded that all animals should come to Adam “to see what he would call them, and they were also living souls” (Moses 3:19). His dominion, in other words, begins with a creative act of naming and continues as a responsibility to ensure the healthy reproduction of all life.<sup>27</sup> We learn some of this responsibility from the temple, which clearly teaches the right of all living things to fulfill the measure of their creation and to have joy in their posterity. Curiously, Adam is commanded to “dress” and “keep” the garden and to avoid the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

The implications of the spiritual continuum in creation are enormous, especially with regard to the ethical treatment of animals; and while this aspect has been given some attention in Mormon scholarship, the significance of trees, for example, also as living souls has not been fully understood or explored. We are told that “out of the ground made I, the Lord God, to grow every tree, naturally, that is pleasant to the sight of man; and man could behold it” (Moses 3:9). The aesthetic value of contemplating trees and the allure of their always idiosyncratic and unique forms and colors are here placed in highest priority, as is the joy of gaining a relationship with creation, even before the value of use. It is only later that “man saw that it was good for food” (Moses 3:9). The implication is that language itself (and all of culture by implication) derives from this wonderful encounter with the strangeness of biological forms. Nature, in other words, is always central to our spiritual and cultural self-understanding, since it instructs us first about our own nothingness, a discovery that then tempers our acceptance of our significance. To the degree that we lose that sense of wonder or diminish our capacity for aesthetic pleasure, or degrade nature’s beauty beyond repair, we are compromising these vital spiritual recompenses of physical life.

There is no more profound expression of the inseparability of physical life and spiritual happiness than in the marvelous cosmic chiasmas Moses describes at the very heart of our human journey: “Ye were born into the world by water, and blood, and the spirit, which I have made, and so became of dust a living soul, even so ye must be born again into the kingdom of heaven, of water, and of the Spirit, and be cleansed by blood, even the blood of mine Only Begotten” (Moses 6:59). Born of the Spirit before coming to earth, we are born in the womb of blood and water. Spiritual birth is a sanctification of the biological conditions of life, an echo in reverse of the voyage from heaven through the birth canal, capped by the reception of the gift of the Holy Ghost. It is only fitting, then, that God would be of flesh and bone and that the earth itself, the very site of our sufferings, our biological evolution, our toil, and our separation from God, would become the place of return and restoration of our unity with God. So, too, it is fitting that the conditions of the Fall (working for food and survival, being subject to sexual desire, experiencing sexual union, and suf-

fering through childbirth and parenting), through the sanctification of the Spirit, are not the conditions of our alienation and separation from God as some forms of Christianity have it but part of what redeems us.

Indeed, if the Fall is a curse and a negative, lamentable event, Christianity would seem to see no hope embedded in physical life. Such a view is precisely why so many critics in environmentalism have taken aim at the Judeo-Christian tradition. To believe that this earth, this body, and this mortal existence are conditions merely to be suffered through in the hope of a better place and a better state is to argue implicitly against the need to concern ourselves with sustainable living. But Mormonism here presents a different view: that working for the health of this mortal existence is the means of truly becoming living souls. The evolutionary story of our emergence from the cell matter of the earth that once seemed so directly opposed to the story of the Creation now seems consistent with the idea that biological process and spiritual creation are not competing but cooperative processes. Indeed, it seems fitting that our bodies that evolved from dust, and blood, and the hard-scrabble struggle for survival over millennia—as evolutionary science seems to suggest—would ultimately be an image of a sanctified and perfect being, the very Son of God. There is something spiritually immanent about all biological accident and all biological process implied here.

I offer this thought as suggestive provocation, as an incentive to consider the need for us to be inherently interested in the workings of physical life, in the diversity of life forms, and in the ways in which physical life is not transcended by the spiritual but is rather informed by and informing of the ultimate verities of the spirit. Ultimately, to be human is not merely a biological story; we are not reduced to our origin and destiny as dust, but we are also given a temporary probation, like a tree, as a “living soul.”

After seeing the ends of the earth and the diversity of the creation, the exhausted Moses slowly recovers and avers in awe: “Now, for this cause I know that man is nothing, which thing I never had supposed” (Moses 1:10). If we are to recover an awareness of this kind of nothingness, we must learn to imagine a wholeness far beyond our experience, and to do this as I have been suggesting is an act of faith. We can be reassured that this ex-

perience of nothingness is a gift of a loving Father, the Creator of the universe, and not merely an empirical experience. Indeed, Moses's recovery of awareness of his own nothingness might sound like what some environmentalists have called for: a thorough debunking of the specialness of humanity. And yet Moses's discovery of his nothingness appears to be his unique human privilege, thus proving the dichotomy as false. Moses, along with all of God's children, is uniquely situated among God's creations to discover his own nothingness in relation to the complexity and beauty of the whole. Awe and wonder are his and our human privilege, not certain knowledge or possession. My reading is intended to show that the principles that should inform our environmental attitudes and that are our moral duty to act upon are deferential reverence and care for the processes that sustain that complexity.

Of course, the story also reminds us that Satan is intensely interested in distorting this sacred relationship to the Creation that is so central to our spiritual health and growth. Moses successfully resists Satan's temptation to worship him precisely because he understands his own value in proper spiritual and biological context. He asks Satan, "Where is thy glory, that I should worship thee? . . . I could not look upon God, except his glory should come upon me, and I were transfigured before him. But I can look upon thee in the natural man" (Moses 1:13–14). In other words, Moses here understands that the unique privilege of awe that comes from understanding our small but vital human place in the vast physical universe is not a merely biological fact, nor a fact that requires merely intellectual or natural understanding. It requires a spiritual transformation of our powers of perception to see with the eyes of faith, a kind of seeing that is a unique combination of the spiritual and the physical, a vivification of the human eye through spirit and blood. Only such a transformation allows him to strike the necessary and delicate balance.

Furthermore, Moses's power to resist Satan's attempt to pervert his relationship to this vast creation comes from a determination to learn more about the mysteries of the earth and our human place on it. In other words, Moses's resistance comes from two understandings. First, he does not deny his unique human station: "Behold, I am a son of God," he says (Moses 1:13). Sec-

ond, he recognizes his need for greater understanding: “I will not cease to call upon God, I have other things to inquire of him” (Moses 1:18). Consequently, Moses’s recognition of his nothingness is a powerful tool of resistance to Satan’s temptation to artificially elevate human significance and power. Satan’s interest here suggests why a problem as serious and as global as climate change demands our heightened moral attention, lest we succumb to false ideas about our place in and responsibility to the world.

In conclusion, the LDS account of the Creation teaches that we can identify spiritually valuable and ethical uses of natural resources because they are facilitated by and enhance our sense of wonder of our spiritual kinship with the whole of the earth, stimulate a desire for deeper knowledge, and respect biodiversity; only these kinds of acts (ecological restoration comes to mind) are spiritually holy and redemptive; they enact the conditions of a Fortunate Fall. Acts that decrease wonder teach us that nature is mere dead matter, stop our growth of understanding, or insist that there is no way to act in our human self-interest and in the interest of the web of life are profane, tragic, and therefore enact the unfortunate conditions of humankind’s profound alienation from God.

We deny the earth’s holiness when we assume that we have the promise that there is enough and to spare regardless of how we use earth’s resources or when we assume that, if the earth appears to be dying or suffering, we are supposed to let it happen. These attitudes are almost fanatical in their devotion to the instrumentality of nature; they see science merely as technology—as a certain means to use the world, not as the work of naming and building relationships to other living souls, or at least trying to imagine the earth on its own terms. They are also views that are bent on avoiding self-questioning and circumspection because they are uncomfortable with circumstances that demand judgment and action despite incomplete knowledge and high stakes. In their adherence to false certainties, these attitudes reject the need to engage our own moral agency. When religious beliefs are motivated by fear rather than love, they shield us from confronting the limitations and uncertainties that science sometimes inspires; when this happens, faith becomes unnecessary, ideology takes over, and religion does not live up to its claims of universality or morality.

As I have suggested, religion can either help or hurt in rising to the moral challenges of living on the earth, challenges that have perhaps existed from time immemorial but which global climate change has only recently spelled out that we can no longer avoid with impunity. The solution is not to declare that one knows the meaning of all things, but to remember that religion is a call to faithful and moral action on behalf of what we love, which is usually more important and far-reaching than what we can claim we know. It is our choice.

### Notes

1. Aldo Leopold, *A Sand Country Almanac* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 214.

2. In *The End of Nature* (New York: Random House, 2006), Bill McKibben argues that climate change has transformed the very meaning of nature as something we once imagined to be outside of human history but which is now within it. For further reading about the causes, range, and impact of climate change, see Timothy Flannery, *The Weather Makers: How Man Is Changing the Climate and What It Means for Life on Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 2001).

3. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) National Climatic Data Center, 2010 tied for the hottest year on record. See [http://www.noaanews.noaa.gov/stories2011/20110112\\_globalstats.html](http://www.noaanews.noaa.gov/stories2011/20110112_globalstats.html) (accessed February 15, 2011) and <http://www.grist.org/article/2010-08-17-summer-2010-is-breaking-heat-records-video/> (accessed October 15, 2010).

4. Of course, Doctrine and Covenants 104 makes it clear that this is indeed a form of iniquity. There is "enough and to spare," the Lord tells us, but He qualifies this promise: "It is expedient that I, the Lord, should make every man accountable, as a steward over earthly blessings, . . . [but] it must needs be done in mine own way. . . . Therefore, if any man shall take of the abundance which I have made, and impart not his portion, according to the law of my gospel, unto the poor and the needy, he shall, with the wicked, lift up his eyes in hell, being in torment" (vv. 17, 13, 16, 18).

5. Michael S. Northcott, *A Moral Climate: The Ethics of Climate Change* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2007), 6.

6. See, for example, Naomi Oreskes and Erik Conway, *Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Global Warming* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2010) and James



Hoggan and Richard Littlemore, *Climate Cover-Up: The Crusade to Deny Global Warming* (Vancouver, B.C.: Greystone Books, 2009).

7. Northcott, *A Moral Climate*, 18, 31, 158, 84. For an LDS perspective on the impact of environmental degradation on the world's poor, see Gary Bryner, "Theology and Ecology: Religious Belief and Environmental Stewardship," *BYU Studies* 49, no. 3 (2010): 21–45, and James Mayfield, "Poverty, Population, and Environmental Ruin," in *New Genesis: A Mormon Reader on Land and Community*, edited by Terry Tempest Williams, William B. Smart, and Gibbs M. Smith (Layton, Utah: Gibbs Smith, 1998), 55–65.

8. This is the argument, for example, of Northcott's book *A Moral Climate*; See also Lyndsay Mosely, ed., *Holy Ground: A Gathering of Voices on Caring for Creation* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 2009); and Roger Gottlieb's indispensable edited collection, *This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, Environment* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

9. Of course, the claim that fighting climate change is too expensive and will hurt the poor may very well be a principled and honest reason for skepticism; but if the hesitancy to move to action is based on the categorical denial of a link between consumption and the well-being of the rest of the world, such a position contradicts the fundamentals of Christian stewardship, especially as they are outlined in Doctrine and Covenants 104 and 49. If the hesitation comes from a preference for small government, then genuine dialogue, not denial, about the best solutions should ensue. As Gary Bryner, "Theology and Ecology," 41, has recently written: "Working out the details of political action requires compromise, patience, and time; environmental policies also tend to conflict with other pressing priorities. But our obligations to each other and to those who come after us cannot be discharged by our mere acceptance of worthy goals and true principles. Those obligations require that we plunge into the world of politics and work with others who may disagree with us on many issues in order to find common ground and workable solutions to the problems we face together."

10. Thomas Friedman, *Hot, Flat, and Crowded: Why We Need a Green Revolution and How It Can Renew America* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2008), 23.

11. Leslie Kaufman, "In Kansas, Climate Skeptics Embrace Cleaner Energy," October 18, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/19/science/earth/19fossil.html?ref=globalwarming> (accessed February 8, 2011).

12. For an exploration into how directly political ideology is linked to attitudes about climate change, see Michael Hulme, *Why We Disagree about Climate Change: Understanding Controversy, Inaction, and Opportunity* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2009); A. Leiser-

owitz, E. Maibach, C. Roser-Renouf, and N. Smith, *Global Warming's Six Americas, June 2010*, Yale University and George Mason University. New Haven, Conn.: Yale Project on Climate Change. 2010, <http://environment.yale.edu/climate/files/SixAmericasJune2010.pdf> (accessed October 15, 2011).

13. Northcott, *A Moral Climate*, 115; emphasis mine.

14. I have criticized the absurdity of this kind of logic before, as have others. See my "The Environmental Ethics of Mormon Belief," *BYU Studies* 40, no. 2 (Summer 2001): 187–211; and George Handley, Terry Ball, and Steven Peck, eds., *Stewardship and the Creation: LDS Perspectives on the Environment* (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2006).

15. Kristen Moulton, "LDS Church Shows Off Its New 'Green' Prototype," June 4, 2010, <http://www.sltrib.com/sltrib/home/49478671-73/church-lds-meetinghouse-davies.html.csp> (accessed June 6, 2010); An article that cites the LDS Church's advances in architecture in conjunction with the greening of Islamic architecture is Christina Koningisor's "The Ground Zero Mosque and the Greening of Faith," August 24, 2010, <http://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2010/08/the-ground-zero-mosque-and-the-greening-of-faith/61967/> (accessed October 15, 2010).

16. Leopold, *A Sand Country Almanac*, 203.

17. George Handley and Lance Larsen, "The Radiant Astonishment of Existence: Two Interviews with Marilynne Robinson, March 20, 2004, and February 9, 2007," *Literature and Belief* 27, no. 2 (2007): 132.

18. In response to atheists who wrote in to his blog to criticize religion's intolerance for doubt and dissent, Fish wrote: "What religion are you talking about? The religions I know are about nothing but doubt and dissent, and the struggles of faith, the dark night of the soul, feelings of unworthiness, serial backsliding, the abyss of despair. Whether it is the book of Job, the Confessions of St. Augustine, Calvin's Institutes, Bunyan's 'Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners,' Kierkegaard's 'Fear and Trembling' and a thousand other texts, the religious life is depicted as one of aspiration within the conviction of frailty. The heart of that life . . . is not a set of propositions about the world (although there is some of that), but an orientation toward perfection by a being that is radically imperfect. . . . So to sum up, the epistemological critique of religion—it is an inferior way of knowing—is the flip side of a naive and untenable positivism. And the critique of religion's content—it's cotton-candy fluff—is the product of incredible ignorance." Stanley Fish, "God Talk, Part 2," May 17, 2009, *Opinionator*, *New York Times*, <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/05/17/god-talk-part-2/> (accessed May 18, 2010).

19. This was painfully evident in my home state of Utah where, in

2010, the state legislature passed an anti-climate-change bill crafted to discredit the entire scientific community as corrupted by ideology, greed, and deception. After insisting on the unreliability of science and the “inconclusive” findings of climate science, the bill’s sponsor, Kirk Gibson, nevertheless disingenuously suggested that we should “let the science develop” lest we make “rash” decisions. At no point did the legislature offer a standard of scientific conclusiveness that would suffice for taking action, which is not surprising, of course, since the science is already overwhelmingly conclusive and corroborated across a diverse range of fields and upheld by every major national and international scientific society. For audio files of the floor debate and for the text of the bill, see <http://le.utah.gov/~2010/htmldoc/hbillhtm/HJR012.htm> (accessed February 10, 2010). For an editorial response, see “Legislators, Open Minds to Science,” <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/700008926/Legislators-open-minds-to-science.html> (accessed February 12, 2010). For more on the visit of climate change skeptic Christopher Monckton to Utah and his influence on Utah climate change politics, see Barry Bickmore’s blog (<http://bbickmore.wordpress.com>, (accessed February 10, 2011). For a full report on the saga, see Bud Ward’s “BYU Earth Scientists Express Concerns over State Legislature’s Climate Efforts,” <http://www.yaleclimatemediaforum.org/2009/11/byu-earth-scientists-express-concerns> (accessed February 15, 2011). In response to the bill, several BYU scientists authored a letter to the legislature, not to argue for policy, but to criticize the legislature’s willingness to craft policy on the basis of erroneous and misleading interpretations of what the science of climate change has found. See Barry Bickmore, Summer Rupper, Stephen Nelson, Jani Radebaugh, Eric Christiansen, Matthew Bekker, Bart Kowallis, Thomas Morris, Jack Sites, Byron Adams, and Michael Dorais, [http://extras.mnginteractive.com/live/media/site297/2010/0204/20100204\\_024750\\_Legislature2.pdf](http://extras.mnginteractive.com/live/media/site297/2010/0204/20100204_024750_Legislature2.pdf) (accessed February 15, 2011). Despite the letter and opposition from the public, the bill, which was largely symbolic, passed.

20. Donald Worster, “Nature and the Disorder of History,” *Environmental History Review* 18 (Summer 1994): 3, 8, 15; emphasis mine.

21. John Haught, “Christianity and Ecology,” in *This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, Environment*, edited by Roger Gottlieb (New York: Routledge, 1995), 279.

22. Since the 1950s, the National Council of Churches (representing mainline Protestant and Orthodox churches in the United States) has issued 133 declarations urging action on pressing environmental issues. The World Council of Churches has urged since 1964 a “better developed theology of nature and man in relation to nature.” Jewish synagogues

across the country have organized more than 150 educational programs related to environmental stewardship. The Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, symbolic leader of more than 250 million members of the Christian Orthodox Church, has been traveling across the world to decry environmental degradation. The Catholic Church has recently added environmental degradation as a “new sin,” the Dalai Lama has called for a deeper respect for nature, the Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences provides resources for mosques and Islamic education centers. In 1993 Dalvin Dewitt, a professor of environmental studies at the University of Wisconsin, founded the Evangelical Environmental Network; and more than a hundred evangelical leaders signed a declaration calling for better “Care for Creation.” They have worked to protect the Endangered Species Act and in 2006 signed a call for action on global climate change. The Environmental Protection Agency estimates that congregations serious about reducing energy consumption could save 25–30%. If half of all congregations in the United States did so, it would have the effect of removing a million cars from the road and would make available 13.5 billion kilowatt hours of electricity for other uses, without the construction of new power plants. All statistics are reported in Charles L. Harper, “Religion and Environmentalism,” in “The Legacy of Lynn White Jr.: Religion and the Environment,” *The Journal of Religion and Society, Supplement 3* (2008): 5–26, <http://moses.creighton.edu/JRS/2008/2008-11.html> (accessed February 15, 2011).

23. Daniel Sarewitz, “Science and Environmental Policy,” in *Earth Matters: The Earth Science, Philosophy, and the Claims of Community*, edited by Robert Frodeman (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1999), 91, 93.

24. Northcott, *A Moral Climate*, 67.

25. Michel Serres, *The Natural Contract*, translated by Elizabeth MacArthur and William Paulson (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 48, 47.

26. See, for example, David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in the More-Than-Human World* (New York: Vintage, 1997). Abram argues that non-Western cultures, by virtue of their polytheistic and animistic traditions, experience nature in this intersubjective way but that Western culture emerged in competition with these cultures and thereby denigrated, to its own detriment, animism’s claims about inspirited nature. Similarly, Lynn White, “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis,” 1967, in *This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, Environment*, edited by Roger Gottlieb (New York: Routledge, 1996), 190–201, argued that Christianity’s rejection of paganism by the Middle Ages led to its claims of nature as dead matter, thus rendering moot the ques-

tion of ethics. Many Christian theologians have responded to these criticisms by arguing that Christianity does indeed posit the living and spiritual presence of the physical world. These ecotheological responses resonate powerfully with Mormon doctrine. Indeed, as I argue in “Environmental Ethics of Mormon Belief” and hope to further elaborate here, few systems of belief in Christianity offer a more comprehensive and unambiguous articulation of the spiritual substructure of all physical life than Mormonism.

27. This notion of dominion has received a lot of attention from critics of the Judeo-Christian tradition because it seems to give us license to do to nature whatever we want. No one has written more powerfully and persuasively in the Mormon tradition about why Adam’s dominion is a “call to service, not a license to exterminate” than Hugh Nibley, “Subduing the Earth,” in *On the Timely and the Timeless* (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1978), 110.

# Enoch's Vision and Gaia: An LDS Perspective on Environmental Stewardship

*Craig D. Galli*

Many faithful Mormons are not familiar with pronouncements concerning environmental stewardship by current and former Church leaders because such teachings typically do not receive as much emphasis from the pulpit and in Church curriculum materials as other more core teachings. Nevertheless, the LDS canon of scriptures and the teachings of Joseph Smith and subsequent LDS Church leaders reveal a rich theology pertaining to the origin and purpose of the earth and to our responsibility as stewards over nature's bounty.

This article examines several salient implications arising from the LDS teaching that the earth has a spirit and feels pain as a consequence of the spiritual defilement and literal pollution inflicted on it by human beings, as the remarkable vision of the prophet Enoch suggests. This key aspect of Mormon ecotheology may resonate more with Native American beliefs, Eastern religions, and various philosophical traditions than with traditional Protestant and Catholic conceptions of the earth. In saying this, I do not suggest that other Christian faiths lack an environmental ethic. Indeed, many Christian denominations and other faiths more overtly embrace environmental stewardship in their teachings, liturgy, and policy statements.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, the LDS teachings described below, if studied and emphasized, provide profound spiritual insights not readily found elsewhere into our relationship with and responsibility for nature.

Moreover, Enoch's vision of an animistic earth largely com-

ports with the views of some modern scientists and naturalists who suggest that the earth's biosphere can be better understood as a living organism—sometimes referred to as “Gaia”—which maintains an equilibrium and relative constancy of temperature, atmosphere, and biospheric and geophysical cycles necessary to sustain life. As such, from both a scientific and spiritual perspective, environmental science and LDS theology both teach that if we live and consume with no respect for earth's delicate balance, we endanger the earth and ourselves.

### **The Earth's Spiritual Creation and Destiny**

From the pulpit, we commonly emphasize the “preexistence” of mortal persons.<sup>2</sup> However, one aspect of the LDS concept of the preexistence that is, in some ways, unique to LDS theology<sup>3</sup> is its recognition of the preexistence of all of God's creations including animals and plants. Understanding that, in the preexistence, as premortal spirits we rejoiced at the creation of the earth and that some preexistent spirits assisted in the creation itself (Abr. 3:23–24) should heighten appreciation for God's creation while in this life.

The Book of Moses recounts the creation of “every plant of the field before it was in the earth, and every herb of the field before it grew. For I, the Lord God, created all things, of which I have spoken, spiritually, before they were naturally upon the face of the earth” (Moses 3:4–5). Referring to the physical creation of plant life, this passage continues: “And out of the ground made I, the Lord God, to grow every tree, naturally, that is pleasant to the sight of man; and man could behold it. And it became also a living soul. For it was spiritual in the day that I created it” (Moses 3:9). Heber C. Kimball taught: “There is nothing on this earth but what came from heaven, and it grew and was created before it grew on this earth”<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Joseph Fielding Smith explained: “The spirits of men, beasts, and all animal life, existed before the foundation of the earth was laid, and are living entities.”<sup>5</sup>

Our reverence for the earth and understanding of its sacred nature predates our temporal existence. Joseph F. Smith emphasized that, during the preexistence, we concurred with and rejoiced in the plan of salvation which included the creation of the earth as our dwelling place: “Our spirits existed before they came



to this world. They were in the councils of heaven before the foundations of the earth were laid. We were there. We sang together with the heavenly hosts for joy when the foundations of the earth were laid, and when the plan for our existence upon this earth and redemption were mapped out. We were there; we were interested, and we took a part in this great preparation.”<sup>6</sup>

The LDS concept of the preexistence promotes a heightened intimacy with and reverence for the creation of the earth. It emphasizes the need to understand the earth’s importance in the plan of salvation. How can we despoil God’s earthly creations over which we rejoiced in the preexistence?

Similarly, the earth’s final destiny underscores our eternal connection to the earth, if we are worthy. Central to LDS theology is Joseph Smith’s millennial prophecy “that Christ will reign personally upon the earth; and, that the earth will be renewed and receive its paradisiacal glory” (Tenth Article of Faith). During the millennium, the earth will be transformed to a “terrestrial state,” at which time the Savior will reign and dwell here.<sup>7</sup> Joseph further revealed that, after the millennium, the earth will again be transformed, this time to a celestial glorified state.<sup>8</sup> The doctrine that the earth itself will become the celestial abode for the righteous and, therefore, is something to be cherished eternally, contrasts with the traditional Christian belief that “our fundamental purpose on earth was to merit an eternity in heaven” and “the earth was really just a temporary testing ground.”<sup>9</sup>

### **The Spirits of All Living Things**

Early Church leaders taught that, during mortality, all life forms—humankind, animals, and plants—have a spirit which coexists with their physical presence. Brigham Young explained that even natural landforms have a spirit: “The spirit constitutes the life of everything we see. Is there life in these rocks, and mountains? There is. Then there is a spirit peculiarly adapted to those rocks and mountains.”<sup>10</sup> Joseph Fielding Smith explained: “No doubt the spirits that possess the bodies of the animals are in the similitude of their bodies. In other words the bodies of animals conform to the spirits which possess them, and which existed before they were placed on the earth. . . . Naturally, then, there is

some measure of intelligence in members of the animal kingdom.”<sup>11</sup>

The “spirit,” as understood in LDS theology, is not immaterial. Rather, “all spirit is matter, but it is more fine or pure” (D&C 131:7–8). Joseph Smith expounded on the nature of the spirit:

[A] very material difference [exists] between the body and the spirit: the body is supposed to be organized matter, and the spirit by many is thought to be immaterial, without substance. With this latter statement we should beg leave to differ—and state that spirit is a substance; that it is material, but that it is more pure, elastic, and refined matter than the body;—that it existed before the body, can exist in the body, and will exist separate from the body, when the body will be moldering in the dust; and will in the resurrection be again united with it.<sup>12</sup>

The concept that all creation has a spirit is not unique to LDS theology. Fifteenth-century Benedictine monk Basilus Valentinus offered: “The Earth is not a dead body, but is inhabited by a spirit that is its life and soul. All created things, minerals included, draw their strength from the earth spirit.”<sup>13</sup> Henry More of Christ’s College, Cambridge University, lectured in the seventeenth century on the “Soul of the World, or Spirit of Nature,” which he believed explained the “vital congruity” evident in nature.<sup>14</sup> Henry David Thoreau believed that “the earth I tread on is not a dead, inert mass; it is a body, has a spirit, is organic and fluid to the influence of the spirit.”<sup>15</sup> Russian philosopher Peter Ouspensky reasoned that “there can be nothing dead or mechanical in Nature. . . . [L]ife and feeling . . . must exist in everything. . . . [A] mountain, a tree, a river, the fish in the river, drops of water, rain, a plant, fire—each separately must possess a mind of its own.”<sup>16</sup>

Outside Western tradition, the “spirit” component of the earth and nature commonly surfaces. Prevalent in North American native traditions is the concept of “spiritual naturism,” which “implies that everything in the universe is alive and given order and harmony by the Spirit.”<sup>17</sup> In Eastern religions, “all being and things, animate and inanimate, were thought to be permeated with divine power or spirit such as the Tao or, in Shinto, *kami*. . . . Mahayana Buddhists speak of the *dharma*, or Buddha-nature of every object.”<sup>18</sup>

LDS theology not only emphasizes that all life forms have a divine spirit, but that the plan of salvation encompasses animal life. As Joseph Fielding Smith taught, “Animals do have spirits and . . . through the redemption made by our Savior they will come forth in the resurrection to enjoy the blessing of immortal life.”<sup>19</sup> According to Bruce R. McConkie, the Savior’s “ransom includes a resurrection for man and for all forms of life.”<sup>20</sup> Elder Tad R. Callister wrote, “The Atonement fully extends its redemptive powers to this earth and to all forms of life thereon to the extent necessary to save them from physical and, where necessary, spiritual death.”<sup>21</sup>

The earth’s essence is both physical and spiritual—just like the dual nature of God’s children. But the earth’s and nature’s need for a Savior and the Atonement differs from ours. Christ “offered himself a sacrifice for sin, to answer the ends of the law” (1 Ne. 2:7). But unlike humankind, the earth has been perfectly obedient—it “abideth the law of a celestial kingdom, for it filleth the measure of its creation, and transgresseth not the law” (D&C 88:18–19, 25). Brigham Young instructed the Saints to “always keep in view that the animal, vegetable, and mineral kingdoms—the earth and its fullness—will all, except the children of man, abide their creation—the law by which they were made, and will receive their exaltation.”<sup>22</sup> While God’s central “work and glory” is to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39), he declared the creation to be “good” before Adam and his posterity inhabited the earth (Gen. 1:25). The Lord revealed that “heaven, the paradise of God,” contained beasts, creeping things, and fowls of the air, and “every other creature which God has created” (D&C 77:2). No wonder that if we wantonly destroy God’s creations, the Lord has warned that “the blood of every beast will I require at your hands” (JST, Gen. 9:9–11). Joseph Fielding Smith reminded in a 1928 general conference: “So we see that the Lord intends to save, not only the earth and the heavens, not only man who dwells upon the earth, but all things which he has created. The animals, the fishes of the sea, the fowls of the air, as well as man, are to be recreated, or renewed, through the resurrection, for they too are living souls.”<sup>23</sup> If we comprehend that all life has a spirit, is beloved of God, and destined for eternal life through the atonement, would we ever wastefully or wantonly destroy?

### Joy Experienced by Living Things

Theologians have debated whether the earth and its nonhuman life forms have any purpose and value other than to feed, clothe, and shelter God's children. A revelation through Joseph Smith assured:

The fulness of the earth is yours, the beasts of the field and the fowls of the air, and that which climbeth upon the trees and walketh upon the earth. Yea, and the herb, and the good things which come of the earth, whether for food or for raiment, or for houses, or for barns, or for orchards, or for gardens, or for vineyards; Yea, all things which come of the earth, in the season thereof, are made for the benefit and the use of man, both to please the eye and to gladden the heart. Yea, for food and for raiment, for taste and for smell, to strengthen the body and to enliven the soul. (D&C 59:16–19)

In the hierarchy of beneficial uses of earth's bounty, the aesthetic attributes of "pleas[ing] the eye and gladden[ing] the heart" and "enliven[ing] the soul" appear to be at least as important as providing food and raiment. Many LDS and other theologians have rejected the notion that the sole purpose of the earth—and its plant and animal life—is only to satisfy the needs of humankind. In the eighteenth century, the Lutheran minister John Bruckner maintained that the "whole plan of Providence" included the "web of life."<sup>24</sup> Church leaders and LDS scholars have taught that animal and plant life have the right to exist in their own sphere and to experience "joy." As Hugh Nibley explained, central to LDS theology is the understanding that "while 'subduing the earth' we must be about multiplying these organisms of plants and animals God has designed shall dwell upon it, namely all forms of life, each to multiply in its sphere and element and have *joy* therein."<sup>25</sup>

The concept that other forms of life experience joy is a logical consequence of the fact that all of God's creations possess a spirit. In 1853, Apostle Orson Pratt stated that "we are compelled to believe that every vegetable, whether great or small, has a living intelligent spirit capable of feeling, knowing, and *rejoicing* in its sphere."<sup>26</sup> Joseph Smith revealed that we look forward to "the *happiness* of man, and of beasts, and of creeping things, and of the fowls of the air" that will exist in the next life" (D&C 77:2; *emphasis mine*). Joseph Fielding Smith similarly taught that "the Lord

gave life to every creature . . . [and] commanded [them] to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. It was intended that all creatures should be *happy* in their several elements.”<sup>27</sup> He further explained that all living things have the right to exist and experience joy: “We cannot restore life when it is taken, and all creatures have the right to *enjoy* life and happiness on the earth where the Lord has placed them.”<sup>28</sup>

The “right” to exist and to experience joy appear connected. Joseph F. Smith proclaimed: “I am a firm believer, with reference to these things, in the simple words of one of the poets: ‘Take not away the life you cannot give, For all things have an equal right to live.’”<sup>29</sup> In the nineteenth century, George Q. Cannon taught: “Our Great Creator . . . has bestowed life upon man, and upon beasts, birds, fishes and insects, and no one has the right to take that life, except in the way and under the conditions the Lord prescribes.”<sup>30</sup> A 1909 First Presidency message reconfirmed: “The whole animal creation will be perfected and perpetuated in the Hereafter, each class in its ‘distinct order or sphere,’ and will enjoy ‘eternal felicity.’ That fact has been made plain in this dispensation.”<sup>31</sup>

Not understanding that animals experience joy historically contributed to the position by some that nonhuman life had no inherent right to exist. French philosopher Rene Descartes based his conclusion that animals have no rights on the assumption that they have no minds or feelings.<sup>32</sup> Pope Pius IX supported the slaughter of animals as a spectator sport for entertainment because animals have no spirit, feelings, or rights.<sup>33</sup>

In contrast, an awareness that all forms of life have feelings and divine potential promotes ethical behavior toward nature. When conditions permit animals to follow their instincts, they experience the full measure of their creation and experience joy. What is the source and nature of joy experienced by nonhuman life forms and how does it differ from the joy experienced by humankind? Instinct governs animals’ migratory patterns, breeding behavior, and defense mechanisms. Scientists may struggle to precisely define instinct, but poets and philosophers have long observed this “life force.” Apostle Harold B. Lee suggested that “we might [refer to] . . . the reason in man and the instinct in animal life . . . as the light of Christ.”<sup>34</sup> Animals experience joy when they

follow their instincts while human beings experience joy when we overcome the “natural man” (Eph. 4:22–24, 2 Ne. 9:39, Mosiah 3:19, D&C 3:4). When we subdue our selfishness, envy, greed, pride, and lust—characteristics of the carnal man that make us enemies to God—we, too, experience joy. We also experience joy and satisfaction as we make decisions that allow other creatures to live, follow their instincts, and experience joy in their own sphere.

Recognizing the rights of other life forms encourages ethical conduct. Philosophy professor Paul W. Taylor in *Respect for Nature* suggests that moral conduct must be “life-centered” or “biocentric,” meaning that humans accord other life forms the “opportunity to fulfill their various potentials.”<sup>35</sup> The United Nations Charter for Nature states: “Every form of life is unique, warranting respect regardless of its worth to man, and, to accord other organisms such recognition, man must be guided by a moral code of conduct.”<sup>36</sup> Recognizing that all life has a right to satisfy the measure of its creation—as implied by this U.N. declaration—falls squarely within LDS ecotheology.

### **Enoch's Vision of the Pained and Weary Earth**

Just as the earth and life thereon can experience “joy,” the earth can experience pain and sorrow. Enoch's vision in the Pearl of Great Price constitutes the most poignant confirmation in LDS scripture of the reality of the earth's spirit and capacity to experience pain. Enoch ascended a mountain and “beheld the heavens open” and “all nations of the earth” (Moses 7:3, 23). After observing the Savior's mortal ministry and wickedness of humankind, the account in the Book of Moses records: “Enoch looked upon the earth; and he heard a voice from the bowels thereof, saying: Wo, wo is me, the mother of men; I am pained, I am weary, because of the wickedness of my children. When shall I rest, and be cleansed from the filthiness which is gone forth out of me? When will my Creator sanctify me, that I may rest, and righteousness for a season abide upon my face?”<sup>37</sup> When Enoch heard the earth mourn, “he wept and cried unto the Lord, saying: O Lord, wilt thou not have compassion upon the earth?” Enoch felt so distressed by this vision, he repeatedly asked the Lord, “When shall the earth rest?” He learned that after the Lord comes again “in

the last days, in the days of wickedness” then “the day shall come that the earth shall rest” (Moses 7:60–61).

Some might assert that the “filthiness” referenced in Enoch’s vision and a reference to “pollution” in Doctrine and Covenants 103:14 equate solely to spiritual wickedness, not to literal pollution caused from careless, wasteful, or excessive use of natural resources. This attitude, however, assumes that literal pollution is not a form of sin, a position that is countered by repeated teachings of Church leaders. President Gordon B. Hinckley affirmed, “This earth is His creation. When we make it ugly, we offend him.”<sup>38</sup> President Ezra Taft Benson explained the connection between a lack of reverence for life and despoliation of the environment: “If there isn’t a reverence for life itself, there is apt to be little reverence for the resources God has placed here on which we must call. Irreverence for God, of life, and for our fellowmen take the form of things like littering, heedless strip-mining, pollution of water and air. But these are, after all, outward expressions of the inner man.”<sup>39</sup> Joseph F. Smith earlier taught: “To Him all life is sacred creation for the use of His children. Do we stand beside Him in our tender regard for life?”<sup>40</sup>

Other Church leaders have taught that God will judge His children on how they exercise their stewardship over the earth. A revelation to Joseph Smith announces: “I, the Lord . . . make every man accountable, as a steward over earthly blessings, which I have made and prepared for my creatures” (D&C 104:13). Brigham Young instructed the Saints: “Not one particle of all that comprises this vast creation of God is our own. Everything we have has been bestowed upon us for our action, to see what we would do with it—whether we would use it for eternal life and exaltation or for eternal death and degradation, until we cease operating in this existence.”<sup>41</sup> According to Hugh Nibley, “A favorite theme of Brigham Young was that the dominion God gives man is designed to test him, to enable him to show to himself, his fellows, and all the heavens just how he would act if entrusted with God’s own power; if he does not act in a godlike manner, he will never be entrusted with a creation of his own worlds without end.”<sup>42</sup> Heber C. Kimball recorded that “Brigham Young was speaking of the earth and telling us that we should be cautious how we use it, for it is our mother, and the man that will disgrace his mother is unwor-



thy of her fostering care.”<sup>43</sup> More recently, Elder Alexander B. Morrison rhetorically posed questions that the Savior might ask Saints at the final judgement: “‘What have you done with the earth which my Father and I gave you as a home? Have you cherished and protected it? Have you dressed it and kept it, as your father Adam was commanded to do? Or have you laid waste to it, defiled its waters, destroyed its fertile lands, befouled its life-giving air?’ To those questions, I fear there are many, even among those who aspire to become a Zion people, who will hang their heads in shame. The earth groans under the insults inflicted upon it.”<sup>44</sup>

The filthiness humankind has inflicted upon the earth, causing it to mourn and the prophet Enoch to weep, must be viewed as both spiritual disobedience and literal pollution—both forms of wickedness which defile the earth.

### **Gaia as an Angry Earth**

Enoch's vision of an animate earth—a living being with a spirit, personality, and even gender—might be considered by some as purely metaphorical. Yet the view that the earth is literally a living organism has a long history. Philosophers, poets, Native American traditions, Eastern religions, and early naturalists have opined that the earth is a living organism. In the fourth century B.C., Plato advanced the concept of “Anima Mundi,” which had origins in even more ancient mythology. He asserted, “This world is indeed a living being endowed with a soul and intelligence . . . a single visible living entity containing all other living entities, which by their nature are all related.”<sup>45</sup> Renaissance philosopher Giambattista della Porta (1535–1615) wrote: “The whole world is knit and bound within itself: for the world is a living creature. . . . When one part suffers, the rest also suffers with it.”<sup>46</sup> Irish poet George William Russell reflected: “Earth revealed itself to me as a living being. . . . This reverence came to me as a boy listening to the voice of birds one coloured evening in summer, when suddenly birds and trees and grass and tinted air and myself seemed but one mood or companionship, and I felt a certitude that the same spirit was in all.”<sup>47</sup> In most Native American traditions, according to Native American scholar and filmmaker Teresa C. McLuhan, “the earth is not only compositionally balanced, but the earth also is sacred. She is physically alive and spiri-

tual and human beings must walk with her in goodness, harmony, beauty and interdependence.”<sup>48</sup>

Among modern scientists, James Lovelock first developed the “Gaia Theory,” named after the earth goddess of Greek mythology, to help explain how the earth’s biosphere and atmosphere function as a tightly integrated, self-regulating, evolving system or organism. Lovelock explained, “I am not thinking of the Earth as alive in a sentient way, or even alive like an animal or a bacterium.”<sup>49</sup> Rather, the earth’s biosphere functions or “behaves” as a living system to maintain temperature and atmospheric conditions in an equilibrium conducive to life through a complex set of interactions or “feedback loops.”<sup>50</sup>

Lovelock and many other climate scientists believe that the earth behaves like a living organism that now suffers from the equivalent of a fever known as global warming or climate change caused by excessive greenhouse gas emissions which disrupt its balance and which, if left unabated, will result in temperature increases which could render much of the earth’s surface uninhabitable by 2100.<sup>51</sup>

The ethical and theological implications of climate change warrant careful examination. Lovelock warns: “Unless we see the Earth as a planet that behaves as if it were alive, at least to the extent of regulating its climate and chemistry, we will lack the will to change our way of life and to understand that we have made it our greatest enemy.”<sup>52</sup> He postulates that, as we commit environmental offenses that alter the delicate harmony and balance that sustain life, “Gaia will look after *herself*. And the best way for her to do that might well be to get rid of us.”<sup>53</sup> “Like an old lady who has to share her house with a growing and destructive group of teenagers, Gaia grows angry, and if they do not mend their ways she will evict them.”<sup>54</sup> Lovelock and other scientists suggest that the earth has the ability to “purge itself of disruptive elements just as a simpler organism remove[s] potentially poisonous liquid and solid wastes and trie[s] to destroy cancers and infections.”<sup>55</sup>

The question is whether the concept of Gaia (whether literal or metaphorical) and Enoch’s vision of the earth as a living entity with a spirit that feels pain for environmental and spiritual sins against her can awaken in humanity a deeper environmental stewardship and conservation ethic. Ironically, in *Our Angry Earth*,

Isaac Asimov and Frederik Pohl dismissed the concept that, as we sin, the earth becomes cursed in the biblical sense; but at the same time, they conceded that the inescapable “consequences of our environmental sins” appears to be the poisoning of the earth and “destruction of the environment we depend on for life.”<sup>56</sup> In contrast, theologian Richard Baer suggests that “failure to fulfill our obligations as faithful trustees of the gifts of God’s creation will inevitably bring God’s judgment upon us. The earth itself will rebel against our greedy and thoughtless exploitation of nature and our irresponsible fecundity.”<sup>57</sup>

Even if one does not accept certain particulars about Gaia becoming overheated through human activity, viewing the earth as a complex living organism that sustains life through maintaining a delicate balance appears consistent with both science and LDS theology. Harvard biologist Edward O. Wilson elaborated on the complexity of the equilibrium between earth’s ecosystems: Life forms on earth have “evolved over hundreds of millions of years to their present condition by the activity of the biosphere, a stupendously complex layer of living creatures whose activities are locked together in precise but tenuous global cycles of energy and transformed organic matter.”<sup>58</sup> Eighteenth-century Swedish botanist Linneaus, who devised an early plant classification system, explained: “All of animate nature is thus bound together in common interest by the chains of sustenance that link the living to the dead, the predator to its prey, the beetle to the dung on which it feeds. . . . God has set up an enduring community of peaceful co-existence.”<sup>59</sup> Another early naturalist, Alexander von Humbolt, sought to describe the “harmony of nature” in spiritual terms based on his scientific observations “amidst that solemn and stupendous scenery, those melancholy and sacred solitudes, where [nature] speaks in a voice so well understood by the mysterious sympathy of the feeling heart.”<sup>60</sup>

George Q. Cannon wisely counseled that humankind must take care not to upset the harmony and balance in nature: “An all-wise Creator has arranged many things which puny man does not fully understand. In our attempts to improve on nature we frequently make hideous mistakes. . . . Nothing was created in vain. Everything has its uses, if we but knew them; and efforts to destroy the equilibrium are generally disastrous.”<sup>61</sup> Joseph F. Smith

similarly acknowledged the existence of such a balance and the imperative to avoid unknowingly disrupting nature's balance: "If we could understand all the purposes of God in His wonderful creations, we would avoid diligently the dangers of disturbing the balance in the distribution of life which God so wonderfully ordained."<sup>62</sup>

### **Gaia's Theological Implications**

To some members of the LDS Church, the idea of an angry or vengeful earth, an earth that is our "enemy," appears to contradict the idea of a benevolent earth created to provide sustenance for Adam, Eve, and their posterity, for it "pleaseth God that he hath given all these things unto man; for unto this end were they made to be used" (D&C 59:20). Yet Gaia's capacity to "feel pain" resonates with Enoch's vision in which he "heard the earth mourn" due to the "filthiness which is gone forth out of me" (Moses 7:48–49).

Some LDS leaders have emphasized that though the earth is holy, as we defile it, the earth will no longer nurture us. Brigham Young taught that "the earth under their feet will be holy; . . . the soil of the earth will bring forth in its strength, and the fruits thereof will be meat for man."<sup>63</sup> But he considered those "who pollute the earth" in the same company with "murderers, thieves, robbers, liars, whoremongers, [and] drunkards."<sup>64</sup> Heber C. Kimball similarly counseled: "Those who live upon this land, or any other that God gives to His people, have peculiar promises made to them. Then do not pollute this land, nor pollute yourselves or your fellow creatures, but let us keep ourselves pure and clean."<sup>65</sup> John Taylor predicted that eventually the day would come when the earth will be cleansed from the filth which has plagued it: "This earth, after wading through all the corruptions of men, being cursed for his sake, and not permitted to shed forth its full luster and glory, must yet take its proper place in God's creations; be purified from that corruption under which it has groaned for ages, and become a fit place for redeemed men, angels, and God to dwell upon."<sup>66</sup>

LDS scripture repeats the theme of the earth's "curse" as a consequence of iniquity. As wickedness increased in Enoch's day, "the earth trembled, and the mountains fled; . . . and the rivers of

water turned out of their course; and the roar of the lions was heard out of the wilderness" (Moses 7:13). Nephi instructed his rebellious brothers: "Behold, the Lord hath created the earth that it should be inhabited. . . . And he raiseth up a righteous nation, and destroyeth the nations of the wicked. And he leadeth away the righteous into precious lands, and the wicked he destroyeth, and curseth the land unto them for their sakes" (1 Ne. 17:36–38). Alma taught his son: "Yea, and cursed be the land forever and ever unto those workers of darkness and secret combinations, even unto destruction, except they repent before they are fully ripe" (Alma 37:31).

The book of Ether provides a detailed account of the Lord cursing the land as a consequence of wickedness and blessing the land when the people repent. As an otherwise prosperous people grew more wicked during the reign of Heth, prophets warned that "there should come a curse upon the face of the land; yea, even there should be a great famine, in which they should be destroyed if they did not repent." After the people rejected the prophetic message, "there began to be a great dearth upon the land, and the inhabitants began to be destroyed exceedingly fast because of the dearth, for there was no rain upon the face of the earth." The fortunes of the people improved as they repented: "Now when the people saw that they must perish they began to repent of their iniquities and cry unto the Lord. And it came to pass that when they had humbled themselves sufficiently before the Lord he did send rain upon the face of the earth; and the people began to revive again, and there began to be fruit in the north countries, and in all the countries round about. And the Lord did show forth his power unto them in preserving them from famine" (Ether 9:28, 30–31, 34–35).

An 1831 revelation that Joseph Smith received stated: "The Lord, in the beginning cursed the land, even so in the last days have I blessed it, in its time, for the use of my saints, that they may partake the fatness thereof" (D&C 61:17). But he warned that "vanity and unbelief have brought the whole church under condemnation" in part as a consequence of failing to repent; as a result, "there remaineth a scourge and judgment to be poured out upon the children of Zion. For shall the children of the kingdom pollute my holy land? Verily, I say unto you, Nay" (D&C 84:57–59).<sup>67</sup>

The notion that the earth would become “cursed” due to humankind’s wickedness is not unique to LDS theology. A repeated theme in the Old Testament is how God punishes the children of Israel for violating His commandments by using natural means such as floods, droughts, and famines. In Hugh Nibley’s words, to the disobedient “all nature becomes his enemy.”<sup>68</sup> Isaiah prophesied that, during the last day, the greater part of the earth would be cursed due to transgression: “The earth also is defiled under the inhabitants thereof; because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore hath the curse devoured the earth, and they that dwell therein are desolate: therefore the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few men left” (Isa. 24:5–6). Descriptions in the New Testament and LDS scripture of the earth’s final cleansing give horrifying details of earthquakes, famine, pestilence, and extreme heat when “the earth shall burn as an oven” (Nahum 1:5; see also 1 Ne. 22:15; 3 Ne. 26:3; D&C 29:9, 45:50, 63:34, 64:24, 133:41 [cleansing by heat and fire]; Alma 10:22 [famine]; D&C 88:80 [earthquakes]). Only then will the Earth “rest, and be cleansed from the filthiness” (Moses 7:48).

“Mother Earth” as a universal symbol exists in ancient and primitive cultures, although most organized religious traditions do not recognize the literal spirit embodied in the earth as suggested in Enoch’s vision. Understanding that the earth itself possesses a literal spiritual and sacred dimension should heighten humankind’s awareness of, and ethical responsibility toward, nature. As George B. Handley, professor of humanities at Brigham Young University, explains: “The notion that physical matter and all living things have some living spiritual character grants a sacred identity to the nonhuman realm, and this would seem to give us pause to consider the ethics of our use of such inspired material.”<sup>69</sup>

In *The Voice of the Earth*, cultural historian Theodore Roszak suggests that the widespread belief that “we have no ethical obligation to our planetary home” constitutes a societal “epidemic psychosis” rooted in our spiritual disconnection from the earth:

The Earth hurts, and we hurt with it. If we could still accept the imagery of a Mother Earth, we might say that the planet’s umbilical

cord links to us at the root of the unconscious mind. Our culture gives us little opportunity to stop and to honor that great truth. . . . But sometimes the voice of the Earth breaks through to us in an instant of realization that flashes back across the eons, reminding us of who we are, where we came from, what we are made of. For an instant we touch the great cosmic continuity that is easily lost in the frenzied affairs of the day.<sup>70</sup>

Today our families are threatened by spiritual and temporal destruction as we often unthinkingly defile the earth and consume more natural resources than necessary. The prophet Alma pronounced a blessing on his children and then “blessed the earth” (Alma 45:15). We can do likewise. As explained by Elder Steven E. Snow: “Our generation, more than any other, has the ability to irretrievably change the land. Financial rewards provide tremendous pressure to unleash our technology to reinvent our surroundings. There will be growth; change will come. But failure to care for the land on which we live means turning our backs on a heritage laid down carefully and at such great cost by our forefathers—and will leave us immeasurably poorer.”<sup>71</sup> Perhaps Enoch’s inquiry to the Lord—“Wilt thou not have compassion upon the earth?”—applies to us.

### Notes

1. Roger S. Gottlieb, *A Greener Faith: Religious Environmentalism and Our Planet's Future* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 81–110, provides examples of environmental declarations from the World Council of Churches, other religious organizations, and specific denominations.

2. First Presidency (Joseph F. Smith, John R. Winder, and Anthon H. Lund), “The Origin of Man,” *Improvement Era* 13 (November 1909): 75–81, rpt., as <http://lds.org/ensign/2002/02/the-origin-of-man?lang=eng> (accessed February 21, 2011): “Man as a spirit was begotten and born of heavenly parents, and reared to maturity in the eternal mansions of the Father, prior to coming upon the earth in a temporal body.”

3. While the concept of a preexistence is not unique to LDS theology, Terryl L. Givens, *When Souls Had Wings: Pre-Mortal Existence in Western Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 6, 217, explains that the doctrine was largely relegated to “the peripheries and underground of Western thought,” leaving the LDS version “in many regards, unique.” Givens’s foundational work handily examines the unique origin and theological implications of the LDS concept of the preexistence but



not its ecological implications (212–20). This observation is not, in any way, a criticism of Givens's treatment but rather an acknowledgement that the ecological implications of the preexistence fell outside the scope of his examination.

4. Heber C. Kimball, August 2, 1857, *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (London and Liverpool: LDS Booksellers Depot, 1855–86), 5:137.

5. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 3 vols., compiled by Bruce R. McConkie (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954), 1:62.

6. Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine* (1919; rpt., Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1977 printing), 93.

7. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 1:84.

8. Joseph Smith clarified that the “sea of glass” (Rev. 4:6) “is the earth, in its sanctified, immortal, and eternal state” (D&C 77:1).

9. Gottlieb, *A Greener Faith*, 90.

10. Brigham Young, “When I Contemplate the Subject of Salvation: A Sermon Delivered on February 12, 1854,” in *The Essential Brigham Young* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), 82.

11. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Man, His Origin and Destiny* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1954), 194.

12. Joseph Fielding Smith, comp. and ed., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (1938; rpt., Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1977), 207.

13. T. C. McLuhan, *The Way of the Earth: Encounters with Nature in Ancient and Contemporary Thought* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 21.

14. Donald Worster, *Nature's Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 41–42.

15. Roderick Nash, *The Rights of Nature: A History of Environmental Ethics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 37.

16. Peter Ouspensky, quoted in *ibid.*, 65–66.

17. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Religion and the Order of Nature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 34.

18. Nash, *The Rights of Nature*, 113.

19. Joseph Fielding Smith, “Your Question: Do Animals Have Spirits?,” *Improvement Era* 40 (January 1958): 16.

20. Bruce R. McConkie, “Seven Deadly Heresies: Speech Given on 1 June 1980,” <http://speeches.byu.edu/reader/reader.php?id=6770> (accessed February 7, 2011).

21. Tad R. Callister, *The Infinite Atonement* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000), 87.

22. Brigham Young, September 30, 1860, *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (London and Liverpool: LDS Booksellers Depot, 1855–86), 8:191.

23. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Conference Report*, October 1928, 100.

24. John Bruckner, *A Philosophical Survey of the Animal Creation*, 1768, quoted in Nash, *The Rights of Nature*, 20.

25. Hugh Nibley, "Man's Dominion, or Subduing the Earth," in *Brigham Young Challenges the Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994), 6; emphasis mine.

26. Orson Pratt, "Figure and Magnitude of Spirits," *The Seer* 1, no. 3 (March 1853): 34; rpt., Salt Lake City: Eborn Books, 2000; emphasis mine. See Psalm 96:12–13: "Let the field be joyful and all that is therein: then shall all the trees of the wood rejoice before the Lord: for he cometh, for he cometh to judge the earth."

27. Joseph Fielding Smith, "Is It a Sin to Kill Animals Wantonly?" *Answers to Gospel Questions*, 5 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1963), 4:44; emphasis mine.

28. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Church History and Modern Revelation* (Salt Lake City: Council of the Twelve Apostles, 1946), 210; emphasis mine.

29. Joseph F. Smith, "The Destruction of Animal Life," *Juvenile Instructor* 48 (May 1913): 308–9.

30. George Q. Cannon, "Revelation—Wanton Killing," *Juvenile Instructor* 24 (December 1, 1889): 548.

31. First Presidency, "The Origin of Man," 81; the internal quotation is from D&C 77:3.

32. Worster, *Nature's Economy*, 40.

33. *Ibid.*, 27.

34. Harold B. Lee, *Conference Report*, October 1944, 74. The light of Christ "is in all things, which giveth life to all things, which is the law by which all things are governed" (D&C 88:13).

35. Paul W. Taylor, quoted in Nash, *The Rights of Nature*, 155.

36. Preamble, United Nations Charter for Nature, United Nations General Assembly Resolution 37/7, October 28, 1982, <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/37/a37r007.htm> (accessed February 8, 2011).

37. David G. Hallman, *Ecotheology: Voices from South and North* (New York: Orbis Books, 1994), 95 (quoting a similar passage in the "Great Euchologion," the chief liturgical book of the Eastern Orthodox Church: "The earth is without words, yet groans and cries: 'Why, all people, do you pollute me with so many evils?'"). See also Romans 8:22: "For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now." Elder Jeffrey R. Holland also described the prophet Zenos on "the earth's reaction to the crucifixion (1 Ne. 19:11–12) in terms that stress the earth's pain: "Nephi and Zenos who clearly understood that Christ is the creator and father of the earth, added this marvelous insight as to why his creation reacted so violently to the crucifix-

ion. This was earth's God being crucified, this was creation's benefactor, this was 'the God of nature' suffering on the cross, and nature would not receive that injustice passively. It reacted in global groaning and sorrow. It reacted in convulsion and outrage and mourning." Jeffrey R. Holland, *Christ and the New Covenant* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997), 43–44.

38. Gordon B. Hinckley, quoted in Terry Tempest Williams, William B. Smart, and Gibbs M. Smith, eds., *New Genesis: A Mormon Reader on Land and Community* (Layton, Utah: Gibbs Smith Publisher, 1998), frontispiece.

39. Ezra Taft Benson, February 1, 1976, quoted in Alexander B. Morrison, *Visions of Zion* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1993), 83.

40. Joseph F. Smith, "Humane Day," *Juvenile Instructor* 53 (April 1918): 182–83.

41. Brigham Young, June 3, 1860, *Journal of Discourses*, 8:67.

42. Nibley, *Brigham Young Challenges the Saints*, 10.

43. Heber C. Kimball, April 27, 1862, *Journal of Discourses*, 9:336.

44. Morrison, *Visions of Zion*, 77.

45. Plato, *Timeus*, quoted in Stephan Harding, *Animate Earth: Science, Intuition and GAIA*, 24.

46. Giambattista della Porta, quoted in Carolyn Merchant, *The World an Organism* (New York: Harper Collins, 1989), 104.

47. George William Russell, 1932, quoted in T. C. McLuhan, *Cathedrals of the Spirit: The Message of Sacred Places* (New York: Harper Collins, 1996), 13, 64.

48. Henrietta Mann, quoted in T. C. McLuhan, *The Way of the Earth* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 416. Henrietta Mann is a full-blood Cheyenne-Arapaho and a professor of Native American Studies, University of Montana.

49. James Lovelock, *The Revenge of Gaia: Earth's Climate Crisis and the Fate of Humanity* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), 162.

50. Harding, *Animate Earth*, 54, 67.

51. Lovelock, *The Revenge of Gaia*, 60, 62–65. Interestingly, many of the apocalyptic scriptures pertaining to the end of the earth describe heat and fire. Deuteronomy 32:24: "They shall be burnt with hunger, and devoured with burning heat, and with bitter destruction"; Job 24:19: "Drought and heat consume the snow waters: so doth the grave those which have sinned"; 2 Peter 3:10: "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up"; Revelation 16:8–9: "And the fourth angel poured out his vial upon the sun; and power was given unto him to scorch men with fire. And men were scorched with great

heat, and blasphemed the name of God, which hath power over these plagues: and they repented not to give him glory"; 3 Nephi 26:3: "And he did expound all things, even from the beginning until the time that he should come in his glory—yea, even all things which should come upon the face of the earth, even until the elements should melt with fervent heat, and the earth should be wrapt together as a scroll, and the heavens and the earth should pass away"; Mormon 9:2: "When the Lord shall come, yea, even that great day when the earth shall be rolled together as a scroll, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, yea, in that great day when ye shall be brought to stand before the Lamb of God—then will ye say that there is no God?"; D&C 101:25: "And also that of element shall melt with fervent heat; and all things shall become new, that my knowledge and glory may dwell upon all the earth"; Moses 7:8: "For behold, the Lord shall curse the land with much heat, and the barrenness thereof shall go forth forever; and there was a blackness came upon all the children of Canaan, that they were despised among all people."

52. Lovelock, *The Revenge of Gaia*, 162. Lovelock makes it clear that he does not view the earth "as alive in a sentient way, or even alive like an animal or bacterium. . . . It has never been more than metaphor—an *aide pensée*" (16).

53. Isaac Asimov and Frederik Pohl, *Our Angry Earth* (New York: Tom Doherty Associates, 1991), 21.

54. Lovelock, *The Revenge of Gaia*, 47.

55. Nash, *The Rights of Nature*, 158.

56. Asimov and Pohl, *Our Angry Earth*, vii–viii, 19.

57. Richard Baer, quoted in Nash, *The Rights of Nature*, 101.

58. Edward O. Wilson, *The Future of Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002), 39.

59. Worster, *Nature's Economy*, 35.

60. Alexander von Humbolt, quoted in *ibid.*, 135–36.

61. George Q. Cannon, "Topics of the Times: Why Continually Want to Kill, Kill, Kill!" *Juvenile Instructor* 34 (August 15, 1899): 492–93.

62. Joseph F. Smith, "Birds," *Juvenile Instructor* 50 (June 1915): 372–73.

63. Brigham Young, April 6, 1852, *Journal of Discourses*, 1:203.

64. Brigham Young, June 12, 1860, *Journal of Discourses*, 8:84.

65. Heber C. Kimball, June 10, 1855, *Journal of Discourses*, 3:261.

66. John Taylor, *The Government of God* (Liverpool, England: S.W. Richards, 1852), 82.

67. Similarly, in the last days, according to the apocryphal *Apocalypse of Abraham*, "all the growing things will be blighted by the . . . great law-

lessness, and the plagues will come over all creatures of all the earth.” Quoted in Nibley, *Brigham Young Challenges the Saints*, 21 note 48.

68. Nibley, *Brigham Young Challenges the Saints*, 16.

69. George B. Handley, “The Environmental Ethics of Mormon Belief,” *BYU Studies*, 40, no. 2 (Summer 2001): 187–211.

70. Theodore Roszak, *The Voice of the Earth* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 14, 308–9.

71. Steven E. Snow, “Skipping the Grand Canyon,” in Williams, Smart, and Smith, *New Genesis*, 244.

# Flexibility in the Ecology of Ideas: Revelatory Religion and the Environment

*Bryan V. Wallis*

Ideas, like everything in the universe, do not exist in isolation. Ideas bear traces of the past, are in a state of continual evolution in the present, and are intertwined in dialectical relationships with other ideas and the world in which they are immanent. Even ideas considered revelatory, having issued from a source beyond the din of the mundane, are tangled in relationships between the revelator, the receiver, the world, and the medium (linguistic or otherwise) by which messages are transmitted. Ideas are part of an interrelatedness that is a fundamental aspect of being—described in the Western tradition as Aristotle’s “efficient” cause, the cause which is “the primary source of . . . change.”<sup>1</sup> This concept suggests that all beings (living and non-living alike) are shot through with the effects of contact with others—a notion also present in the Buddhist principle of emptiness, which maintains that “any belief in an objective reality grounded in the assumption of intrinsic, independent existence is untenable.”<sup>2</sup>

Anthropologist and social theorist Gregory Bateson (1904–80) describes an “ecology of ideas” in which ideas are interconnected and interact with one another in complex ways across space and time.<sup>3</sup> He refers to ideas as existing in constellations that operate somewhat independently yet are also bound together in complex networks of relationships. In these constellations of ideas, creation mythologies are central nodes in the unconscious bedrock of thought, being, and action.<sup>4</sup> All cultures have a story or stories by which they explain their origins and thereby set the

stage for their own sense of “being-in-the-world.”<sup>5</sup> The manner in which individuals and communities perceive themselves in the world vis-à-vis creation mythologies—their cosmic context as it were—influences how they perceive and treat the world and entities in it. Whether the world and its human and non-human inhabitants are seen to be the fruit of theogenic creation *ex nihilo*, an organization of preexisting elements by an intelligent agent, an emergence through a center (*omphalos* or navel), the result of a random series of mutations, or some combination thereof, creation stories are foundational to the way in which cultures view themselves in relationship to the world at large.

Latter-day Saints believe in the basic creation account in Genesis, yet that account has inspired both the destruction of and contempt for the world as well as affection for it and the desire to preserve it. The same creation text was wielded by the crusaders, the conquistadors, the Puritans, Saint Francis of Assisi, and Martin Luther King. Yet rather than simply jettisoning Christianity and its texts as insufficient or ambiguous to the point of uselessness, many Latter-day Saint thinkers may feel a kinship with thinkers such as essayist Wendell Berry who states: “There are an enormous number of people—and I am one of them—whose native religion, for better or worse, is Christianity. We are born to it; we began to learn about it before we became conscious; it is, whatever we think of it, an intimate belonging of our being; it informs our consciousness, our language and our dreams. We can turn away from it or against it, but that will only bind us tightly to a reduced version of it.”<sup>6</sup>

Like Berry, most Latter-day Saints have been reared in the Western Judeo-Christian tradition, a tradition with a troubling cultural and environmental legacy. Yet unlike those who frame the Judeo-Christian/Western legacy in exclusively negative terms and speak of rejecting religion altogether, I, like Berry, believe that doing so often results in becoming bound to a reduced and often caricatured version of it.<sup>7</sup> Most environmentally minded LDS thinkers would agree with Berry’s affirmation that “our native religion should survive and renew itself so that it may become as largely and truly instructive as we need it to be.”<sup>8</sup> In this respect, Mormonism provides a framework with the requisite epistemological flexibility.



Bateson notes that, on both an individual and a societal level, ecologies of ideas do not bestow equal importance on all ideas. While some new ideas are entertained, evaluated, employed, or rejected, others become more deeply engrained: "Ideas which survive repeated use are actually handled in a special way which is different from the way in which the mind handles new ideas."<sup>9</sup> These engrained "trusted ideas" tend to settle to a level below the scrutiny of conscious inspection and solidify into the bedrock of the unconscious. Trusted ideas, Bateson continues, "become nuclear or nodal within the constellations of other ideas, because the survival of these other ideas depends on how they fit with the hard-programmed ideas."<sup>10</sup> "Hard-programmed ideas" thereby become the unconscious foundation upon which the framework of subsequent thoughts and attitudes are built.

While the passing of ideas from the realm of critical inspection into the unconscious is not negative per se—and is, in fact, required for mental and social economy—Bateson notes that, simply because an idea has survived long enough to become solidified in the unconscious, does not prove "that the idea is either true or pragmatically useful over a long time," or that patterns of thought that may have formerly been benign may not later "become pathogenic."<sup>11</sup> The need therefore arises to maintain epistemological flexibility, allowing the evaluation of new ideas and bringing even hard-programmed ideas into the light of critical inspection. In such a flexible framework, unconscious ideas may be retained, modified, or rejected, based on a continually renegotiated dialogue between new information, current needs, and the legacy of the past. The emphasis is on process rather than teleology. This flexibility, Bateson maintains, is crucial to the continued health of systems while, conversely, "the using up of that flexibility is death."<sup>12</sup> Systems of thought that influence how individuals or societies perceive themselves in the context of the world must therefore be continually evaluated and modified based on new information and evolving needs and circumstances. Bateson's model of flexibility suggests that continual modifications must be made to preserve overall systemic integrity.<sup>13</sup>

Joseph Smith conceived of an epistemology that was simultaneously flexible in adapting to changing knowledge and circumstances and open to various sources of truth. Smith spoke in

broadening terms when he asserted: "One of the fundamental principles of 'Mormonism' is to receive truth, let it come from whence it may"<sup>14</sup> and, on another occasion, "Truth is Mormonism."<sup>15</sup> He often blurred the distinction between what has come to be considered "sacred" and "secular" knowledge. In his conception of Mormonism, truth must be ascertained both from divine revelation *and* through the God-given faculties of perception and discernment. When petitioning the Lord for instruction, Oliver Cowdery was famously told to "study [the matter] out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right" (D&C 9:8).

In this model, revelation is predicated on the exercise of perceptual and deliberative abilities, and apprehension of truth is a synthesis of the exercise of cognition as well as receptivity to external revelation. The Doctrine and Covenants affirms that "the glory of God is intelligence" (93:36), encourages Saints to acquire knowledge "of things both in heaven and in the earth, and under the earth; things which have been, things which are, things which must shortly come to pass" (88:79), and promises "Whatever principle of intelligence we attain unto in this life, it will rise with us in the resurrection. And if a person gains more knowledge and intelligence in this life through his diligence and obedience than another, he will have so much the advantage in the world to come" (130:18–19).

Similarly, Brigham Young did not limit valorized knowledge to what is contained in scripture, or even revelation, but taught that "fields and mountains, trees and flowers, and all that fly, swim or move upon the ground are lessons for study in the great school our heavenly Father has instituted for the benefit of his children," and encouraged Saints to "explore this great field of information that is open before us in . . . the great laboratory of nature."<sup>16</sup>

Joseph Smith's flexible epistemology resisted formalization into rigid creeds, and he lamented the yoke of inflexible tradition that constrained his followers from accepting new ideas. Rather than dogmatic tradition, Smith emphasized revelation and spoke of it in flexible terms, affirming its adaptability to changing circumstances. Speaking to a conference of Church elders in the spring of 1834, Oliver Cowdery recorded Smith's proclamation: "We are differently situated from any other people that ever ex-

isted upon this earth; consequently those former revelations cannot be situated to our conditions.”<sup>17</sup> In a personal letter to Nancy Rigdon in 1842, Smith states: “God said, ‘Thou shall not kill’; at another time He said, ‘Thou shalt utterly destroy.’ This is the principle on which the government of heaven is conducted—by revelation adapted to the circumstances in which the children of the kingdom are placed.”<sup>18</sup> Richard Lyman Bushman notes that Smith resisted the rigidity that would have been implicit in systematizing Mormon belief into a formal creed, a practice prevalent throughout Christian history. Such creeds “circumscribed truth, when he [Smith] wanted expansion. . . . Revelation overturned old ideas and was forever evolving.” Even the thirteen Articles of Faith, Bushman notes, “were never meant to encompass all Church doctrine or even distill its essence.”<sup>19</sup>

However, Smith fought an uphill battle against the tendency of his followers to doggedly cling to fixed traditions rather than flexibly accommodating the flow of new truths and principles: “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 pieces like glass as soon as anything comes that is contrary to their traditions,” he lamented in a discourse given in Nauvoo in January of 1844.<sup>20</sup> Although he maintained enough doctrinal structure to prevent the Church from falling into chaos or theological and cultural relativism, Smith emphasized that flexibility was necessary in the Mormon system of thought to maintain its vitality.

As Bateson warned, rigidity in constellations of thought can become “pathogenic,” “disastrous,” and ultimately “lethal.”<sup>21</sup> Key moments in the history of Western religious thought illustrate the perils of rigidity in how the religiously minded perceive the world. A well-known example is that, for centuries, the Ptolemaic or geocentric sense of the universe was almost universally accepted as the definitive cosmic model. Inherited from Aristotle, this model described the earth as the center around which the moon, the sun, planets, and the stars rotated in concentric spheres. Epistemologically, this worldview was based on fairly sound evidence of the time—passed down as the wisdom of the ancients, confirmed by a certain reading of biblical passages: “The world also

shall be stable, that it not be moved" (1 Chr. 16:30). This worldview also seemed to be confirmed phenomenologically and was supported by a long-held view of the universe as an ordered system (Greek *kosmos*, or "good order"). The Ptolemaic sense of the universe therefore settled into the unconscious of the thinkers of the time. Assumed to be an accurate picture of the world, it therefore needed no further revision or critical examination. As this geocentric worldview became engrained as mental habit—a central node in the constellation of contemporary religious ideas—it became intertwined with theology, as vividly depicted by Dante's *Divine Comedy*. As the Catholic Church inflexibly wedded itself to a particular (and in this case largely extra-scriptural) sense of the world, threats to the validity of the Ptolemaic universe were perceived as threats to the Church's validity. Thus, Galileo was tried for heresy when he dared to assert "the false doctrine taught by some that the sun is the center of the world and motionless and the earth moves even with diurnal motion."<sup>22</sup> While not fatal to the Church, this inflexibility proved damaging to its credibility when dogmatically held views were later demonstrated to be incorrect.

Maintaining Joseph Smith's flexible epistemological framework may help modern Latter-day Saints avoid these traps of the past, or what Bateson refers to as "the grooves of fatal destiny."<sup>23</sup> One example is evolution. The popular biography of famous Mormon scientist Henry Eyring provides a useful case study of such essential epistemological flexibility. Renowned in his field, Eyring acknowledged his belief in the possibility of biological evolution as the means by which the various forms of life on earth have come into being. His views attracted the ire of some in the Church who espoused a literal creationist interpretation and insisted on a creation lasting six days. The most conspicuous spokesman for the literalist view was Apostle Joseph Fielding Smith, with whom Eyring exchanged letters and had a "lively" in-person discussion on the subject.<sup>24</sup> According to his biographer, Eyring "enthusiastically studied the possibilities and even the probabilities of evolution . . . yet notwithstanding this scientifically rigorous speculation, in the end he wouldn't take a stand on how God did it."<sup>25</sup> Despite the temptation to assume a definitive stance on the question of the processes of creation, and knowing the credi-

bility he could impart by virtue of his status as a renowned scientist, Eyring maintained a certain humble agnosticism, refusing to definitively align himself with either faction.<sup>26</sup> Rather than simply being noncommittal, however, his position recognizes humankind's inherent ignorance before the largely unknown and perhaps unknowable facts of the universe. Eyring's stance maintains the flexibility necessary to accommodate further infusions of light and knowledge to be gained both from empirical observation and, potentially, from divine inspiration.

Bateson's sense of the need for flexibility in ecologies of ideas provides insight into the teachings of Joseph Smith regarding the need for continual revelation. In presenting himself as a prophet to the world, Smith challenged fundamental conceptions of the ontological nature of creation, and being, and the divine. In doing so, however, he did not rely on systematic or definitive expositions of his doctrine to persuade or compel. Rather, as reported in an 1832 article in the *Evening and the Morning Star*, he invited Mormons to invoke the principle of continuing revelation: "Ask your Heavenly Father, in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, to manifest the truth unto you, and if you do it with an eye single to His glory, nothing doubting, He will answer you by the power of His Holy Spirit. You will then know for yourself and not for another. You will not then be dependent on man for the knowledge of God."<sup>27</sup>

As I read Joseph Smith's position, he prophetically desired each human being to fundamentally evaluate engrained modes of thought which had slipped beneath the realm of critical inspection and to seek personal spiritual confirmation of the ideas he presented as the truths of the restored gospel. In doing so, he made each individual responsible for evaluating the truth, rather than simply relying on him for its confirmation. Smith's emphasis on the need for continuing revelation and his belief in the possibility of acquiring truth from a variety of sources safeguards the flexibility necessary for Latter-day Saints to walk the high wire, balancing reason and empirical observation with faith.

### Notes

1. Aristotle, "Physics," in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, edited by Richard McKenon (New York: Random House, 1941), 194b30.

2. The Dalai Lama, *The Universe in a Single Atom: The Convergence of Science and Spirituality* (New York: Morgan Road Books, 2005), 46.

3. Bateson notes that, through the “ecology of ideas,” ideas may survive beyond the death of their originator(s): “The very meaning of ‘survival’ becomes different when we stop talking about the survival of something bounded by the skin and start to think of the survival of the system of ideas. . . . The contents of the skin are randomized at death. . . . But the ideas, under further transformation, may go on out in the world in books or works of art. Socrates as a bioenergetic individual is dead. But much of him still lives as a component in the contemporary ecology of ideas.” Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 467.

4. In referring to “mythologies” I employ the word in its sense as story (the Greek root *mythos* can refer to anything delivered by word of mouth or speech, or to any story or narrative), rather than pejoratively as narratives that are considered false or fanciful.

5. German philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) used the German *In-der-Welt-sein* (“being-in-the-world”) and *da-sein* (“being there”) to attempt to dislodge the Cartesian subject/object dualism prevalent in the Western philosophical tradition and to posit instead that the surrounding world is co-constitutive of human “being” and not simply a world of objects that exist “over there,” discrete from the perceiving human subject. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (1927; rpt., Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), esp. 7–9.

6. Wendell Berry, *Sex, Economy, Freedom, and Community* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1994), 95–96.

7. Lynn White, (1907–87), “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis,” *Science*, March 10, 1967, 1203–7, is the most widely known of this strain of thought. White blames much of the modern environmental destruction on the Judeo-Christian tradition. He argues that “pagan” views of nature were characterized by a certain animism that allegedly fostered respect for spirits immanent in nature itself; this attitude thereby kept ancient peoples from perpetrating significant environmental harm. In contrast, Judeo-Christian monotheism maintained a sense of the divine as distinct from nature and had the goal of transcending the dross of the surrounding world. From this root attitude, White argued, sprang modern environmentally destructive attitudes and practice.

8. Berry, *Sex, Economy, Freedom, and Community*, 96.

9. Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, 509.

10. A child, for example, when learning to walk dedicates much mental energy to coordinating muscle movements and carefully maintaining balance, yet upon mastering the skill of walking, the child gives

little attention to such basic mechanics and his or her mind is therefore free to concentrate on other things. According to Bateson, “trusted ideas” become habit and form the foundation of the way in which individuals (and societies) think and perceive the world. They become automatic, “available for immediate use without thoughtful inspection, while the more flexible parts of the mind can be saved for use on newer matters.” Ibid., 509–10.

11. In discussing ideas that have become engrained simply through tradition, but that may, over the long run, prove destructive, Bateson states that, while “hard-programmed ideas become nuclear or nodal within constellations of other ideas . . . frequency of validation of an idea within a given segment of time is not the same as *proof* that the idea is either true or pragmatically useful over long time. We are discovering today that several of the premises which are deeply engrained in our way of life are simply untrue and become pathogenic when implemented with modern technology.” Ibid., 510.

12. Bateson’s sense of flexibility operates within certain tolerances, the violation of which results in “discomfort, pathology and ultimately death.” He employs the example of an acrobat on a high wire who must maintain a certain amount of rigidity as well as the flexibility “to move from one position of instability to another.” If, instead, “his arms are fixed or paralyzed . . . he must fall.” If a system of thought becomes so rigid that it loses the flexibility to evaluate even its unconscious assumptions or so supple that it loses all form, then it will consequently fall. Ibid., 503–6.

13. Bateson states that the ecological thinker must be adamant about maintaining flexibility. “[The ecologist] must also exert authority to preserve such flexibility as exists or can be created. At this point (as in the matter of unreplaceable natural resources), his recommendations must be tyrannical. Social flexibility is a resource as precious as oil or titanium.” Ibid., 505.

14. Joseph Smith Jr. et al., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, edited by B. H. Roberts, 2d ed. rev. (6 vols., 1902–12, Vol. 7, 1932; rpt., Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1980 printing), 5:499. He delivered this sermon Sunday, July 9, 1843, at the grove near the temple.

15. Dean C. Jessee, ed., *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1984), 419.

16. Brigham Young, August 31, 1862, *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (London and Liverpool: LDS Booksellers Depot, 1855–86), 9:369–70.

17. Fred C. Collier and William S. Harwell, eds., *Kirtland Council Minute Book* (Salt Lake City: Collier’s Publishing, 1996), 37.

18. Jessee, *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 508.



19. Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 172.

20. Joseph Smith, January 21, 1844, *History of the Church*, 6:184–85.

21. Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, 509.

22. Maurice A. Finocchiaro, editor and translator, *The Galileo Affair: A Documentary History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 288: The panel of theologians who tried Galileo asserted that his belief that “the sun is the center of the world and motionless is a proposition which is philosophically absurd and false, and formally heretical, for being explicitly contrary to Holy Scripture; That the earth is neither the center of the world nor motionless but moves even with diurnal motion is philosophically equally absurd and false, and theologically at least erroneous in the Faith.”

23. Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, 504.

24. Henry Eyring, “A Tribute to President Joseph Fielding Smith,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 7 (Spring 1972): 15–16.

25. Henry J. Eyring, *Mormon Scientist: The Life and Faith of Henry Eyring* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2008), 228. The Book of Abraham substitutes “time” for the Genesis use of “day,” implying indeterminate periods of creation, and states that, after planning the creation “the Gods watched those things which they had ordered until they obeyed” (4:18), suggesting a process rather than a one-time creative act.

26. Hugh Nibley wryly described the ongoing debate between evolution and a literal creationism as “a foolish contest between equally vain and bigoted rivals in which it is a moot question which side heaps the most contempt on God’s creatures.” Nibley, “Before Adam,” in *Old Testament and Related Studies: Collected Works of Hugh Nibley, Vol. 1*, edited by John W. Welch, Gary P. Gillum, and Don E. Norton (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book/Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1986), 50.

27. Joseph Smith, “To the Honorable Men of the World,” *Evening and the Morning Star* 1, no. 3 (August 1832), 22, <http://www.centerplace.org/history/ems/v1n03.htm> (accessed February 15, 2011).

# Whither Mormon Environmental Theology?

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Ecological theologian and cultural historian Thomas Berry has suggested that we are entering the “Ecozoic” age, which he defines as “that period when humans would be present on the earth in a mutually enhancing manner.”<sup>1</sup> Here Berry is expressing a hope that human creativity can transcend the destructive and short-sighted culture of the modern age, which has precipitated the greatest environmental crisis in human existence—a crisis that recently featured the largest oil spill in U.S. history. By mutually enhancing, Berry means not simply a benign human presence on the earth, but the emergence of an ecological consciousness that nests the human economy into the larger earth system, a sort of human-earth symbiosis. As Berry and many others suggest, the problems associated with the environmental crisis—pollution, species extinction, climate change—are but symptoms of a much deeper failure on the part of our civilization to relate to the earth and its creatures in moral terms. Berry and others have focused blame for the crisis on Western, specifically industrial, civilization whose historical development emerged from the mechanistic cosmology of enlightenment science and a pervasive subject-object oriented ontology (way of being/perceiving the world)—an ontology in which human subjects seek mastery over the objective (material) world.

Lynn White, in his now infamous essay “The Historical Roots of the Ecological Crisis,” singled out medieval Christianity for planting the seeds from which our present industrial society grew.<sup>2</sup> White particularly blames Christianity for despiritualizing the natural world by emphasizing the transcendent nature of God and the instrumental purpose of the earth. White writes: “To a Christian a tree can be no more than a physical fact. The whole

concept of the sacred grove is alien to Christianity and to the ethos of the West. For nearly two millennia Christian missionaries have been chopping down sacred groves which are idolatrous because they assume spirit in nature.”<sup>3</sup>

Since White leveled these claims in 1967, there has been a flurry of responses from those who would defend Western Christianity and religion in general from this blame. Among recent responses has been that of Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, scholars of religion and ecology, who write: “As key repositories of enduring civilizational values and as indispensable motivators in moral transformation, religions have an important role to play in projecting persuasive visions of a more sustainable future.”<sup>4</sup> While admitting religions’ role in the current crisis, they, among many others, are more optimistic about world religions’ potential contribution to solving the crises we face, precisely because of their moral dimensions.

From 1996 to 1998, Tucker and Grim organized a series of ten forums, “Religious Traditions of the World and Ecology,” which included Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism, Shinto, and indigenous religions. These forums brought together religious scholars, environmental ethicists, and practitioners from around the world who explored both the promising and problematic aspects of the world’s major religious traditions with respect to the environment. Through these forums, scholars and activists from many of the world’s religious traditions are reexamining and redefining the human-earth relationship, which has been eclipsed—especially in Western Christianity—by the primacy of the human-God and human-human relationships as the domains of religious moral concern.

As Tucker and Grim point out, this reflective process includes three basic methods of inquiry: retrieval, reevaluation, and reconstruction. Retrieval comprises the scholarly mapping of a tradition’s earth-teachings and, in many cases, the excavation of neglected ones. Retrieval reflects on the positive and negative environmental consequences these teachings may have. Reevaluation involves rethinking a given tradition’s earth-teachings in light of contemporary ecological issues and scientific knowledge and proposing new interpretations of these traditional teachings. Reconstruction aims at the creative adaptation of a tradition’s teachings

and practices to specific environmental ideas, problems, or circumstances with an emphasis on religious orthopraxy (or, right religious action).

In his book *Ecologies of Grace*, environmental ethicist Willis Jenkins masterfully outlines several “lived environmental theologies” within global Christianity in response to the current crisis.<sup>5</sup> Many traditions within Christianity have taken up the call to formulate a moral response to the ecological crisis, doing so on their own terms and in their own language. For example, the World Council of Churches has formally incorporated responsibility for creation into its programs.<sup>6</sup> On January 1, 1990, speaking at the Catholic World Day of Peace, Pope John Paul II, called the ecological crisis as “our common responsibility.” Many Catholic dioceses have also published “pastoral letters” addressing local and international environmental issues.<sup>7</sup> The Evangelical Environmental Network has rallied behind “creation care” as a sacred moral duty.<sup>8</sup> Greek Orthodox Patriarch Bartholomew, who has been referred to as the Green Pope, has been a fierce advocate for rectifying our “ecological sins.” Each strategy is unique to its theological tradition, but each emphasizes our moral duty to care for the earth.

Mormonism, as a non-traditional Christian tradition, has nevertheless paralleled mainstream Christianity’s more ambivalent reaction to environmental issues. While founding and early Mormon leaders spoke passionately on a wide array of issues related to our moral duty to the earth (mostly focused on prudent use of resources and kindness to animals), contemporary Mormonism has largely remained silent on environmental problems and excluded the earth from our sphere of core moral concerns.

The absence of a robust contemporary Mormon environmental ethic stems largely from a deep polarization of environmental issues on the American political landscape during the last fifty years. An excellent example is juxtaposing tree-hugger environmentalist hippies against hard-working middle-class folk, as was the case in the jobs versus owls debate during the 1990s in the Pacific Northwest. And when those who would advocate for environmental issues become stereotyped with free love, drug culture, and secularism, conservative Mormons tend to stop listening. In such a volatile political atmosphere, the Church has increasingly

shied away from declarations or sermons on our duty to care for the earth.

However, as a student of Mormon environmental theology, I have been pleased to note a dramatic increase in grassroots environmentally focused Mormon activism, art, symposia, scholarship, blogs, and listservs.<sup>9</sup> Mormons, along with the rest of Western civilization, are beginning to engage in serious reflection on what our tradition has to say about the earth and our moral responsibilities toward it and its creatures. In my observation however, much of this Mormon scholarship and activism has been focused on the *retrieval* of earth-affirming doctrines with the hope that highlighting these lesser-known teachings will foster more environmentally minded orthopraxis among the Mormon faithful.

I propose that these retrieved Mormon earth-teachings can be divided into two broad traditions. Abstracting Mormon earth-teachings into these traditions becomes helpful when attempting to understand Mormon moral ontology—how we perceive our duty to the rest of creation. By “tradition,” I mean the body of scripture, teachings, official declarations, relevant ecclesiastical duties (such as callings), and Mormon orthopraxy that relate to our moral duties to the earth and its creatures.

The first of these traditions I will call the “stewardship tradition.” While Thomas G. Alexander uses this label in his 1994 article “Stewardship and Enterprise: The LDS Church and the Wasatch Oasis Environment, 1847–1930,”<sup>10</sup> I am using the term, not as a broad Christian ecological theme, but rather as a specific sub-set of Mormon earth-teachings and practices. The stewardship tradition is supported by a robust mixture of the above criteria (scriptures, teachings, declarations, orthopraxy) especially reflected in nineteenth-century Mormon agrarianism. The stewardship tradition holds an instrumental moral ontology regarding our relationship to the earth—that the earth and its creatures are God-given materials whose existences are means to human ends, both utilitarian and aesthetic. This view has also been labeled as anthropocentric, or human-centered.

The second of these traditions I will call the “vitalistic tradition.” While both scriptures and teachings support this tradition, it has not, to my knowledge, been meaningfully reflected in the orthopraxy of the Mormon faithful. Thus, the vitalistic tradition

consists of those Mormon teachings that hold in common the implication of an intrinsic moral ontology regarding our relationship to the earth. By “intrinsic,” I mean simply that the earth and its creatures have value as ends in themselves outside of their usefulness to human wants and needs—again, both utilitarian and aesthetic. This tradition implies but does not explicitly state a biocentric, or life-centered ontology.

While I praise and have learned much from the retrieval of the unique earth-teachings and practices of Mormonism from both traditions because environmental issues have become so polarizing, simply reemphasizing these lesser-known teachings has been insufficient to reconnect the earth and its creatures with Mormon moral concern and orthopraxy, especially in a post-agrarian society. In this article, I will flesh out the two categories of retrieved Mormon earth-teachings, commenting on their implied moral ontologies. I will end by reevaluating and reconstructing several aspects of the vitalistic tradition.

### **The Stewardship Tradition**

As a popular strategy of Evangelical Protestantism, stewardship encourages “responsible habitation” of the earth. As Jenkins points out, “The stewardship strategy thus makes environmental issues significant in light of God’s attitude toward human agents, situating environmental practices wholly within the exchange between God and humanity.”<sup>11</sup> Stewardship thus maintains an anthropocentric view of creation, with the earth and its creatures ordained for prudent and respectful human use.<sup>12</sup>

While Genesis 1:28 speaks of “subduing” the earth and exercising “dominion” over its creatures (1:26), Genesis 2:15 speaks of “dressing” and “keeping” the Lord’s garden. Many ecological theologians have argued about the proper interpretation of these texts outside of their original ancient Near Eastern contexts.<sup>13</sup> However, within the broad Christian stewardship tradition, exploitation and dominion give way to keeping the Lord’s garden, a moral charge that has resonated with many contemporary Christians.<sup>14</sup>

Environmental ethicist Clare Palmer proposes that the contemporary widespread use of stewardship in relation to the environment emerged from Christian usage in the 1950s and 1960s

with respect to *financial* resources and was later incorporated into the language of the ecological awakening of the 1960s.<sup>15</sup> John Passmore's *Man's Responsibility for Nature* was also a milestone in articulating a twentieth-century approach to environmental stewardship as a human moral duty to care for creation.<sup>16</sup>

Stewardship emphasizes God's goodness in creating the world. Because human beings benefit from that goodness, we are obliged to make prudent and wise use of its bounty and to safeguard human health.<sup>17</sup> The Church of England 1986 report, *Our Responsibility for the Living Environment*, represents a typical articulation of Christian environmental stewardship: "The Bible pictures mankind in relation to nature as a shepherd, a farm manager, or a household steward—a role which allows us to make use of resources for our needs, but does not permit us to destroy them, since they are entrusted to us for only a limited period."<sup>18</sup> The earth's resources are a gift to human beings for which we are accountable to God.

Scripture and teachings within the Mormon stewardship tradition share these assumptions. The writings of Joseph Smith frame the earth as a divinely created gift to its human dwellers, an essential platform upon which the mortal phase of the plan of salvation is carried out. The classic formulation of the Mormon stewardship tradition as taught by Smith appears in Doctrine and Covenants 59:18–20:

Yea, all things which come of the earth, in the season thereof, are made for the benefit and the use of man, both to please the eye and to gladden the heart;

Yea, for food and for raiment, for taste and for smell, to strengthen the body and to enliven the soul.

And it pleaseth God that he hath given all these things unto man; for unto this end were they made to be used, with judgment, not to excess, neither by extortion.

The earth was made as a means to human ends—an anthropocentric view typical of the rest of Christian stewardship discourse—both to gladden the heart and eye (aesthetic concern) and for food and raiment (utilitarian concerns).

Early Mormon settlers of Utah did not easily separate the aesthetic and the utilitarian, the sacred and the temporal.<sup>19</sup> These settlers, though accustomed to the climates in the eastern United



States and Europe, were determined to make the desert “blossom as a rose.” The first communities in the Salt Lake Valley set to work building gridded cities with wide avenues. They made gardens, farms, and orchards. They cooperatively built hundreds of miles of irrigation canals.<sup>20</sup> An agrarian aesthetic permeated not only their livelihoods but their religious metaphors and practices.

Brigham Young stated, “You are here commencing anew. . . . [T]he soil, the air, the water are all pure and healthy. Do not suffer them to become polluted with wickedness. Strive to preserve the elements from being contaminated by the filthy, wicked conduct and sayings of those who pervert the intelligence God has bestowed upon the human family.”<sup>21</sup> Here Young does not distinguish between physical and spiritual pollution. Again he states: “our work is to beautify the whole face of the earth, until it shall become like the Garden of Eden.”<sup>22</sup> Stewardship for Young was framed in an eschatological vision that assumed goodness in creation and a moral duty to work toward our mutual exaltation.

Apostle George Q. Cannon, counselor in the First Presidency of Brigham Young, John Taylor, Wilford Woodruff, and Lorenzo Snow, is well known for his passion for promoting animal welfare among Church members. He made frequent contributions to the *Juvenile Instructor* and in 1889 wrote: “The Lord has given animals, fowls and fish to man for his use. They are placed under man’s control, to be used for food with prudence and thanksgiving and not wastefully. But we have heard of animal life being very much wasted to gratify the hunting propensity of some men. This is wrong. When people can use game of any kind for food, and they stand in need of it, the Lord is not displeased if they kill it. When, however, they hunt it for the mere pleasure of killing, then sin is committed.”<sup>23</sup> Here Cannon encourages the use of animals for human needs but frowns on killing for killing’s sake. Waste and cruelty are considered a sin. Cannon was so effective in his advocacy for kindness to animals that the Church held an annual Humane Day, beginning in 1897 and lasting until 1918, to emphasize care for animals as a moral obligation.<sup>24</sup> Joseph F. Smith was also a passionate advocate for animal welfare and frequently recited the folk saying: “Take not the life you cannot give, for all things have an equal right to live.”<sup>25</sup>

In addition to a scriptural and teaching basis, the stewardship

tradition was also perceptible in early Mormon orthopraxis. Joseph F. Smith tells of crossing the plains when an ox collapsed from exhaustion. He relates: "The brethren poured oil on the head of the ox and then laid their hands upon it."<sup>26</sup> The fact that these men would perform a priesthood ordinance on an animal proves the strong connection between their spiritual and temporal lives.

The responsibility of individual members to accept and magnify their ward calling however small is a critical part of Mormon orthopraxy and a frequent theme in lessons and general conference discourses. As political scientist Ronald Smith shows, in early Utah wards bishops also frequently served as "water masters" to maintain decentralized control over a community's irrigation water. The bishop resolved disputes and made sure that the water was distributed equitably.<sup>27</sup>

While early Mormon agrarian communities did not separate utility from aesthetics or the temporal from the spiritual, it was not long before overgrazing and deforestation led to acute environmental problems such as sand storms, flooding, and drought.<sup>28</sup> Despite the admonition of early Church leaders, the spirit of capitalism was too strong to resist and soon utility became the domain of the market, aesthetics the domain of the parks and wilderness, and spirituality the domain of personal morality. Today the vast tracts of manicured farms have all grown houses, and Doctrine and Covenants 104:17 ("For the earth is full, and there is enough and to spare") invokes images of supermarket shelves rather than brimming root cellars or granaries bulging with wheat.

Since the 1960s, the rise of environmentalism has radically shifted the political implications of moral discourse regarding the earth. In a contemporary American context, this movement has resulted in the decline of the stewardship tradition to such an extent that stewardship for the earth is no longer a recognizable imperative of Mormon moral discourse.

One of the last recognizable contributors to the stewardship tradition is Ezra Taft Benson. Benson frequently repeated the themes of George Q. Cannon and Joseph F. Smith regarding kindness to animals, avoiding waste, and alleviating suffering. Benson's environmental theology fit squarely within the stewardship tradi-

tion when he taught: "It is terribly important that we preserve and improve the great natural resources with which the God of heaven has so richly blessed us, that we may not follow the experience of some other nations that have come and gone because of the mismanagement of their natural and God-given resources."<sup>29</sup> Ironically, despite the fact that, as Church president Benson was well known for his enthusiasm for gardening, though perhaps less so than President Spencer W. Kimball, as Secretary of Agriculture under U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower, Benson oversaw the expansion of industrial farming and the demise of the family farm, part of the "get big or get out" philosophy.<sup>30</sup>

Hugh Nibley, a legendary scholar of ancient scripture at Brigham Young University but never a General Authority, has been a lone voice in the wilderness (sometimes quite literally) in defense of the Mormon stewardship tradition. Nibley went to great lengths to defend the benevolent exegesis of Genesis 1 by framing stewardship as a choice between God and Satan's dominion. He was quite comfortable within the stewardship tradition and saw plenty of moral implications for our relation to the earth with its teachings. By focusing on the Latin root *dominus*, rather than the harsher Hebrew *Radah*, Nibley points to the apocryphal writings of early Judaism and Christianity to show humankind's proper role as caretakers. Nibley famously wrote, "Man's dominion is a call to service, not a license to exterminate."<sup>31</sup>

The stewardship tradition makes a significant contribution to a potential Mormon environmental ethic. However, for me it remains problematic because it is marked by an instrumental valuation of the earth and its creatures by giving human subjects mastery over material objects. The earth is always framed in reference to human needs and wants. Moral duty is concerned with metering waste, not causing unnecessary suffering, and beautifying the earth. Another potentially problematic aspect of stewardship is that the scriptures define the earth's productivity as an incentive that will reward obedience to other moral and ritual commandments—a sort of conditional ethic of the land, rather than an authentic land ethic. Caring for the land is never a commandment in itself. Leviticus 25:18 is an example: "Wherefore ye shall do my statutes, and keep my judgments, and do them; and ye shall dwell in the land in safety." The Book of Mormon is full of "if, then"

promises regarding obedience to God's laws: "And inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments, ye shall prosper" (1 Ne. 2:20). Both the ancient Hebrews and early Mormons were keenly aware of the fragility of the land, and perhaps obedience to God was simply insurance against crop failure; but caring for the land was never a moral imperative in itself.

Despite these problems, contemporary Mormon moral discourse is marked by the conspicuous absence of earth stewardship as a moral focus. As evidence, there are no stand-alone environmentally themed Sunday School lessons on caring for the earth in any of the Church's manuals. The Church's official website {LDS.org} and its social networking site {Mormon.org} include no introductory doctrinal positions. Neither one includes caring for the earth as part of the Church's core "principles" or "values." While stewardship does appear on {LDS.org}, it refers exclusively to the responsibility to fulfill one's callings and to complete one's monthly home teaching duties.

### The Vitalistic Tradition

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines vitalism as "the theory that the origin and phenomena of life are due to or produced by a vital principle, as distinct from a purely chemical or physical force."<sup>32</sup> Vitalism is common among the world's spiritual traditions. In Chinese culture this energy-force is *ch'i*. In the Hindu Vedas, this vital principle is most closely associated with *prana*. In Pacific Islander philosophy, this impersonal force that dwells in all life is called *mana*. Although the concept was quickly rejected by Western science, the idea made an appearance as *ether*. In his 1907 *Creative Evolution*, French philosopher Henri Bergson coined the term *élan vital*, which he postulated as similar to electricity, as the animating principle of life. Within Mormonism, this vital primordial force is *intelligence*. Thus, the vitalistic tradition contains scriptures and teachings that elaborate on the nature of intelligence. It also includes teachings such as the eternal nature of matter and expands traditional Christian notions of spirit to nonhumans, including the earth itself, both of which join humans in possessing an eternal existence. Many of these teachings have already been retrieved by Mormon environmental theologians to bolster Mormonism's moral obligation to the earth,<sup>33</sup> but unlike

the stewardship tradition, these seeds have fallen on hard ground, and precious little orthopraxis reflects the radical implications of the vitalistic tradition.

The vitalistic tradition begins with a unique Mormon teaching that originated with Joseph Smith—namely the eternal nature of matter and the material nature of spirit. Mormon creation theology asserts that there was no *ex nihilo* (out of nothing) creation by a self-existing, transcendent God. While the idea of eternal matter was common among pagan and indigenous traditions of the ancient Near East and Greece including Plato, after approximately 200 C.E., it was universally accepted in the Christian Church that God was the ultimate cause of everything and that He created all things out of nothing.<sup>34</sup> In Smith's view, "the elements are eternal" and creation as traditionally read in Genesis 1 is read as "formed or organized."

By 1843 Joseph Smith was teaching that not only is matter in its basic elements uncreated, but that there was no such thing as immaterial matter:

There is no such thing as immaterial matter. All spirit is matter, but it is more fine or pure, and can only be discerned by purer eyes;

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

According to Smith, all matter (including spirit) is imbued with intelligence. "Man was also in the beginning with God. Intelligence, or the light of truth, was not created or made neither indeed can be" (D&C 93:29). Abraham 3:22 provides a slightly different concept of intelligences—less a quality of matter than a premortal characteristic: "Now the Lord had shown unto me, Abraham, the intelligences that were organized before the world was; and among all these there were many of the noble and great ones." Intelligence in both cases clearly point to the basic units of the pre-mortal soul.

Apostle Orson Pratt took this idea a step further: "All the organizations of worlds, of minerals, of vegetables, of animals, of men, of angels, of spirits, and of the spiritual personages of the Father, of the Son, and the Holy Ghost, must, if organized at all, have been the result of the self combinations and unions of the preexistent, intelligent, powerful, and eternal particles of sub-

stance. These eternal Forces and Powers are the Great First Causes of all things and events that have had a beginning.”<sup>35</sup> Pratt takes Smith’s intelligences in the direction of self-organizing intelligence-matter as the basic unit of cosmological creativity, out of which the myriad forms of the organized universe emerge.

Brigham Young, while he certainly taught from the stewardship tradition, also taught a kind of vitalism: “There is not one particle of element, which is not filled with life. . . . There is life in all matter, throughout the vast extent of all the eternities; it is in the rock, the sand, the dust, in water, and gasses, and in short, in every description and organization of matter whether it be solid, liquid, or gaseous, particle operating within particle.”<sup>36</sup> Like Pratt, Young sees all matter as alive. The eternal nature and self-organizing properties of intelligence-matter make it the building blocks of a Mormon theology of subjectivity and agency.

The Book of Moses, dictated and published by Smith between 1830 and 1831 alters the King James Version (KJV) creation narratives making room for Smith’s expanding unified cosmology. One important addition to these narratives includes the elaboration of a spiritual creation which includes plants and animals. In Moses, dominion is still the operative word, and Moses 3:7 echoes the KJV almost word for word: “And I, the Lord God, formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a *living soul*” (emphasis mine). However, Moses 3:9 adds an important and unique idea to the creation story: “And out of the ground made I, the Lord God, to grow every tree, naturally, that is pleasant to the sight of man; and man could behold it. And it became also a *living soul*” (emphasis mine). Moses 3:19 repeats this concept: “And out of the ground I, the Lord God, formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and commanded that they should come unto Adam, to see what he would call them; and they were also *living souls*” (emphasis mine). It is interesting that the Hebrew for “living creature” (*Nepesh Chayy*), was used for both humans and non-humans.<sup>37</sup> However, the KJV translators translated this term as “living soul” in the case of humans and as “living creature” in the case of animals (Gen. 2:7, 19). Joseph Smith used “living soul” for both humans and nonhumans (Moses 3:7, 9, 19), providing a curious synthesis between the ancient Hebrew and the Western concept of

the soul and making explicit the Mormon doctrine of plant and animals souls.

Another aspect of the living souls doctrine are the teachings that expand salvation and eternal destiny to plants and animals. This 1909 statement from the First Presidency, then consisting of Joseph F. Smith, John R. Winder, and Anthon H. Lund, sums up both the sentiment and the seriousness with which this doctrine, originating with Smith, is taken: “[God] made the tadpole and the ape, the lion and the elephant. . . . The whole animal creation will be perfected and perpetuated in the Hereafter, each class in its ‘distinct order or sphere,’ and will enjoy ‘eternal felicity.’”<sup>38</sup>

Related to the living souls doctrines, Moses 7:48 presents a profound scene: “And it came to pass that Enoch looked upon the earth; and he heard a voice from the bowels thereof saying: Wo, wo is me, the mother of men; I am pained, I am weary, because of the wickedness of my children. When shall I rest, and be cleansed from the filthiness which is gone forth out of me? When will my Creator sanctify me, that I may rest, and righteousness for a season abide upon my face?” First, the portrayal of the earth as our mother is one of the oldest metaphors human beings possess. This passage gives voice to our Mother Earth through Enoch. Nowhere else in the Christian canon is the earth heard in such touching expressiveness. Second, this passage invokes a spiritual dimension to the work of climatologist James Lovelock’s increasingly popular Gaia Theory. Lovelock has shown that the dynamic interaction of the geology, biology, and atmosphere of our planet literally behaves like an organism in self-regulating the earth’s temperature within the narrow range suitable for life, despite the fact that the sun’s temperature has increased over the last several million years. Lovelock boldly proposes that “the entire surface of the earth including life is a superorganism.”<sup>39</sup> Joseph Smith’s Book of Moses provides the spiritual Elias of this increasingly accepted scientific proposal.

Smith and early Church leaders also taught that the earth itself would participate in the eternal progress of human kind. Doctrine and Covenants 77:1 asks: “Question: What is the sea of glass spoken of by John, 4th chapter, and 6th verse of the Revelation? Answer: It is the earth, in its sanctified, immortal, and eternal state.” In addition to the eternal destiny of the earth, Doctrine



and Covenants 88:18–20 teaches that the earth will be the eternal dwelling place of exalted human beings:

Therefore, it [the earth] must needs be sanctified from all unrighteousness, that it may be prepared for the celestial glory;

For after it hath filled the measure of its creation, it shall be crowned with glory, even with the presence of God the Father;

That bodies who are of the celestial kingdom may possess it forever and ever.

The earth is not only a living soul with a past, present, and future but is also inextricably connected to the fate of its inhabitants, an idea that I find particularly powerful.

The vitalistic tradition contains a complex array of earth-teachings within a unified cosmology: eternal intelligence-matter, the doctrine of living souls (plants, animals, and the earth itself), the eternal nature of these living souls along with humans, and the proposition that there will be an eternal relationship between human beings and the earth. These teachings imply an intrinsic moral ontology. The fact that matter is eternal and inherently alive strongly implies that, in addition to its instrumental uses, the earth and its creatures have intrinsic worth as ends in themselves. This implication contrasts with the instrumental valuation of matter in the stewardship tradition as material means to human spiritual ends.

However, despite this doctrinal richness, many of the above teachings are obscure and seldom dwelt upon in contemporary Mormon discourse. In Sunday School, we seldom talk about any of these teachings or their implications for environmental issues. When we do talk about the earth, we do so in strictly anthropocentric terms for its role in the plan of salvation. When talking about the millennium and the eternities (which we seem to love doing), we dwell on the more violent aspects of the eschaton.

### **Reevaluation, Reconstruction, and Restoration**

In this article, I have presented a brief overview of retrieved Mormon earth-teachings and practices within two traditions—the stewardship and vitalistic traditions. Neither tradition finds adequate emphasis in contemporary Mormon moral teachings or practices due to the increasingly polarized nature of environmental issues. While retrieval of both traditions contains a rich canon

of ethically compelling scriptures, teachings, and orthopraxy, the vitalistic tradition provides the most compelling moral ontology for a Mormon contribution to the Ecozoic Age.

First, because the vitalistic tradition frames the cosmos as made up of self-organizing intelligence-matter, the primacy of the human subject as the basic unit of cosmic subjectivity is rendered problematic. Agency and subjectivity are expanded, thus subverting the strict Western dualism between subjects and objects which has been identified as a key ontological feature of the current crisis. As stated in the introduction, Thomas Berry has been a leading voice for both a moral response to the environmental crisis and an ontological shift in Christian theology. In order to overcome the current polarization surrounding the environment, Berry, among many others, proposes an ontological shift away from the dominion-based subject-object relationship to the earth that has precipitated the current crisis, toward an inter-subjective ontology that views the cosmos as an emerging process of interacting and vital particularities. Rather than acting out our wills on an external and passive “nature,” humanity could take a humbler yet empowering position in the cosmos. Berry and physicist Brian Swimme suggest that “the universe is a communion of subjects, rather than a collection of objects.”<sup>40</sup> The vitalistic tradition certainly supports this radical shift in ontology. By democratizing humanity’s place in the cosmos as subjects among subjects Berry believes (and I would agree) that our moral response to the earth should focus on creating a “mutually enhancing” relationship with the earth. This ontological shift combined with its guiding ethic of mutually enhancing relations transcends the polarization of utilitarian and aesthetic concerns characteristic of modern environmental discourse which divides the earth into sacred, untouchable spaces (e.g., national parks) and exploitable resources (Kennecott copper mines).

In addition to subverting Western and Christian ontology, Mormon vitalism makes matter the essential stuff of which the eternities are composed. The classical image of the soul as a ghost in the machine is a persistent metaphor, one that fits well with Mormon dramatizations of the preexistence. The doctrine of intelligence-matter infusing all matter with life challenges the pervasive dualism between body and spirit and denies any supernatu-

ral numinous quality to spirit. This doctrine has important implications for environmental ethics. If matter is the essence of our eternal identity and experience, truisms like “we are spiritual beings having a human experience” fall apart. A theology of matter as sacred rather than as fallen, flawed mortal substance becomes plausible. How might our perception of the cosmos shift if the “eternal felicity” we were waiting for was the continual emergence of the cosmos taking place all around us?

The doctrine of animals and plants as living souls also throws a wrench into notions of the earth and its creatures as means to human ends. It would be much more ethically problematic to cram chickens, pigs, and cows into small cages and feedlots if they were actively understood as possessing a pre-, mortal, and post-mortal existence to which our treatment of them was as morally based as our relation to our fellow humans. This is not to argue that we should become vegans; plants have souls, too. But once we have made the ontological shift toward inter-subjectivity, the discourse of the prudent use of natural resources is replaced by *participation* in the earth’s systems with all the rights and responsibilities that implies. All creatures must eat to live; thus the simple act of eating is sacramental of this basic principle of life. The Word of Wisdom found in Doctrine and Covenants 89 gives a firm scriptural foundation for an expansion of the dietary prohibitions of alcohol, tobacco, coffee, and tea to prescriptive methods for raising crops and livestock that allow animals and plants to fill the measure of their creations and avoid toxic chemicals that destroy life. Perhaps we could develop a Word of Wisdom Certification system for agricultural and food processing.

Further, planetary biodiversity and ecological integrity become a sacrament to the ever-evolving creative energy of intelligence-matter, the sacred substance we share with minerals, plants, animals, and Gods, all of which are promised to continue throughout eternity. Protecting and maintaining biodiversity as the spectrum of sacred creativity thus takes on a moral imperative. Through Enoch, Mother Earth mourns, not because we forget to read our scriptures or break the law of chastity, but for the continual desecration of its body by greedy, extractive, and polluting industries and the lifestyles they support.

The vitalistic tradition accomplishes an ontological shift to-

ward inter-subjectivity with its guiding ethic of creating mutually enhancing relationships with the earth and its creatures. It opens the imagination to an eternal ecology. In addition, Mormon environmental theologians could consider adding a fourth method: restoration. Many of the current ecological issues form part of what I would call an *ecological* apostasy, the great falling away by Western civilization from sacred truths about the spirituality of the earth and its creatures which Joseph Smith began to restore in his vitalistic theology. And despite Lynn White's accusation that Christianity is anathema to the sacred grove, Mormons hold a grove in upstate New York to be particularly sacred indeed! Our response to the ecological apostasy thus requires both spiritual and ecological restoration.

Restoration provides an essential grammar that can guide us through acts of retrieval, reevaluation, and reconstruction so that we are not simply adapting our teachings to outside pressures but fulfilling a sacred task that began with Joseph Smith but is carried on by the Mormon faithful. Restoration provides the key connection between the vitalistic tradition and Mormon orthopraxy by engaging Mormon belief in acting out the implications of these sacred doctrines and repenting of our ecological sins by restoring the ecosystems we have destroyed. We must restore the earth-teachings and orthopraxy that morally connect us to the earth and its creatures, in addition to repairing and healing the damage we have done to Enoch's Mother Earth so that her pain will be assuaged and we can move through the eternities together in mutually enhancing symbiotic exaltation.

### Notes

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2. Lynn White Jr., "The Historical Roots of the Ecological Crisis," *Science*, March 10, 1967, 1203-7.

3. *Ibid.*, 1206.

4. Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, "Introduction: The Emerging Alliance of World Religions and Ecology," *Daedalus*, Fall 2001, <http://www.amacad.org/publications/fall2001/fall2001.aspx> (accessed January 2010).

5. Willis Jenkins, *Ecologies of Grace: Environmental Ethics and Christian Theology* (New York City: Oxford University Press, 2008).

6. The World Council of Churches website includes such programs as "Climate Change and Water" and "Poverty, Wealth and Ecology," <http://www.oikoumene.org/programmes.html> (accessed January 2, 2011).

7. John Hart, *What Are People Saying about Environmental Theology?* (New York: Paulist Press, 2004), 23–38.

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10. Thomas G. Alexander, "Stewardship and Enterprise: The LDS Church and the Wasatch Oasis Environment, 1847–1930," *Western Historical Quarterly* 25, no. 3 (Autumn 1994): 341–64.

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14. Jenkins, *Ecologies of Grace*, 80.

15. Palmer, "Stewardship," 66.

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20. For detailed examples of good and bad impacts of Mormon pioneers, see Alexander, "Stewardship and Enterprise"; Dan L. Flores, "Zion in Eden: Phases of the Environmental History of Utah," *Environmental Review* 7, no. 4 (1983): 325–44; Terry B. Ball and Jack D. Brotherson, "Environmental Lessons from Our Pioneers," *BYU Studies* 38, no. 3 (1999): 62–83; Richard C. Foltz, "Mormon Values and the Utah Environment," *Worldviews* 4 (2000): 1–19.

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# “The Blood of Every Beast”: Mormonism and the Question of the Animal

*Bart H. Welling*

*And surely, blood shall not be shed, only for meat, to save your lives; and the blood of every beast will I require at your hands. (Gen. 9:11, Joseph Smith Translation)*

*Man will live here until he has made this planet a garden, this orchard, with no question about the animals. Man debases himself by his use of animal food. There was no butcher in Paradise.—Amos Bronson Alcott<sup>1</sup>*

*The eyes of the future are looking back at us and they are praying for us to see beyond our own time. They are kneeling with hands clasped that we might act with restraint, that we might leave room for the life that is destined to come. . . . Wild mercy is in our hands.—Terry Tempest Williams<sup>2</sup>*

The recent collections *New Genesis: A Mormon Reader on Land and Community* and *Stewardship and the Creation: LDS Perspectives on the Environment* both demonstrate in myriad ways that the time is right for LDS scholars in the humanities and other Saints to speak up about the environmental crises which, as President Gordon B. Hinckley has asserted, render creation ugly and offend its Creator.<sup>3</sup> However, whether we participate in Christian conversations on “creation care” or secular debates on the idea of wilderness, or both, it is impossible to avoid noticing some troubling gaps between Mormonism’s unique doctrine and history, which have challenged the anthropocentrism of mainstream American attitudes and behaviors toward the nonhuman world in a number of important ways, and the current LDS status quo, in which environmental concerns are often dismissed as the province of “extremists.” Everyday LDS life bears less and less of a resemblance to that

of the early Saints, for whom sustainable agriculture and green building techniques *avant la lettre* were practically as integral to the gospel as baptism by immersion or the Book of Mormon.<sup>4</sup>

One of the most awkward, and yet also most profound, of these tensions between past and present, doctrine and behavior, has to do with the contemporary role of animals in Mormon culture. LDS scripture clearly teaches that animals are “living souls” (Moses 3:19) who existed before this earthly life and will be resurrected after death; as such, they should be killed only in situations where human survival depends on it. Yet most of us today quietly support production regimes that put to death billions of animals every year for food and for less defensible purposes: cosmetics testing, fashion, recreation, even the pet trade.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, we seem to have little to say in the Church about the worldwide extinction crisis, despite our doctrinal mandate to care for the non-human creatures which, like us, were designed to “fi[ll] the measure of [their] creation” (D&C 88:19) and that also received God’s blessing/commandment to “be fruitful, and multiply” (Moses 2:22). Uncomfortable as it may be, perhaps the time has come for a serious reconsideration of Mormon relationships with animals.

In this article, I try to contribute to just such a reconsideration by placing several key LDS doctrines and historical events in dialogue with some of the central questions that subtend the growing interdisciplinary field of animal studies. Both theoretically rich and ethically challenging, the best work being done in animal studies offers ways of thinking about human-animal relationships that powerfully unsettle speciesist assumptions even as they carefully historicize and analyze the lived complexities of these relationships. While it is probably too early to hope for a First Presidency letter calling for a boycott on factory-farmed meat or announcing a new Church fund to support research in conservation biology, taking a close look at animal studies can at least help Mormon scholars place our religion’s traditional concern for animals in a broader historical and cultural context. And finally, it is my hope that this article will help us theorize ways to work toward a future in which “the enmity of all flesh” (D&C 101:26) shall cease.

A brief note on my purposes here: As an enthusiastic violator of the “meat clause” of the Word of Wisdom until seven years ago, I do not wish to harangue anyone about his or her decision to eat

meat, wear leather, and so on. Rather, although I can barely scratch the surface of this topic in a short article, I hope to foster discussion in the Church on the past and possible future status of animals on an earth where the righteous dominion advocated in Mormon scriptures has unquestionably been superseded by the worst kinds of “extortion” (D&C 59:20).

For now, I will concentrate on a foundational tension in early Mormon thought between a sort of practical millennialism, in which concern for animals and a semi-vegetarian diet are linked to the prophetic promise of a future without violence, and a frontier farming and hunting culture in which native animal species, particularly predators, were viewed not as fellow souls but as dangerous adversaries, perhaps even allies of the Adversary himself. Viewed from a slightly different angle, my argument (to borrow Mary Sayre Haverstock’s formulation<sup>6</sup>) concerns the implications for early Mormons of a competition between visions of the American landscape as, on the one hand, a peaceable kingdom, and, on the other, a howling wilderness. While this early American discursive conflict has mostly given way to others, such as the ongoing war between views of earth as biosphere and earth as resource, studying the first Mormons’ oscillating relationships (both imagined and lived) with animals can contribute to what Foucault termed a history of the present—a present in which the liberatory potential for animals of latter-day revelation has been largely, but not completely, foreclosed.

My explorations begin with the Book of Mormon, a sacred text that, from beginning to end, registers powerful anxieties about the dangers posed by wild things and wild places. On many occasions, Book of Mormon authors tap into the fear of what Australian environmental philosopher Val Plumwood has called “being prey,” or what Nephi, son of Helaman, characterizes to the rebellious people of Zarahemla as the likelihood that they will “become meat” if they do not repent.<sup>7</sup> This Nephi, Helaman’s son, would have known that, in fulfillment of an earlier prophecy, the dead citizens of Ammonihah, after being completely annihilated by Lamanites, had been “mangled by dogs and wild beasts of the wilderness”; their remains are referred to in Alma 16:10 not as “bodies” but as “carcasses” [sic].<sup>8</sup>

This kind of rhetorical dehumanization indexes the Book of

Mormon authors' approval of the Ammonihahites' horrible but just punishment, but it also adumbrates a fear that may run even deeper than the nightmare of being consumed by wild animals: namely, the terror of *becoming* animal, the possibility that one might trade one's salvation and divinely imaged human identity for the savage delights and counterfeit sacraments of the wilderness, leaving behind the life of a settled, peaceful omnivore for the fully carnivorous and totally amoral life of a wandering predator.

In the Book of Mormon the prime example of the dangers of becoming-animal is set, of course, by the Lamanites.<sup>9</sup> The numerous analogies in the Book of Mormon comparing Nephites to sheep and Lamanites to wild beasts<sup>10</sup> hinge on a more than metaphorical, even more than metonymical (i.e., herding-farming culture versus hunter-gatherer culture) logic; Enos describes a *physical* process of devolution when he writes that the Nephites' diligent efforts to "restore the Lamanites unto the true faith in God" were "vain" because of the Lamanites' "evil nature." "They became wild, and ferocious, and a blood-thirsty people," he continues, "full of idolatry and filthiness; feeding upon beasts of prey; dwelling in tents, and wandering about in the wilderness with a short skin girdle about their loins and their heads shaven; and their skill was in the bow, and in the cimeter, and the ax [rather than in agricultural implements]. And many of them did eat nothing save it was raw meat; and they were continually seeking to destroy us" (Enos 1:20).

Through their disobedience, the Lamanites have suffered a kind of second Fall; and, as with Adam and Eve, the curse against them involves a significant change in diet as well as physiology. In the chapter where the nature of the curse is detailed for the first time, Nephi notes not just that the Lamanites are cursed with a "skin of blackness" but that "because of their cursing which was upon them they did become an idle people, full of mischief and subtlety, and did seek in the wilderness for beasts of prey" (2 Ne. 5:21, 24). As the Book of Mormon continues, the Lamanites' violations of the Mosaic proscriptions against eating predators and consuming blood and meat that had not been prepared correctly, to say nothing of the unwritten cannibalism taboo, represent less a conscious rejection of Nephite faith traditions than an instinc-

tual and progressively expanding taste for flesh. Again and again the Book of Mormon demonstrates that the interlinked and often coterminous boundaries between humans and beasts, Nephites and Lamanites, and sinners and saints are actually, in the American Promised Land, frighteningly porous liminal spaces that must be watched and guarded with great care.

Like Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, the Book of Mormon is large, it contains multitudes, and would seem to contradict itself regarding the connections between human savagery and such practices as hunting and consuming raw meat. Doesn't Lehi's family survive on raw meat in the Arabian desert without "going wild" (1 Ne. 17:2)? Why doesn't Nephi himself become cursed for hunting beasts in the wilderness (1 Ne. 16:31)? How is Enos able to experience his powerful conversion on a hunting expedition (Enos 1:3)? Moreover, why is it that some Lamanites, such as King Lamoni and his people, raise flocks like the Nephites and are capable of overcoming their "evil nature" to the extent that they take an oath against shedding human blood and practice an early form of what we would now call nonviolent resistance (Alma 24:15–27)?

One obvious way of answering these questions has to do with obedience and agency. Nephi represents the animals he has killed in the desert as earthly blessings contingent on his family's obedience; he is directed to them by the Liahona and, in a direct reenactment of stories recorded in Exodus, God himself blesses the meat so that it, like manna, becomes "sweet" and does not need to be cooked (1 Ne. 17:12). Enos lays down his bow to pray when his spirit begins to hunger more for eternal life than his belly hungers for meat. God's cursing of the Lamanites, like all of his curses and blessings in the Book of Mormon, comes with the proviso that it may be overturned at some point based on how His children exercise their agency individually and collectively.

When we move beyond the Sunday School answers and consider these episodes from an animal studies perspective, however, the stories begin to yield important insights into the development of a viable Mormon ethic of interspecies and intercultural care that, according to Mormon thought, has (or should be perceived as having) implications of eternal significance. Lehi's family's experience in the desert illustrates the doctrine that would shortly be articulated more directly in the Book of Moses (1830) and Jo-

seph Smith's translation of Genesis 9:11, in revelations that would be canonized as sections 49, 59, and 77 of the Doctrine and Covenants (1831–32) and, most explicitly, in the 1833 Word of Wisdom: the idea that animals are eternal beings possessing spirits, are subject to Christ's atonement, are more than Cartesian automata or symbolic screens for human spiritual needs and truths, and that their lives—like human lives—are to be taken only under strictly defined conditions.

When we apply later revelations to 1 Nephi 16–17, it becomes clear that Nephi's hunting episode is a sort of companion piece to his account of killing Laban; both stories help define the bounds that God has set on the uses of violence in a fallen world. Without question, the animals that Lehi's family eats have been "ordained [by God] for the use of man"; eating meat saves Lehi's family from "famine and excess of hunger," and they use meat "sparingly" as well as "with thanksgiving" (D&C 89:15, 12). Nephi undoubtedly goes about killing the animals "with judgment, not to excess, neither by extortion" (D&C 59:20). Nephi's unusual use of the word "sweet" for the meat seems to indicate that, when the time comes for God to "require" the blood of the animals at the family's hands (JST Gen. 9:5), he will hold them as blameless as if they had eaten fruit.

The adjective "sweet" also calls to mind, perhaps deliberately, the verses in the King James translation of Genesis 1 where God articulates what animal theologian Andrew Linzey calls his "original will for creation,"<sup>11</sup> instructing Adam and Eve that they are to share fruit and other plant foods with animals as their only "meat" (Gen. 1:29, 30). Together with the narrative of the transformation of King Lamoni and his people, Nephi's hunting story suggests that "nature," whether human or nonhuman, is not as immutable as it was, and is, generally taken to be. If human wickedness could exacerbate the effects of the Fall, human righteousness—in our dealings with all living beings—could help undo them. Through "the wisdom and power of God, and the wisdom, obedience and faith of man combined," as Hyrum Smith put it in an 1842 address on the Word of Wisdom, the howling wilderness could in reality be transformed into the peaceable kingdom—not instantly, by divine fiat, but "eventually" and collaboratively, perhaps in a process of reorganization and re-creation that would parallel the

process, as revealed in the Book of Abraham, by which the earth was originally created.<sup>12</sup>

Hyrum Smith had learned this lesson in what Richard Lyman Bushman calls “millennial ecology” (241) from an excellent teacher.<sup>13</sup> The corporate authors and editors of the *History of the Church* relate that Joseph Smith taught it to the brethren in a particularly forceful way during the Zion’s Camp march of 1834. “We crossed the Embarras river and encamped on a small branch of the same about one mile west,” they write in their prophet’s voice:

In pitching my tent we found three massasaugas or prairie rattlesnakes, which the brethren were about to kill, but I said, “Let them alone—don’t hurt them! How will the serpent ever lose its venom, while the servants of God possess the same disposition, and continue to make war upon it? Men must become harmless, before the brute creation; and when men lose their vicious dispositions and cease to destroy the animal race, the lion and the lamb can dwell together, and the sucking child can play with the serpent in safety.” The brethren took the serpents carefully on sticks and carried them across the creek. I exhorted the brethren not to kill a serpent, bird, or an animal of any kind during our journey unless it became necessary in order to preserve ourselves from hunger.<sup>14</sup>

This “beautiful lesson,” as Joseph F. Smith characterized it, is famous in the Church.<sup>15</sup> It became one cornerstone of a nascent Mormon animal theology in Utah and is still invoked on campouts by LDS youth leaders to stop young Mormons from harassing small animals and insects. But the second part of the lesson is less well-known, perhaps because its power to shock remains undiminished—and, indeed, has probably grown over the last 170 years. The “Joseph”-narrator continues:

I had frequently spoken on this subject, when on a certain occasion I came up to the brethren who were watching a squirrel on a tree, and to prove them and to know if they would heed my counsel, I took one of their guns, shot the squirrel and passed on, leaving the squirrel on the ground. Brother Orson Hyde, who was just behind, picked up the squirrel, and said, “We will cook this, that nothing may be lost.” I perceived that the brethren understood what I did it for, and in their practice gave more heed to my precept than to my example, which was right.<sup>16</sup>

Paul, Amulek, and other prophets had taught that Jesus Christ’s atonement had ended the need for animal sacrifice, but



Joseph Smith's Abrahamic test of his followers exemplifies, along with an unerring feel for what it takes to destabilize ossified ways of knowing and perceiving the world, a mature understanding of the deeply entrenched role of violence toward animals in human culture: an awareness that, in practice, animal sacrifice has never ended, and that the Millennium will not come to pass unless we confront our tendency to "make war upon . . . the brute creation" as directly as possible. Jacques Derrida would have probably viewed the first LDS prophet's sacrifice of the squirrel as one more example of how religion has been used to shore up what he named the "carnophallogocentric order," a "sacrificial economy" underpinning all of Western culture in which animals and animalized humans are subject to a noncriminal murder by those in power over them.<sup>17</sup> But it would be fairer, I think, to regard the killing of the squirrel as a new kind of sacrifice: one that manages, paradoxically, to escape this sacrificial economy altogether. Joseph Smith did not sacrifice the squirrel to atone for human sins or to point up some purely "spiritual" human truth—it was not standing in for anything human at all. True, Smith objectified and instrumentalized the squirrel, but he did so with the goal of encouraging his followers to save many other animals in the future. Wordlessly (at least according to the official account), without imposing any meaning on the act or providing the brethren with any additional means by which to interpret it, their prophet gives them a brutal and unforgettable object lesson in the nature of "extortion."

Numerous accounts of Zion's Camp demonstrate that one or both sides of the lesson—the millennial and the extortionary—bore immediate fruit in Joseph Smith's colleagues' improved treatment of animals.<sup>18</sup> Echoes of the lesson can also be heard many years later in statements by Brigham Young,<sup>19</sup> as well as by leaders who did not participate in Zion's Camp, such as Joseph F. Smith and George Q. Cannon. In fact Cannon, a first counselor to Brigham Young, John Taylor, Wilford Woodruff, and Lorenzo Snow, was instrumental in advocating the humane treatment of animals and promoting a "Humane Day" that was observed in LDS Sunday Schools every spring from 1897 to 1918.<sup>20</sup> Cannon was interested in more than emulating non-LDS groups like the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals; as

Aaron R. Kelson notes (quoting Cannon), his efforts were rooted in the millennial conviction that “the time will come when man and animals which are now wild and ferocious will dwell together without hurting each other. . . . But before this day comes men will have to cease their war upon the animals, the reptiles and the insects. . . . When man becomes their true friend, they will learn to love and not to fear him. The Spirit of the Lord which will rest upon man will also be given to the animal creation—man will not hurt nor destroy, not even tigers and lions and wolves and snakes, and they will not harm him—and universal peace will prevail.”<sup>21</sup>

In a 1912 editorial titled “Kindness to Animals,” Church president Joseph F. Smith—deliberately invoking the memory of his uncle’s lesson on Zion’s Camp and unconsciously echoing eighteenth-century European explorers who detected traces of Edenic or pre-millennial harmony in the Galápagos and Falkland Islands and New Zealand—looked to Yellowstone National Park for earthly proof of the validity of this doctrine.<sup>22</sup> “In the Yellowstone Park,” President Smith wrote,

where the use of guns and other deadly weapons is prohibited by law . . . the animals and birds are becoming as tame and fearless of human beings, their deadliest foes, as domestic animals and barnyard fowls. . . . The birds do not fly away with fright at the approach of men; even the brown, cinnamon and grizzly bears are friendly, some of them so tame as to take their food from the hands of men—all because, for a few years, they have not been hunted, shot at and slaughtered by the lords of creation. Thus it may be seen, in harmony with the sentiments expressed by the Prophet Joseph Smith, that if man did right, were humane and merciful toward animals, they would, in time, lose their fear and dread of him, and would also lose many, if not all, of their own bad traits.<sup>23</sup>

Statements by Joseph Smith and his successors openly situate themselves within a scriptural rather than a secular genealogy, with Isaiah 11 being the most obvious antecedent. But, consciously or not (and this question, like many more raised below, merits serious scrutiny), they were also placing Mormons in distinguished literary company. A few years before the Zion’s Camp episode, Percy Bysshe Shelley was using poetry and the essay form to explore the “emerging proto-evolutionary theory that species could change their nature over time.”<sup>24</sup>

However, it doesn't take a graduate degree in ecology or environmental history to recognize some of the major problems involved in imposing a millennial vision inspired by the Bible (or, for that matter, by ecosystems such as those of New Zealand, which had evolved over the millennia to flourish without predators) on a place like Yellowstone, where grizzlies, wolves, and other large predators play a crucial role in maintaining delicate ecological energy flows. If carnivory among animals is not seen as part of the natural order but is considered as one of the "bad traits" (Joseph F. Smith) introduced to the world by human wickedness, then well-intentioned humans motivated by this view may actually exacerbate rather than abolish the "war" between humans and animals, predators and prey.

When the "bear shows" that Joseph F. Smith seems to have had in mind began at hotel garbage dumps in Yellowstone a few years before his editorial was written, bears *did* start to "lose their fear" of human beings. That was the problem. Their fearlessness grew as individual tourists started feeding bears from the windows of their automobiles. The National Park Service created feeding areas such as the large Otter Creek facility, where, by the mid-1930s, up to 1,500 people per night were crowding into an amphitheater to watch between fifty and seventy grizzly bears emerge from the woods to eat the Yellowstone visitors' garbage.<sup>25</sup> There was an "ugly reality behind the 'magic'" of human-animal encounters in Yellowstone, notes Alice Wondrak Biel: not only were wild bears being transformed into garbage-eating pets, clowns, or beggars; but "between 1931 and 1975, visitors reported 1,897 bear-related injuries; 1,101 bears were recorded killed due to the 'bear problem'; and many others were hurt or maimed, either after being hit by automobiles or in the course of trying to obtain foods—even natural foods such as fish—that people didn't want them to have."<sup>26</sup> While the vast majority of Yellowstone tourists would not have interpreted the "bear shows" as precursors of millennial harmony, many of them undoubtedly came to the park expecting to witness and participate in what Yellowstone's first National Park Service superintendent, Horace M. Albright, described as an "era of friendship between mankind and bears."<sup>27</sup> Biel's book shows that it took decades to overcome

the damage to bears, and to the human view of them, caused by this variety of “friendship.”

The “peaceable kingdom” attitude may seem antithetical to the “howling wilderness” view of the more-than-human world, but it would be more appropriate to think of the visions as two sides of the same coin. Predators that could be induced to give up their “bad traits” counted as evidence of the coming millennium, but “carnal, sensual, and devilish” animals (Alma 42:10) that persisted in their bloodthirsty ways needed to be eliminated.<sup>28</sup> In December 1848, the same Brigham Young who would advocate interspecies peace as part of the work of building the kingdom of God in Utah authorized a two-month “war of extermination” in the Salt Lake Valley in which 1,026 ravens, 1,192 canids (foxes, coyotes, and wolves), and numerous bears, mountain lions, eagles, hawks, owls, and other “wasters and destroyers” were put to death in exchange for prizes and bounties.<sup>29</sup> The pioneers’ choice of the word “destroyers” to refer to predators and scavengers connotes not just the fear of losing valuable livestock, but, most likely, the suspicion that carnivores were spiritually allied not with Christ, the Lamb, but with Satan, the “ravenous wolf” and “destroyer” of souls.<sup>30</sup> The term “wasters,” of course, emblemizes a post-lapsarian worldview in which carnivores and herbivores are seen as perpetually warring enemies rather than partners in a fragile and dynamic dance of ecosystemic energies. Needless to say, this misunderstanding of ecology has produced much more devastation in the U.S. West and around the world than the “peaceable kingdom” view, which has actually yielded some conservation benefits in places like the Galápagos that would seem to offset Yellowstone’s failures.<sup>31</sup>

Some of the effects of treating predators as unnecessary “wasters” are described memorably by the pioneering ecologist and environmental writer Aldo Leopold in his 1944 essay “Thinking like a Mountain.” The essay centers on a 1909 experience (Bill McKibben calls it “the key Damascus Road story of American environmental conversion”) in which Leopold—then a young, inexperienced ranger involved in a “steady war” against predators in Arizona’s Apache National Forest—began to understand, as he put it elsewhere: “You cannot love game and hate predators. . . . *The land is one organism.*”<sup>32</sup> Remembering what it was like to watch

a “fierce green fire” die out in the eyes of a wolf he and his colleagues had just shot, Leopold stresses that his youthful belief that “no wolves would mean hunter’s paradise” was tragically misguided. “Since then,” he writes, “I have lived to see state after state extirpate its wolves. I have watched the face of many a newly wolfless mountain, and seen the south-facing slopes wrinkle with a maze of new deer trails. I have seen every edible bush and seedling browsed, first to anaemic desuetude, and then to death. I have seen every edible tree defoliated to the height of a saddlehorn. . . . In the end the starved bones of the hoped-for deer herd, dead of its own too-much, bleach with the bones of the dead sage, or molder under the high-lined junipers.”<sup>33</sup>

Leopold conjures up an infernal, rather than a paradisiacal, vision of a world without wolves; in his hands the deer become worse “wasters and destroyers” than the wolves ever could be. Sadly, Leopold’s thinking-like-a-mountain philosophy still isn’t shared by everyone. As I was writing this paragraph, I received a mass email from Defenders of Wildlife dealing with the current plight of wolves in the Southwest. Descendants of Mexican gray wolves reintroduced to wild areas, including Leopold’s Apache National Forest, in 1998, these animals face a daunting array of threats: “anti-wolf politicians, lawless wolf-killers and well-funded wolf opponents” in addition to the usual survival challenges.<sup>34</sup>

In anatomizing some of these problems I do not mean to side with one letter writer quoted by Clark S. Monson, who ridiculed (perhaps unwittingly; was he a Mormon?) the idea of allowing wolves to return to Utah as the product of “a desire to live in a pristine world, a kind of holy nostalgia for a time that no one really remembers . . . [the] pursuit of a dream of Eden.”<sup>35</sup> Nor do I wish to suggest that Mormons have been especially hypocritical or cruel in translating the “howling wilderness” view of nature into ecocidal behavior. In some ways, the entire history of western colonialism has been one long—if often unintentional—“war of extermination” not just against unwanted animals and indigenous peoples but against native plant species, ecosystems, and landforms. As we contemplate this heartbreaking legacy of destruction, Mormon environmental doctrines and practices, while far from perfectly aligned (as Jeanne Kay and Craig J. Brown, Thomas G. Alexander, Aaron R. Kelson, and other scholars have observed), can of-

fer us many useful and hope-inspiring lessons along with the humbling ones. For instance, George Q. Cannon understood the vital ecological role of predators ten years before Aldo Leopold's epiphany (and almost fifty years before "Thinking like a Mountain"), arguing in his forcefully titled 1899 editorial, "Why Continually Want to Kill, Kill, Kill!": "An all-wise Creator has arranged many things which puny man does not fully understand. In our attempts to improve on nature we frequently make hideous mistakes. In most cases these bounty laws [against wolves, bears, raptors, and other animals] are among the gravest of these mistakes. Nothing was created in vain."<sup>36</sup>

This is a time for ecologically minded Latter-day Saints to renew, not reject, our people's "dream of Eden." The challenge is to avoid repeating the "hideous mistakes" of the past. I believe that we can do this, in part, by allowing our beliefs and history to enter an authentic (open, mutually respectful, spirited, honest, nonparochial) dialogue with other faith traditions' environmental histories and beliefs, with evolutionary theory and ecocritical literary theory, with the sciences of animal consciousness and behavior, and with the philosophies of animal rights and animal welfare. We must also rethink how we define Eden or what the earth's "paradisiacal" state may look like. We have much to learn from an "earthest" (a play on "atheist") like Edward Abbey about perceiving more of Paradise in the "here and now, the actual, tangible, dogmatically real earth on which we stand." "Now when I write of paradise," Abbey insists in *Desert Solitaire*: "I mean *Paradise*, not the banal Heaven of the saints. When I write 'paradise' I mean not only apple trees and golden women but also scorpions and tarantulas and flies, rattlesnakes and Gila monsters, sandstorms, volcano[e]s and earthquakes, bacteria and bear, cactus, yucca, bladderweed, ocotillo and mesquite, flash floods and quicksand, and yes—disease and death and the rotting of the flesh."<sup>37</sup>

As we struggle (and fail and struggle again) to free ourselves from Eurocentric and anthropocentric approaches to the nonhuman world, while trying to remain true to LDS doctrines and covenants, we may discover that our visions of heaven look a bit less like the celestial room of the temple and a bit more like the redrock wilderness of southern Utah, or like the granite mountains from which that temple was hewn. Better yet, we may find

ways to demolish the relatively new dichotomy between temple and natural world altogether, learning to appreciate again what Heber C. Kimball meant when he told his fellow Saints in 1857 that “those that will live the religion of Christ will have orchards.”<sup>38</sup>

One major obstacle to living the religion of Christ in our dealings with nonhuman “living souls” remains to be addressed: our un-Christlike pride in Mormonism’s—and, for that matter, in human beings’—apparent uniqueness. In reviewing Mormon animal doctrine and the history of institutions like Humane Day, it may be tempting for Latter-day Saints to interpret Mormonism’s approach to animals as one more example of its exceptional or even superior status. George Q. Cannon himself seems to have succumbed to this temptation, to a certain degree, in his editorial in the May 1871 issue of his *Juvenile Instructor*. He condemned the lassoing of horses as a practice “fit only for savages” and for a “rude, barbarous people, like the Californians were when we settled this valley.” Lassoing “is a very cruel way of catching horses,” chides Cannon, “and ought never to be practiced by people like us.”<sup>39</sup> In a mild way, the editorial reminds us—as does Jonathan Burt’s incisive study of legislative attacks on *shechita* (traditional Jewish slaughter methods) by Nazis and others—that a position of humaneness toward animals by no means exempts one from less-than-humane attitudes toward one’s fellow human beings.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, some of Cannon’s writings explicitly deny but implicitly substantiate the point that kindness to animals and unkind attitudes toward humans (whether whites who are cruel to animals or Native American “savages,” Mexican-Americans, and members of other groups viewed by Europeans and Euro-Americans as subhuman) can sometimes converge in decidedly uncharitable ways.<sup>41</sup>

A simpler message to be drawn from Cannon’s editorial, as well as from virtually every other statement about animals by LDS leaders, is that, while such doctrines as the immortality of animals do help set Mormonism apart from mainstream theologies, most average Mormons seem to have viewed the unorthodox teachings as relatively minor points of faith or else have conveniently chosen to ignore them, just as large numbers of early Mormons selectively applied the Word of Wisdom’s counsel on alcohol, tobacco, and coffee. “Mormons are not actually more humane than their



neighbors,” many of the nineteenth-century pronouncements imply, “but they *should* be”; pre- and proscriptive utterances must not be misconstrued as accurate descriptions of lived human/nonhuman relationships.

But the disconnect between belief and action is not the only factor complicating the study of Mormon animal theology. Mormonism’s animal doctrines themselves, while thoughtful and even radical compared to the unexamined assumptions and knee-jerk invocations of the Bible that have subtended most Americans’ treatment of animals from the beginning, limit but fall well short of entirely dismantling religious anthropocentrism, much as some Latter-day Saints (including me) may wish that the truth were otherwise. It must also be acknowledged, in light of Tristram Stuart’s formidable scholarship on the history of vegetarianism, for instance, that Joseph Smith’s revelations on animals, instead of bursting into his time and culture *ex nihilo*, grew out of an inspired dialogue with nineteenth-century American culture and, in many cases, with much older and more widespread traditions than Mormonism.

Without making a single reference to Joseph Smith or LDS doctrine, Stuart’s recent cultural history *The Bloodless Revolution* drives home the point again and again that the origins and contours of LDS animal theology will come into much sharper focus when scholars address the philosophical, scientific, medical, political, and agricultural contexts within which the theology emerged. For example, Joseph Smith may have backdated his animal doctrines to the time of Noah by reworking Genesis 9:5 as “And surely, blood shall not be shed, only for meat, to save your lives; and the blood of every beast will I require at your hands” (JST Gen. 9:11), but the restored scripture (along with the Word of Wisdom and other revelations) bears a striking resemblance to a statement by the British radical prophet Richard Brothers in his 1801 book *Description of Jerusalem . . . with the Garden of Eden in the Centre*: “To eat also of fish, flesh, or fowl, clean and unclean, ever was and ever will be lawful, when distress or hunger requires it for human preservation. But if there was, or is, not any necessity to do such things, then indeed the crime becomes presumptuous and the sin of the blackest nature.”<sup>42</sup> Since, according to the WorldCat database, multiple editions of at least two books by

Brothers were published in the 1790s in such places as West Springfield, Massachusetts, New London, Connecticut, and Albany, New York, the possibility of a direct influence on Joseph Smith merits further investigation.<sup>43</sup> But whether Smith had read Brothers's book, it is clear that both of the self-described revelators and gatherers of Israel were using the language of prophecy to respond to the same vital questions: questions that their contemporaries were addressing through the lenses of natural history, philosophy, medicine, and many other fields.

To be sure, the differences between Smith's revelations and Brothers's writings also demand attention. Although the word "extortion" is used in Doctrine and Covenants 59:20 to characterize unrighteous dominion over animals and plants, latter-day scriptures never propose that animal abuse, sport hunting, unnecessary meat consumption, and so on should actually be criminalized. By the same token, while such practices are unequivocally redefined by LDS scripture and commentary as sins, they are not considered as serious in the moral scale as murder or apostasy. Comparing Joseph Smith with Richard Brothers (and with dozens of other figures profiled in Stuart's book) demonstrates that LDS "concern for animals" is equally a question of concern for humans.

Joseph Smith reportedly said during the Zion's Camp march, in words that echo those of many earlier thinkers, that excessive anger and abuse of animals can cause humans to "place themselves on a level with the beasts" when they should "be possessed of a more noble disposition."<sup>44</sup> The Word of Wisdom does not spell out why it is "pleasing" to God that meat "should not be used, only in times of winter, or of cold, or famine" (D&C 89:13), but medical explanations—having to do with old and influential ideas about the dangers that meat posed to human health—probably deserve as much attention as explanations centering on inter-species ethics.

Then again, it is undoubtedly misleading to draw too sharp a divide between human self-interest and compassion for animals, in light not just of modern ecology but of Joseph Smith's revelations on the materiality of spirit (D&C 131:7) and on the ways in which the fates of all living souls on earth are bound together, from creation to millennium to exaltation and beyond. Joseph

Smith's animal teachings, not excluding the killing of the squirrel, look remarkably consistent and even biocentric when compared with those of René Descartes, whose theories on the soullessness and a-rational status of animals (or "beast-machines," as he styled them) have authorized innumerable horrific acts of cruelty in the vivisection chamber and the animal testing lab, but who preferred keeping to a vegetarian diet for the sake of his own health.<sup>45</sup>

Beyond allowing us to gauge more precisely how revolutionary or reactionary Mormon animal doctrine may have been in its evolving cultural contexts, scholarship like Stuart's opens up fascinating research possibilities for LDS scholars by helping us understand the degree to which Joseph Smith and later Mormon leaders were intervening in centuries-old and complexly interrelated discourses and debates that have continued to develop and have, in fact, attained a greater importance now than at any point in human history. These include questions about the nature of human physiology vis-à-vis that of nonhuman creatures (are humans by nature carnivores, omnivores, or herbivores?); about the meaning of key scriptures, from Genesis to Revelation, having to do with animals; about the connections between meat consumption, bad health, and spiritual impurity; about animals' capacity to feel pain, sorrow, joy, and other sensations that the Cartesians would generally limit to humans; about the links between abuse of the more-than-human world and unjust treatment of the poor by the rich; about the most efficient and ecologically sound forms of agriculture (grain for "food animals" or grain for humans?); and, crucially, about a set of "prelapsarian" and millenarian ideas centering on the conviction that humans could, in Stuart's words, "reform the world to the conditions of Paradise."<sup>46</sup>

It is both humbling and inspiring to learn that, around 150 years before Mormon animal theology was born, Sir Isaac Newton was engaged in a (mostly private) search for traces of God's original laws for humankind in the religions of Egypt, India, and other cultures; one of the most important of these laws, he wrote in the unpublished essay "Irenicum," was "not to feed on the flesh or drink the blood of a living animal, but to be mercifull even to bruit beasts."<sup>47</sup> Newton scholar Richard S. Westfall has argued that "in his innermost heart," Newton may "have dreamed of him-

self as a prophet called to restore the true religion.”<sup>48</sup> It would be all too easy to use this information as evidence that Newton was a failed prototype of Joseph Smith, a herald *manqué* of the true restoration to come. But what if, instead of treating all human history as a lead-up to the wonders of Mormonism, we were to follow Newton and Smith’s examples in pursuing a humbler line of questioning: one in which we could set aside both our exceptionalist tendencies and our deeply engrained habit of “anthropodenial” and accept that animal representations and human-animal relationships are at the core of everything we, like members of other traditions, consider most sacred, most “cultural,” and, indeed, most human?<sup>49</sup>

My sense is that grappling with the so-called “question of the animal” as LDS scholars and members of the LDS community will yield two very important sets of benefits. The first set will comprise the insights to be gained by pondering questions like these: What were the exact pathways through which Joseph Smith and other early Mormon figures were exposed to animal-related elements of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century millennial thought? What about their knowledge of the Pythagorean tradition and vegetarian practices in India? How well-versed were they in the tenets of Enlightenment-era science, including the belief that science could not merely explain but transform and restore a fallen world? Compared (for instance) to the Shakers, how deeply were they influenced by the theories of Sylvester Graham (1794–1851), the controversial U.S. vegetarian health reformer?<sup>50</sup> Why, unlike Graham, did early Mormons avoid drawing a strong connection between meat consumption and sexual carnality—particularly masturbation?<sup>51</sup> Everyone knows about the role that tobacco use among the early Saints played in the origins of the Word of Wisdom, but what about the cholera epidemic of 1832? Specifically, to what degree might the Word of Wisdom’s valorization of fruits, grains, and vegetables and concomitant warnings against meat constitute an inspired rebuttal to the doctors and health boards who were advocating a diet low in fruits and vegetables and high in meat (and, in some cases, alcohol) as a safeguard against cholera?<sup>52</sup>

What can we learn by comparing early Mormon approaches to animals with those of Transcendentalists like Emerson, Thor-

eau, and their friend Amos Bronson Alcott, who envisioned his vegetarian utopian community Fruitlands as an American “Second Eden” in which the “divine seed” was to “bruise the head of evil, and restore man to his rightful communion with God in the Paradise of Good”?<sup>53</sup> How might evolving Mormon conceptions of a restored Eden or a millennial earth parallel and diverge from the visions of an artist like Joseph Smith’s contemporary Edward Hicks (1780–1849), a Quaker painter whose well-known series of more than sixty *Peaceable Kingdom* depictions uses animals to allegorize human characteristics<sup>54</sup> but also devotes an incredible amount of energy to exploring the beauties and mysteries of the animals themselves? How common was the blessing of sick and injured animals in early Mormonism, and how did (or does?) the Mormon version of this practice relate to the blessing of animals in the Franciscan and other traditions? How indebted to Darwinian discourses are Mormon narratives about “*evolving* into a God,”<sup>55</sup> as Joseph F. Smith’s First Presidency put it at the end of their 1909 message “The Origin of Man,” despite their official disavowal that humans had evolved from “lower” animals?

The second set of questions, focusing on Mormonism’s lopsided application of the Word of Wisdom and related doctrines, may benefit everyday Saints more than scholars, and animals even more than humans. In *Mormonism in Transition*, Thomas G. Alexander notes that, in 1898, as president of the Council of the Twelve, Lorenzo Snow argued that the Word of Wisdom “was a commandment and . . . should be carried out to the letter,” including its injunction to avoid meat “except in dire necessity.”<sup>56</sup> Why was the “meat clause” largely forgotten, while the use of alcohol, tobacco, coffee, and tea came to be regarded as serious transgressions? How did rank-and-file Mormons respond to Snow’s declaration that sport hunting was a “murderous amusement,”<sup>57</sup> and how much of an impact did similar statements by Joseph F. Smith, Joseph Fielding Smith, and Spencer W. Kimball have on hunting in “Mormon America”? Richard N. Ostling and Joan K. Ostling claim that “Mormons, in contrast to Seventh-day Adventists, have no vegetarian tradition,”<sup>58</sup> but, given the evidence that Snow, Heber J. Grant, George Albert Smith, Joseph Fielding Smith, and other leaders and everyday members have made a point of consuming very little or no meat, if only for health reasons at certain

periods of their lives, how accurate is this statement? How many nonhuman living souls would be allowed to live out their natural life spans if the “forgotten verses”<sup>59</sup> of Doctrine and Covenants 89 were restored to prominence, and how would the economies and ecologies of Mormon-populated areas adapt? How will Mormon animal theology and policy themselves adapt to pressures from within and without, including the rising financial, ecological, social, medical, and climate change-related costs of raising animals for food according to the factory farm and industrial slaughterhouse paradigm of meat production and consumption?<sup>60</sup> What about the increasingly complex ethical challenges posed by animal testing, xenotransplantation of body parts from animals to humans, genetic engineering and plastic surgery resulting in human/animal hybrids, and eye-opening scientific discoveries in the fields of animal communication, culture, and emotion?<sup>61</sup> Finally, to return to one of this essay’s central concerns, is the ideal of the peaceable kingdom worth reviving as we work to prevent another era of “hideous mistakes,” to borrow George Q. Cannon’s term—namely, cataclysmic extinctions?

In his 1967 essay “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis,” Lynn White Jr. forcefully contended that “we shall continue to have a worsening ecologic crisis until we reject the Christian axiom that nature has no reason for existence save to serve man.”<sup>62</sup> Readers who accept this claim may find it hard to get past Mormonism’s proud declaration that “all things which come of the earth . . . are made for the benefit and the use of man” (D&C 59:18), regardless of the scriptural caveats having to do with excess, extortion, and animal souls. Anti-Mormon critics may argue that a smug and slothful “soft” anthropocentrism will ultimately prove as deadly for the endangered species and “food animals” of the world as the relentless “hard” anthropocentrism of the rain forest loggers and bush meat hunters, the fast food CEOs and meat industry tycoons, and the multinational animal testing corporations.

But, perhaps perversely, I derive a measure of hope from White’s article, especially from this statement: “The whole concept of the sacred grove is alien to Christianity and to the ethos of the West” (12). Alien to *mainstream* Christianity, that is, but where would Mormonism be without a certain sacred grove in upstate

New York? Just as White ends his article by nominating Saint Francis of Assisi as a heretical patron saint for scientific ecologists, I would propose Joseph Smith as a heterodox patron Saint for latter-day millennial ecologists and restorationists of our world's ruined groves. Hyrum Smith foresaw in 1842 that escaping our fallen condition would require a "restorative that man has not in his possession—wisdom which is beyond the reach of human intellect . . . and power which human philosophy, talent and ingenuity cannot control."<sup>63</sup> Restoring the peaceable kingdom was never going to be easy. But through "little wheels in God's designs" like the Word of Wisdom, Joseph and Hyrum Smith fully believed that the earth would eventually be "revolutionize[d]" and all things would be restored.<sup>64</sup>

It is my fervent hope that Mormon scholars in the humanities and everyday Saints will return to whatever sacred groves are left to them to pray to the God of all living souls—animals, trees, people—for guidance not just for themselves and their families, but for the many nonhuman beings that they have the power to save or destroy. As we wait to hear the whisperings of inspiration from above, let us not discount the voices of reason, humility, and forbearance emanating from within and around us. Let us pay closer attention to the broader historical trends and dialogues, the intellectual, cultural, and spiritual ecologies, of which our tradition is a part. And, above all, let us listen to the chorus of myriad other voices—buzzing, squawking, howling, clicking, peeping, grunting, trilling, burbling, whinnying, and echoing silently across the landscapes of extinction—that have been inspiring and answering our prayers all along.

### Notes

1. Karen Iacobbo and Michael Iacobbo. *Vegetarian America: A History* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2004), 61.

2. Terry Tempest Williams, *Red: Passion and Patience in the Desert* (New York: Pantheon, 2001), 215.

3. Terry Tempest Williams, William B. Smart, and Gibbs M. Smith, eds., *New Genesis: A Mormon Reader on Land and Community* (Salt Lake City: Gibbs Smith, 1998), ii; George B. Handley, Terry B. Ball, and Steven L. Peck, eds., *Stewardship and the Creation: LDS Perspectives on the Environment* (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2006).

4. Brigham Young reassured his followers in 1851: "When the Saints



in Zion are sowing and reaping, and building according to counsel, they are causing the light to shine, as emphatically as though they were abroad in foreign nations, preaching and baptizing for remission of sins. All things needful to be done, are but parts of the great whole, which must be accomplished before men will be prepared to be restored back again into the presence of the Father." Quoted in Jeanne Kay and Craig J. Brown, "Mormon Beliefs about Land and Natural Resources, 1847–1877," *Journal of Historical Geography* 11, no. 3 (1985): 257. As I will stress later, the operative phrase in my sentence is "*challenged* . . . anthropocentrism" rather than "*dismantled*" it. Thomas G. Alexander, offers one of the most thorough and perceptive explanations of the origins and development of the gap between stewardship-oriented doctrine and economics-driven behavior in his essay "Stewardship and Enterprise: The LDS Church and the Wasatch Oasis Environment, 1847–1930," in *Stewardship and the Creation: LDS Perspectives on the Environment*, 15–32.

5. "Billions" may sound like an overstatement, but leading scholars in the British Animal Studies Group remind us that several billion chickens and turkeys alone are raised and killed for human consumption in the United States each year, in addition to tens of millions of pigs, cows, sheep, and goats. The U.S. Department of Agriculture has put the tally at nine billion animals per year or more since 2001. Humane Society of the United States, "Farm Animal Statistics: Slaughter Totals." *Factory Farming Campaign*, March 4, 2011, [http://www.humanesociety.org/news/resources/research/stats\\_slaughter\\_totals.html](http://www.humanesociety.org/news/resources/research/stats_slaughter_totals.html) (accessed March 14, 2011). These numbers do not include the many animals that are driven extinct, "gassed, electrocuted, exterminated, hunted . . . vivisectioned, shot, trapped, snared, run over, lethally injected, culled, sacrificed . . . executed, euthanized, destroyed, put down, put to sleep, and even, perhaps, murdered." Animal Studies Group, *Killing Animals* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 1–3.

6. Mary Sayre Haverstock, *An American Bestiary* (New York: Abrams, 1979), 19–33.

7. Hel. 7:19. The full verse reads, "And behold, instead of gathering you, except ye will repent, behold, he shall scatter you forth that ye shall become meat for dogs and wild beasts." Doctrine and Covenants 29:18–20 foretells a similarly horrible fate for the wicked at the time of Christ's second coming. Val Plumwood's essay, "Being Prey," details a violent encounter in Australia's Kakadu National Park with a crocodile that attacked and nearly killed her. While (or perhaps because) Plumwood's essay challenges conventional Christian spirit/nature dualism, her thoughts on the "forbidden boundary breakdowns" represented by "death in the jaws of a crocodile" are well worth quoting in this context.

The “ultimate horror” involved in this kind of death comes, she writes, from the combination of “decomposition of the victim’s body with the overturning of the victory over nature and materiality that Christian death represents. Crocodile predation on humans threatens the dualistic vision of human mastery of the planet in which we are predators but can never ourselves be prey. We may daily consume other animals in their billions, but we ourselves cannot be food for worms and certainly not meat for crocodiles.” Quoted in David Quammen, *Monster of God: The Man-Eating Predator in the Jungles of History and the Mind* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2003), 315. At the time of the first publication of the Book of Mormon, of course, the fear of “being prey” or “becoming meat” in the wilderness of the United States was much greater than it is now, even if (then as now) wolves, bears, and other large predators normally avoided contact with humans.

8. This rhetorical device lived on in the Mormon revenge narratives that emerged from the killings of Joseph and Hyrum Smith. N. B. Lundwall, *The Fate of the Persecutors of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1952), compiles several earlier accounts of Missouri and Illinois “mobocrats” who “rotted alive” (297) or were eaten by maggots as a result of a “Mormon curse” (296) supposedly put on them by Joseph Smith or Brigham Young. Many of the stories clearly display the influence of Doctrine and Covenants 29, with its threats of maggots and rotting flesh. Others, such as the story of mob leader James Campbell, bear a stronger debt to Book of Mormon rhetoric. After “the angel of God saw fit to sink the boat” in which Campbell and other mobocrats were crossing the Missouri River on their way to attack the Saints, Lundwall reports that Campbell’s body “floated down the [Missouri River] . . . and lodged upon a pile of driftwood, where the eagles, buzzards, ravens, crows and wild animals ate his flesh from his bones . . . and left him a horrible looking skeleton of God’s vengeance” (353). Brigham Young referred to these accounts as “facts” in an 1860 address: “The bones of those who drove the Saints from Independence, from Jackson County, then from Clay and Dav[iess] Counties, and last of all from Caldwell County, from whence they fled into Illinois, have been scattered over the Plains—gnawed and broken by wild beasts, and are there bleaching to this day, while the Saints who have died on the Plains have, without an exception, had a decent burial where they have died.” Brigham Young, January 5, 1860, *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (London and Liverpool: LDS Booksellers Depot, 1855–86), 9:101.

9. It would require another essay to unpack some of the problems involved in the Book of Mormon’s treatment of unrepentant American Indians/Lamanites as subhuman “wild men” and to place these descrip-

tions in the context of early nineteenth-century thought. For now, it is worth noting that the Book of Mormon approaches human-animal boundaries in a dynamic way, showing that just as Lamanites—and Nephites—risk growing more animal-like the more wicked they become, they can become more *human* in sync with their growing righteousness (even if, as we would now say, characterizing bad human behavior as “animal-like,” or judging nonhuman animal behavior “good” or “evil,” anthropomorphically fails to recognize the otherness of nonhuman psychologies and ways of being).

10. For instance, Alma 25:12 recalls Abinadi’s dying words: “And he said unto the priests of Noah that their seed should cause many to be put to death, in the like manner as he was, and that they should be scattered abroad and slain, even as a sheep having no shepherd is driven and slain by wild beasts; and now behold, these words were verified, for they were driven by the Lamanites, and they were hunted, and they were smitten.”

11. Andrew Linzey, *Animal Theology* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 126.

12. Hyrum Smith, “The Word of Wisdom,” *Times and Seasons*, June 1, 1842, 799–800.

13. Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 241.

14. Joseph Smith Jr. et al., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, edited by B. H. Roberts, 2d ed. rev. (6 vols., 1902–12, Vol. 7, 1932), 2:71–72.

15. Joseph F. Smith, quoted in Gerald E. Jones, *Animals and the Church* (Salt Lake City: Eborn Books, 2003), 92.

16. *History of the Church*, 2:72.

17. Jacques Derrida, “The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow),” translated by Gary Wills, *Critical Inquiry* 28, no. 2 (2002): 369–418; and “‘Eating Well,’ or the Calculation of the Subject: An Interview with Jacques Derrida,” *Who Comes after the Subject?* edited by Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor, and Jean-Luc Nancy (New York: Routledge, 1991), 96–119.

18. Jones, *Animals and the Church*, 24–25, mentions several examples involving snakes. President James E. Faust, “By What Power . . . Have Ye Done This?” *Ensign*, November 1998, <http://lds.org/general-conference/1998/10/by-what-power-have-ye-done-this?lang=eng&query=faust+power> (accessed March 4, 2011), cites a humorous rattlesnake episode from George A. Smith’s journal. When several of the Zion’s Camp men found a rattlesnake coiled up near the sleeping Solomon Humphrey’s head, Humphrey stopped them from killing it with the words “No! I’ll

protect him, you shan[']t hurt him for he and I have had a good nap together.”

19. “Let the people be holy,” Brigham Young preached on April 6, 1852, “and the earth under their feet will be holy. Let the people be holy, and filled with the Spirit of God, and every animal and creeping thing will be filled with peace; the soil of the earth will bring forth in its strength, and the fruits thereof will be meat [Gen. 1:29] for man. The more purity that exists, the less is the strife[:]; the more kind we are to our animals, the more will peace increase, and the savage nature of the brute creation vanish away.” *Journal of Discourses* 1:203. On June 4, 1864, Young blamed human beings for the “savage and destructive nature” of animals, but also argued that humans, with the help of divine powers and through the “law of the Holy Priesthood,” had the capacity to “remove the curse and its consequences from earth,” to “say to the raging and contending elements, ‘peace, be still’ and extract the poison from the reptile’s tooth.” Young described this effort as “the great work of sanctifying [humankind] and the earth for final glorification in its paradisiacal state.” *Journal of Discourses* 10:301–2. He thus shifted the rhetorical (if not theological) focus of Joseph Smith’s Tenth Article of Faith (“We believe . . . that the earth will be renewed and receive its paradisiacal glory”), placing the emphasis as much on human effort as on Christ’s return and other forms of divine intervention.

20. For a very useful overview of George Q. Cannon’s efforts, see Aaron R. Kelson, “‘A Plea for the Horse’: George Q. Cannon’s Concern for Animal Welfare in Nineteenth-Century America,” *BYU Studies* 38, no. 3 (1999): 46–61.

21. *Ibid.*, 57–58.

22. Tristram Stuart, *The Bloodless Revolution: A Cultural History of Vegetarianism from 1600 to Modern Times* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007), 387–88, notes that the reports of interspecies harmony coming back to Europe from places like New Zealand “corroborated the millennial fantasy” of animal advocates like Humphry Primatt. Primatt wrote in 1776 that, if humans obeyed the divine law of mercy, “all would be peace, harmony, and love. Men would become merciful; Savage Brutes, would become tame; and the tame Brutes would no more groan under the lash. . . . [A]ll, both Men and Brutes, would experience the blessing of the renovating change.”

23. Joseph F. Smith, quoted in Jones, *Animals and the Church*, 92–93.

24. Stuart, *The Bloodless Revolution*, 385.

25. Alice Wondrak Biel, *Do (Not) Feed the Bears: The Fitful History of Wildlife and Tourists in Yellowstone* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006), 20.

26. Ibid., 148.

27. Ibid., 25.

28. Another Yellowstone example: In the same years in which the feeding of bears was becoming one of the defining features of the park, Yellowstone officials were busy exterminating members of a less “friendly” species: wolves. Clark S. Monson, “A House Divided: Utah and the Return of the Wolf,” in *Stewardship and the Creation: LDS Perspectives on the Environment*, edited by George B. Handley, Terry B. Ball, and Steven L. Peck (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2006), 124, notes that this policy resulted not in an enhanced ecosystem but in a “cascade of ecological calamities”: overpopulated and starving elk, overgrazed vegetation, damaged riparian environments, fewer beavers and beaver ponds, accelerating erosion, dropping water tables, and a host of other unforeseen consequences. The reintroduction of wolves to Yellowstone, observes Monson, has benefited everything from elk populations to grizzlies to aspen trees to songbirds to cutthroat trout (126, 135 note 40).

29. Ibid., 122–23.

30. For an LDS reference to Satan as the “destroyer,” see Doctrine and Covenants 61’s headnote, describing a dangerous 1831 canoe trip on the Missouri River. William Phelps, “in daylight vision, saw the destroyer riding in power upon the face of the waters.”

31. Charles Bergman, “Obits for the Fallen Hunter: Reading the Decline—and Death?—of Hunting in America,” *American Literary History* 17, no. 4 (2005): 829, writes that the Galápagos Islands “offer new lessons in human relations with animals” through the “intimacy with animals” that can be found there. He adds: “Darwin noted it. . . . Melville did as well. . . . Sea lions swim up to you in the sea or walk up to you on the beach. Mockingbirds land on you. Blue-footed boobies let you approach to within inches. Over five million years of evolution *without* predators gave the creatures this wonderful tameness.” Of course, while ecotourism presents numerous advantages over other land uses in places like the Galápagos, the 100,000 or so ecotourists who flock there every year in search of this “intimacy” pose serious threats of their own. Juliet Eilperin, “Despite Efforts, Some Tours Do Leave Footprints,” *Washington Post*, April 2, 2006, P1.

32. Bill McKibben, “Aldo Leopold,” in *American Earth: Environmental Writing since Thoreau*, edited by McKibben (New York: Library of America, 2008), 265; Marybeth Lorbiecki, *Aldo Leopold: A Fierce Green Fire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 42–43, 167; Aldo Leopold, “Conservation,” in *Round River: From the Journals of Aldo Leopold*, edited by Luna B. Leopold (1953; Oxford, Eng.: Oxford University Press, 1993), 146.

33. Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There* (1949; New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 130–32.

34. Defenders of Wildlife, “Southwest Wolves Face Extinction in the Wild,” email to Bart Welling, October 18, 2007. Anti-wolf hysteria is based, in part, on the misguided notion that wolves frequently prey on humans. A 2002 Norwegian study of records of European wolf attacks dating from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries did find evidence of several hundred fatal or injurious wolf attacks, most of which involved children, but the majority of the attacks were carried out by wolves infected with rabies, which no longer poses the threat in Europe and North America that it once did. Habituation to humans, human provocation of wolves, and anthropogenic damage to wolf habitat were the three other major factors associated with wolf attacks. On the whole, the report’s authors note, fatal wolf attacks have been “extremely rare,” and wolves are “among the least dangerous species for their size and predatory potential.” John D. C. Linnell et al., *The Fear of Wolves: A Review of Wolf Attacks on Humans*, NINA Oppdragsmelding 731 (Trondheim, Norway: NINA-NIKU, 2002), 5.

35. Monson, “A House Divided,” 121–22.

36. George Q. Cannon, quoted in “A Plea for the Horse,” 52. Cannon’s editorial echoes the great conservationist John Muir’s argument in *A Thousand Mile Walk to the Gulf* (1867): “Many good people believe that alligators were created by the Devil, thus accounting for their all-consuming appetite and ugliness. But doubtless these creatures are happy and fill the place assigned them by the great Creator of us all. Fierce and cruel they appear to us, but beautiful in the eyes of God. . . . The universe would be incomplete without man; but it would also be incomplete without the smallest transmicroscopic creature that dwells beyond our conceitful eyes and knowledge.” John Muir, from *A Thousand Mile Walk to the Gulf*, in *American Earth*, 86, 88.

37. Edward Abbey, *Desert Solitaire: A Season in the Wilderness* (1968; rpt., New York: Touchstone, 1990), 167. While President Cannon and “Brother” Abbey would probably roll their eyes at being mentioned in the same essay, and Abbey’s vision of Paradise obviously contradicts key Mormon doctrines of immortality, his books have much to offer when it comes to appreciating the paradisiacal aspects of the world as it is, rather than as we think it should be.

38. Heber C. Kimball, October 18, 1857, *Journal of Discourses*, 5:335.

39. Cannon, quoted in Jones, *Animals and the Church*, 45.

40. Jonathan Burt, “Conflicts around Slaughter in Modernity,” in Animal Studies Group, *Killing Animals* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 120–44.

41. Some of Cannon's *Juvenile Instructor* editorials fall in the talionic tradition of William Hogarth's 1751 engraving series *The Four Stages of Cruelty*, which explores the connections between cruelty to animals and cruelty to humans. It traces the growth and downfall of an animal-abusing orphan named Tom Nero. In the first print, Nero is leading other boys in torturing a dog and other animals; in the final print ("The Reward of Cruelty"), an adult Nero—having been hanged for murdering his pregnant mistress—has been reduced to a corpse that is in the process of being probed and disemboweled by the sadistic anatomists of the Royal College of Physicians. Beneath the dissecting table the animal world exacts its revenge: a dog is about to eat Tom Nero's heart. William Hogarth, *The Four Stages of Cruelty: Engravings by Hogarth, 101 Prints*, edited by Sean Shesgreen (New York: Dover Books, 1973), 77–80.

42. Stuart, *The Bloodless Revolution*, 340.

43. The only edition of Brothers's *Description of Jerusalem* mentioned by WorldCat was printed in London; but given the dynamic nature of the transatlantic book trade in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it is not impossible that Joseph Smith could have encountered the book. D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1987), 14, found that Brothers's most influential book, *A Revealed Knowledge of the Prophecies and Times*, had made its way to "such hinterland towns as Hanover, New Hampshire, where Hyrum Smith attended school near the Joseph Smith family residence." I have not been able to consult *A Revealed Knowledge* to see whether it contains similar teachings on animals.

44. Jones, *Animals and the Church*, 25.

45. Stuart, *The Bloodless Revolution*, 135–37.

46. *Ibid.*, 83.

47. Sir Isaac Newton, quoted in *ibid.*, 111.

48. Richard S. Westfall, quoted in *ibid.*, 113.

49. Primatologist Frans de Waal coined "anthropodenial" to refer to human practices that frame human-animal differences as differences in kind rather than Darwinian differences in degree. Cited in Marc Bekoff, *Minding Animals: Awareness, Emotions, and Heart* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 48. Cary Wolfe, *Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species, and Posthumanist Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), argues persuasively that speciesism should not be regarded as one more "-ism" to be added to the list of politically incorrect views; rather, speciesism's rigid human-animal boundaries lie at the heart of sexism, racism, and even humanism.

50. According to Stephen J. Stein, *The Shaker Experience in America: A History of the United Society of Believers* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univer-



sity Press, 1992), 156–58, 305–6, vegetarianism among the Shakers in the 1830s was inspired by Sylvester Graham’s writings rather than by revelation and was the subject of intense debate—not a matter of settled doctrine. In 1841, Shakers *were* commanded by “divine revelation” from their central ministry to abstain from coffee, tea, and pork; and in 1845 they received word that “meat or fish” would be banned on the Sabbath “except in cases of ill health,” although Stein observes that not all Shaker believers were committed to observing the new “holy laws” (198). It would be interesting to know whether Parley P. Pratt and Sidney Rigdon understood the controversial nature of vegetarianism among the Shakers when, in 1831, they visited the United Society community at North Union, Ohio, with former Shaker Leman Copley to deliver the revelation that would become Doctrine and Covenants 49. The revelation includes an ambiguously worded reference to Shaker vegetarianism in verse 18 (“And whoso forbiddeth to abstain from meats, that man should not eat the same, is not ordained of God”) but follows up in verse 21 with a strong endorsement of the principle expressed in JST Genesis 9:11 (“And wo be unto man that sheddeth blood or that wasteth flesh and hath no need”). Bushman, *Joseph Smith*, 154, characterizes the 1831 meeting between the Mormons and the Shakers as a disaster, not because of disagreements over vegetarianism but because of the Mormon revelation’s affirmation of marriage (as opposed to celibacy) and to Pratt’s “lack of tact” in shaking the dust off his coattails (see Mark 6:11) when the Shakers rejected the revelation.

51. On Graham’s idiosyncratic but influential (as well as controversial) theories on the connections between diet and sexual desire, see Stephen Nissenbaum, *Sex, Diet, and Debility in Jacksonian America: Sylvester Graham and Health Reform*, Contributions in Medical History No. 4 (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1980), 32–36, 119–20. “The truth of the matter is simply this,” wrote Graham in *A Lecture to Young Men, on Chastity . . .* (1834): “A pure and well regulated vegetable diet, serves to take away or prevent all morbid or preternatural sexual lust . . . and thus enable [man] to be chaste in body and spirit.” Quoted in *ibid.*, 120. The Word of Wisdom, of course, says nothing about chastity.

52. Ronald M. Deutsch, *The New Nuts among the Berries* (Palo Alto, Calif.: Bull, 1977), 23, claims that in August 1832, the Washington, D.C., Board of Health issued a ninety-day ban on the sale of practically every kind of fruit and vegetable except for potatoes, beets, tomatoes, and onions—“but even these they would admonish the country to be moderate in using.” A few weeks earlier, New York’s Special Medical Council had advised citizens to “avoid crude vegetables and fruits.” Charles E. Rosenberg, *The Cholera Years: The United States in 1832, 1849, and 1866* (Chi-

cago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 30. Other prominent doctors recommended diets heavy in meat and port wine. Iacobbo and Iacobbo, *Vegetarian America*, 18. Many in the United States viewed excessive alcohol consumption as a leading cause of death. Sylvester Graham was one of them; he also warned his rapidly growing audience of readers and listeners against coffee, tea, opium, spices, excessive meat consumption, and too much sex. Nissenbaum, *Sex, Diet, and Debility*, 86–104. These theories were wrong, of course, but it would be more than twenty years before the British physician John Snow made the necessary epidemiological link between cholera deaths and contaminated drinking water.

53. Frederick C. Dahlstrand, *Amos Bronson Alcott: An Intellectual Biography* (Rutherford, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1982), 190–91. In his 1836 book *The Doctrine and Discipline of Human Culture*, Bronson Alcott wrote: “It is the mission of this age . . . to reproduce Perfect Men. The faded image of Humanity is to be restored, and Man to reappear in his original brightness.” At Fruitlands, the foundations of an Edenic revolution in the natural world itself were to be laid. By abstaining from the use of manure for fertilizer and employing other enlightened farming techniques, Alcott wrote in a journal entry titled “Husbandry” that the Fruitlanders could ensure: “The soil, grateful thus for man’s generous usage, debauched no more by foul ordures, nor worn by cupidities, shall recover its primeval virginity.” Quoted in Richard Francis, *Transcendental Utopias: Individual and Community at Brook Farm, Fruitlands, and Walden* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997), 156, 182. Given the ideological similarities between LDS and Transcendentalist utopian experiments, the community’s short life span (June 1843–January 1844) should not disqualify it from comparison with longer-lasting LDS (agri)cultural projects in Utah and elsewhere.

54. See, for instance, Carolyn J. Weekley with Laura Pass Barry, *The Kingdoms of Edward Hicks* (Williamsburg, Va.: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1999), 51–64, 92, and excerpts from a sermon Hicks delivered at Goose Creek, Virginia, in 1837 (223–32) in which he classifies different types of Quakers according to their dominant humors and compares each type to an animal. For instance, “phlegmatic” individuals are like bears: normally “dull, sluggish, inert creature[s],” but likely to reveal a “powerful, cruel and voracious” side when “agitated by some of the stronger passions” (228).

55. Joseph F. Smith, John R. Winder, and Anton H. Lund (First Presidency), “Gospel Classics: The Origin of Man,” 1909, edited version reprinted in *Ensign*, February 2002, 30; emphasis mine.

56. Thomas G. Alexander, *Mormonism in Transition: A History of the*

*Latter-day Saints, 1890–1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 259.

57. Sandra Bradford Packard, “Animals,” *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 5 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 1:42.

58. Richard N. Ostling and Joan K. Ostling, *Mormon America: The Power and the Promise* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1999), 176.

59. Jim Catano, “The Word of Wisdom: The Forgotten Verses,” *Vegsource.com*, November 8, 1997, <http://www.vegsource.com/articles/catano.htm> (accessed October 26, 2007).

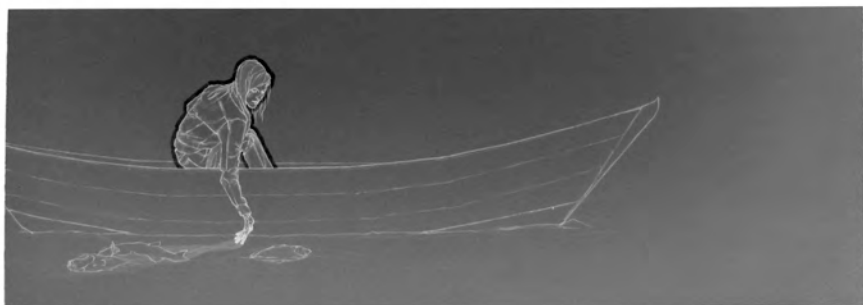
60. Humanity’s growing hunger for meat takes a terrible toll not just on the animals that are killed but on the larger biosphere, including our own bodies. Worldwatch Institute, *Good Stuff?: A Behind-the-Scenes Guide to the Things We Buy*, March 31, 2004, <http://www.worldwatch.org/taxonomy/term/44> (accessed October 26, 2007), reports on some of meat’s not-so-hidden costs relating to oil, water, hormones, antibiotics, land use, methane, animal waste, bovine spongiform encephalopathy (“mad cow disease”), and so on. Researchers at the University of Chicago have reported that “the average American diet—including all food processing steps—results in the annual production of an extra 1.5 tons of [carbon dioxide]-equivalent (in the form of all greenhouse gases) compared to a no-meat diet.” If their findings are correct, going vegetarian would have a bigger impact on global warming than switching from a standard car to a hybrid. Brad Knickerbocker, “Humans’ Beef with Livestock: A Warmer Planet,” *Christian Science Monitor*, February 20, 2007, <http://www.csmonitor.com/2007/0220/p03s01-ussc.html> (accessed October 26, 2007). Eric Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal* (2001; rpt., New York: Harper Perennial, 2005), 149–90, follows Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle* (1906) in documenting the meat industry’s scandalous mistreatment of its human workers.

61. Erica Fudge, *Animal* (London: Reaktion Books, 2002), offers an excellent introduction both to problems like these and to the field of animal studies in general. She is a member of the Animal Studies Group.

62. Lynn White Jr., “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis,” in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 14.

63. Hyrum Smith, “The Word of Wisdom,” 799.

64. *Ibid.*, 800.



Mary Toscano,  
*A Perch*, 10.5"x 10.5",  
*A Foothold*, 10.5"x 18.5" and  
*A Float*, 10.5"x 30"  
graphite, watercolor and gesso on  
paper, 2009.

# Why Joseph Went to the Woods: Rootstock for LDS Literary Nature Writers

*Patricia Gunter Karamesines*

## **Why People Go to the Woods**

We could say that Joseph Smith Junior went to the woods for the same reason Henry David Thoreau went: He wished to live deliberately. Or maybe we should say that Thoreau went for the same reasons Joseph Smith did. In 1820, Joseph took to the Sacred Grove to discover “who of all these parties is right, or are they all wrong together? If any one of them be right, which is it and how shall I know?” (JS—H 1:10). Thirty years after Joseph went into the grove, Thoreau took to Walden Pond to “front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach.”<sup>1</sup> Thoreau stayed at Walden for twenty-six months. Joseph Smith stayed in the Sacred Grove for—we might guess—only a few hours at most. But both men came away from their experiences with the “essential facts” they sought.

Thoreau’s *Walden* swaggers with insight gleaned at the pond in the woods. Joseph Smith’s more modestly told First Vision gives a matter-of-fact account of what happened when he took to his sanctuary. Lacking wisdom, he says, he dropped to his knees, laid out the seeds of his desire, and watered them with fervent prayer. The season was right, the desire fertile, and the *light*—that is, after Joseph wrestled his bout with darkness—the light broke through, warmed the seeds bearing his desire to know, and split them wide.

Joseph’s choice of grove over church, barn, or bedside for putting his Big Questions to God suggests that he trusted solitude

and the stimulating qualities natural environments offer. Perhaps in ways difficult for us to grasp because potential Sacred Groves are harder to come by than they were in Joseph's Smith's time, nature, in concert with scripture and a boy's desire to get beyond limits in his understanding, might have facilitated the emergence of the modern church. Whatever else, the Sacred Grove provided everyone involved, including its Creators, with early geopositioning for the gospel's restoration. Joseph Smith's account of what happened to him when he went to the woods to pray bears many labels. Among them could be that it's one of the world's most striking moments in nature literature.

Through Joseph Smith's First Vision, Mormonism stakes a claim in the grand tradition of finding God in the wilderness. Couple this claim with belief in eternal progression, add the central role that repentance plays in Mormons' lives, and Mormons really have quite the lenses for gazing upon the grandeur of the Mystery. With growing LDS scientific and cultural communities, LDS literary nature writers ought to abound. In fact, given the Mormon belief that there's a mustard-seed god in each of us, one would expect more Mormon writers to be chronicling its growth in the creation. So . . . where are our records of discovery? Where are our LDS literary nature and science "personal journals"?

### **What Is "Nature Writing"?**

Perhaps one reason LDS writers haven't ventured far into the field of nature writing is because they're not sure what it is or does and whether writing it fulfills covenants they have made to help build the kingdom of God. Furthermore, in my experience, many in the LDS population don't know how to interpret the anger, misanthropy, or sorrow that crops up in much contemporary nature writing, especially when the high rhetoric expressing such emotions threatens LDS lifestyles and beliefs. Important, call-to-action terms like "stewardship," a word that many, if not most, Latter-day Saints accept as an essential component of concepts like "service" and "righteous dominion," prove uncomfortably mercurial when applied to environmental issues. Writing nature literature *might* qualify as exercising "good stewardship" and thus as an act of building the kingdom, but what kind of writing quali-

fies as nature writing and what aspects of building the kingdom might it accomplish?

In an internet essay proposing definitions for literary science and nature writing, naturalist Barry Lopez states: “Among the salient and generally agreed upon characteristics of [nature writing] today are: 1) an assumption that ‘landscape’—every element and nuance of the physical world, from a snowstorm passing through, to line and shadow in a woody draw, to the whinny of a horse—is integral, not incidental to the story; 2) a thematic focus on the relationship of human culture to place or, more generally, of culture to nature; and 3) a heightened sensitivity to issues of justice and spirituality.”<sup>2</sup>

Lopez points out that many stories not commonly considered nature writing cast the natural world in key roles in their tales of good versus evil. He notes that Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick* is such a story, emanating formidable seagoing narrative energy as it does.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, the sea is the domain of one of the story’s main characters—an awesome white whale. Examples of such “sort of” nature literature abound. Weaving elements of nature writing into the plot of an otherwise non-nature narrative is a common way to explore humankind’s place and purpose in the creation. This kind of “nature writing,” with its archetypal themes and tensions, lies well within the reach of LDS authors writing for an audience that includes LDS readers as well as readers who are not LDS.

Regarding Lopez’s third category of nature writing that contains a “heightened sensitivity to issues of justice and spirituality,” many Mormons grow up steeped in such literature. The Old and New Testaments chronicle events staged in the wilderness and also draw on images from nature to make moral points. The story of the Garden of Eden, the plagues that Moses called down upon the Egyptians to persuade them to free the children of Israel from bondage, and the Israelite exodus to the promised land itself, are among those scriptural tales that focus the relationship of culture to place and explore matters of heightened spirituality and social justice.

In the New Testament, Christ’s effect on the physical world, ranging from calming the sea to multiplying fishes and loaves, further illustrates nature’s integral roles in scriptural narrative in-



tent and is considered an important marker of his spiritual gifts. Furthermore, like Joseph Smith's first petition to God, at least two of Christ's critical prayers occur in nature-rich settings. One crucial prayer took place in the olive groves of the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:39). And after feeding the crowd of 5,000, Jesus "went up into a mountain apart to pray" (Matt. 14:23). In Mormonism's home book of scripture, the Book of Mormon, God and the wilderness offer the Nephites the "promised land" they require to build toward spiritual and cultural aspirations that the big city of Jerusalem had repressed.

Lopez provides examples of modern writers whose work integrates elements of this category. "In Cather and Steinbeck," he comments, "and more recently in Peter Matthiessen, Gary Snyder, and Wendell Berry, we find the same pursuit of a just relationship with the divine in a particularized landscape and, again, themes of social justice. The approach also often assumes that the physical landscape is not ownable, that it may be numinous, and that these landscapes and all they include, from weather to color to basalt boulders, exist in the same moral universe with the human."<sup>4</sup>

For those who prefer their modern writing to be more markedly "spiritual," Lopez notes that Catholic poet, author, and social activist Thomas Merton, "more than any other contemporary prose writer, maintained the tradition of spirituality in American writing now thought to be integral to nature writing."<sup>5</sup> In a writers' workshop in Bluff, Utah, naturalist and author Terry Tempest Williams stressed a similar point, saying that there's a "spiritual quality" to the work of nature writing: "Writing," she said, "is a spiritual practice."<sup>6</sup> In general, spirituality of one degree or another is an expected feature of writing focused on the natural world.

For the logically inclined, an interesting development in nature writing is the advent of lyrical science writing—poetry, prose poems, fiction, and essays—that shapes its themes upon historical and current scientific knowledge. This kind of writing anchors itself in scientific discovery and terminology while relying on metaphor and other traditional tropes and figures of speech to strike insight. Sci-poems commonly bear titles like "Seismicity of the Eastern Snake River Plain Region" (Timothy Doyle) and "Ephemerides of a Minor Planet" (Jessica Goodfellow). Essays with titles

like “Trace Elements” (Jeff Porter) and “V.E.C.T.O.R.L.O.S.S. Project” (Michael Branch) demonstrate how scientific discoveries meet personal voice, at once bringing science down to earth and elevating nature writing above the bipolar tradition of sorrowful lament and wildly celebratory verse and prose popular thirty years ago that still emerges in current literature now and again.

Certainly, aspiring LDS nature writers have many reasons to rejoice. Nature writing has acquired greater narrative diversity, with many avenues that are kingdom-building friendly. New forms in the genre allow for the development of Mormon spiritual themes; in fact, any and all of the narrative pathways opening up rely for their effectiveness on various manifestations of spirituality. Nature writing cannot be said to be this rhetorical creature or that one, but rather many creatures differing in habits but bearing striking resemblances.

### **Do We Need to Get Ourselves Back to the Garden?**

Clearly, whatever other defining qualities nature writing might exhibit, spiritual sensitivity will be the most important for LDS writers. One reason is because the overarching nature of spiritual quests, like the one James 1:5 proposed to Joseph Smith and to every reader of the New Testament, lies at the core of the LDS experience. From the time children enter LDS Primary at age three, they’re taught that acquiring a personal testimony of the restored gospel’s power and truth and learning how to apply that power and truth in their lives is a foremost goal. While the potential for spiritually heightened experiences in nature is not often suggested over LDS pulpits, Joseph Smith’s Sacred Grove experience is frequently put forward as a strong example to follow, especially for the young. For instance, in the summer of 2005, a Payson, Utah, stake sponsored a super-activity urging youth to follow Joseph Smith’s spiritual path by basing it upon the slogan, “Find Your Own Grove.”

In his *Last Child in the Woods*, Richard Louv describes the triangle that exists between children, nature, and spiritual desire. Among other points, Louv argues that all children carry within them the potential for the sort of spiritual desire that brings about transcendent experiences.<sup>7</sup> He reminds readers that, in older religious texts, not only did notable prophets and leaders begin spiri-

tual quests at what might seem nowadays to be precocious ages (Abraham, Samuel, and Christ, for example), but also that the scriptures overall are fertile with images connecting children with the highest qualities of spirituality.<sup>8</sup>

Louv links children's native spirituality to nature, observing that poets like William Wordsworth and William Blake endowed children with natural spirituality and, in their poetry, bound that spirituality to beauty and to nature. Louv notes: "As a child, Blake announced that he had seen the prophet Ezekiel sitting in a tree. . . . He also reported seeing a tree filled with angels who sang from the branches."<sup>9</sup> Louv also notes that psychologists Abraham Maslow and Edward Hoffman saw the childhood quest for spiritual truth as more widespread than is commonly imagined. Hoffman interviewed "children and hundreds of adults who described spontaneous childhood experiences 'of great meaning, beauty, or inspiration.'"<sup>10</sup> For Mormon readers, the parallels between Louv's thesis of childhood spirituality roots in nature and fourteen-year-old Joseph Smith's experience in the Sacred Grove are striking, especially as Hoffman found that among the "triggers [of experiences of great meaning] are heartfelt prayer or more formalized religious moments" that might result in revelatory dreams or even "a visionary episode."<sup>11</sup>

Louv grants that aesthetics also provide "gateways" into visionary or transmundane experiences. But in his chapter titled "The Spiritual Necessity of Nature for the Young," he stresses: "Most interesting . . . is Hoffman's finding that most transcendent childhood experiences happen in nature,"<sup>12</sup> again a parallel directly relevant to Joseph Smith's vision of God. Joseph Smith states the triggers for his vision: his own heightened excitement of mind, stimulated by the "greatly excited" and "incessant" religious tumult of his time; the impression James 1:5 made on him; and his immersion in earnest prayer. The beauty of the spring day on which he chose to petition God made enough of an impression that he mentions it: "It was on the morning of a beautiful, clear day, early in the spring of eighteen hundred and twenty" (JS—H 1:14). Perhaps if Joseph's reading of James 1:5 had brought him to utter his prayer in the vacant town square in the middle of the night, God the Father and Jesus would have appeared to him there. But Joseph chose the woods for his sanctum.

Certainly, interior spaces like LDS temples, chapels, and private household sanctums are dedicated ground in which one might encounter the sacred; and in the Church, they are heartily promoted as such. The potential of outdoor spiritual arenas is not often urged in Church publications, over-the-pulpit talks, or congregational hymns; but as Joseph Smith's experience and the experiences of many spiritual pilgrims demonstrate, natural, outdoor settings ought not to be discounted as sacred settings. Nor should narratives recounting experiences in natural settings be dismissed out of hand as being unsuitable ground for engaging the sacred.

### **Are Mormon Nature Writers Shy?**

Are Mormons having spiritual experiences in nature? In a comment on my "Back to the Garden," a post on A Motley Vision blog, Stephen Carter, current AML-List moderator and writer for the satirical gazette *The Sugar Beet*, laid out his view of why Mormons don't engage in nature writing or even in the environmental discourse at large:

I know a lot of Mormons who don't think twice about environmental stuff because they believe Jesus is going to come with his very own Super Fund in just a little while now. So why worry?

And then there's the idea Joseph Smith put forward that the world, in its perfect state, will resemble a big ball of glass. It seems that the majority of the ideology popular among Mormons these days leads us to be suspect of this world. After all, Satan has control over it, right?

And the telestial kingdom is supposed to resemble this world. Meaning that there are at least two spheres more exalted than this one.

There's also the idea that, as gods, we're going to be big real estate developers in the sky, with no constraints put on our creative abilities. Which doesn't lead one to think about resource management.<sup>13</sup>

Carter's summary might be a fair, if amusing, catalogue of some ideological obstacles that those wishing to engage in literary nature writing might encounter in their Mormon audiences. But I suspect that Mormons are having more spiritual experiences in nature than they report simply because they hesitate to call them "spiritual." In response to my Times and Seasons post, "A Walk

into the Moon,” a commenter named “Darrell,” who at the time was an LDS bishop, reported:

I had a night class in Portland and drove home up the Columbia Gorge on the Washington side. There is a turn-off just a few miles from my home called Cape Horn. I pulled off the road, exited my car and watched the moon as it reflected off the Columbia River.

The river far below, the mountains, the trees, Beacon Rock (off in the distance) were all “aglaze.” . . . I watched a barge glide through the water, lights glowing even in the bright moonlight. It was almost a spiritual experience. I offered a prayer of thanks for being in this place in this time of my life.<sup>14</sup>

Darrell prefaced this lovely piece of writing by saying that he wasn’t good at putting such experiences into words, a disclaimer many make when recounting spiritual episodes. Questioned about what would have made this moment a fully spiritual one for him, he replied: “I definitely understated the experience. You are right it was spiritual, I should not have used the word “almost.” Perhaps I was comparing it to some of the experiences that I have had in the temple. However, more than once, as I have hiked through these woods and mountains and among waterfalls, I have felt as close to God as within the walls of the temple.”<sup>15</sup>

In a weblog post from which I’ve taken the title of this paper, I asked readers of the LDS blog *Times and Seasons* the following questions:

1. Do you read, write, or care in any degree for literary nature and science writing?
2. Do you feel disengaged from the nature/environment discussion?
3. What in Mormonism provides your spiritual grounding for caring about the well being of this planet and the people and creatures inhabiting it?
4. Have you had spiritual experiences in nature?
5. What ingredients do you think meaningful nature writing should include?<sup>16</sup>

Not everyone who read the post responded, and many of those who did respond are among the most outspoken members of the so-called Mormon bloggernacle. All the same, their responses are telling. Some readers reported liking nature writing and poetry about the natural world as a matter of course. They

don't like environmental rhetoric that paints over the human image in the landscape or that otherwise exhibits disdain toward human beings. Some of the thread's readers echoed *Times and Seasons'* permablogger Kaimi Wenger's dislike for Jon Krakauer-type nature literature where people having an abundance of money and time turn nature into an exclusive country club. For Wenger, who also teaches at the Thomas Jefferson School of Law in San Diego, the "annoying presence of nature snobs has tainted the idea of nature." Wenger also remarked that unorthodox Mormon nature writers who appear to undermine orthodox beliefs give Mormons good reasons to disengage from the discussion.<sup>17</sup> Likewise, commenter "Kevinf" prefers that nature writing acknowledge the presence of people and human relations: "Nature completely separated from human life is interesting, but I'd take a group of friends and family over solitude about any time."<sup>18</sup>

Russell Arben Fox, another *Times and Seasons* permablogger, expressed his strong preference for the type of nature writing that Lopez outlines in his second and third categories: thematic focus on the relationship of human culture to place and a heightened sensitivity to issues of justice and spirituality. Fox, a professor of political science at Friends University in Wichita, Kansas, said he considers "pastoral, counter-cultural, and agrarian fiction and nonfiction . . . to be nature writing of the highest order." Furthermore, the human element as it manifests itself in human communities and production must be present because he believes that the most compelling issues emerge not in privileged acts of outright environmental protection but "in moral reform and socioeconomic justice." However, where important language overlaps between conservation/nature ethics and moral reform, inspiring people to change their behavior for the better, useful rhetorical ground might form. Furthermore, Fox reports having had some spiritual experiences in nature but says he has had more such experiences while "listening to a fine piece of music, or reading a great book, or viewing a masterful work of art."<sup>19</sup>

Like Russell Fox, Adam Greenwood, a former *Times and Seasons* permablogger, sees people as necessary movers and shakers in environmental discourse, though his interest rests mostly with "exemplary people and the communion of the saints." When wilderness does engage him, he sees it more as a function of soli-

tude, which he believes to have an “absence of good and evil.” Like Fox, Greenwood said that wilderness as a thing in itself doesn’t interest him. To his thinking, spiritual experiences occur in cultivated spaces where human presence is most manifest, such as gardens, fields, and “other places where nature and the works of man meet.”<sup>20</sup>

Commenter “MLU” says that nature writers overall “were not helping build the kingdom I wanted to live in.” Like Fox and Greenwood, he wishes for nature writing that makes it possible to view people in the Creator’s image. The trend in nature writing, he said, “seemed to be away from seeing people in the image of the Creator and toward believing that granting any innate dignity to humanity was ‘specism’, a constant readiness to blame ‘the Judaeo-Christian tradition’ for all the ills of the planet, a resurgence of pagan forms of nature worship, etc. etc.” Furthermore, because what we know can only be a “semblance” of the whole picture, good writing must display “a sense for metaphor.” Echoing Wenger’s remarks about unorthodox Mormon nature writers who attempt to undermine orthodox Mormons’ beliefs, “MLU” says he would “surely buy any book of nature writing that didn’t curry favor with the ‘right’ people by, for example, criticizing Brigham Young.”<sup>21</sup>

A commenter calling himself “greenfrog” said that for him, nature writing must be well written. If it doesn’t contain “clear perception and accurate, specific articulation,” it runs the risk of making matters worse. Nature writing, he says, that is “imprecise and fuzzy in its focus or its execution . . . is false and prone to mislead, either the writer or the reader or both.”<sup>22</sup>

It was with these thoughtful comments in mind that, in February 2009, I, along with William Morris, founder of the Mormon Arts and Culture Blog, A Motley Vision, started the nature-writing blog Wilderness Interface Zone (WIZ). Described as “a Mormon literary backcountry where words and place come together,” WIZ is designed to help develop, inspire, and promote literary nature and science writing in the Mormon writing community. Its intent is to open a frontier in Mormon arts, demonstrating in the process that nature writing is not an artistic dalliance but rather that it meets the spiritual needs of many Mormons who feel connections to nature and through nature to God and the divine in



its many creative forms. WIZ features criticism and theory; reviews; interviews; original writing, including excerpts, creative nonfiction, poetry, hybrid literary forms, and fiction; odds and ends such as field notes; and news and commentary on events related to its writers and to nature writing.<sup>23</sup>

It was our hope at the blog's outset that not only Mormon artists but also writers who are not Mormon but are interested in nature writing would find WIZ a vibrant literary ecotone. As of February 2011, the blog has run for two years. Open to submissions, it has developed a modest and slowly growing readership. Many readers are Mormon, but some non-Mormons do indeed follow the blog. Events such as Wilderness Interface Zone's Spring Poetry Runoff Contest bring in high-quality, nature-themed writing, much of which demonstrates beyond a shadow of a doubt that Mormon relationships with nature are alive and well and spiritually vibrant. As for how WIZ will help build the kingdom, we'll let nature take its course and see what arises.

### **Make It Possible to "Hope All Things"**

Here at the outset of the hoped-for development of Mormon-generated nature literature, two basic ways, having many divergent tracks and unbroken trails, lie open to Mormon writers. Mormons could produce nature literature to satisfy Mormon audiences specifically, writing in the traditional religious language that many Mormons expect to find in material produced in their culture and that contains clear and recognizable "building the kingdom" rhetoric. Or they could write nature literature where "building the kingdom" rhetoric is not Mormon-specific, working from Mormon sensibilities to explore broad concerns of stewardship, spirituality, human-nature relationships, and social justice, relying on metaphor and other rhetorical figures and tropes to enable diverse responses to their work. Many Mormon readers, as well as readers who are not and never will be Mormon, expect—indeed, need—to find convincing spiritual matter present in nature writing. LDS writers are qualified to provide it.

Whatever paths Mormon-generated literary nature and science writing takes, writers would do well to create with language that "hopes all things" (Article of Faith 13). That is, rather than relying on traditional lament-style nature narrative or angry social

criticism, both of which often leave audience members feeling attacked, ignored, uninspired, cornered—or worse, that manipulate any sense of outrage readers might be feeling—Mormon writers of nature literature might consider entering the dialogue from two angles. First, they should seek to educate themselves on environmental subjects they care deeply about. Second, they should try to engender hope by providing in their written language the raw materials for experience that readers can use to forge for themselves new relationships with nature. Such language would open the prospects for human progression in relation to the Creation and its creators.

To borrow from conservation rhetoric, any stewardship effort that includes taking a rhetorical stance toward nature must be conscious of its effects not only on the natural environment but also on the environment of human language; it must strive for sustainability in its quality of expression. Sustainable language is creative, productive, replenish-the-earth language that makes it possible for others to care about what you care about. Such language effectively sparks those that encounter it to create their own risk-choice spectrums. Through uses of rhetorical figures and tropes like metaphor and especially irony—irony in its highest forms, not the low forms of irony manifested in sarcasm, cynicism, or sardonic language—sustainable language creates a range of meaning that allows for an audience to make something more of their experiences of it. It opens possibilities rather than applying high rhetoric or limited options to bait others, nor does it use readers' fear, depression, anger, sense of loss, shame, or guilt to channel them in particular directions, as bad writing in any genre is apt to do.

Whether a writer or reader of nature literature embraces the Garden of Eden scriptural account of human beginnings or the emerging evolutionary narrative, human language—what it is and what it does on earth and in the heavens—is a deeply spiritual concern. What people say and how they say it exerts a tremendous influence on the planet at all levels, not just in making policy to preserve natural environments, to address matters of climate change, or to develop more mindful strategies to extract, refine, or harness natural resources. It also affects people's attitudes and behavior when they go out into the natural world or encounter other

species wherever they may. Indeed, with the discovery and development of the electronic frontier and its accompanying rhetorical land rush that continues full tilt today, millions of people are racing to stake out narrative territory. The opening of the electronic frontier and its accompanying scramble for narrative ground has accelerated and magnified human language's effects on the conditions of all human and natural environments. Whether given by God or developed by this planet through us, human language is a wilderness in its own right, containing a superabundance of cultural and natural resources. Language stewardship is as vital to the health of this planet as is stewardship of the land.

Passionate writers wishing to contribute toward the well-being of the planet should recognize and respect human expression's cosmoplastic<sup>24</sup> or "world-building" qualities and not assert declamatory freedom of expression for every turn of phrase without regard for its downstream effects. Among other considerations, this means that a writer of nature literature should not feel him- or herself immune from criticism or, more importantly, averse to self-examination of his or her own motives and behavior in the Logoscape in which he or she creates. This awareness is, of course, a complex matter requiring years of effort. A writer over time and with experience will develop an awareness of, and assume responsibility for, actual as well as possible consequences to which his or her words give rise. But to begin, a Mormon writer of nature literature might find helpful the rule one sees often on signs and pamphlets advising hikers and campers on their behavior in sensitive areas: "Leave it better than you found it." When I've been out poking around in the backrocks where there has been no litter or any condition at all begging for attention, I've wondered how to apply this dictum. But in the wildlands of human expression, its applications could prove limitless.

### Notes

1. Henry David Thoreau, *Walden—An Annotated Edition*, Chap. 2 ("Where I Lived, and What I Lived For"), para. 16, <http://thoreau.eserver.org/walden00.html> (accessed March 1, 2008).

2. Barry Lopez, "Introduction to Our Catalogue of Nature Writing," on the website of Ken Lopez, bookseller, who uses as context Barry's brief introductory remarks (accessed March 1, 2008).

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.; from paragraph beginning, "Work of this sort has set American literature apart since at least the middle of the nineteenth century . . ."

5. Ibid.

6. My notes on the Williams workshop, February 2008, Bluff, Utah, in Patricia Gunter Karamesines, "Field Notes #5: Writers' Workshop with Terry Tempest Williams, February 2008, <http://www.motleyvision.org/2008/field-notes-5-writers-workshop-with-terry-tempest-williams/> (accessed March 3, 2008).

7. Richard Louv, *Last Child in the Woods* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: Algonquin Books, 2005), 285–300.

8. Ibid., 286: "In the old texts, a child's spiritual life was assumed. Abraham began his search for God as a child."

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid., 287–88.

11. Ibid., 288.

12. Ibid.

13. Stephen Carter, July 11, 2006, comment on Patricia Karamesines, "Back to the Garden," A Motley Vision: Mormon Arts and Culture blog, July 10, 2006, <http://www.motleyvision.org/2006/back-to-the-garden/>.

14. "Darrell," October 26, 2007, comment on Patricia Karamesines, "A Walk into the Moon," Times and Seasons blog, October 26, 2007, <http://timesandseasons.org/index.php/2007/10/a-walk-into-the-moon/comment#12>.

15. Ibid.

16. Patricia Karamesines, "Why Joseph Went to the Woods," Times and Seasons blog, November 1, 2007, <http://timesandseasons.org/index.php/2007/11/why-joseph-went-to-the-woods/>.

17. Kaimi Wenger, November 1, 2007, comments on Patricia Karamesines, "Why Joseph Went to the Woods," Times and Seasons blog, November 1, 2007, <http://timesandseasons.org/index.php/2007/11/why-joseph-went-to-the-woods/>.

18. "Kevinf," November 1, 2007, comment in *ibid.*

19. Russell Arben Fox, November 1, 2007, comment in *ibid.*

20. Adam Greenwood, November 1, 2007, comment in *ibid.*

21. MLU, November 1, 2007, comment in *ibid.*

22. "greenfrog," November 1, 2007, comment in *ibid.*

23. Patricia Karamesines and William Morris, Wilderness Interface Zone blog, <http://wilderness.motleyvision.org/about/>.

24. John D. Niles, *Homo Narrans: The Poetics and Anthropology of Oral*

*Literature* (Philadelphia, Pa.: University of Pennsylvania Press: 1999), 4, uses “cosmoplastic,” meaning “world-building,” to describe the power that human language—in particular oral narrative—exerts on the world, especially on human culture. He asserts: “The conclusions to which my own research have brought me concerning the constitutive value of storytelling . . . are consistent with the hypothesis that narrative had (and still has) a crucial role in human evolution.” I find his points on storytelling striking, mirroring the effects storytelling has had upon the development of my own consciousness. While Niles speaks of dominant narratives as stories that have triumphed, for one reason or another, over competing narratives, it seems clear that the most powerful stories come to us through gifted folk speaking to us out of heightened, disciplined sensibilities; in other words, they are good stewards of language and of the cultures that they help to shape. Niles’s ideas about oral narrative can be extended to written narrative and thus carry the implication that greater care for language’s effects on people and on the planet generally would be of the highest value for the current state and future development of humankind and the planet’s well-being. Deleterious rhetoric, on the other hand, has destructive qualities affecting others’ minds as tainted rivers can affect their bodies. Any writer, therefore, should take care what “downstream effects” his or her actions in language give rise to, but nature writers should take special care that, to the best of their abilities, the words they put out there build the world rather than poison the rhetorical environment in which human minds live and grow.

# Recompense

Adam S. Miller

George Handley's *Home Waters: A Year of Recompenses on the Provo River*<sup>1</sup> practices theology the way a doctor practices CPR—not as a secondhand theory but as a chest-cracking, lung-inflating, life-saving intervention. The book models what, on my account, good theology ought to do: It is experimental, it is grounded in the details of lived experience, and it takes charity—that pure love of Christ—as the only real justification for its having been written. It is not afraid to guess, it is not afraid to question, it is not afraid to cry repentance, and it is not afraid to speak in its own name. The book's self-description reads, in part:

People who fly-fish know that a favorite river bend, a secluded spot in moving waters, can feel like home—a place you know intimately and intuitively. In prose that reads like the flowing current of a river, scholar and essayist George Handley blends nature writing, local history, theology, environmental history, and personal memoir in his new book *Home Waters: A Year of Recompenses on the Provo River*. Handley's meditations on the local Provo River watershed present the argument that a sense of place requires more than a strong sense of history and belonging, it requires awareness and commitment. Handley traces a history of settlement along the Provo that has profoundly transformed the landscape and yet neglected its Native American and environmental legacies. As a descendent of one of the first pioneers to irrigate the area, and as a witness to the loss of orchards, open space, and an eroded environmental ethic, Handley weaves his own personal and family history into the landscape to argue for sustainable belonging. In avoiding the exclusionist and environmentally harmful attitudes that come with the territorial claims to a homeland, the fly-fishing term, "home waters," is offered as an alternative, a kind of belonging that is informed by deference to others, to the mysteries of deep time, and to a fragile dependence on water.<sup>2</sup>

Rather than responding to Handley's live theology with sec-

ondhand theory, I would prefer to respond in kind. The essays that follow don't review *Home Waters* so much as they give an account of what life—what thoughts, inclinations, sensations—its intervention pumped into me. My own meditations treat three themes: the soul as a kind of watershed, genealogy as a kind of ecology, and recompense as the way of creation.

### Soul as Watershed

Spurred by *Home Waters*, I've been reading Wallace Stegner. Like Handley, Stegner is interested in the tight twine of body, place, and genealogy that makes a life. On my account, Handley and Stegner share the same thesis: If the body is a river, then the soul is a watershed. Like a shirt pulled off over your head, this thesis leaves the soul inside-out and exposed. You thought your soul was a kernel of atomic interiority, your most secret secret—but as you stand there, shirt in hand, everyone can see your navel.

Stegner's novel, *Angle of Repose*, opens with the narrator's own version of this thesis. An aging father, writing about his pioneer grandparents, names the distance between himself and his son:

Right there, I might say to Rodman, who doesn't believe in time, notice something: I started to establish the present and the present moved on. What I established is already buried under layers of tape. Before I can say I am, I was. Heraclitus and I, prophets of flux, know that the flux is composed of parts that imitate and repeat each other. Am or was, I am cumulative, too. I am everything I ever was, whatever you and Leah may think. I am much of what my parents and especially my grandparents were—inherited stature, coloring, brains, bones (that part unfortunate), plus transmitted prejudices, culture, scruples, likings, moralities, and moral errors that I defend as if they were personal and not familial.<sup>3</sup>

Right off, Stegner fingers what is different about this notion of a soul: time. Thinking that souls are tucked away inside us generally goes hand in hand with thinking that they are untouched by time. Dammed up inside, the soul, unmoved, is safe from the perpetual rush and tumble of Heraclitus's *panta rhei*.

But wrong-side-out, the soul has no such repose. Here, nothing is still and the soul's "I am!" is both compromised and constituted by its temporality. It moves but its movement is "composed of parts that imitate and repeat each other." It moves, but it moves as a gathering litany of brains, bones, beliefs, scruples, and preju-



dices copied from the bodies and lives of parents and grandparents and channeled through the narrow straits of *my* canyon walls.

As Handley points out, “This is the way with watersheds. They gather tributaries from upstream and connect all that is above, beneath, and beside and give life through unseen processes of exchange” (xv). Downstream, the river appears self-sufficient, its banks clearly defined, its water an unremarkable grace. But the accessible obscures the obvious. “A river is water, yes, but it is also soil, plant, and animal life—a watershed” (128). A soul is a body, yes, but it is also a place and a time. A soul, like water, “seeps through the edges of stone, leaps out of rocky walls, or surges from beneath the soil, and it grows in size and momentum as it flows downward from the tops of the mountains. Little capillaries of water meet up with others to form small rivulets and streams, which meet others still in naturally formed transepts, until a river takes shape and creates inverted mountains to aid its way down. Down to the sea or directly to the clouds from where it drops on the mountains again” (213).

The simile is striking, but I don’t want to leave it there. Handley’s attention to the force of place insists that we are dealing with more than metaphor. The soul names both the body’s place and that body’s being placed. There are no souls without bodies, but a body, in itself, is a wire unplugged. Souls socket bodies into the place of their time. It is in this sense, Handley suggests, that “geography teaches us the first lessons of being” (38), that every kind of being involves a being *there*.

This concept fits with Mormonism’s own original take on the soul. Sometimes we use the word “soul” like everyone else, but sometimes we don’t. Doctrine and Covenants 88:15 gives the term a twist: “The spirit and the body are the soul of man.” Where Plato’s soul is, above all else, indivisible, Joseph gives it as composite. “Soul” names the body’s being-there-with a spirit. And given that the separation of body and spirit is death, the soul—this being-there-with of body and spirit—is synonymous with life.

We might take the idea one step further. In Mormon parlance, the separation of body and spirit is physical death, but the separation of my spirit from the presence of God is spiritual death. Eternal life, spiritual life, depends on my spirit’s being-there-with God’s Spirit. Eternal life sparks when body sockets into spirit that

sockets into Spirit. This compounding togetherness is the essence of a soul. Souls are the “taking place” of this shared life. They are the “there” of our being-there. There is no salvation without this shared place or promised land.

Sin, on the other hand, dis-places us. All sinners are expatriates—not because they’ve left some particular place behind but because they’ve come ungrounded from place altogether. As sinners, we no longer know where we are. We no longer feel earth beneath our feet, smell rain in the air, or stain our hands with walnut hulls. Sky turns unnoticed.

Religion, then, is revealed geography. Angels, when they come from the presence of God, do as Moroni did for Joseph Smith: They point to the ground and say “Here!”

Attention to place involves not just attention to landscape but to the body as well. The body is the place where life happens. While the soul is the place of the body, the body localizes the extended geography of the soul. “The body is the cup in which to drink the world” (42). This cup always runs over; but without the body, life won’t hold water.

We stuff, abuse, and ignore our bodies at our own peril. The soul as watershed feeds the body’s current through the capillaries, rivulets, and transepts of sensation. In order to be here, “sensation is what one needs” (57). A respiring body, a sweating body, a wind-chapped body, a sun-kissed body is what one needs. A body in open air. We forfeit our souls, our place, if our bodies become just “excess baggage, things to be maintained so that we can continue to live as if they were irrelevant, as if we were not embodied biological matter” (34). Handley climbs mountains to pace out the dimensions of his watershed, and it is the work imposed by the slope that wakes him to it. “The mountain,” he says, “stirs me from strange and varied slumbers of the body” (187). Awakening to our bodies is the key to awakening to our place.

None of this is to deny that we are “insufficient vessels,” that our bodies are “not built to withstand [even] the daily tremors beauty offers” (162). But this insufficiency, this dependence of the river on a watershed that spreads from view, is the whole point. The body that I am, the repetition of blood, faith, and sin that I am, is necessitated only by this insufficiency. This insufficiency is the tie that binds body to place and parent to child. A

soul is the sharing of this insufficiency in a common place. It is the wakeful shouldering of its burden from one body to the next.

### Gene/Ecology

Earth is stratified time, the past piled up in place. Use some wind, water, and pressure. Sift it, layer it, and fold it. Add an inhuman number of years. Stack and buckle these planes of rock into mountains of frozen time. Use a river to cleave that mountain in two. Hide hundreds of millions of purloined years in plain, simultaneous sight as a single massive bluff. It's a good trick.

Bodies, made of earth, are just the same: In my face, generations of people are stratified in plain, simultaneous sight. My father's nose, my grandfather's ears, my mother's wink, the lines my kids have etched into my squint. My wife pats my cheek and says: "Dear, your genealogy is showing." She's right. The lines on my face and in the palms of my hands are family lines. But these lines aren't easy to follow because, counter to expectation, time's line isn't straight. Time is composed not only of necessities but of repetitions and contingencies that make it loop around, knot up, peter out, and jump ahead. Time moves in fits and starts. Its straight-shot inevitability is tempered by the meandering play of accident and coincidence.

Handley finds the same thing. Alone in the family cabin, he tries sorting out his own family lines. He's got rolls of genealogy, "full names, dates and locations of birth, dates of death . . . each name like myself, a knot of time and flesh" (75). These knots are tough to untangle because life is not the line but its skein. "There are simply too many tangentials and too many generations in the past that must exhaust us and be arbitrarily ignored to create the impression that families are 'lines' at all and not wide webs, connected below the surface of time like that grove of aspen trees out my window breathing in the same nutrients through the same shared root system" (71).

Here, stately family trees turn out to be more like thorny briar patches. And if we're going to talk, not about oaks but briars, we may as well just be honest and make room for sun, rain, and dirt. Who can draw a bright line between what lives life and what gives it? Plotting *these* family histories, we're going to need more paper.

"If genealogy teaches us anything, it is how narrow and contingent our understanding of kinship is" (104).

The illusion that I'm simply me, free of ecology, independent of pedigree, is just another variation on the illusion that only the dramatic events in our lives or notable names in our trees are decisive. Everyone wants King George for a second uncle, but your kinship with a diabetic great-aunt, a charwoman, will probably have more sway. This kind of "Great Man" history squeezes off-stage the ordinary and tangential that compose the bulk of our lives. A more faithful family history would have to be much more modest. We're wading in the muck of a river here, poking in its rushes with a stick, not digging an irrigation ditch with the industrial reach of an excavator.

Handley turns and re-turns in the course of *Home Waters* to the abrupt tragedy of his brother's suicide. Like a stiff punch in the eye, this death leaves Handley seeing stars, and rightly so. He can't help but finger the deep, tender bruise and wonder how this life and its passing have shaped his own. But this bruise is not mine; and in the end, I am just as interested in all the room that Handley's book purposefully gives to a colleague, a gas station attendant, a peach farmer, a soccer mom, and a hiking buddy—his accidental companions, his collateral pedigree, tossed together by circumstance and offered as oblique recompense. Whether our lives are filled with or bereft of Spirit depends on learning how to see these small, unrequested contingencies of time, place, and family as a grace rather than a spoil. Doing this means learning "something about how to assent to circumstances, how to live within constraints of place and culture, and then maybe [we] will know the depth of extended mercy" (16).

### Recompense

Of his awakening, Dogen says, "I came to realize clearly that Mind is no other than mountains and rivers and the great wide earth, the sun and the moon and the stars."<sup>4</sup> Tinged with enlightenment, you see what Dogen saw: that life is borrowed and that mind itself is mooched. Mind borrows mountains and rivers, earth, sun, and sky. But you can't just keep these things forever. Even if they weren't quite what you wanted, they gave what they

had and now some compensation is needed, some recompense is required.

“Recompense is payback,” Handley says. “It means to weigh together, to bring back into balance” (xi). What was loaned must be returned or replaced. What was given must be given back. Nobody gets to start from scratch, not even God. To make a world is to borrow, recycle, and repurpose the matter that, even if disorganized, is already out there mattering. All creation is reorganization. Even the mind of God must mooch its mountains, cajole them, persuade them, serve them, compensate them.

This is messy, and its messiness is compounded by the fact that everything is in motion. “Nothing is still,” Handley reminds us (3). Nothing can be still because recompense is itself never done. Recompense compels the world’s motion: Everything is in play as everything borrows from everything else in giant, intermittently harmonious rounds of exchange, compromise, and negotiation. Leaves borrow light, cows borrow leaves, people borrow cows, worms borrow people, etc., etc. The world is the floor of the New York Stock Exchange, everyone’s a broker, and the closing bell never gets rung. The whole thing echoes Anaximander’s famous lines:

Whence things have their origin,  
Thence also their destruction happens,  
According to necessity;  
For they give to each other justice and recompense  
For their injustice  
In conformity with the ordinance of Time.<sup>5</sup>

This is the world in a nutshell. It will die if it stops swimming. Handley sees it. He goes fly-fishing, but “every time I step off the bank and into the water, the shape of the current is noticeably different. The water has risen or fallen, it is muddied, olive, or amber, the banks carved differently than before” (29). Every time he wades in, something new has been borrowed, added, or traded away.

But rivers are a cheap example. Take the mighty mountain instead. Handley sees it here, too. “Mountains as landmarks belie what any hiker—or anyone with the eyes of an impression it—knows,

that a mountain never retains the same shape. There are as many mountains as there are steps it takes to climb them, or as there are angles of sun and shifts in the weather" (92). To climb a mountain is to negotiate its shifting face. You can borrow a handhold here in exchange—quid pro quo—for breaking up some ice over there.

Mountains and rivers both wake Handley's mind to the "fundamental recognition of an ongoing creation" (130). They wake him to the recognition that creation must be ongoing because creation is compensation. Everything must always start again—and again, and again!—because all the debt is shared, we've borrowed against our own lives, and what we're borrowing is each other.

This is where things get sticky—where we begin to hear more clearly a call for repentance in our talk of recompense. We should do unto others as we would have them do unto us because we will all—inevitably, necessarily, repeatedly—be doing it unto each other. We will all impose on, borrow from, use up, and trade away parts of one another. Everyone will both repurpose and get repurposed.

Obvious problems result from all this claim-jumping: You *will* get borrowed as something you don't want to be, and you *will* have to borrow stuff that isn't "exactly" what you wanted. Either way, our shared lives are such that the potential for offense abounds. In response to these offenses, forgiveness must be understood as more than an occasional virtue. It must be cultivated as a baseline disposition. You will be forgiven only as you forgive.

You will get lots of practice. The world will resist you. It will exceed your grasp. It will practice indifference toward you. Like a borrowed shirt, it will fit you imperfectly, it will be loose in the neck, short in the cuff, and the tag will itch. The world will irritate you, bruise you, thwart you, anger you. In the end, it will even—at least for a time—kill you. Suffering the indignity of these rounds, you will, by default, be tempted to just flit from one offense to the next, simmering in frustration, stewing in quiet desperation.

But to live, you will have to let these offenses go. You will have to learn how to make and accept recompense. You will have to forget the fiction of cash equivalences and barter with whatever is at hand.

You didn't get what you wanted? Or even what you needed? Your life was repurposed by others for something other than what you had in mind? Join the party. I'm sympathetic, but in the end these objections are going nowhere. That bus, while always idling,

never actually leaves the station. You presume a world that doesn't exist, and you fantasize a fixer-God who, unlike ours, is Himself doing something other than divinely serving, borrowing, and repurposing.

Ask instead: What *were* you given? Where were you taken? What was your recompense? Learn to like lemonade.

But you had plans? You didn't want that recompense? Do not be so proud. You have done to others just the same. You have, in turn, taken, borrowed, and appropriated—and probably with quite a bit less grace and restraint. What have you taken? At what cost? What recompense have you been withholding from whom? You've been using up mountains and trees, the great wide earth, the sun, the moon, the stars? You've been drinking the rivers dry? You've been repurposing your spouse, your children, your parents, your friends? You've borrowed and wasted at your convenience? You've squeezed hard, turned their cheek for them, and then squeezed again? Nursing grievances, you've justified such actions with accusation and, often enough, even invoked God in your own defense?

This, Handley suggests, is a kind of “ecological apostasy” (130). For my part, I doubt that there is any other kind.

We need to wake up to the recompense of what has been given. We need to freely offer that recompense in return. “We need,” as Handley advocates with a borrowed phrase, “to learn to think like a mountain” (xv).

### Notes

1. George Handley, *Home Waters: A Year of Recompenses on the Provo River* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2010). Quotations from this book are hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

2. “Home Waters,” University of Utah Press, <http://content.lib.utah.edu/u?/upcat,1668> (accessed January 5, 2011).

3. Wallace Stegner, *Angle of Repose* (New York: Modern Library, 2000), 3–4.

4. Dogen, quoted in Philip Kapleau, *The Three Pillars of Zen* (New York: Doubleday, 1989), 215.

5. In “Anaximander,” Wikipedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anaximander#Apeiron> (accessed January 5, 2011).



# Grandpa's Hat

*Ron Madson*

*Ring the bells that still can ring.  
Forget your perfect offering.  
There is a crack in everything—  
That's how the light gets in.*

—Leonard Cohen

When my father died in February of 2007, I inherited from him many of my grandfather's Church books—one published as far back as 1846. I knew my grandfather was a bibliophile—collecting, reading, and leaving his underlining and commentary throughout his books. While surveying these books, I unexpectedly found his missionary journal. I didn't know he had kept one, and his worn leather journal had entries for every single day of his mission from October of 1906 to October of 1908 in the Northern States Mission.

Grandpa's mission had been an inspiration for the Madson clan. His progeny knew by heart the story of Grandpa's hat. While serving his mission, he encountered a great deal of religious bigotry and persecution. He and a group of elders were holding an evening meeting in a barn with a single lightbulb. During the meeting, someone shot it out. Elder Madson got another lightbulb and, while trying to install it, he was shot in the head. He was immediately taken to a nearby hospital. Days passed. He was not getting better—in fact, was getting worse. His mission president came to the hospital to give him a blessing. The mission president through inspiration realized that the medical staff was giving Grandpa Madson poison. He was taken from the hospital and fully recovered. The story was further reinforced when the Madson family could produce the very bullet-holed hat that he was

wearing at the time. This faith-promoting story had left a mark on all of us.

My first impulse was to race through the pages and find this wonderful account. However, for some reason, I felt restrained as I held what I considered a sacred family text that had just been unearthed and made known to us. Feeling a duty to share it with the entire Madson tribe, I decided to immediately start typing each page until I had transcribed the entire record and then surprise them by sending copies to all my extended family as a Christmas gift. My grandfather had been born on December 23 so stories of Grandpa, Joseph Smith, and Jesus were all wrapped together at Madson Christmas parties.

I was reading only the pages that I transcribed and anxiously waiting for the miraculous story to unfold—more than enough motivation as I waded through endless days of Grandpa writing about the rain, rejection, and no noticeable success other than selling a Book of Mormon now and again. The transcribing of days, weeks, and months passed by quickly; and I waited with anticipation, believing that maybe it would be the next page that would reveal Grandpa's story.

Then I read and typed an account of him and his companion going to a home. The man came to the door, pointed a shotgun at them, and told them to get off his property. Then about two weeks later, he recorded that someone threw a rock at him, cutting open his head. He went to the hospital to have it dressed. Meanwhile, the mission president was also taken to the hospital because of an attack of appendicitis. They were both treated and recovered. Could it be?

I plowed forward, transcribing each day, now only guardedly optimistic that the story involving the bullet-ridden hat and the spiritual intervention would appear. Page after page, Grandpa Madson doggedly persisted in his missionary efforts. He defended polygamy ("All they ever want to talk about is polygamy.") as best a young missionary could at that time. He defended Joseph Smith and Mormon history. He studied the gospel and read everything he could get his hands on. He went door to door and walked long distances from town to town with little purse and even less scrip. He became a battle-worn missionary who would

not give up no matter how often his message was rejected or misunderstood.

I came to the last few pages and finished the work—transcribing his exact words that he recorded every single day with spelling and grammatical errors left intact. I was pleased to have completed this gift for the Madsons, but I had a certain melancholy, realizing that the inspiring story involving Grandpa's hat was most likely a melding of the gun incident, his head being hit by a rock, and meeting the mission president at the hospital. It seems that, over the decades, all of us had, quite naturally, contributed to taking ordinary events and stitching them together to create an inspiring story. In my opinion, there was never any intentional fabrication but simply the fertile mix of human nature, religious expression, and time.

I called our family's genealogist/historian aunt to tell her the good news about having the missionary journal and that I had completely transcribed it. I told her that I needed all the email addresses of aunts, uncles, cousins, etc. She was really thrilled. Before sending it to her and others in cyberspace, I asked her about Grandpa's hat story. She enthusiastically confirmed the story.

I then told her that the story might very well be a patching together of a few events over a three-week period—and I explained to her why I believed that the hat story was most likely an embellishment. She went stone silent on the other end of the phone. Then suddenly she protested: "You're wrong. I know it happened. We have the hat with the hole in it." I knew better than to contend with such a noble and strong matriarch's testimony.

I thanked her for her assistance, and we talked family. Then after entering dozens of email addresses, I pushed "send." Now the only actual first-hand account of William Hyrum Madson is out there for anyone who wants to read the word-for-word daily record written by his very hand.

My grandfather returned from his mission, married Grandma, and fathered six children. Though he remained a man of small means, he created a large personal library consisting of all kinds of Church and secular histories and great literature. His written high council talks reflected his love of learning and desire to know the truth. My father, his oldest son, told me that Grandpa was always searching to know everything he could about his and

his family's faith and heritage, that he believed that "Mormonism is truth and truth is Mormonism," that "in Mormonism we are only required to believe that which is true," and that if something is true, then we embrace it and if not, then we discard it. My father inherited his father's beliefs and books and now they are in my possession.

My home is a home where books and questions are welcomed. And now, everyday people and historians are pushing the "send" button, making available previously "hidden" books, journals, and original histories and documents that have been shelved and, prior to the internet, accessible to only a few. Once being habituated to wanting to "know things," it is only natural to fire up the search engine, but I have found that, by accepting these offerings, one makes a Faustian bargain; and there is no going back.

I sometimes envy those who manage to have their hats, stories, and testimonies intact, untouchable by new "facts." There is so much comfort, peace, and inspiration in Grandpa's hat story. My first and most immature impulse has been and still is to make sure that everyone knows, as I have discovered, the "real story"; but with the passing of time, I now believe that the real miracle is not to be found in what may or may not be the completely authentic stories in his life or those we tell each other, but in recognizing the legacy of my grandfather's virtue, goodness, and fidelity to faith and family, not only during his mission but throughout his life—without which the power and influence of the stories we have shared or will share lose their meaning.

But it is my lot to have inherited from my grandfather the journal and not the hat. I also inherited his belief that the truth is the "fairest gem that the riches of worlds can produce"<sup>1</sup> and that in the end it will prevail. What I consider the real story is now in cyberspace, so if any family member cares enough to actually read Grandpa's diary, then they can draw their own conclusions without my assistance.

Soon enough in this age of information where the simplest "internet ploughboy" has original sources at his disposal, some, if not many, of the myths and stories that we tell each other in family settings, community, church, and national tribes will continue to be eroded or totally lost—whether we like it or not. Because the power of myths (real or not) is essential to all families, communi-

ties, and nations, some, or perhaps many, may understandably want to protest any new information, call it a lie, and demand allegiance to a certain story/myth while others will insist that it be given up. Patience, listening ears, and wisdom will be needed. However, recriminations back and forth may be part of the inevitable transition. Something must die so that something new and better can take its place.

I believe we will, in time, grow into a much more mature, nuanced, and profound faith—less tribal, more inclusive, and far less dependent on sensational, unsupportable claims that we might feel compelled to spend our whole life's mission defending despite the evidence. Grandpa's hat has a hole in it? So do many stories we tell each other, but we should appreciate the holes in our individual and collective hats—for that is how the light gets in.

### Note

1. John Jaques, "Oh Say, What Is Truth?" *Hymns* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985), no. 272.

## POETRY

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### Gaius

*Sarah Dunster*

I cannot look at moths.  
One seizes himself from  
spade to spade, in  
the haggard mat of grass roots, and  
I feel impatient with the  
inefficiency of frenetic,  
blind antennae.  
Still it is my lawn,  
great, or small and disturbed.  
It's all my glorious mix of crab  
and Florida blue,  
roaring ant lions,  
and creaking night crawler.  
Even the scat of a neighborhood pet  
that wandered off the street.  
And those triangular wings—  
the wings of a folded airplane—  
I flinch away from the thick fuzz  
of antennae, and even in flinching  
I confess it to myself  
and to the kingdom of heaven:  
If I wish to claim a piece of nature,  
I cannot, then, shudder at  
the badgering about my nightlights,  
the cloud that erupts from

my stalest firewood boxes.  
I must admire even the needle nozzle, with  
its fan of wasted breath, and listen  
to the dull buzz of electricity.  
I keep my switches flicked for the  
wash of heat that warms and lights  
a squat little body,  
hovering on a windmill of wingbeats.  
I seriously consider the Gaius  
along the edge of a swat-tool,  
(white matter, suffused with mucosa).  
I spend an hour to watch them agitate;  
and when night falls—shiver me lunar—  
I acknowledge the face there,  
the blue chin clockwise of  
the eyeless features—more than a medallion  
inside my worn jewelry basket.  
In the end, it might be that I must even  
stretch my own chin on the chance—  
even the slightest chance—that I myself,  
with my peach-fuzz skin and saltwater breath  
could be the perfect, warm perch  
to calm the lost moth  
and tame its seizing.



## **Easter Sermons**

*Harlow Soderberg Clark*

### **I**

#### **The Rancher Speaks**

I was in the sheep business for years.  
Sold off my sheep and got into the cattle business and now I have  
friends.

The cattlemen talk to me.

I suppose what finally drove me out was the predators.

The eagles swooping down and taking newborn lambs  
and there was nothing we could do about it.

We tried noisemakers and other things.

Finally we heard about Great Pyrenees dogs.

You put two in the pen, and they protect the sheep.

Well, my cousin and I drove up to Idaho  
and the fellow wanted \$500 apiece for them.

We each bought two.

We put them in the pens and they started right in doing what they  
were supposed to.

Bringing the sheep in from the spring field, we found thirty head  
and a dog missing.

We had a higher pasture so my wife and I drove up there.

We found the thirty head and the dog

—limping and thin and shaggy.

It was apparent he had fought off some predators,  
and he had worn out his feet.

I put him in the back of the truck,

but he wanted to get out so I tied him in,

and my wife started down to the lower pasture to put out food  
and water,

and I walked the sheep,

but she stopped.

The Great Pyrenees was hanging over the edge of the bed.  
Well, I tied him in tighter,  
but he started hanging over the side of the bed and he managed to  
slip out of his collar.  
He wasn't going to let anything keep him from his job.  
When we got down to the lower pasture, he barely stopped for a  
drink,  
then went back to his sheep.  
He died a few days later.  
I was a sheepman, he a shepherd.  
The cost to be a good shepherd is everything.

## II

### **The Rancher's Wife Comes to the Pulpit**

Not a shepherd? Perhaps, but let me tell you about his ducks.  
He bought a new batch of chicks and ducks, keeps them out in the  
garage.  
He's really good about keeping them fed and watered and the box  
cleaned out.  
He had them in the same box but the ducks weren't being nice to  
the chicks.  
He told me one day, "I'm worried about this one. Its feet are cold."  
When he worries I worry.

Going down to the basement, I heard water running in the bath-  
room.  
He was washing the duck's feet.  
I thought about the Savior washing Peter's feet  
And how at first Peter didn't want it.  
Sometimes we let our pride get in the way of what the Savior  
needs.  
When Peter understood this, he said, "Lord, wash all of me,  
Hands, head, feet, and all."  
But the feet suffice to warm the duck.

## Seasonal Ritual

*Jon Ogden*

On Sundays in rows of chaos,  
Children shouting over a tinny piano,  
Spring was popping popcorn —  
Week after week, we took it in armfuls.

As a teen, blooming was the last breath of winter.  
The snow having seeped into roots of trees,  
Pushing methodically to tips of limbs,  
Bursting into blossom, then blowing off again in flaky grace.

And there's still this youth—an ever-flourishing festival  
At the fringe of a common Mormon town, thousands  
Of curious celebrators reveling in a distant  
Hindu ritual, still euphoric for the popping colors of spring.

## Winterscape: Prairie

*Jonathon Penny*

Fallow soil, windblown, is a rigid latticework  
Pressed hard against patchwork fields etched with snow.

A river, drawn amblingly, God's Hancock doodle,  
Flows its cursive way across the whole.

Jealous of its motion, frozen lakes and ponds  
Lie low and sullen in their teardrop bowls.

## Mother Willow

*Karen Kelsay*

You are the gentle willow, who I often  
thought looked weak. Your strong-willed  
child that made her loud debut among  
your branches, hanging

in the adolescent wind, has grown.  
Your leaves have turned a softer lemon-green.  
Sparrows gather on your quiet sleeves  
to nest. It's peaceful in your presence.

Once, I could not see the fine lacework of shadows  
that you cast. Your bark is deep with lines,  
and catkin clusters free themselves  
to float across the twilight's dark divide

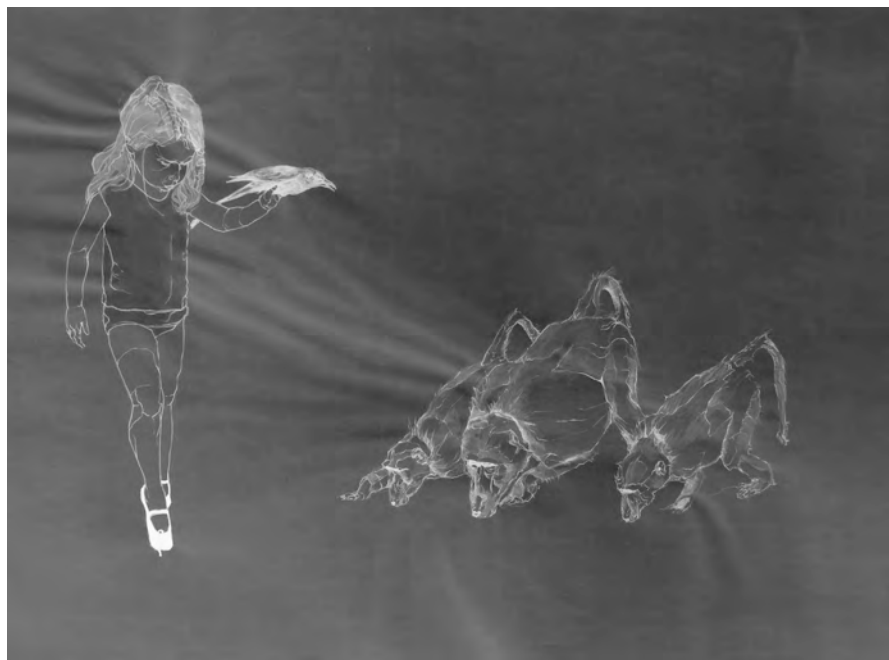
where little drowsy seeds prevail  
along the moonlit trails.

## Girl without a Mother to Her Big Brother

*Sandra Skouson*

I never saw so many frogs;  
neither did you. We walked  
the tracks, sometimes stepping  
from tie to tie, sometimes  
walking the rail—holding  
our hands out as if  
for balance. It was all show.  
Our balance was never  
in question. Besides, the danger  
ran in the other direction,  
along the bridge. We  
could look down, almost dizzy,  
and see the river. But even there,  
we didn't need our hands—  
only our feet  
and our knowing the way.

They were in the hole  
under the beet dump,  
flooded with spring sub water,  
little frogs, noisy and so many  
we ran home, using the road,  
using big steps and racing  
so we could bring back  
a shoebox. We filled that thing  
with frogs and took them home,  
taking turns carrying.  
We knew what we needed,  
but we had no plan. Only later  
we discovered big sisters  
do not understand a throbbing  
shoebox Monday morning  
under the clothesline.



Mary Toscano,  
*The Tightrope Walker*,  
graphite, watercolor and gesso on  
paper, 27.5" x 39.5",  
2009.



# The Birth of Tragedy

*Hugo Olaiz*

*For Neal Chandler, il miglior fabbro*

“Is Mormonism still part of your *Weltanschauung*?” Aunt Doris asks me every time she sees me. She knows that at 2:15 on Sunday afternoons I’m blessing the sacrament like any other Mormon priest, even though I can be found Sunday mornings at St. James Episcopal helping administer the chalice—“the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ keep you in life everlasting”—and sometimes I even help lay out the cups and saucers for coffee hour. When I drive from St. James to Sacramento Second Ward, it’s like reversing the wedding at Cana—the wine becomes water, the priestly robes turn into dark suits, and the emaciated body of Christ, which at St. James is a wafer, miraculously rises to the texture of Wonder Bread. “That’s the way our parents brought us up,” I tell Aunt Doris for the millionth time. Dad is Mormon and Mom is Episcopalian, so my brother Steve and I were born Mormon-Episcopalians. Five years ago, Steve decided he wanted to be only a Mormon, which Mom and Dad said was fine; but after his mission, he moved in with his boyfriend Ramón, and now he says he’s neither.

Aunt Doris forgives me for attending Sacramento Second because she knows that I attend Saturday rehearsals at the McHenry with the same devotion. The McHenry was built when Sacramento was a boom town and a certain Mrs. McHenry (AKA the Merry Widow) couldn’t think of a better way to immortalize her husband than by building a theater in his memory. Now the city of Sacramento owns the building and sponsors all McHenry Company productions. As the artistic director, Aunt Doris insists that we all call it an “amateur company” rather than community theater, and once she sued a reporter from the *Sacramento Bee* who described the company as “a troupe of loonies and bohemians

who spend the weekends smoking pot.” I got involved with the McHenry when I turned twelve; and even though we do have plenty of loonies and bohemians (with Aunt Doris at the top of the list), the only pot I have seen so far is the cauldron we used in *Macbeth*.

Some in the ward think that Dad, as the family patriarch, shouldn’t endorse my Episcopalian activities, but patriarchy is one of the many Mormon concepts that doesn’t make sense to him. “I had a remarkable dream last night,” Dad told Mom recently at the dinner table. “They released Keith, called Brother Marks in his stead, and the next thing we knew both our children had been officially kicked out of the Mormon Church.” Keith Roberts is our bishop, and he’d rather get released than put me in the hot seat of the Mormon Inquisition. In our interviews he doesn’t even mention the E word—it’s all about feeling good when you go to church and living the gospel. But his first counselor, Brother Marks, is a different breed.

One could say that, between St. James and Sacramento Second, I have the best of both worlds. Every June it’s a campout with the Boy Scouts, duty to God and country, and then in late July I go to cool places with the Episcopal youth group, which is strictly coed. We’ve done Yellowstone, the Grand Canyon, and once we even went to Baja. There’s little conflict, because at St. James the year revolves around Advent, Christmas, Lent, and Easter, whereas at Sacramento Second there are no special Sundays except for general conference.

Mom says it’s good for me to grow up in a mixed household. “It’s like ordering two main courses in a restaurant,” she told me once. “When they bring them to the table, you can smell them up close, get a taste of both of them, and then you’ll know for certain which one better suits your appetite.” She comes to Sacramento Second when Dad and I sing in the choir or give talks. When Brother Marks sees her at church, he always makes a point of shaking her hand with a smile calculated to show her how welcoming Mormons are, but when Mom isn’t there things don’t always run so smoothly. One Sunday he took Dad aside and asked him somberly if the rumor he had heard was true—“that your sister-in-law is a lesbian.” “A *thespian*,” Dad corrected him. That happened two years ago, and we’re still laughing.

I started my career in the McHenry as the curtain boy at age twelve, then I was promoted to the prompt box, and finally Aunt Doris put me in charge of the backdrops and stage furniture. A few months ago, when I turned seventeen, she endowed me with the additional title of *chau-ffeurrr*, which means that every Saturday before rehearsal I have to take her shopping. First we get her groceries, then we pass by Props and Frocks, and we always end up at the Salvation Army and other thrift stores that she insists on calling “vintage.” Last Saturday we were looking for helmets and swords, and at Props and Frocks we also got a wax head and some stage blood. Even though we have a tight budget, we buy stage blood because what we spend on blood we save in sweat. With stage blood, the costumes don’t need to be dry cleaned, and most of all we don’t have to hear the building supervisor kvetch about tomato sauce stains on the stage floor. With Aunt Doris’s passion for classic heroines, blood is one of our staples. Last year she played Blanche Dubois (“like a Parisian hooker,” according to Steve). Two years ago, she played Joan of Arc, for which she got a crew-cut like Sigourney Weaver in *Alien*. This year we’re staging Hebbel’s *Judith*, and who but Aunt Doris to cut off Holofernes’s head and serve it to the audience on a silver platter?

Aunt Doris attended sacrament meeting with us for Steve’s missionary homecoming, but afterward she lamented that Mormon services are deprived of drama. “When the procession comes down the aisle, when you smell the incense and hear the bells—that’s what I call celebration. Mormon services are the epitome of tedium.” I told her that Dad and I attend the Mormon Church because we feel good about it. “And don’t you see the problem with that?” she replied. “Mormonism is all about feeling warm and fuzzy, which might be a wonderful criterion when you’re scarf shopping, but disastrous when you’re choosing a religion. You need some Brechtian distancing, my dear. You need some *Verfremdungseffekt*.”

Steve had met Ramón at Stanford, and sometimes on weekends they come visit. Last Thanksgiving it was the six of us for the first time; Ramón sat next to Aunt Doris, and Aunt Doris was trilling the R on “Ramón” as only a coloratura soprano would. “So, Rrrramón, who’s your favorite playwright?” she asked him. Ramón said something about plays with religious themes—Antigone

as a religious heroine, and Hochwälder's *Holy Experiment*. His reply pleased Aunt Doris immensely, because for her there's no language like German and no heroine like Antigone.

"Why, of course," said Aunt Doris. "Tragedy is always born of a religious impulse. Have you read *Die Geburt der Tragödie*?" Steve told her she got it wrong—it wasn't Nietzsche who said that but Lévi-Strauss, and the three of them spent the rest of the evening discussing Carl Jung and the Thanksgiving turkey as a propitiatory sacrifice.

Last Sunday it finally happened. We released Keith Roberts with a vote of thanks and sustained Brother Marks in his stead. Marks didn't waste any time. Today just before rehearsal, the ward clerk called me to set up an appointment for an interview, and I know perfectly well what's going to happen next. Marks is going to use the E word. Probably he'll quote Matthew: no one can serve two masters. Immediately after I hung up, I called Steve to tell him the news. Steve said, "This is the easiest decision you'll ever have to make in your life." I hurried to the McHenry and found Aunt Doris off-stage—she had just killed Holofernes and was still carrying the wax head in one hand and a sword in the other. "This is so Oedipal," she said when I told her. "Don't you see? You'll have to kill your father so you can marry your mother." Then she began to recite the lines she had learned when she played Queen Elizabeth in Schiller's *Mary Stuart*:

What mean the ties of blood, the laws of nations?  
The Church can sever any bond of duty,  
can sanctify betrayal and all crimes—  
'tis this your priests have taught.

As she said it, she was still holding Holofernes's head by the hair, and those little drops of fake blood were falling on the floor like crazy.

# American Trinity

*David G. Pace*

The other two are more patient than I am. They bide their time. What's worse, Jonas is always telling me that I am shirking my duty. I haven't talked to him in over a century. Hundred and fifty years the last time I talked to Kumen. Even though I have returned to my mission of wandering and ministering, both would insist I've lost the spirit of the assignment. I avoid them now. I was just coming out of the Empire Theatre in Old New York when I last talked to Jonas. Word must have gotten out. Like myself, Jonas was dressed as a patron in tuxedo and gloves. Courtly old Jonas. "I like the collapsible opera hat," I told him. "Nice touch."

"You're playing with me, Zed. That I should even feel compelled to be here is an embarrassment." He looked about wide-eyed at the throng of velveteen ladies and their escorts climbing into broughams parked under gas lamps.

"How long has it been?" I asked, putting on my own gloves. "The courts of Montezuma?"

"We go where we are called to go," he intoned. Then he looked at me, bemused. "You're the one holed up in the theater district. Shameful."

"Yes, but isn't it interesting that every time *you* decide to make an appearance, it's where there happens to be a lot of social position? A lot of pretty ladies?" I said, nodding in the direction of another exiting entourage. "Even if it is an embarrassment." Jonas looked at me with practiced contempt. Then he asked me for one of the new manufactured cigarettes, for which I had recently given up my pipe. Convenience . . . plus I'd needed a change. Any kind of change. We walked down 40th Street, stepping over muddy wagon ruts.

In the restaurant, Jonas ordered wine and oysters while I smoked and studied the lace drapes on the windows behind him.

Unlike Jonas who covets the world's beautiful artifacts, I am simply amazed that the living-who-will-die go to such efforts to create it at all. The crystal chandeliers brought over from Old World Bohemia. The coffered ceilings of the rich. During the centuries of catastrophic Nephite wars, a man would intricately etch his sword as if his life depended not so much on the might of the metal, but on how beautifully it could kill. But as my two colleagues and I, left behind by edict, moved through the carnage with our amulets, our consecrated oils, our prayers, there was no way to see the wounded as dying beautifully.

Even when I was in Old New York with Jonas, the senior one, and eating oysters, I had surmised that this life we led was the way it was always going to be. For the Three Nephites, this was it. There would be no return of Jesus to mark the end of days and the end of our mission. That was why I was going to the theater—to escape. After three glasses of wine, I told Jonas that.

"You've lost your faith," he said.

"I've lost my life."

"Nonsense. The Lord has kept His promise to us. We are still here, aren't we?" He took another sip from the finely cut crystal glass and returned it carefully to the table. He leaned back in his chair and breathed in the night, then continued as if it were an afterthought.

"You've been here since the days of Zarahemla. A full life for us, if there's ever been one. We had families, children. Gave them our blessing before they went—"

"No," I interrupted, "*you* had children. *You* watched them die of old age. I had no children. I was always alone. I'm still alone." Jonas shook his head at me, the rims of his eyes pomegranate-red. I'll admit, when I received the calling nearly two thousand years ago, it seemed like a good idea—minister to the earth's inhabitants and then, at the second coming, go right into heaven, "in the twinkling of an eye," as The Book says.

"Perhaps you're lucky, Zed," he finally said. "It was merciless to watch my grandchildren die of old age. Even more so to see their grandchildren slaughtered needlessly."

"Maybe it *was* needed. Part of the history that must be written?"

"That's not what bothered me. There will always be wars. No,

it was how they turned against themselves. And those bastard robbers,” he spat, referring to the Gadianton Robbers which still existed, a parallel order held together by secrecy and oaths and by the constant manufacture of an outside enemy to distract the people. In Old New York they were now called magnates. “Each of us is alone, Zed. You, me . . .”

“Not Kumen,” I mused. “He has his fans.” Jonas sensed my attitude. I had been watching too much Restoration drama, and I was becoming a cynic.

“He likes it out there.”

“He likes the desert,” I said. “Unlike you.”

“What do you mean?”

“He’s probably eating locusts right now, on principle. Not exactly hot terrapin or oysters.”

“We go where we are called to go,” he repeated, annoyed.

“And also where there happen to be urban wonders and warm baths and . . . bottles of Bordeaux.” I lifted my glass. He reluctantly toasted.

“I’m doing my time,” he said.

“It is more like a sentence than a promise. And it’s not over yet.”

Jonas sighed, and pushed his plate away, the outline of his moving arm blurring ever so slightly in the air. It is the only feature that might distinguish us from others, a sort of full-body halo that lightly pulses around each of us and can only be seen by children and the occasional drunk whose vision is already failing at the edges. I am told that around my inexplicable red hair and fair skin the hue is pink.

“I really thought it was all about to end with the new age of prophecy,” said Jonas.

“Never pin your hopes to a seer who secretly takes multiple wives. And in Illinois, no less.”

“At least he translated *The Book* before he was gunned down. We have that, thank God. Maybe the end times are upon us after all?”

“Or maybe it’s just a tease. A cosmic burlesque.”

“You are a bitter man, Zed,” said Jonas, and he drank the last of his wine. “Are you going down to the docks tonight?”

"I suspect there will be the sick to attend to. Where else would I be?"

"A box seat back at the Empire?" Now it was my colleague's turn to call my bluff.

That was in Old New York, which doesn't exist any longer, and perhaps never really did—with all of its privileged, just another version of the Gadianton Robbers, this time in spats. It was the last time I saw Jonas. Well, there was the Triangle Fire twenty years later, but I couldn't bring myself to speak to him then. I can always find him if I need to. But what do you say to someone you've known that long? Two thousand years as the American Trinity—it breeds contempt. But it's contempt with a residual ache for one another. So we routinely seek one another out, trapped as we are somewhere between deity and humankind. Mortal but unable to die. Angelic in our transport but plodding in our flesh. Embalmed alive. All of it set forth in *The Book*, the sacred history of the American continent.

Our story may not have a stirring ending—an ending at all—but it has a fabulous, inventive beginning. By the time I was born in Zarahemla, twenty-five years before Jesus made His New World appearance, my people had largely fallen out of favor with God; and in the turmoil, the Gadianton Robbers could wreak their havoc.

In the midst of their intrigues, I was busy working in the temple scriptorium, a library of worn parchments. We were attempting to abridge them to something more permanent and had to compete with the armory for gold and other metals. I didn't think we needed another sword, another shield, however beautifully wrought. What we needed was the story. I actually paid attention to all the old tales I was transcribing. And I imagined what it was like to be one of my Hebrew ancestors, clambering into a ship and making the great journey from the Old World. I made a point of infusing the accounts with the requisite miracles.

There are worse things than doing that.

I was too slightly built to be a warrior. So I became the hands to my old mentor Omni whose fingers were permanently balled and ruined. He'd always seemed to care more about the written traditions than about war. And so did I. His work was to tell a story, to reset old writings into the plates of soft alloys and to in-



terpret them for our day. Omni made us all part of a continuing story.

“Show me a people who don’t feel connected to their own biblical saga,” he told me once, “and I will show you a people doomed to destruction.”

But now, with the last of the precious metals needed for the war effort, the temple scriptorium was under siege. And Omni was failing. Lost in a fever, he lay against pillows in the corner of the room while I continued frantically to pound into metal the text from the papyri so that my own fingers had begun to curl in on themselves. When the metal plates were complete, I bound them with rings and sent them out to be hidden from the enemy of the hour. You see, for the Gadianton Robbers, it was always a classic “let’s you and them fight.” The Nephites were a nation hopelessly divided, and all the robbers had to do was give us enough rope and wait. That, and use our own schismatic warriors to do their dirty work. In fact, it was these warriors, lusting for gold, who were converging on the temple.

I heard voices outside. Before giving the last of the plates to the courier, I placed my hands on them and offered a prayer to the Nephite god for their protection. Suddenly, there were men everywhere in the room, their thick legs wrapped in leather and metal, their spears towering above me. On their heads they wore the traditional Nephite helmet, but their faces were striped with Lamanite paint. When they didn’t find what they were looking for, they left, except for two of the men who took off their helmets and looked at me savagely. I knew it was my hair, an anomaly. Their mouths were wet and red with wine, their own hair long and tangled.

“You!” bellowed the bigger of the two. “Hiding yourself here with a worthless old man who steals our gold while we fight his wars!” And with that he took his spear and slowly pressed it through Omni’s chest so that his eyes opened wider and wider for one revelatory moment while he reached up with both arms as if to embrace a phantom deliverer. I could not go to Omni. Was it because I knew it wouldn’t do any good? Or was I just afraid? Words, however, never failed me.

“Your wars have become the games of boys,” I screamed, thinking I could shame them into silence. “You are Gadianton’s

lackeys, fighting for your own illusions and your own pleasure in death.”

“Today you will die!” the warrior shouted.

“No, *you* will die—and all of this,” I said, gesturing at the room of now scattered papyri and metal filings, “will be the only meaning left to your vandal lives.” That’s the way the story goes. How it got recorded. Omni pinned against crimsoned pillows, my fear turned to outrage. The thugs were not interested in meaning, however, even though they were silenced, if only for a minute before moving in on me, patting my head as if I were a house dog.

They took me by the hair, spread my legs, and raped me. After that, I knew I had to believe. The prophecies of my people needed to be real instead of just a beautiful literary device. They needed to be something that took place in real space, in real time where truth and accuracy aren’t always contingent. The prophecies were that the Messiah was coming now, in a local appearance. That is how I remember it, through the record that now exists as The Book. That the Messiah would save me, Zedekiah, the red-headed scribe with the small hands.

Nothing like the grinding of another man’s hips into your own for the word to become flesh, to believe. And it was clear what I needed saving from—an invading army, crashing through our homes and temples, and imbibing our blood.

And so it came to pass that the Messiah did come, out of the sky—a pinpoint of a man dressed in white and descending as if on a wire through a sky so dark that it was said you could feel it. In the ruins of the city, he stood, stretched out His arms, the wounds in His hands and in His feet still luminous and purple. He was the most beautiful man I had ever seen. He came, and there was peace and prosperity (in the parlance of our time) even if it was for only a few years which would have suited me fine had I died within a man’s life span. The span of life portrayed so well in the theater.

On stage it’s like this. What counts is not so much what happens, but the arc of what happens between curtain rise and curtain fall. And, chiefly, there is the ending, a luxury reserved for those who will die. It’s no mystery to me why, instead of tending to the needy or worse, slogging through the battlefields of collapsing nations as I am supposed to, instead I sit clutching a playbill

and watching the drama open, build to a climax, and then end. The blessed ending. Maybe that's why, earlier, I cared so much about The Book. It had a life of its own. And it had to be recorded by someone—to be shaped. And so it was, by me.

I think there are worse things than fudging history. Like not having a history worth reading at all. I know the record kept changing because, for a while, I was the one doing it. He wasn't Jesus when he made his appearance. He was the Nephite god, and I'm okay with that. The story needing to be told was that we were Christ's "other sheep," destined to be brought into "one fold" with "one shepherd." I expected to continue as scribe, but then I was called to be one of His chosen disciples. Me, the small one with hair of fire. I was promised immortality as a kind of assist in the New World. Of course, I had to give up possession of the record, but I had had my time with it, and I refuse to complain about the scribes who came after me.

Okay, maybe I will. It's just that, as a scribe, *I* had a certain sensibility, a respect for the language, a sense of the record having continuity. Unlike Mormon. I can never forgive his imbecilic pruning of whole centuries of the story. "This army went here, this army went there . . . and it came to pass . . ." In his hands, a history became a kind of strident, outdoor pageant. He even cut the entire episode about Omni and the scriptorium. Granted, he was pressed for time during those final, desperate years of the Nephite nation. But did The Book have to be named after him?

"I have constraints of space and time," he kept telling me. And I would badger him, reappearing over and over in his tent, once five times within the hour.

"You're possessed," I told him once point blank. "You're possessed by military maneuvers."

"I'm a warrior," he would bark.

"A prophet-warrior. Like David, maybe?" I would suggest to him—to inspire him.

"He was no prophet."

"He was a poet."

"He was no prophet." Mormon was right about that. In fact David had forfeited any ready communion with his God. That's what made his songs so beautiful. The longing. The abject misery

at being cut off. I like to believe that in the hereafter God will make an exception for a poet.

Maybe my hope for David is hope for myself. Maybe it was my hope for The Book that Mormon was hurriedly pounding out in condensed form from the voluminous old plates of Nephi—some of which I had translated myself in the scriptorium. The hope was that our mystical story of God's leading us from danger to a promised land might rival the Hebrew record brought out of Jerusalem by Father Lehi and the clan, even the Torah, or "Bible" which is today cherished above all other histories. Without our own inspired, and inspiring book, those of us residing in the new world would always be relegated to the step-sheep of God.

"We are more than just the sum of our battles," I would say, and storm out of Mormon's tent. Eventually, he got back at me. In his account of the three of us, left behind to walk the earth for century after dreary century, the old warrior-editor quipped that he had seen the three of us, and that we "ministered" unto him. I can't speak for the other two, but I did not "minister" unto Mormon. Harangued him was more like it. I was the one possessed by something. Mormon was about to die in battle, and I was worried about translation, emphasis, what certain people would eventually call *hermeneutics*.

Maybe we *are* the sum of our battles. But my battles are interminable, it seems, my immortality a curse. Before He rose to heaven, the Nephite god promised the three of us that we wouldn't die until He came again in glory to the whole world. He said, "And again, ye shall not have pain while ye shall dwell in the flesh, neither sorrow save it be for the sins of the world; and all this will I do because of the thing which ye have desired of me, for ye have desired that ye might bring the souls of men unto me, while the world shall stand. And for this cause ye shall have fulness of joy . . ."

Joy. But when? The text is maddeningly unclear.

I remember little more about the Lord's sojourn with us than what anyone else can currently read, and I was there! That's what you call the power of a text. So what I was fighting Mormon for was nothing less than my existence, my identity as a disciple of a god who battered our hearts into newness—not just micro-managed ancient Meso-American battles. Mormon has gone on to his end and his reward. But all that I am, stretched out like a string

over two thousand linear years, is in the permanent record that got left behind. I am the one ministering around—longing like David—for some kind of ending to the story that *I* am still living.

It certainly doesn't feel like "fulness of joy." Jesus must have meant that joy would be our *eventual* reward. After we are "changed in the twinkling of an eye" at His second coming. I've had a mind to track Him down, to demand closure. But I am afraid it might demonstrate that I have lost my faith, as Jonas says. Maybe I am just terrified of what my Lord would tell me.

None of this seems to bother Kumen. When he reads the one account of who he is—one of three Nephites left to wander and bring souls to the Jew Jesus who became Christ, the Son of God, and then God himself—he accepts the catechism without question, shedding all personal feeling, all memory. Like a coat.

For Kumen, it goes like this. A Jew or a Gentile—either one—gets into trouble. Kumen floats around until he finds one of these souls, believer or no, and he materializes. Brings a flask of water to save the dying-of-thirst, presses forgotten consecrated oil into the palm of the healer, enters the cockpit of the tumbling jetliner. He saves the day. Then, he dematerializes before they turn around to say thank you, vaporizes with their despair. This is the sign, the guardian angel thing.

I get the idea that this tickles old Kumen pink. Being sneaky, formulaic. I call it guerilla ministering.

"How do you know if that leads them to greater faith?" I asked him once in 1871, years before my dinner with Jonas. I had just seen a show called *Buffalo Bill* in New York and become curious how accurate the stage story was to the American West. So I just "happened" by one day in the Sierra Nevada when Kumen was about to blast through to a gold digger trapped in a mine.

"Of course it leads to greater faith. If you saw a miracle in front of you, what would you think?" I lit my pipe—still my prop at the time—and followed him into the mine, unseen. The man, in a fetal position, lay near crumbled rock, his head darkly matted with blood.

"I might think it was Buddha, if I were Buddhist. Or if I were a superstitious Muslim, a jinni. That's not exactly working the program, if you know what I mean." Kumen took an amulet from his threadbare coat and placed it on the forehead of the man whose

dusty eyes opened to the miracle above him. Kumen offered a prayer in the Adamic language that featured some impressive-sounding diphthongs, then he smiled gently at the man who sat up, the light from the lantern reflecting off the beatific face of my colleague.

Oh, the look in the miner's eyes! Even I got choked up.

"The problem with you, Zed, is that you are a humanist. You have no sense of what's absolute," said Kumen outside the mine where it was so bright that I instinctively manufactured a broad-brimmed hat to protect my notoriously pale face from the sun's rays. He slapped the dirt from his dungarees. Kumen had no idea what "humanist" meant. But he liked to use the term as a battering ram. "People just want to feel better in the moment. They don't want to actually solve their problems."

"Some of us want to solve our problems," I said, puffing on my pipe. I followed him east, holding my hat in the arid wind, to the pioneer settlements of the Ute Territory, where the people of The Book were congregating. Though he was third in the Trinity, he was the most diligent of the Three Nephites, based on the account of who we were supposed to be. As usual, I fell into the role of nag and hated myself for it.

We were standing outside a makeshift adobe hut. A polygamous woman came to the back door to shake out a rug. Kumen was there, asking for food. He knew, as she did, that there was only enough corn meal to make one small flapjack for her two hungry children. She took him in anyway and fed him. There was unanswerable pain in her sunburned, twenty-year-old face, a disolute pain kept in check only by the ignorance of youth.

"Thank you, sister," Kumen said after his humble meal. He tipped his hat to her. When he left, the grain bin began to glow, and I knew what Kumen had done. A textbook miracle. She raced to the door to see who this strange figure was, but he was gone. Of course. We watched as she fell to her knees and wept.

"I'd say that woman—Sister Leavitt is her name—I'd say she has a life full of faith ahead of her," said Kumen, and he smiled. "That's what's real, Zed. Giving them something to believe in."

"What about follow-up?" I asked, folding my arms across my chest.

"Being able to tell her sister wives this little story about one of

the Three Nephites appearing to her in her hour of desperation is all she'll need to carry on in this life. A scribe, in the year of our Lord himself, like you, should understand the power of telling a story."

"It's not that," I said. "I question your motives."

"There is no need for me to question my motives if I'm doing what I was called to do. We must be in the world but not of it."

"But you're doing all of this by rote. Maybe the reason people don't try to solve their problems—to really transform—is that they sense that for you there's nothing outside your silly standards. Not even their own experience, for heaven's sake." I could see that Kumen was losing patience with me, but I couldn't resist. "The interaction may be as much about you as it is them. Maybe they're supposed to change you as much as the other way around. Ever consider that?"

"The dogs bark, but the caravan moves on," he snarled, then reached over, ripped the pipe out of my mouth, and threw it to the ground. "Why would anyone take you seriously with that bowl of filthy weed in your mouth?"

"What do you remember Jesus's directive was to us?" I demanded, nonplussed.

"It's not what we *remember* His directive to be," Kumen said. "It's what the directive *was*. You're like one of those Unitarians, Zed, so imbedded in the world that they're always distorting everything." He sighed. "You know as well as I do that it was to bring souls to the Christ."

"But what does that mean? Do you ever question what—"

"It means what it meant for *us*," he shouted. He clutched at his chest, breathing hard.

"But I don't remember what it meant to me," I said. "Not really. And maybe that's the way it's supposed to be. Maybe that creates an opportunity for us to redefine what it means. To tailor it to the circumstances, to the individual." Kumen sat down, still clutching his chest. He always did this when we debated doctrinal matters, apparently forgetting that we'd been promised we wouldn't suffer physical pain. I used to find it cute the way he would pant and moan, talk about his palpitations. But this time I was just annoyed. I looked around for my pipe.

"Do you know how much work you've avoided by fretting over



details non-stop?" he said finally. "You're a sophist, Zed. A Gadian-ton Robber."

"Gadian-ton?" I spotted it, next to that rock.

"Exploiting the situation. Sabotaging the work. Sneaking around and sowing seeds of doubt, not change . . ."

"I'm entitled to a life, to my own experience, damn you. And don't forget that it was I who kept The Book from getting into their hands. That's what they wanted."

"And what have you done since then? I tremble to think of how disappointed in you the Lord is, Zed. The way you snivel all the time—it's enough to make me sick."

"Maybe the Lord is disappointed in *you*," I said, tapping the back of my pipe against my palm. "Your fly-by-night ministrations. Your—your sentimentalizing of Him into some kind of long-haired celebrity."

Kumen stood up, and I knew I had pushed him too far. He brought his right arm to the square to denounce me. "By the power of the Melchizedek Priesthood, I forbid you to demean our Lord and Savior."

Now that I was denounced, I had to leave. At least for the time being. That was the rule. So I did, muttering to myself and ashamed for mistreating one of my own brethren. Kumen always used that against me. Not the arm-to-the-square thing. No, he would question my character, my commitment.

Maybe Kumen is right. Maybe my sins are the greater, held captive by my own game. It wasn't the altruist in me that found the calling appealing or even the desire to share the taste of salvation. Maybe it was just that never dying would mean I could spend time pegging others—Kumen the fundamentalist, Jonas the executive—so that I would never have to peg myself as anything. What I didn't anticipate was that I would not only end up utterly alone, but that I was going to have to learn what it meant to die without ever actually dying.

And what better place to learn how to die than in the theater? *Medea*, *Hamlet*, Dryden's *All for Love*, the title of which says it all. That's when I took my little "holiday" as they say, which is why Jonas showed up outside the Empire Theatre to reprimand me. But I wasn't ready then to give up the theater and its artificial but seductive modes, and I didn't. Not until later. There was the stage



at night, and the streets of New York during the day. I would look at the arriving immigrants, pathetic, frightened things, and wonder if I could extend the meaning wrought by the stage onto them and thus onto me. I thought maybe they held some kind of remedy to the agony of my loneliness in the promised land.

It was 1911, and I was still in New York. As I walked down busy 26th Street, I heard fire alarms, four of them in fifteen minutes. By the time I arrived at the Asch Building at the corner of Washington Place and Greene Street, several small bodies had already shattered the glass canopy covering the sidewalk and were lying still against the hard pavement. All around, as the fire trucks arrived, horrified people were screaming “Don’t jump!” at the girls huddled in ninth-floor windows that were pouring out smoke, a hundred feet up. But jump they did, some holding hands, their burning dresses blowing up over their faces, one dress catching on a wire where the girl dangled before the cloth burned through and she thudded to the ground.

Even I, who had ministered ankle deep in blood to the slaughtered Lamanites in Central America, I, who had cared for the Africans in the dark holds of slave ships, I, who held up the lolling heads of the bayoneted bodies in Lincoln’s War—even I could hardly stand to watch children burning and falling while adults stood helplessly by. Then it occurred to me that all of the sidewalk crowd was an accomplice to this tragedy. An accomplice to an age that not only conveniently clothed and fed us but kindled this fire as well. And I, too, was an accomplice to this event just as the Nephites were to their own extinction.

I took off my jacket and hat and walked up to the largest pile of bodies lying in a pool of water from the firehoses. The firemen had no time to attend to what looked like the dead, for a dozen more of the terrorized girls were still getting ready to jump through the smoke and haze and through the hopelessly futile fire nets, falling like overripe fruit dropping to the orchard floor.

I sensed that someone was alive in the pile. I wormed my way through the corpses, through arms and legs, bloodied and crushed, and near the bottom to where a twelve-year-old lay, her body twisted. Everywhere was the smell of smoke, of burned hair, of moistness all around. She lay quietly, her eyes open and afraid, her crushed chest still somehow rising and falling. I lay next to her

and held her in my arms and tried to remember my prayers through fear that seemed to vault to the height from which my new charge had fallen. There was the little-girl smell in her skin, so different from that of boys, and I pressed my lips into the top of her dark, tangled hair.

"The finished shirtwaists caught fire," she whispered. "They were all above us, and they burned off the wires and fell on top of us, and the trimmings on the floor caught the fire, and the elevator was blocked and there were only windows."

"Were you afraid?" I asked. She could not look at me, because her neck was broken, but I could see the sudden sadness in one of her eyes.

"I was afraid when the others jumped. When I saw them fall to the ground. It was not so bad when I finally did it. Am I going to die?" she asked finally.

"You are going to die," I said.

"Then I shall pray," she said, and it was then that I saw in her other hand a book in Hebrew she had obviously taken to the window and clutched during her plunge. She groped at the pages with one hand and her lips began to move. I held her tightly, making myself as small as possible under the pile of bodies—just large enough to do my duty, to see it through, while the final scene of her life closed in around her. I wanted to be a witness, and maybe if I was lucky, to be a kind of comfort, to hold the only kind of child that would ever be mine—a dying one.

She stopped praying, and for a moment I thought she had passed on, but then I felt her hand reach up and touch my face. Without knowing it and against all the rules, I was crying, and she had felt my shaking. She offered a prayer that I neither heard nor understood but simply felt through the points of her two small fingers pressed into my brow.

"Don't be afraid," she finally said.

When the men reached her, she was still breathing, but two minutes later, she expired. I watched as her spirit rose out of her, thinning to a shining thread, her outline momentarily blurring in the air. Blurring as ours does.

As they carried what remained of the girls away, Jonas was there, standing to the side of the crowd still milling across the street. As always, he was alone. I looked at him for a long time,

ashamed, but somehow renewed at the same time. Had he come to discipline me, this senior member of the august Three Nephites? Discipline me for losing my composure while on duty? I turned away, looking up one last time at the now silent building, still intact. When I turned back around, Jonas was gone.

And so it came to pass, I gave up the theater after the drama of the 1911 Triangle Fire. In the theater, there is too much vicarious life on stage, thrilling in that pre-digested way—but instantly dismissible once you walk out the door. I hear that theatrical entertainments are quite the show now. With the invention of moving, lighted pictures on a screen, our relentless industrialization has turned technological. And dramatized illusions are so mesmerizing, they say, that daily life for some has become the intermission between cinematic moments. But illusions as such would have no power over me today, having simply made it obvious that the meaning of our lives has always been a construction. As in *The Book*.

That is why, today, I am no longer waiting for His return. I am going in search of the Nephite god, the Savior of the world. I must see Him again.

It isn't as hard as I thought it would be. He is nearby, asleep on an antique, four-poster bed and, lying there, He has that half-levitating look of someone dreaming, His body outlined under a sheet. I wait for him to wake; and for a moment, I feel again the ancient stirring in my heart from the days He lived with us. The adrenaline. The infatuation. Desires unaccounted for. But then I realize that, out of His setting, it just isn't the same. He is slighter of build than I remember, the shape of His face less angular, less strong. Freckles on His arms and chest. And the five special wounds on His hands, feet, and side are now scars, mere plugs to the punctures I once touched with my own hands. To touch Him, to touch His wounds, was to know that He understood me, what it had been like for me not just to be raped that day in the scriptorium, but all of it, to be the outsider with strange gifts and even stranger desires that never fit the way of the world—desires in the mind and in the body. To be childless. To be chosen as one of His New World disciples because He felt sorry for me.

"I want to die," I say to the sleeping form. "I want you to release me from my mission. I have seen too much. I've been here

longer than you were.” He stirs slightly, lifting His arm up over His head and twisting in the bed. I can hear His breathing, see His chest rising and falling slowly, the chest whose warmth I felt when He ordained and blessed me before he left us. But now, I feel old enough to be the father of this sleeping god. That I have more to tell Him about His life than He can tell me about mine.

“The threat from the Gadianton Robbers was never disbelief, or even secret wars,” I say. “No, the real threat was that there would be no record, no book to find oneself in. That was what they wanted to destroy. Not ourselves, but our literary selves. I may not be a believer like Jonas or Kumen, but I believe in The Book. I fought over how it got put down. Listen to the words: ‘The time passed away with us, and also our lives passed away like as it were unto us a dream, we being a lonesome and a solemn people, wanderers, cast out from Jerusalem, born in tribulation, in a wilderness, and hated of our brethren . . . wherefore we did mourn out our days.’

“I made sure that passage survived. That was my work. So that there would be a record of how it was like for this people. Of how we read this life.

“That was why I loved you. When you were among us in the flesh, you read my heart. I thought you could see through this smallish, irritable man to one who loved the word, and the idea of you, and your grand entrances and exits. Who loved your continuity from beginning to end, from ministry in the Old World to ascension in the New. The way you died. Your curtain calls. The way you sleep and dream now.”

There are tears that suddenly water His image lying before me, washing the scene of any grand mystique. What I want is not the same as what I need. And so I cry for the lost Nephite that I am, and then lean and kiss my Lord good-bye, not as I want Him to be, but as He is.

The sleeping god smiles, and now I can go.

## REVIEWS

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### Image and Reality in the Utah Zion

Polly Aird. *Mormon Convert, Mormon Defector: A Scottish Immigrant in the American West, 1848–1861*. Norman: Arthur H. Clark Company, an imprint of the University of Oklahoma Press, 2009). 320 pp. Illustrations, photos, maps, footnotes, bibliography, index. Cloth: \$39.95; ISBN 978–0–87062–369–1

*Reviewed by Benjamin E. Park*

Just as national histories are always written by the victors, religious narratives are often written by those who remain within the fold. The common tropes of conversion, devotion, dedication through trials, and faithfulness until death dominate Mormon historiography. Missing are those stories that diverge from the traditional storylines. In *Mormon Convert, Mormon Defector: A Scottish Immigrant in the American West, 1848–1861*, Polly Aird provides us with an account of her great-great-uncle, whose narrative significantly differed from the faith-promoting norm. Peter McAuslan embraced the Mormon faith in his native Scotland, made the arduous trek with his wife and children to Utah to live with the body of Saints, grew disillusioned with the faith he had once loved during the turmoil of the Reformation, and then decided to leave the Church and Utah. The McAuslans then established a new life—permanent this time—in California. While stories like that of Peter McAuslan are often quickly forgotten, they are crucial to enriching our understanding of the historical period, offering extratraditional views to complete our portrait of the past.

Perhaps Aird's most significant accomplishment is her ability to richly recreate the historical context for each of the different episodes McAuslan experienced. Utilizing numerous secondary sources, varied contemporary records, and the eclectic collection of McAuslan's writings, she introduces readers to the dynamic and disruptive environment of early nineteenth-century Scotland, the traumatic and tedious experiences of migration over land and sea (Aird's treatment of the British Saints' voyage should be particularly singled out for its vivid brilliance), and the rugged, difficult, and often unstable society of early pioneer Utah. Aird dedi-

cates many pages to this larger environment—perhaps, at times, to the extent of forgetting the biography’s central character—and the result is a text that is useful for understanding both McAuslan as well as the world he lived in. While ostensibly about a single individual, the book is really a group biography and microhistory narrating the circumstances of the many different groups McAuslan associated with: Scottish converts struggling to make a living in a tumultuous climate, immigrant Saints enduring the dangerous trek to Zion, and imported foreigners fighting to survive the rough Utah soil and even rougher Reformation rhetoric. By moving beyond the restrictions of traditional biography, Aird casts a much wider net enabling a much broader—and thus, much more relevant—narrative.

A specific thematic cycle permeates the entire text: the high hopes of idealist faith, and the painful disillusionment when those hopes cannot be reconciled with reality. McAuslan and his fellow Saints had high hopes when they set off to travel to Zion, yet the trip was filled with difficulties, sickness, and death. When they finally settled in Deseret—narrated in a chapter ironically titled “The Promised Land”—they were only met with difficult weather, crop-eating locusts, and a priesthood leadership more intent on reforming personal spirituality than on sympathizing with the toiling settlers. The unity of the kingdom of God that McAuslan originally pictured was replaced with discord and bickering. Attending general conference only five days after arriving, McAuslan witnessed Orson Pratt, previously the hero to Scottish Saints from his term as mission president over the British Isles due to his prodigious writings and publications, being reprimanded by Brigham Young for preaching doctrine contrary to Young’s own beliefs. Welcome to Zion, indeed.

The narrative becomes broadest during the chapters depicting McAuslan’s time in Utah. To fully explore McAuslan’s defection from Mormonism, Aird spends considerable time on the fiery rhetoric of the Mormon Reformation, especially the jarring discourses of Brigham Young. Readers may be taken aback by the domineering, insensitive, and extremist portrait that Aird paints of Mormonism’s second prophet—and indeed, she may at times be guilty of presenting a one-sided and simplistic caricature of a deeply complex figure. However, I found the depiction justi-

fied—at least to a certain extent—for a very important reason: caricature or not, it was the view that Peter McAuslan (and others) actually had of Brigham Young. Aird recreates the worldview encouraged by the Reformation's shocking rhetoric, and Mormons' inclination to take their leaders' words *literally*—a trait not only justifiable but arguably to be expected, given Mormonism's strong emphasis on authority and obedience. McAuslan's story is a valuable cautionary tale about the potential effects of violent discourse in a religious culture.

One reason the themes of obedience and rebellion are key to Aird's narrative is that the characters in this historical drama often seem limited in their agency. Peter McAuslan, his fellow Scottish workers, the poor Mormon immigrants, and the struggling settlers of Utah all appear to be more creatures of their environment than creators of their own destiny. Perhaps steeped in the social history that dominated the second half of the twentieth century, Aird's presentation is more concerned with temporal survival than personal expression, more with societal requirements than with individual liberties. In this framework, deep theological answers have little merit for those striving to build Zion, and the spirituality of the story's participants can be defined as—at best—apathetic. Though ironic for a narrative that focuses on a religious "convert" and "defector," actual religious belief (at least more than just a superficial level) takes a back seat to practical issues in the story—a point that becomes a bit more jarring later in the text when McAuslan's later writings reveal an individual deeply concerned with spiritual matters. Whether this gap is more a result of a dearth of McAuslan's earlier writings or Aird's authorial penchant, it seems like a significant shortcoming of the work.

Overall, though, Aird is to be commended for providing an important contribution to Mormon historiography. *Mormon Convert*, *Mormon Defector* helps us better understand nineteenth-century Mormon culture, a culture that we are beginning to appreciate as much more dynamic, heterodox, and multifaceted than previously understood. Only when Mormon history acknowledges these nuances in the LDS past—the countless examples of people like Peter McAuslan—can the larger picture become more complete.



## Not Just Buchanan's Blunder

William P. MacKinnon. *At Sword's Point, Part 1: A Documentary History of the Utah War to 1858*. Norman: Arthur H. Clark Company, an imprint of the University of Oklahoma Press, 2008. 546 pp. Foreword by Will Bagley. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. Vol. 10 in KINGDOM IN THE WEST: THE MORMONS AND THE AMERICAN FRONTIER. Cloth: \$45. ISBN: 978-0-8706-2353-0

*Reviewed by Polly Aird*

In this first volume of a planned two-volume documentary history of the Utah War, editor William P. MacKinnon has assembled a treasurehouse of previously unexploited documents to illuminate the decisions, actions, and bungling on both sides that led to and flowed from this little-known civil war. With unquestionable authority, this book occupies a pivotal place in Mormon historiography: It explains a critical hinge that swung Mormon-government relations into patterns of hostility and even hatred for another half-century. It also sets a benchmark of expertise that for years to come will influence interpretations of the Mormon story both before and after the war.

The eighteen chapters cover the multifaceted beginnings of the Utah War up to January 1858, when Thomas L. Kane set off on his difficult winter journey to Salt Lake City with hopes of finding a peaceful resolution. The book includes, by my count, 204 documents or excerpts of at least a paragraph in length. Of these, the majority are from archival sources. As one would expect, over half of this material is from the extraordinarily rich LDS Church History Library, especially its Brigham Young Collection. The next largest source is federal government documents, some published in now-obscure reports and many from the manuscript holdings of the National Archives. Articles from contemporaneous newspapers from Washington, D.C., and New York City to Buffalo; Cincinnati; St. Louis; Lawrence, Kansas; and San Francisco are included, as are letters, diaries, photos, sketches, and other pieces from nearly fifty libraries and historical societies.

MacKinnon has chosen not to reprint documents readily available from such sources as LeRoy R. Hafen and Ann W.



Hafen's 1958 compilation *The Utah Expedition 1857-58*, or House Exec. Doc. 71, the primary government publication on the war; nor has he included those previously used in his own earlier journal articles, although he cites them for interested readers. Building on earlier works, he has focused on documents never before published or at least not previously studied for their relevance to the Utah War. MacKinnon thus presents us with many new "voices" from Mormon Utah, the army's Utah Expedition, and elsewhere, including those of women.

MacKinnon places these documents in a lucid narrative that guides the reader through the confusing emotions, plans, and events in Salt Lake City, Washington, D.C., and other places that resulted in army troops marching west to confront the Mormon kingdom. And he sets the record straight on long-persistent myths and assumptions about the war. From the acknowledgments and footnotes, it is apparent that he has worked with virtually all of the authors of recent works whose research has overlapped his own: Will Bagley, David L. Bigler, Matthew J. Grow, Ardis E. Parshall, and Richard E. Turley Jr. This cross-fertilization has contributed to a much broader view of the war.

The thirty-two illustrations are accompanied by extensive captions. Many are rare portraits of key and peripheral players, such as that of Thomas L. Kane before the Civil War (404), General Albert Sidney Johnston wearing the brevet brigadier's star awarded for his leadership of the Utah Expedition (447), and the only known image of diarist Captain Albert Tracy (457). These images are complemented by contemporary sketches, including two previously unknown Tracy drawings showing a panorama of the army's winter camp and the interior of Fort Bridger after Johnston fortified it in November 1857 (448-49, 451). An excellent modern map of the country between South Pass and Salt Lake City (396) helps orient the reader to what one researcher calls the region where the war was actually "fought" in the fall of 1857 (330).

Early in the volume, MacKinnon points out the Utah War's importance and its far-reaching consequences: "the near-depletion of the U.S. Treasury; the forced resignation of a secretary of war; the bankruptcy of the nation's largest freighting company; severe damage to the reputation of a president and his nerve for

confronting southern secession; the indictment of a church's prophet for treason and murder; the execution of his adopted son for mass murder; the Anglo rediscovery of the Grand Canyon of the Colorado; the organization of England's Pacific Northwest possessions into the province of British Columbia; and Russia's sale of Alaska" (17).

The text opens with a discussion of precursors to the war starting as early as 1849 in what MacKinnon warns is a "sprawling, complex story" (17). Especially noteworthy among the early tensions was the army's Steptoe Expedition of 1854–55. When the soldiers left Utah for California in May 1855, they took with them about a hundred married and single Mormon women seeking an armed escort out of Utah. An enraged Brigham Young swore he would never again allow U.S. troops to enter Utah or be near Mormon women. Other frictions that rasped between the government and the Mormons included the quality of mail service, jurisdictions of the courts, perceptions that the Mormons were tampering with Indian allegiances, Brigham Young's handling of government appropriations, the accuracy of the 1850 Utah Census (important in an attempt to qualify for statehood), the massacre of Captain John Gunnison's survey party, the Mormon ejection of Jim Bridger from his fort in 1853, and Young's on-going efforts to acquire arms and munitions.

Underlying these conflicts were even more volatile issues: the competency of federal appointees, the practice of plural marriage, and especially Young's vision of Utah as an autocratic theocracy. MacKinnon writes, "The Utah War came about not because of a single critical incident during the spring of 1857. Rather, it was the product of nearly a decade of corrosive incidents, deteriorating relations, and grossly differing philosophies of governance—one secular, conventional, and republican while the other was authoritarian, millennial, and theocratic" (44).

By 1856, emotions had reached a new level. Letters written by federal territorial appointees intended for their superiors in Washington, D.C., were intercepted by the Mormons and came to rest in Brigham Young's files. Most federal officials fled the territory after being threatened, two were beaten, and two were murdered on the plains "under controversial circumstances" (54 note 4). In the fall, Young launched his religious Reformation with its

most incendiary doctrine—that some sins were so grievous they could be atoned for only by spilling the sinner’s own blood. At the same time, Young continued efforts to mine ballistic lead near Las Vegas and encourage gunpowder manufacture closer to home.

In February 1857, Young preached one of his most violent sermons on blood atonement. Only days before, he had sent two letters to bishops in the south warning them that two recently released convicts, John Ambrose and Thomas Betts, were headed that way and might steal Church-owned horses, then wintering south of Salt Lake City. The message was “to authorize, if not order, their summary execution” (78). By mistake, assassins attacked four other travelers, badly wounding them as they camped along the Santa Clara River in southern Utah. A month later, Bishop Aaron Johnson of Springville interpreted one of those letters as a license to kill William Parrish and his sons, who were fleeing to California after losing their faith. Johnson was reported to have said in a meeting he had called, “some of us would yet ‘see the red stuff run’” (79).

Meanwhile, Young wrote to Philadelphian Thomas L. Kane, a non-Mormon but Church ally in the past, asking him to influence President-elect James Buchanan in appointing territorial officials whom Young and the Utah legislature had designated in one of two memorials sent to Washington. When Buchanan’s cabinet members later read them, these documents were so aggressively phrased that they had fateful effects.

MacKinnon points out, as virtually no one else has, that both Buchanan and Young were ill that spring and that neither leader liked to delegate decision-making, though Young was both younger and a more experienced manager. Nevertheless, “one wonders how the health, stamina, and leadership style of President Buchanan and Governor Young affected the decisions that they made during this critical period” (84). Buchanan’s appointment of John B. Floyd of Virginia as Secretary of War brought in a man who lacked understanding of military affairs and had little administrative skill or experience. General Winfield Scott, commander of the U.S. Army’s line regiments, had arbitrarily moved his headquarters to the Hudson River Valley in New York after the Mexican War, while in Washington, D.C., Floyd directed the army’s

staff bureaus. The result was that the Utah Expedition “was seriously flawed in its leadership and instructions” (90).

Contrary to what many have long assumed, Buchanan’s decision to intervene in Utah was not based on the despised Judge W. W. Drummond’s letter of resignation sent from New Orleans in early April 1857. That letter “recited nearly every accusation of Mormon disloyalty and perfidy that had accumulated during the prior ten years” and portrayed Utah as a “territory out of control,” with Governor Brigham Young as “the prime offender” (116). MacKinnon shows that the real catalyst for sending troops to Utah was “the substance and rhetoric in at least three other batches of material received in Washington during the third week of March 1857, weeks before the government was aware of Drummond’s resignation” (100).

The first decisive documents were the Utah legislature’s two memorials urging the appointment of only Mormons to territorial offices. As Utah delegate John M. Bernhisel reported to Young, they were seen as “a declaration of war,” breathing “a defiant spirit” and “not respectful” (106). The second document was a letter sent by Drummond probably before he left California for New Orleans and unrelated to his later letter of resignation. It detailed the impossibility of enforcing federal laws in Utah. Two more letters arrived the same week from Utah Judge John F. Kinney to Attorney General Jeremiah S. Black. Kinney gave more examples of the subversion of U.S. law in Utah and recommended that Buchanan replace Young as governor and establish an army garrison in the territory. The second Kinney letter enclosed a message from Utah’s Surveyor General David H. Burr, which included his dramatic assessment that any new governor risked assassination; Burr, too, recommended a military force.

Drummond sent his inflammatory letter of resignation in early April and gave a copy to a New Orleans newspaper, which quickly telegraphed it to newspapers throughout the country. “Soon a clamor for action from the press arose to rival the controversies over the Dred Scott decision and the fate of slavery in Kansas” (116). Thomas Kane, along with several Mormon apostles traveling in the East, tried to discredit Drummond by exposing his sordid character, but the sensationalism of this campaign only kept “the pot of Utah controversy roiling” (119). Rebuffed by Bu-

chanan, beset by family problems, discouraged, and in poor health, Kane retreated to the mountains of Pennsylvania while Bernhisel started on his homeward journey, thereby leaving a vacuum of Mormon advocacy in Washington at a critical juncture.

The die was cast. In late March Buchanan decided to replace Young as governor and to send some kind of military escort, the size undetermined. But he failed to notify Young of his decision.

MacKinnon then turns to Brigham Young and his military preparations, which included: continuing to collect arms and munitions, reorganizing the territorial militia (Nauvoo Legion), strengthening the defenses at Fort Bridger (finally paid for in 1855), establishing a revolver factory in Salt Lake City, and undertaking a five-week trek to check out Fort Limhi (the Mormon Indian mission in what is now Idaho and which was then part of the Oregon Territory). This locale, or even the Pacific Coast, were seen as possible way stations or places of retreat if the Mormons were forced to abandon Utah.

Communications among the War Department in Washington, D.C., General Scott's headquarters in New York, and General William S. Harney, commander of Fort Leavenworth, were conducted by ordinary mail rather than telegraph, even when every day counted if the Utah Expedition was to beat the winter snows. Harney was tentatively selected to command the expedition even though he had been stationed in Kansas Territory with a pledge to maintain order there in the midst of civil upheavals over slavery. Nevertheless, Harney set to work organizing the Utah Expedition: transferring regiments, hiring Jim Bridger as a guide, assembling a staff, and driving quartermasters to obtain the livestock, wagons, tents, supplies, and food they would need. Harney had a tough reputation and experience on the plains; with a large force, he wanted to "overawe" the Mormons. Harney's orders finally came at the end of June. These were to be the only orders that gave official guidance to the commander and to his successor, Albert Sidney Johnston, during the entire campaign.

President Buchanan's next challenge was to find someone willing to replace Young as territorial governor, no small task. After an embarrassingly large number of men declined, Buchanan at last found a willing Alfred Cumming, an undistinguished, 400-pound alcoholic who had been mayor of Augusta, Georgia,

and who was currently serving in St. Louis as superintendent of Indian Affairs for the upper Missouri River. His instructions did not come until early August. In the meantime, Harney and the Utah Expedition's dragoons were reassigned to Kansas's governor, who insisted that they were needed to cope with an armed rebellion there. Thus it was the third week in July before most of the Utah Expedition left Fort Leavenworth, though supply trains had been on the trail west for several weeks. The army set out for Utah without an overall leader present, a prescription for disaster.

MacKinnon then takes the reader through the response of Brigham Young and his Nauvoo Legion as they learned unofficially about the new governor and his army escort. Young and his counselors used vitriolic language in Sunday sermons that, when reprinted outside Utah, shocked and offended the nation and became "costly to the Mormon cause" (230). In sharp contrast to the dithering in Washington, Young immediately launched tactical moves including instructions to obtain tribal allegiance, sending Apostle George A. Smith south to call zealously for the settlers there to prepare for war, raising the specter that the Mormons might need to desert and burn their homes, declaring Mormon independence from the United States, and seeking intelligence about whether the army would venture farther west than Fort Laramie before winter and whether Colonel E. V. Sumner's unrelated Cheyenne Expedition indeed had secret orders to attack the Mormons and seize and perhaps lynch their leaders. (It didn't.)

MacKinnon describes the uncertainties besetting Young by the second week in September: "the advances of the Utah Expedition; the nature of the violence unfolding at Mountain Meadows; the intentions of the Buchanan administration; the need for alliances with Utah's tribes; the disposition of an oncoming tide of British converts; the political obliteration of Utah; and the optimal use of Thomas L. Kane" (277). These concerns are revealed in letters sent to Mormon leaders in Philadelphia, New York, and Liverpool, as well as in messages to non-Mormons such as the U.S. Commissioner of Indian Affairs and Kane. Young then proclaimed martial law, which not only forbade the army from entering Utah, but also proscribed travel into, out of, or through Utah by anyone without a pass. "Without question," MacKinnon writes, "Young's release of this document escalated the tensions between

the LDS church's leadership and the U.S. government, transforming the conflict from a matter of inflammatory rhetoric to a provocation stunning in its insubordination by a federally sworn governor. . . . Brigham Young's declaration of martial law was his crossing of a Rubicon" (286).

One of the most notable chapters is titled "Lonely Bones." The Mountain Meadows Massacre of September 11, 1857—the slaying of 120 children, women, and unarmed civilian men in southern Utah—belies the oft-stated claim that the Utah War was bloodless. The massacre was not an isolated tragedy perpetrated by rogue leaders in the wild borderlands. Rather, it came out of a brew consisting of the impact of past persecution, the violent preaching of Church leaders, and more particularly from the war sermons given by George A. Smith as he traveled through the area during August 1857. The massacre was planned by men who were both Church leaders and Nauvoo Legion officers, and it was executed by them with Paiute auxiliaries. The massacre was preceded, first, by the Betts-Ambrose attack on the Santa Clara River and second, by the Parrish-Potter murders during February–March 1857. Mountain Meadows was quickly followed by a series of smaller-scale killings. According to MacKinnon, "this little examined violence . . . firmly links the Mountain Meadows Massacre to a broader context—the military campaign and the territorial culture of violence that spawned it" (297).

To explain further, MacKinnon details the murders that can be closely identified with the Utah War: Richard E. Yates, who sold gunpowder to the army and was considered a spy by the Nauvoo Legion; the Aiken party of six men from California, with their pockets full of gold, riding fine horses with fancy saddles and weapons; and Henry Forbes, also well outfitted, who was heading home to Illinois from California but was detained in Utah by martial law and the lack of an exit pass. MacKinnon examines the sources for such violence (and the pervasive looting of victims' possessions) and concludes that they lay in Brigham Young's irresponsible language, negative leadership, and bad example. After reviewing instances of these behaviors, MacKinnon writes, "There was an unhealthy, wholly undisciplined, longstanding use of language by and in the presence of the governor and the Legion's most senior commanders about lynching, other



forms of summary execution, and theft” (325). Compounding the situation, Young neither investigated the murders nor punished the perpetrators.

MacKinnon is not proposing that irresponsible leadership and inappropriate acts were limited to the Mormon side. He gives the reader a hint of what is to come in *At Sword's Point, Part 2*: the federally instigated Indian assault on Fort Limhi in February 1858 and General Johnston's March decision to hire Shoshone warriors as mercenaries to operate and defend the critical ferries on the Green River. “During the Utah War neither side had clean hands with respect to violence and atrocities. In quite different ways and on a substantially different scale both Brigham Young and James Buchanan were accountable, if not culpable, for what took place as well as for what they authorized and communicated” (328). MacKinnon's willingness to present documents on both sides and to try to strike a balance—uneven as it is—makes *At Sword's Point* particularly valuable.

The Mormon atrocities were not isolated events but were intricately connected to the guerilla-type operations of the Nauvoo Legion. As the army advanced toward Fort Bridger, the Mormons had to assess whether it would attempt to enter the Salt Lake Valley before winter and plan how best to protect their women and leaders there. Then too, though less publicly, they needed to deflect the army from investigating the killing fields at Mountain Meadows. Thus, the Nauvoo Legion began a campaign to delay or halt the army by any means without shedding blood, although under the pressures of mid-October, Young and Nauvoo Legion General Daniel H. Wells clearly authorized, if not directed, use of lethal force against army officers and their civilian mountaineer guides. The legion set out to capture and burn army supply wagons, stampede cattle, burn grass far and wide so as to destroy forage, and burn both Fort Bridger and Fort Supply, thereby denying the army shelter or comfort for the winter. It was a scorched-earth policy that ranged over portions of Nebraska, Utah, and Oregon territories. “Within less than a month this destruction—together with the Mountain Meadows Massacre, the martial-law proclamation, and the publication of General Wells's captured operational orders to Major Joseph Taylor—reinforced the nation's conviction that Utah was indeed a rebellious territory” (330).



Using fresh sources, MacKinnon records the army's reaction to the Nauvoo Legion attacks and to Colonel Alexander's ineffective, demoralizing march up Hams Fork and back. These developments are followed by reports of the Mormon raids in the eastern press and the shockwave they created. President Buchanan and the military leaders finally awoke from their seeming lethargy and began to formulate plans for a possible second thrust up the Colorado River or overland from California or Oregon. Even the ambassadors in Washington from Great Britain and Russia became alarmed at the possibility of a mass Mormon exodus to Pacific Coast havens such as Vancouver Island or Alaska.

Finally, after the loss in a blizzard of thousands of animals, newly arrived General Johnston decided that he lacked the literal horsepower to push into the Salt Lake Valley through highly defended Echo Canyon. During the third week in November, the Utah Expedition went into winters quarters and set to work building Camp Scott, which soon spread over the general area of Fort Bridger. Adjacent Eckelsville, named in honor of incoming Judge Delana R. Eckels, formed the civilian village that housed the new territorial officials. Johnston took immediate action to "defend, police, reinforce, and resupply" (446) the Utah Expedition to prepare for a spring move on Salt Lake.

In Eckelsville, Judge Eckels empaneled a grand jury of questionable impartiality, which returned treason indictments against Young and more than a thousand other Mormons; Governor Cumming finally took the oath of office; and Indian agent Garland Hurt visited Uintah Indian bands in the mountains to reinforce their allegiances with the federal government. But in all this activity, no one launched a federal investigation into the Mountain Meadows Massacre or tried to determine the whereabouts of the child survivors. One of the more engaging accounts from this winter period is that by discharged army teamster Charlie Becker who was captured by Mormon scouts and related their kind treatment—a sharp contrast to the fatal bludgeoning of civilian prisoner Richard E. Yates.

The final chapter contrasts the year-end annual message of President Buchanan to Congress with that of "Governor" Young to the Utah legislature. Incredibly, it was Buchanan's first public explanation of why he had sent the army west and consists of justi-

fications and indignation at Mormon raids and Young's declaration of martial law. Nevertheless, it was ambiguous about the state of rebellion in Utah and, in a stunning omission, failed to mention the Mountain Meadows Massacre. Young's address omitted any reference to the presence of a newly sworn governor at Fort Bridger, the mobilization of the Nauvoo Legion, the Mountain Meadows Massacre that it had committed, and his own proclamation of martial law. Remarkably, Young's message—read to the legislature by the legion's adjutant general—mentioned the army then wintering on Utah's northeastern border as simply a "rumor" (488). The volume ends with documents bearing on the Christmas discussions between Kane and Buchanan and with Kane setting off for New York where he would embark on a steamship for Panama, then to cross the Isthmus, land at San Pedro, California, and start overland for Salt Lake City. The phrasing of the letters he carried from President Buchanan make clear that Kane was acting on his own, but at the same time—and ever after—there have been commentators more than willing to assert that he was indeed a government agent.

For all its virtues, the book is not perfect. For a volume of this significance and complexity, the index is sadly inadequate. At one point I tried to locate references to the alleged tampering with Indian allegiances by the Mormons, but the entry for "Indian-Mormon relations" consists of thirty-seven page numbers with no subtopics, making it essentially useless. Furthermore, by my calculation, a fifth of the text is footnotes—866 in all—many of which contain intriguing anecdotes or other information that I expect to want to locate in the future, but they are not indexed. I hope in a future reprinting of this volume, this deficiency will be rectified, for without a comprehensive index, the value of the book is unnecessarily diminished.

I highly recommend this "sprawling," exciting, and well-written documentary history. I eagerly await Part 2.

## Scry Me a River

George B. Handley. *Home Waters: A Year of Recompenses on the Provo*

*River*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2010. 236 pp. Paper: \$24.95; ISBN 978-1607810230

*Reviewed by Rob Fergus*

Terry Tempest Williams saved my life. As a BYU undergraduate suffering from late winter doldrums back in 1993, I heard her claim that you don't really know your own place if you don't know the local birds. She had no idea, but she had just slapped defibrillator paddles on my heart. I was a long-time birder but hadn't been birding for months. The next day I skipped class on a hare-brained quest to find a northern shrike in the frozen steppes of the Skull Valley Indian Reservation. Fortune smiled upon me, and I not only survived my trek across hazardous and poorly plowed West Desert gravel roads, but I found my bird sitting on a barbed wire fence miles from nowhere. I spent nearly every day of the next year searching for birds throughout Utah, including most of the canyons, trails, and backroads in Utah and Heber valleys.

I don't get back to Utah very often these days, so I was excited and anxious to read George Handley's meditations on a year spent exploring my old stomping grounds along the Provo River. Before picking up *Home Waters*, I fancied myself an intrepid geographical, ecological, and spiritual explorer. I reveled in Joseph Smith's counsel that "the things of God are of deep import; and time, and experience, and careful and ponderous and solemn thoughts can only find them out" and that in order to find salvation, our minds "must stretch as high as the utmost heavens, and search into and contemplate the darkest abyss, and the broad expanse of eternity."<sup>1</sup> *Home Waters* called my self-assessment into question by exposing my impatience, lack of care, shallowness, and unwillingness to stretch and ponder.

I wasn't four pages into the first chapter when I found myself frustrated. By the end of the book, I had followed Handley through twelve chapters and numerous explorations of the Provo River from its headwaters to its terminus in Utah Lake, and even to the far reaches of the Great Salt Lake, but Handley's river barely resembled the Provo River I know and love. We had walked the same trails, explored the same canyons, and climbed the same mountains, but somehow it seemed we inhabited different plan-

ets. I was hoping to reconnect with dipppers, pygmy owls, moose, and mountain lions, but was disappointed to find precious little about these old friends in *Home Waters*. I put down the book in frustration.

Then I recalled sitting bewildered and confused in the celestial room after my first time through the temple and how my inspired mother immediately ushered me into a second endowment session, where I was able to relax, enjoy, and appreciate much of what I had missed my first time through. So I picked up *Home Waters* again and began to see how much I had missed and failed to contemplate in my initial reading. There is clearly much here that time, and experience, and careful and ponderous and solemn thoughts can only find out!

As Handley makes clear in the prologue, *Home Waters* seeks “to use the literary imagination as a vehicle for exploring the uniqueness of a Mormon relationship to land” (xv) and in doing so, to “tap the potential of Mormonism to inspire better stewardship in the interest of all communities in the West” (xiv). In addition, Handley sees “this essay as an exercise in thinking like a river” (xv), an allusion to Aldo Leopold’s classic essay in which he uses the metaphor of thinking like a mountain to explore the connections between all the forms of life that make up an ecological community. This is where I became initially frustrated. Handley confesses that he is “no naturalist” (4); and for a work of nature writing, *Home Waters* seemed light on ecology and heavy on personal narrative and literary allusion. However, as with my previous experience as an unprepared initiate, my expectations had clouded my ability to see the emotional and spiritual components of the landscape Handley was trying to convey through metaphor and a more literary imagination.

In recounting his hikes and fishing experiences along the Provo River, Handley is clearly describing a lone and dreary world, or as he puts it, a “strange, wild world” (63) that can swallow up unwitting hikers and tragic young campers who wander off, never to be found again. The animals I hoped to encounter are missing because Handley—and the rest of us to a greater or lesser degree—are alienated from other creatures in this fallen world. Fish, marmots, and birds make brief appearances; but from our fallen perspective, most animals have symbolically, if

not quite entirely, retreated “to the higher reaches of the surrounding mountains” (119). In the valleys, the river, heavily modified by dams, irrigation, and other civil engineering projects, is a pale ecological shadow of what it once was. Outdoor enjoyments are a guilty pleasure, occasional hours of “stolen moments” (11) away from family and other responsibilities.

Handley, in his “unnatural East of Eden state” (34), is a twenty-first-century Adam, if not naked, at least highly exposed in his struggles with guilt, separated by his own thoughts from the nature he seeks, haunted by weaknesses and youthful indiscretions, along with the insecurities of marriage and life as a privileged middle-class academic. Frequently exploring the outdoors with friends and family, he is still painfully alone, “blind,” searching for solace in nature where “the veil of the world is thinner” while “always yearning to push through the surface of what I see, to feel a hand on the other side” (67).

This world alienated from nature is one I initially resisted and didn’t want to confront. I wanted to sprint past this perplexing world to the greater light and knowledge promised to gospel seekers, to a perhaps terrestrial world where humans and nature are in harmony, or to a blissful celestial realm. What I failed to appreciate is that only “after many days” in his fallen state is Adam given the heavenly truths he needs to obtain a better world (Moses 5:6). As Joseph Smith intimated, this takes some time; and Handley invites us to join him in exploring and pondering the highs and lows of our current home in this fallen world. Through the recounting of personal and historic narratives, as well as examinations of Mormon scripture and theology, Handley exposes us to the highs of exquisite natural beauty including stunning vistas from atop Mount Nebo, and lows that include peering into uncomfortable historical episodes, and the darkest abyss of death. In a world of opposition in all things, Handley explores with us Wallace Stevens’s claim that “death is the mother of all beauty” (169).

In pondering “death’s abyss” (143), Handley plunges us into a world haunted by the specter of suicide. We witness his brother’s self-inflicted gunshot wound when Handley was in high school, the fatal leap from the subsequently eponymous Squaw Peak by the wife of murdered Timpanogots warrior Old Elk after being driven from Utah Valley by Mormon settlers, and the suicidal im-

pulses of anarchists wishing to liberate nature from the ravages of modern humanity, which in turn seems set on destroying itself and its environment through carelessness if not willful ignorance of our ecological constraints. It is a dark journey, with much that we might wish to avoid. But as Handley writes, acknowledgment is the first step in repentance—the very doctrine revealed to Adam, and which we all must follow as individuals, and as a society, if we wish to be free from the horrors of our own making.

But all is not darkness and woe. From our vantage point within this fallen world, we can look back to Eden, as well as forward to healing and atonement—for ourselves, our society, and the entire creation. Looking back—be it through Handley’s account of Spanish explorations or later Mormon settlement—we realize that there was always a snake in Eden, ecological and social sins that helped bring about our current state, alongside bountiful opportunities for growth and joy. Looking forward, we are given promises and revealed truths that can bring us into a terrestrial world of millennial peace, as well as a final celestial world where the earth is “a great seer stone, which means that nothing, no one person, brother, sister, son or daughter, no animal or stone, is lost” (122). This earth, including Handley’s Wasatch Mountains and Provo River, either once was or will eventually—perhaps even simultaneously—be an Edenic, telestial, terrestrial, and celestial world. It is also a world of spirits, and Handley acknowledges and ponders the voices and visitations of ancestors and loved ones now departed. *Home Waters* does not present a traditional ecology of place but anticipates a Mormon ecology of multiple and not quite separate worlds, while providing important signposts to help us through “our strange pilgrimage in this land” (187).

Ecological restoration is one of these important though frequently neglected pathways to atonement and environmental healing, which we can bring about through the creation, or more accurately a re-creation, of a better world. As Handley, quoting Isaiah 34 and 35, makes clear, when it comes to the world we inhabit, we get what we deserve; our “just desserts” are our ecological recompenses. If we defile the land, we become defiled as well. In a fallen world where we have frequently appropriated the bounty of nature to rule with blood and horror to the detriment of each other—not to mention the other species which share our world—“ecological

restoration is neither technophilia nor antihuman escapism. It is repentance, plain and simple" (xiii).

Only after staring our present condition in the face—seeing for once our true state and becoming “morally chastened”—are we able at last to move forward toward a terrestrial world, where we can take “action guided by the best knowledge we can find” as well as “by the highest principles of accountability to the gift of life” (208) in order to enjoy the recompenses of higher laws that include ecological harmony. Only then, after withdrawing our puny arm trying to turn the Missouri—or the Provo—River from its decreed course (D&C 121:33), will the Latter-day Saints be able to enjoy the knowledge—including vast troves of scientific knowledge—that the Almighty is pouring down from heaven. Then it will be time to move beyond what Handley calls “the substance of my dreaming” to begin “naming again” the creatures of the earth (208), to leave behind the provincialism of our lone and dreary world, and to enter a realm where we can enjoy an “awareness of the staggering size and diversity of the more-than-human community of nature” (42).

While *Home Waters* was not what I expected it to be, it turned out to be something much more—an exploration of not just a cherished landscape, but of our current place in eternity. As I re-read with a softened heart, my mind was stretched and my soul was renewed. I know I will be returning to this book again and again. The margins of my copy are full of notes and cross-references that I scribbled while my mind was stretching beyond the Wasatch to approach the utmost heavens, contemplating dark abysses, and wondering at the broad expanse of eternity. Reading it, I was alternately humbled, heartbroken, and amazed, and most important of all, brought to a closer communion—not just with the landscapes of the Provo River, but with their Creator.

### Note

1. Joseph Smith Jr. et al., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, edited by B. H. Roberts, 2d ed. rev. (6 vols., 1902–12, Vol. 7, 1932; rpt., Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1980 printing): 3:295.



Mary Toscano,  
*Wherever He May Go*,  
letterpress print on paper, 8"x 10",  
2009.



# This Little Light of Ours: Ecologies of Revelation

*Peter L. McMurray*

*Note: This sermon was delivered August 22, 2010, in Cambridge First Ward, Cambridge, Massachusetts.*

I've been asked to speak about the power of personal revelation today. But I'd like to tell you a (slightly) different story about revelation, one full of highs and lows, but in recent years perhaps more lows than highs. Or maybe more accurately, more questions than answers. And while revelation has remained deeply personal for me through these years, one of the central, ongoing questions in my life has been my connection to you, to all of you, to the Church, to everyone else, to the world itself. On the one hand, we're taught in the parable of the ten virgins that maintaining our spiritual light is a personal matter, that each of us is responsible to keep our own spiritual fires burning (Matt. 25:1-13); but paradoxically, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus also teaches that spiritual light is a community affair: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 5:16). It would seem that Jesus just can't make up His mind!

I'd like to explore this tension today and suggest that, in fact, not only are there times when it's okay to live on "borrowed light" but that there are many times when choosing not to do so actually takes us farther away from God. The idea that revelation is a personal experience can be deeply empowering; but in my experience—especially in recent years—I believe that the scriptures make the same suggestion: Revelation has more often extended beyond the personal to encompass our relationships with family, friends, neighbors, and the world around us. At the risk of making things

unnecessarily complicated, which I'm prone to do, I'd like to suggest a phrase that I've found useful to highlight this distinction. Rather than "personal revelation," I like to think of "ecologies of revelation"—in other words, how revelation goes beyond us as individuals, beyond the ego, the self-absorbed "I," and moves into a broader realm where our testimonies burn brightly, not just to ensure our own salvation when the Bridegroom comes, but for the direct benefit of the entire world.

### **Me. And Me Now: Revelation as Personal Apocalypse**

But I'm already getting ahead of myself. Imagine me, ten years younger. A crew-cut, no beard. In fact, ten years ago today I was set apart as a full-time missionary, called to serve in the Slovenia Ljubljana Mission. My mission included the entire former Yugoslavia, an area of the world that, at the time, was beset by a recent American-led bombing campaign, two civil wars in Kosovo and Macedonia, and a major war in Bosnia a few years earlier that killed tens of thousands and displaced many more. As I've mentioned before over the pulpit in this ward, it was an extremely difficult mission in many ways. But for me, it was also a time of a deep, revelatory connection with God and one that will forever be associated closely with those places I served, a peculiar aspect of revelation to which I'll return in a moment.

Only a few months earlier, however, I had felt little inclination to serve a mission. I had just moved from my home in Utah here to the Boston area for college; and while I was attending church and more than willing to do the work a mission would entail, I had a slight problem. I really didn't believe in God. I don't want to overdramatize my conversion, but this unbelief was quite the hang-up. It was a time in my life when I valued, perhaps more than anything, the quality of integrity. I felt strongly that if I didn't believe, I could hardly go preach. I should point out that I wasn't opposed to the Church, though I was aware of a number of issues that troubled me. I wasn't opposed to the notion of proselytizing; in fact, I found myself proselytizing for a variety of social justice causes at the time, tutoring inmates at a local prison, protesting for animal rights, and volunteering at a local homeless shelter. If I wasn't sure what God wanted, if indeed He or She or It existed, I was sure

that it was our moral responsibility to help those in need here and now.

Had I stayed in Utah for college, I'm not sure how things would have played out; but here in Cambridge, God moved in more mysterious ways. Instead of sending home teachers or a caring bishop, he sent me a new best friend, John, a gay, secular Jew from Chicago who could hardly stomach organized religion and who, in some of the most startlingly funny ways imaginable, would take every opportunity to let me know what he thought of the mere possibility of my spending two years on a Mormon mission. He forced the issue to a head, and I found myself determined to "experiment upon" the word, as the Prophet Alma suggests (Alma 32:26–30).

Near the end of fall term, I took a few days off from classwork and immersed myself in religious study, prayer, fasting, and, importantly for me, music that spoke to my soul. My question was simple: Does God exist, and if so, how does this whole "personal witness" stuff work? What I lacked at that moment of "faith in Christ," I made up for with "a sincere heart and real intent" (Moro. 10:4). As the weekend approached, I still had no answer, and I felt the rest of my life starting to pile up more pressingly. My parents wanted to talk, friends wanted to hang out, readings and problem sets needed to be done, and papers needed to be written. But I wanted my answer, and I pushed back hard to get it.

And it came. It came as I sat for a few hours out on the stone-slab benches of Cambridge Common, shivering a bit in the late-autumn air of a quiet Sunday morning, praying and meditating through the chill morning. At some point, it simply struck me with all the clarity and force I could have asked for: God knew me, and He cared for me. And He cared for many others in the world, a few of whom I might be able to reach if I were to consecrate a couple of years to His service. That was it: a manifestation of His love and some divine foresight to sense, if only for a moment, what was at stake in that decision. The decision, it seemed, was left to me. If I had to define revelation, that would be it: a clear sensation of God's love and the moral clarity to allow us to choose—to exercise agency in its fullest sense.

We often use "revelation" for such experiences, and it certainly was that. But having majored in classics in college, I'll pre-

tentiously throw it out there that “revelation” (which comes from Latin and means roughly “to unveil”), pales in comparison to its Greek counterpart, which we know as “apocalypse.” While it means more or less the same thing, thanks to Hollywood and subway-station evangelists, we recognize this word as having a much more radical connotation: the end times, the cataclysmic finale of our world. In my case, to describe this experience as “cataclysmic” might be overstating things, but it definitely shook me up and reordered certain aspects of my life.

Speaking of the world, it also made me rethink certain places, certain locations in my life-geography. As Elder Boyd K. Packer and—more recently and locally—our fellow ward-member Rich, have shared, revelatory experiences typically defy words. Often the best we can do is point to where they happened, to stake out our own sacred groves (or hills where we’ve snowboarded, for Rich) where we have communed with God. The book of Mosiah tells us the same: “Yea, the place of Mormon, the waters of Mormon, the forest of Mormon, how beautiful are they to the eyes of them who there came to the knowledge of their Redeemer” (Mosiah 18:30). The Bible can be read as a litany of sacred sites of revelation: Eden, Beth-El, Mount Moriah, Sinai, the temple, Gethsemane, the road to Damascus. For me, Cambridge Common always will be, too.

What followed seemed to be a torrent of revelation, of apocalypses from God designed, I presume, as a crash course for me for the upcoming two years. Lest you misunderstand, I grew up in the Church and was always fairly active. I liked Mormonism, I liked its fruits, and I guess I probably knew its doctrine (at least intellectually) better than most. But I don’t think I could stand and firmly say that I knew God. I had occasionally felt inklings of the Spirit in my life, but I had never really put revelation to the test. And so after that fateful Sunday morning on the Common, I found myself asking for more and more, and receiving more: confirmations of truthfulness about Joseph Smith, the temple, my relationships with my family, especially with my mother who was diagnosed with cancer only weeks later and with whom I had (gently, but regularly) butted heads for years over everything from church meetings to my nascent veganism to punk rock. God cared, and He was making it abundantly clear to me.

And He seemed to continue caring throughout my mission. I genuinely felt as if God had blessed me with the gift of prophecy, of preaching, of faith. I had a numerically bizarre—or arguably abysmal—mission, I confess. I’m guessing I taught the “first discussion,” or introductory explanation of the gospel, to around five or six hundred different people; I taught the following lesson to only about ten. I never baptized anyone; and as I’ve shared here, the only people whose conversions I played a part in fell away from the Church in catastrophic ways—hardly the apocalypse I had foreseen. But throughout it all, I felt what is so eloquently described in the *Lectures on Faith* as one of the foundations of faith in God: an “actual knowledge that the course of life which [I was] pursuing” was in accordance with God’s will.<sup>1</sup>

### After Laughter Comes Tears

After returning home from my mission, things changed. If I’ve spent more time than I should retelling that particular revelatory moment, it’s because it became the measuring stick I used to judge all future spiritual encounters with the divine. And over the ensuing years, while I tried to remain faithful to that personal apocalypse and to seek out new light and knowledge, I began to stumble. Some of that stumbling was definitely the result of mistakes I was making (though as my parents taught in family scripture reading, only those who are pushing forward stumble). But in some ways, it has simultaneously seemed as if God cared less during these times. At first, I felt a deep loneliness because of this apparent isolation, but I’ve found more recently that it’s a somewhat widespread phenomenon: the apostasy of the faithful, we might say. The strange silencing of the heavens. It seems to afflict a lot of returned missionaries and others who have felt, for some period, a deep connection with God but have then been left to fend for themselves spiritually.

And so I return to the idea I began with: that revelation is less an individual experience and more something nested within a web of places and people who stand to benefit from God’s encounters with humankind. Even my epiphany-on-the-Common was marked by the fact that it was on *that* common, in a particular (and fittingly communal) place. And maybe more importantly, it gave me insight into what my relationships with others might

be—whether with friends at school, my family (all devout Mormons), or the people I would meet as a missionary, some of whom remain my closest friends. God gave me light; and while you may criticize me for not filling up my spiritual lamp with more oil, as the parable goes, I hope when I meet Him at the day of judgment, I can say that I let the light of that experience shine for others. It may not be a major revelation for anyone, but I hope and trust that somewhere along the line, that experience offered or will offer a “lower light . . . burning” for someone in need.<sup>2</sup>

But additionally, the reverse must be true: God wants me, and all of us, to draw spiritual strength from our own ecologies, from our spiritual communities, even when He is not extending his hand through the veil, so to speak. In fact, the great revelation of the past eight years since my mission has been my wife, Eunice. At the risk of devolving into awkward sentimentality or patronizing statements of affection, I’d like to pay her the highest compliment I can: in the seven and a half years we’ve known each other, she has pushed me to understand (or at least try to understand) God in ways that I never would have thought to do. In particular, she’s challenged the way I understand revelation and, I think, fine-tuned it—or more accurately, blown it wide open.

And this ward has done the same. You’ve brought me closer to a notion of Zion than any place before: Zion is “the pure in heart” (D&C 97:21), a place with no inequality—we surely still fall short there—but it must also be a place where God matters, where in our day-to-day interactions we discuss spiritual things, we attempt to wrestle with our struggles of faith, and we share spiritual light with one another. I point to Zion because I believe that, by sharing our individual “candles of the Lord” (Prov. 20:27), we build community beyond ourselves, we make our ecologies of revelation. Not only do we see better as a group, we are able to sustain those who may be stumbling, or at least gain empathy for the rugged terrain over which others are called to pass.

### **A Community of Prophets**

Let me share a few examples that you’ve shared with me:

In April 2010, after the general priesthood session, a few guys from the ward got together to rap over Slurpees about what we’d just seen. I’d been deeply touched by President Dieter Uchtdorf’s

talk on patience—for precisely the reasons I’ve described here, the silencing of my heavens—and I said that I really liked it. I think I may have even had the audacity to pronounce it “an instant classic.” Stuart, my home-teehee and a neuroscience graduate student, pointed out that it left him uncomfortable, not only for its pseudo-science but because of some of the assumptions it made about what spiritual normalcy might look like, how someone with a different personal disposition or ADD, for example, might feel, and so on. Having grown up with several friends who struggled seriously with such issues, I felt enlightened. I hope the exchange helped us both “understand one another, and both [be] edified and rejoice together” (D&C 50:22). That night, both 7–11 and the seating area at the nearby Au Bon Pain were also sanctified in some small way. (At this rate, pretty soon, Harvard Square will be taken up with the City of Enoch—just watch—maybe minus the dozen-or-so banks.)

In 2008, Church leaders broke the hearts of many gay members and supporters when they called on members in California to give money and time to pass Proposition 8. The conflict spilled over into our ward, culminating in a fireside/question-and-answer session with our stake president that I did not find especially revelatory in the sense that he uncovered new truth about the nature of the family, or sexuality, or even California politics. But on that night, the revelation was community itself. When I was a missionary, I might have agreed with some of the perspectives expressed by certain members of the ward, but I don’t now and probably won’t ever again. And they probably don’t agree with mine. But the fact is that we sat there and struggled for two hours to express the bits of insight and revelation we’ve collectively accrued on this question. We did not come to a unified perspective, but I believe we took one step closer to understanding each other; and at that moment, being of one heart seemed more critical to the project of Zion than being of one mind anyway.

For the past couple of years, a small group of people—mostly from our ward, but with a few outliers—have gathered weekly to read and discuss Church history, literature, and other Mormon issues. No question is off the table, which perhaps speaks more to foolhardiness than anything else, but I have to say that sitting around on Friday evenings discussing the early Relief Society, late



polygamy, the priesthood ban for African American men, and other difficult issues has been enlightening. Some would call this process a recipe for apostasy; but as I said before, these are some of the most faithful people I know—women and men who believe deeply enough and have enough integrity to ask the questions that make the rest of us blanch at our own spiritual temerity. These are valiant spiritual explorers. While our lights may burn dimmer than those of missionaries, there is something affirming about linking arms (so to speak) and facing our theological demons together. We will probably not find all the answers we seek; but as we learn from the brother of Jared's experience, having the faith to seek for the transcendent, no matter how difficult the issue, does not offend God (Ether 2:25–3:6). If anything, it seems we offend him by not daring to ask, or disbelieving when He then chooses to reach His finger through the veil to enlighten our lives.

And finally, here's something more specific and orthodox. A couple of weeks ago, I went to the temple with two close friends from our ward, Logan and Quinn. As we chatted in the celestial room, Logan recounted some of his own recent struggles to believe. I personally don't feel the need for a happy ending to every story we tell. After all, we're still living these experiences—the ending is not yet clear, happy or not. But after pointing out some aspects of why it's difficult for him to believe, Logan shared something that I think is profound. In fact, it's an idea so profound that it makes up a significant chunk of each of the three "endings" Moroni writes to the Book of Mormon (in the books of Mormon, Ether, and Moroni). In essence, he said that, upon spiritual reflection, he remembered the promises he had made to his wife and to God to build their marriage upon covenants and on a relationship with God. And even if he felt his spiritual reservoir dipping low at present, a promise is a promise.

Let me then close with Moroni's parsing of these same questions. I've mentioned his promise from Moroni 10:4 above—that if we pray sincerely, God will manifest truth to us directly by His spirit. In praying for and receiving this truth, we will be on our way to faith, hope, and charity. It's a more pleasant, even serene way of restating what he says in a very angry way at the end of Mormon: to cowboy up, get over our petty doubts, and believe—the miracles will follow (Mormon 9:1–27). Let's remember



the ecology of these revelations. Angry Moroni has just seen his father, his friends, and everyone else in his tribe killed; serene Moroni has been wandering alone for years and is just about to bury the plates and be relieved of the burden of his calling.

Allow me to split the difference between these two Moronis with a quick reading of the best chapter in the most theologically adventurous book in the Book of Mormon: Ether. We talk about Ether 12 often in the context of weakness, but we miss the point in large part when we do. Moroni is writing—again—about faith, hope, and charity. But here we find him more reflective, a bit somber or maybe even depressed—again, with good reason. His burden was a heavy one. (And as an aside, for critics who assume that Joseph Smith wrote this, I find this triple ending a remarkable piece of literature—psychology and theology that simply go beyond the raw material Joseph seems to have been working with. But that’s an aside.) Moroni reflects on the good old days, formulaically recounting a catalog of the greatest hits of faith in the Book of Mormon: Alma and Amulek, missionary-brothers Nephi and Lehi, and the brother of Jared. And then it gets interesting, as we watch Moroni converse with the Lord about his particular lot in life, his fears, his hopes—the human side of this great prophet. God reassures him, and then Moroni in turn partakes of one of the most important revelatory processes in scripture, and the same process Logan articulated in the temple: Moroni remembers.

First, Moroni remembers the powerful faith of the brother of Jared, enough to move mountains. But then, his remembrance becomes more poignant and personal. He remembers the hopes he felt long ago: “And I also remember that thou hast said that thou hast prepared a house for man, yea, even among the mansions of thy Father, in which man might have a more excellent hope; wherefore man must hope, or he cannot receive an inheritance in the place which thou hast prepared” (Ether 12:32). He then continues on to charity, or love: “And again, I remember that thou hast said that thou hast loved the world, even unto the laying down of thy life for the world, that thou mightest take it again to prepare a place for the children of men. And now I know that this love which thou hast had for the children of men is charity; wherefore, except men shall have charity they cannot inherit that place

which thou hast prepared in the mansions of thy Father” (vv. 33–34).

Why does a prophet say “I remember”? Don’t we bear testimony by saying “I know” or “I believe” or some other pronouncement of faith? And why, in a conversation with Jesus, does he need to remember things about Jesus? If it’s so important, why doesn’t Jesus do the talking? Let me offer my thoughts, as my modest contribution to our collective ecology of revelation. Revelation is a long-term, ongoing process. Though we feel an “answer” to a prayer, it’s ultimately a small addition of light. We see better, but we continue to need that same light, those same answers; it’s not as if we outgrow truth, even if we do (typically) outgrow our current circumstances. For some reason, remembering brought comfort and renewed commitment to Moroni as it had to my friend in the temple. And when I hear their testimonies, it sparks similar memories for me—from the past, from things I’ve heard at conference, in books, at school, at home, in the temple. From Friday nights conversing with friends, or sipping Slurpees in the square. And above all, from a cold Sunday morning on Cambridge Common. In the name of Jesus Christ, I testify that God lives and loves us, and pray that we may all build a Zion community and world by sharing our light and allowing ourselves to rely on the light of others to illuminate our lives.

### Notes

1. *The Lectures on Faith*, 3:5.
2. Philip Paul Bliss, “Brightly Beams our Father’s Mercy,” *Hymns* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985), no. 335.

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HARLOW SODERBORG CLARK {harlowclark@comcast.net} lives with his wife, Donna, and son, Matthew, in Pleasant Grove, Utah, where he reports on the Cedar Hills City Council meetings for the *Timpanogos Times*. Twenty years ago, he presented his first paper at the Association for Mormon Letters annual meeting. “Easter Sermons” is part of a larger work-in-progress, *Sacrament Meeting in the Alzheimer’s Ward*, which includes a character who writes poems from people’s sacrament meeting talks. He thanks Leslie Norris for ideas about simplicity that allowed him to recognize this poem when he heard it.

SARAH DUNSTER {thedunsters@gmail.com} is a full-time mother and homemaker. When she is not spending time with her husband, Jeffrey, and their six children, she loves to sing, ski, experiment with vegetarian cooking, read, write, and explore nature. Her poetry has appeared on Wilderness Interface Zone.

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GEORGE B. HANDLEY {george\_handley@byu.edu} is professor of humanities at Brigham Young University and has been researching, writing, and teaching about the intersections between religion, literature, and the environment since moving to Utah in 1998. As a comparatist of literatures of the Americas, he is the author of two books of literary criticism and most recently of *Home Waters: A Year of Recompenes on the Provo River* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2010), a creative nonfiction blend of nature writing, theology, personal memoir, and local history. He and his wife, Amy Handley, have four children and live in Provo.

PATRICIA GUNTER KARAMESINES {pk.wizadmin@gmail.com} is a poet, essayist, and novelist. Her novel *The Pictograph Murders* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2004) won the 2004 AML Award for the Novel. She writes for the blog A Motley Vision {<http://www.motleyvision.org/>} and runs its companion blog, Wilderness Interface Zone {[www.wilderness.motleyvision.org](http://www.wilderness.motleyvision.org)}, a blog focused on nature writing. She presented an earlier version of this article at the Association for Mormon Letters annual conference, March 2008, at Utah Valley University.

KAREN KELSAY {pkincalif@yahoo.com} is a three-time Pushcart Prize nominee and the editor of *Victorian Violet Press*, an online poetry magazine. She is a native Californian, who lives in Orange, California.

PETER L. McMURRAY {plmcmurray@gmail.com} is a musician and composer pursuing graduate studies in ethnomusicology. His wife Eunice Si Yi McMurray is an erstwhile medical student.

They have lived in the Boston area for much of the past decade, though they are currently planning to move to Berlin and Istanbul for a two-year research project. They currently serve on the Cambridge Massachusetts Stake History Committee.

RON MADSON {madsonron@aol.com} is a lawyer in private practice in Alpine, Utah. He has earned English and J.D. degrees from Brigham Young University, posts regularly with the Mormon Worker blog, and has published four articles in the Mormon Worker: "In Defense of Blackwater, Gangs, and Neocons" (December 2007); "Wendell Berry's 'Gift of a Good Life'" (March 2008); "National Flagophilia" (July 2008); and "12th Article of Faith: Sustaining the Law" (March 2010). He and his son Joshua are compiling their essays/lectures advocating their message of non-violence and anti-war.

ADAM S. MILLER {adamscottmiller@gmail.com} is a professor of philosophy at Collin College in McKinney, Texas. He is the author of *Badiou, Marion, and St Paul: Immanent Grace* (London: Continuum, 2008), the director of the Mormon Theology Seminar, and a managing editor at Salt Press ([www.saltpress.org](http://www.saltpress.org)).

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DAVID G. PACE {dgp@comcast.net} is the Literature Program Officer for the Utah Humanities Council. His award-winning novel manuscript, "Where Empty Armor Comes to Rest," is currently under consideration. This is his first published short story.

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SANDRA SKOUSON {ardnasm@citlink.net} won the Utah Arts Council prize for poetry in 2004 with her manuscript *Woman without a Net*. She has taught poetry at College of Eastern Utah–San Juan and presents workshops and crafts talks for local schools and community groups. She has also written scripts for educational television, multimedia presentations, and slide shows.

BRYAN V. WALLIS {bvwallis@ucdavis.edu} is a Ph.D. student in English with emphases in critical theory and classical Greek language and literature at the University of California, Davis. He previously received a B.A. in English and an M.A. in environmental humanities, both from the University of Utah. He has participated in environmental education and sustainable rural development projects with Instituto Terra in Brazil and is interested in the intersections of literature, the environment, and religion.

BART H. WELLING {bhwellin@unf.edu} is an associate professor of English and an Environmental Center Fellow at the University of North Florida in Jacksonville, where he teaches a range of courses focusing on animals and environmental issues in literature and film, in addition to modern American literature surveys

and other classes. He and his wife, Elizabeth Siobhain Murphy-Welling, are the parents of five children: Autumn, Solstice, Orion, Chora Belle, and Linnea ("Nimi"). **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:** I express appreciation to everyone who contributed valuable feedback on early versions of this essay at the inaugural Mormon Scholars in the Humanities conference in March 2007 at Brigham Young University, and at the Mormonism and the Environment Conference held a few weeks later at Utah Valley University. I am grateful to the English Department of the University of North Florida for facilitating my travel and research associated with the project, and offer special thanks to George Handley of Brigham Young University and Boyd Jay Petersen of Utah Valley University for making it possible for me to speak at the Utah Valley University gathering. This essay is dedicated with great love to my grandmother, Dorothy Dixon Harrison, with whom I had many interesting conversations about Mormonism and the "question of the animal," and whose passion for literature and learning never ceased to inspire me, along with countless other young readers.



Mary Toscano,  
*A Beginning*,  
graphite, watercolor and gesso on  
paper, 22"x 30",  
2011.



# WRITING AWARDS FOR 2010

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## *Dialogue* Best of the Year Awards

*Dialogue Best of the Year awards are for contributions judged  
as superior in their respective categories:*

### ARTICLE

Heikki Räisänen,  
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INTERVIEWS AND CONVERSATIONS

Stephen T. Cranney, "Divine Darwinism, Comprehensible Christianity, and the Atheist's Wager: Richard Rorty on Mormonism—an Interview with Mary V. Rorty and Patricia Rorty"  
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POETRY

James Best, "Contingency #4: White Out" and  
"Our First Home Has Forgotten Us"  
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REVIEWS

James C. Olsen, "Terryl Givens and the Shape of Mormon Studies," review (with Marc Alain Bohn) of  
*Terryl Givens, The Book of Mormon:  
A Very Short Introduction*  
**Winter issue, \$100 award**

Joseph M. Spencer, "René Girard and Mormon Scripture:  
A Response"  
**Fall issue, \$100 award**

## ABOUT THE ARTIST

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MARY TOSCANO grew up in Salt Lake City and received a BFA in printmaking and photography from the University of Utah. She works mainly in drawing, printmaking, installation, and works on and with paper. She has recently exhibited work throughout Utah and in Boston, including collaborative exhibitions with Cara Despain at the Central Utah Art Center (Cinderbox) and Kayo Gallery (Into the White) and contributions to several group shows in Salt Lake City venues such as GARFO Art Center, Copper Palate Press, Signed and Numbered, and the University of Utah's Gittins Gallery. In 2009, she received a Juror's Award at 35x35, an Artists of Utah exhibition at Finch Lane Gallery that featured thirty-five Utah artists under age thirty-five. She works as the exhibitions coordinator for the Marriott Library and the Book Arts Program at the University of Utah.

Toscano's work focuses on themes of isolation, fatalism, and the uncanny. These themes are often represented through depictions of human and animal interactions, juxtaposing the figures in relationships that suggest tensions between the human and natural worlds. Settings within her work are often left undefined, with no geographic markers to orient the characters, creating an uneasy feeling that leaves room for viewers to make their own interpretation of the narrative. Toscano's narratives are inspired by ancient myths and fairy tales mixed with anecdotes and memories of her life. By using contemporary figures in undefined settings, she intends her work "to show how these time-worn stories are applicable to modern situations and are as relevant to today's culture as those in the past."

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