



DIALOGUE

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DIALOGUE

a journal of mormon thought

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

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CONTENTS

SPECIAL ISSUE: HEALTH AND HEALING IN MORMON TRADITION

Letter to the Editor	1
Editor's Note	3

ARTICLES

“Fast from that Which is Not Perfect”: Food Abstinence and Fasting Cures in the Kingdom of God	<i>Cristina Rosetti</i>	5
“My Indignation Has Got the Better of My Intention”: A Case Study in Latter-day Saint and “Gentile” Female Family Correspondence in Nineteenth-Century America	<i>Bonnie Young</i>	33
Truth and Reconciliation: Reflections on the Fortieth Anniversary of the LDS Church's Lifting the Priesthood and Temple Restrictions for Black Mormons of African Descent	<i>Robert A. Rees</i>	55

PERSONAL VOICES

Knot Theory	<i>Aurora Golden-Appleton</i>	85
The Quest for Mutual Empathy in the Gospel	<i>Ben Bailey</i>	89
A Missionary Farewell	<i>Justin Goodson</i>	101
Healing Together: The Lonely Intersection of Faith and Sexuality	<i>Matt Koster</i>	109
A Superior Alternative	<i>Julie J. Nichols</i>	115

POETRY

Heart Sutra	<i>Charles Shirō Inouye</i>	123
Homemade Medicine	<i>Emily Updegraff</i>	128
Mormon Tea	<i>Emily Updegraff</i>	129
No Man Can Serve Two Masters	<i>Gregory Brooks</i>	131
Throwing Up in the DC Temple	<i>Gregory Brooks</i>	132

Passion	<i>Alix Brobby</i>	133
Fierce Passage	<i>Darlene Young</i>	134
A Good Sick Girl Never Gives Up	<i>Darlene Young</i>	135
Hippocrates	<i>Darlene Young</i>	137
Migraine Suite	<i>Darlene Young</i>	138
Thanksgiving in Kindergarten	<i>Hilary Brown</i>	141

FICTION

The Last Day	<i>Jacob L. Bender</i>	143
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REVIEWS

Discerning Between Truth and— John Bennion, <i>Spin</i>	<i>Julie J. Nichols</i>	153
Joseph Smith and the Long Eighteenth Century Colby Townsend, ed., <i>Envisioning Scripture: Joseph Smith's Revelations in Their Early American Contexts</i>	<i>Stephen Thomas Betts</i>	158
No Country for Nostalgia Todd Robert Petersen, <i>Picnic in the Ruins</i>	<i>English Brooks</i>	161
Wickies for the Lord Ronald V. Huggins, <i>Lighthouse: Jerald & Sandra Tanner, Despised and Beloved Critics of Mormonism</i>	<i>Jeremy M. Christiansen</i>	167

FROM THE PULPIT

So Then They Are No More Twain, But One: An Exploration of Liminality	<i>Tony Brown</i>	171
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ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE ON LEVI PETERSON

Dear Editor,

After reading Melissa Leilani Larson's review of Levi Peterson's short story collection, *Losing a Bit of Eden* ("The Promise and Limitations of Working-Class Male Protagonists," *Dialogue*, Summer 2022), I would like to offer a different perspective. I had an easier time reading the stories than she did; I saw the misogyny as satirized.

Peterson's main characters—mostly male, mostly rural Western, all ambivalently Mormon—range in age from fourteen ("Badge and Bryant") to sixty-five (Rulon in "The Return of the Native"). The stories take place in the late nineteenth century, the twentieth century, and the early twenty-first century. Most importantly, the protagonists lose at least "a bit of Eden" (their innocence, their assumptions about themselves and others); some lose a lot. Many of the men behave badly; most suffer intense guilt. The sins that torment them almost always involve sex. These men ultimately regard them-

selves as weak, not manly. The reader is asked to understand them.

There are a couple of men who seem unredeemable—not main characters but characters who are nevertheless important to the action in the story—and they are both shot to death, one by a woman.

Although men outnumber women in the stories, I found many of the women to be compelling characters, even when their stories are not told from their (literary) point of view. A contemporary woman narrates the title story, in which she is trapped, during a snowstorm, in a motel room with her bishop. In "Cedar City," the point of view moves back and forth between the unworthy missionary and the young woman he leaves behind. Usually, we get to know the female characters from dialogue and actions.

Some of the collection's important female characters succumb to sexual temptation and, like their male counterparts, feel guilty. The

major women characters are loyal; most are resourceful, strong. For example, the title character of “The Shyster,” in a story narrated by her increasingly supportive husband, is a dynamic, feminist defense attorney in a small town with a provincial ward. Self-reliant Iris, in “Bode and Iris,” intelligently juxtaposes the Mormon and Baptist religions.

Except for the two Vietnamese, one African American, and two Latina prostitutes defended by “The Shyster,” there are no persons of color in the collection. Yet, unlike Larson, I found the scope of the book wide—wide enough for me to temporarily live in the worlds of two libidinous teenage boys from Linroth, Arizona;

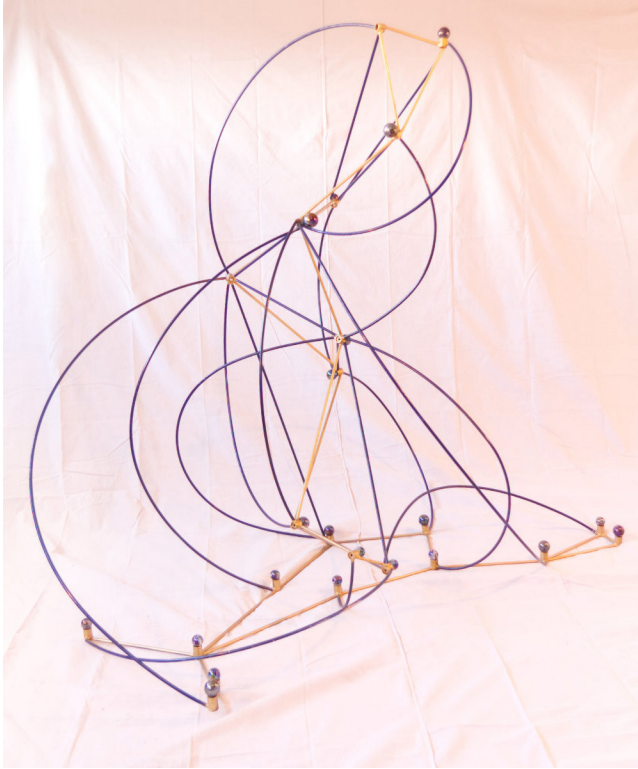
an uneasily rehabbed Seattle street addict in a derelict logging town named Beaufort; and a polygamous family in Oakley when nearby Park City was known for silver mines and a timbering camp.

As I reread some of the stories, I was caught up again in the drama. What *would* happen to Effie and Hoyt, to Jennie and Reeves, to Rulon, to Darby? Peterson is an adroit storyteller. I cared about the people in the stories—losing a little or a lot of Eden, they changed, they grew in ways they had never imagined. They journeyed into a brave new world.

Karen Rosenbaum
Kensington, California

EDITOR'S NOTE

This issue features submissions that address Latter-day Saint and Mormon approaches to health and healing. The topic has seemed especially pressing in recent years as we have both undergone significant losses and disruptions due to the COVID-19 pandemic and seen renewed urgency for attention to social and mental illnesses. It is also the case that issues of health and healing are deeply intimate matters that affect some of the most sensitive facets of our lived experiences. The following articles, essays, and creative works touch on these topics and more. Among other things, they deal with weighty matters of life and death, bodies, frameworks for thinking about health, and oppressive racial and gender prejudices. The journal is committed to a diverse range of perspectives on these topics. Some practices are controversial. Publication does not imply endorsement of all the ideas here. When making personal decisions about mental and physical health, readers should seek responsible advice from trusted sources.



Nicole Woodbury,
Bootes Constellation Emergence, 2017,
steel rod and glass, 6" x 4" x 3"

“FAST FROM THAT WHICH IS NOT PERFECT”: FOOD ABSTINENCE AND FASTING CURES IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Cristina Rosetti

Content warning: This article contains references to disordered eating and bodily harm.

Orlean

Beginning in March 1935, Orlean Kingston documented her rigorous fasts and visionary experiences that revealed the proper diet for the kingdom of God.¹ In her first entry on the subject, she wrote, “We fasted every other day. I grew very weak. One night after fasting all day I was in such misery from hunger and weakness I could not sleep nor rest. I prayed twice for strength, spiritual strength when it seemed as though 2 [Clyde Gustafson] came home from 1’s [Elden Kingston] place with

1. This article uses “Orlean” to refer to Orlean Harriet Kingston Gustafson. Many people in the DCCS either had or adopted the last name “Kingston,” including Orlean’s father, brothers, and leadership. While she took “Gustafson” as her married name, she shared this name with her sister wife, who is mentioned in Orlean’s diaries and this article. For both of these reasons, the decision to use her first name was based on a need for clarity. In conversations with members and former members of the religion, she is referred to simply by her first name. Her first-name basis indicates that her legacy is well-known in the community.

a bowl of food appearing something like candy.”² A dark spirit struck her as she ate the food, and a painful sound buzzed through her ears. “I fought and prayed to be delivered,” she wrote. “It seemed like it would choke me. It left as quickly as it came. I thanked my Heavenly Father for the deliverance and the spiritual food he had allowed me to eat. I slept till morning still feeling as though I had eaten a meal.”³ From the day of this revelation onward, Orlean developed a fasting regimen that became a common practice in her religious community.

In her work on American Christianity and diet, R. Marie Griffith has argued that food abstinence is one of the most “enduring and elastic devotions aimed at bodily discipline.”⁴ Food abstinence was historically a method of bodily discipline that transformed the body into a vessel more capable of spiritual insight. This was the case for Orlean, whose diary entries reveal a lifelong interest in food abstinence for its spiritual and health benefits. Orlean Kingston never hid her poverty, a possible material explanation for her intense interest in food and proper nutrition. However, she never mentioned this as the direct cause of her fasts. Her primary concern for the body was rooted in her faith and revelatory experiences. Bodily and spiritual well-being were intimately connected, and her food preferences, or lack thereof, stemmed from divine encounters.

2. March [1] 1935, Orlean Harriet Kingston Gustafson History, N.p. N.d. Photocopy in author’s possession. 8. The leadership in the Davis County Cooperative Society use a system of “numbered men” to designate the organization’s hierarchy. As the founder of the movement, Elden was number 1. Orlean’s husband, Clyde Gustafson, was number 2. Charles Kingston was number 5. Orlean Kingston noted that the numbers corresponded with not only increased leadership duties but also increased sacrifice: “To those who have the lower numbers much more is expected than the ones that come in later on” (Dec. 5, 1937, Orlean History, 66).

3. March [1] 1935, Orlean Harriet Kingston Gustafson History, N.p.

4. R. Marie Griffith. *Born Again Bodies: Flesh and Spirit in American Christianity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 24.

In the Davis County Cooperative Society (DCCS), the small Mormon group incorporated in 1941 by Orlean's brother, Elden Kingston, food abstinence became most controversially associated with a forty-two-day fast. During his tenure as the leader of the group, John Ortell Kingston, "Brother Ortell" as followers faithfully called him, planned frequent forty-two-day fasts and instructed his followers to do the same. Charts and outlines of the regimen instruct to fast one week dry (no water), one week with water, two weeks on grape juice alone, and thirty days (at least) on raw food. Those who participated tracked their physical and spiritual "goals" for their fast along with the outcomes. Written instruction and testimony of the fast credited male leaders of the community with the revelation for the fast and the spiritual strength they received from participation: "Brother Elden talked about fasting in the first of the Order. He likened our bodies to a blacksmith shop. When things come in to be fixed we are working on something else so we put the things in the corner instead of fixing it."⁵ John Ortell Kingston fasted for an extended period at least once a year. Other accounts include the groups' patriarch, Charles W. Kingston, who cited the fast as the reason for his long life.⁶ Always present in the accounts was the testimony of priesthood leaders who received temporal, physical, and spiritual knowledge to better lead the faithful. Notably absent are the experiences of women.⁷

This article reframes the DCCS's fast not as the product of male revelation but as the embodiment of a woman's religious life. While Orlean is mostly invisible in the historical record outside of devotional literature, she produced a discernible impact on the community. Like women mystics who came before her, Orlean was both celebrated and

5. "Outline Talk #3 on #8 Fasting and Self Healing." N.p. N.d., 2. Photocopy in author's possession.

6. "Outline Talk #3 on #8 Fasting and Self Healing."

7. "Outline Talk #3 on #8 Fasting and Self Healing."

chastised for her devotional food abstinence and subsequent visions.⁸ The sister of the DCCS's founder, Orlean spent years fasting, receiving subsequent visions, and documenting dreams associated with food abstinence. Through the later years of her life, Orlean painstakingly experimented with what she believed was the ideal diet for communion with the divine, a more complete Word of Wisdom. Her diaries reveal a woman whose embodied devotion often confused her small religious community and whose belief in a perfected body raises contemporary questions about religious women's pathologized faith. Had Orlean been a Mormon man, she might have been a prophet. Nevertheless, her largely invisible and ultimately broken body is the foundation for one of the DCCS's most controversial marks of the Kingston devotional body.

The Kingdom of God

Orlean Harriet Kingston Gustafson was excommunicated from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints on September 28, 1933, a year after her husband was excommunicated for teaching and practicing polygamy after the Second Manifesto. She was twenty-one and charged with "apostasy from the teaching as set forth by the present authorities of the Church and insubordination to church ruling."⁹ Although she was not permitted to speak during the proceeding, she left resolved in her mission to always follow the teachings of Joseph Smith. Like others at the time, Orlean was not deterred by the hearing and continued religious engagement with Mormonism. On the night of her excommunication, she met Joseph Smith in a vision. He offered Orlean the distinct impression that "all we had to do was follow Brother Joseph but to get to the same place he was we would have to die like he

8. Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 112.

9. Orlean Harriet Kingston Gustafson History, N.p. N.d. Photocopy in author's possession. 3.

did.”¹⁰ Smith spoke to Orlean and other people in the dream about the required sacrifice and dedication of Mormonism. After receiving his comments, she met Smith at the edge of a body of water, got in a boat, and crossed to the other side. Smith, Orlean believed, remained her guide outside the church he founded.

By the time of Orlean’s disciplinary hearing, excommunications of polygamous families were increasingly common. Charles W. Kingston, Orlean’s father, was one of the individuals excommunicated for practicing polygamy. Kingston was a homesteader in Idaho Falls who “had been watching conditions in the L.D.S. Church and saw that all was not well.”¹¹ According to Orlean’s account of the events, her father believed that the Church had “apostatized and broken the everlasting covenant” when they announced the end of polygamy, a principle Orlean believed was a fundamental element of her faith.¹² Kingston was not alone, and soon he became one of the many polygamous Mormons who came into communication with Charles Zitting, John W. Woolley, and Lorin C. Woolley, men who eventually led the earliest iteration of the Mormon fundamentalists movement.¹³ Through the recollections and publications of these men, as well as extensive time spent studying Church history, Kingston became convinced of the centrality of plural marriage and the authenticity of John Taylor’s 1886 revelation. He further believed he was among the men called to perpetuate plural marriage into the Millennium. He affirmed this during both his meeting with his temple president, Elder George F. Richards, and later at his disciplinary hearing. His comments sealed his fate in the Church.

Shortly after the disciplinary hearing that ended his Church membership, Kingston received a vision of God the Father, who appeared to him clothed in a plain dark suit. The vision was a watershed moment

10. Sept. 28, 1933, Orlean History, 4.

11. Sept. 28, 1933, Orlean History, 27.

12. Sept. 28, 1933, Orlean History, 27.

13. Charles W. Kingston, “My Life’s History,” 9.

for Kingston and a moment that shaped the community's attire of plain coveralls for successive generations. Kingston recalled, "Strength and power flowed from him through my right arm into my body. He began to talk to me and the words were powerful and sweet. Such words I had never heard so powerfully expressed before, and I wondered who this powerful stranger could be. He made it known to me that my action before the High Council was approved."¹⁴ Like other men excommunicated in the 1920s and 1930s for the practice of polygamy, removal from the institutional Church did not necessarily mean the end of his Mormon identity. Rather, his excommunication from the LDS Church was the catalyst for his longstanding involvement in the fundamentalist movement.¹⁵

Kingston's vision came at a difficult time. Most notably, his Idaho Falls homestead failed and forced him into industrial labor in the railroad industry. The precarious financial situation led him to southern Utah, where he met J. Leslie Broadbent, the leader of the Mormon fundamentalist movement, to inquire about participation in the consecration effort that sought to revive nineteenth-century Mormon communitarianism.¹⁶ Despite the Kingston family's interest, Broadbent turned them away.¹⁷ In her later recollections of this experience, Orlean

14. Charles W. Kingston, "My Life's History," 190.

15. See Cristina Rosetti, "'Hysteria Excommunicatus': Loyalty Oaths, Excommunication, and the Forging of a Mormon Identity," *Journal of Mormon History* 47, no. 3 (2019): 22–43.

16. See Brian Hales, *Modern Polygamy and Mormon Fundamentalism: The Generations after the Manifesto* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2006); and Craig L. Foster and Marianne T. Watson, *American Polygamy: A History of Fundamentalist Mormon Faith* (Charleston, S.C.: The History Press, 2019); and Dean L. May, "One Hear and Mind: Communal Life and Values among the Mormons," in *America's Communal Utopias*, edited by Donald E. Pitzer (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

17. Charles W. Kingston, "My Life's History," June 1, 1938. N.p., available online at <https://www.dccsociety.org/dccs-history/my-lifes-history-by-charles-w-kingston>.

penned a diary entry about the Broadbent ordeal, centering the spiritual elements of the refusal:

If a smaller key is turned by using it under the wrong direction how much greater and quicker would the priesthood be taken away if used under wrong direction and how much harder to repent and receive it again. Look how easy the L.D.S. Church lost it and the Broadbent faction in S.L.¹⁸ This is why it is so important to always keep the spirit of the Lord and be able to distinguish between the two spirits no matter how close the evil one is able to come and appear as the spirit of the Lord. The evil one has a duplicate for everything that the Lord has and we must be able to judge between so we will not be deceived.¹⁹

In Orlean's telling, the priesthood guides the faithful in the right direction. The right direction for Orlean's family was toward a unique priesthood claim, not the extant Mormon groups. There is little contemporary information about why the United Order in southern Utah denied the Kingston family.²⁰ One current member of the DCCS explained that,

18. Orlean is referring to the main body of fundamentalists, under the leadership of J. Leslie Broadbent. Members of the group had been on good terms with Broadbent earlier—he sealed Orlean to Clyde Gustafson in 1931—but by this point had separated.

19. November [1], 1934, Orlean History, 15.

20. See Charles W. Kingston, "Why I did not join the Woolley Group, Woods Cross, Utah March 5, 1967," 3, photocopy in author's possession. In Kingston's account, he learned that the Woolley group was teaching a doctrine referred to as "virgin sacrifice" that the group attributed to Joseph Smith. The doctrine asserted that it was "lawful for a man to take virgin and force her to live with him and it did not matter who this girl married afterwards; she still belonged to the first man, even though she was forced to live with him the first time." This accusation led to three dreams that Kingston later told Zitting. In the final dream, he was taken to the home of Zitting's newest wife and found a bathtub filled with human waste. He took the tub to a creek near Zitting's home to clean it and found that the entire creek became contaminated. From this dream, he gathered that the doctrine of virgin sacrifice had "corrupted the whole group. That they were all teaching it secretly" (5). Despite Kingston's claim, there is no evidence of this doctrine being taught by either Joseph Smith or the Woolley group.

while the family sought participation in Broadbent's organization, Elden Kingston simultaneously claimed priesthood authority that countered Broadbent, leading to mutual disinterest. Contemporary recollections from descendants of both groups corroborate Orlean's inclination that the denial was a matter of contested authority.

The denial by Broadbent did not deter Kingston from his consecration mission. As happened to many polygamous Mormons, internal and external economic conflict devastated the Kingston family. The Great Depression created economic difficulty that caused particular hardship among large families.²¹ This hardship was among the initial catalysts for the early fundamentalist movement's interest in reviving Joseph Smith's vision for Zion.²² Internally, polygamous Mormons who sought to retain the practice of polygamy were excommunicated from the LDS Church and did not qualify for the Church's new welfare program.²³ A lack of national and institutional support made polygamous people particularly vulnerable when the nation struggled. Cooperative living was the solution.²⁴

21. While most of Orlean's visions were religious or dietary, one dream specifically focused on the financial state of the group, "I dreamed there was employment for \$10 a day at a certain place" (Apr. 17, 1939, Orlean History, 60).

22. See Joseph W. Musser, *The Economic Order of Heaven: Setting Forth True Communism-Socialism-Capitalism as Ordained by God for the Economic Salvation of His People* (Salt Lake City: Truth Publishing Company, 1948).

23. See Randy Powell, "Social Welfare at the End of the World: How the Mormons Created an Alternative to the New Deal and Helped Build Modern Conservatism," *Journal of Policy History* 31, no. 4 (2019): 488–511.

24. According to Orlean Kingston's recollection of Church meetings, consecration was a doctrine first espoused by Jesus Christ. Its removal from the earth coincided with the gradual apostasy of the Church after the death of the apostles. "In the time the Savior was crucified when the mountains moved all the wicked were killed and only those left that would conform to the laws of the Savior. He established the law of consecration etc. and the people lived it until about 200 years A.D." (Dec. 5, 1937, Orlean History, 66).

Charles Kingston was the first in his family to receive a visitation by God. However, it was not until his son Elden began receiving revelations while seeking guidance for his consecration effort that an organization formed around the family.²⁵ As recorded in "The Sacred Things of the Order," a short document that provides a brief history of the visitation, Elden Kingston took his scriptures and blanket up a mountain near his home to pray in an act that amounted to the "greatest striving that had ever taken place between God and man."²⁶ During this meeting, Kingston was overcome by the spirit of God and recorded, "I got an enduring testimony that this order that he started is in deed the Kingdom of God that he would establish on the Earth and his second coming."²⁷ As Kingston prayed on the mountain, a divine personage met him in the silence. "Sometime during the night he was awakened by someone standing at his side. He was lying on the ground. There was a light radiation from this Heavenly Being. This being had him read in the 42nd Chapter of Isaiah, the first 8 verses."²⁸ Through this revelation, Elden became assured of his position as the rightful man called to lead God's people through the world's end.

25. Unlike others at the time, Elden's eventual authority claim was not found in the succession line of Benjamin F. Johnson or Lorin C. Woolley but was based on a visitation that bestowed divine authority. Elden's experience mimics the experience of later fundamentalist leaders who claimed divine visitation as the catalyst for their movement. The most notable examples include James D. Harmston and the True and Living Church of Jesus Christ of Saints of the Last Days, Roger Billings's Church of Jesus Christ in Zion, and Alex Joseph's Church of Jesus Christ in Solemn Assembly.

26. "The Sacred Things of the Order." N.p. n.d., 1. Photocopy in author's possession.

27. "The Sacred Things of the Order," 1. Note that throughout the article, spelling and grammatical errors in quotations were not edited.

28. "The Sacred Things of the Order," 2.

According to accounts of this event from the group he founded, the personage charged Elden to organize the kingdom of God.²⁹ The outcome was the Davis County Cooperative Society (DCCS), first organized in 1935. The organization formally registered with the state of Utah in 1941. The stated purpose was the promotion of “the economic welfare of the membership,” who could “increase their talents and abilities by utilizing their united funds and efforts for the purchase, distribution and production of commodities and the performance of sources in their interest in the most economical way.”³⁰ In fulfilling this mission, the Cooperative believed they could establish lasting peace and abolish bloodshed. In her account of a Bible class led by Elden the year after the formation of DCCS, Orlean explained the timeline of the formation in terms of biblical prophecy:

1935 marks the time when the seed was sown. 1936 marks the time when it is up above the earth and can be seen. It took one year for the seed to germinate.

360 =time
 +720 =times
 ±180 =half a time
 1260 years of darkness
 1830 Church started
 -1260 time, times and half a time
 570 A.D. When the gospel left the earth
 570
 +1290 2nd date in Daniel, time of darkness 1860
 570
 +1260 first date in Daniel
 1820 when Church commenced

29. Today, the “Kingston group” operates with a three-tiered structure of Kingdom, Family, and Church, with the DCCS and Latter Day Church of Christ operating in different capacities and with different membership. During Orlean’s life, and in her own recollections, the DCCS was synonymous with the Kingdom of God.

30. “DCCS Articles of Information,” Sept. 16, 1941, available online at <https://www.dccsociety.org/dccs-history/dccs-articles-of-incorporation-1941>.

1860
-1830
 30 years difference in dates in Daniel
 1335 blessed is he who comes at this date.
 1335
+ 570
 1905 When Michael stood up and began to plow the ground.
 1936 is date on the great pyramid. It says "even the angels in heaven
 will not know this date. It was revealed to Brother 1 after this
 work commenced in 1935.
 1936 —It had grown till people of world noticed it. 1905
+ 30 years difference in dates in Daniel
 1935 The date the Kingdom of God started in the earth.³¹

A new dispensation began when the personage bestowed authority on Elden, amounting to something that positioned itself as more of a re-Restoration than simply another of many movements.³²

Over time, the emerging group reimagined Elden Kingston as the prophesied figure who would "set in order the house of God" and the one who held the priesthood authority necessary to seal plural families after the Second Manifesto.³³ On Elden's twenty-sixth birthday, Orlean recorded an account of a young man who went to the mountains and undertook a period of striving, a term Orlean used as shorthand for extended prayer and fasting. During this period, "He was shown that Brother 1 would become the one mighty and strong and would work under the direction of the prophet Joseph Smith. . . . He was also shown

31. Apr. 2, 1938, Orlean History, 74–75. This timeline mirrors other fundamentalist leaders who spoke on sacred time, including Francis Darter.

32. Brian Hales, *Modern Polygamy and Mormon Fundamentalism*; Foster and Watson, *American Polygamy*, 378. "Re-Restoration" was used by James D. Harmston and his followers in reference to the True and Living Church of Jesus Christ of Saints of the Last Days.

33. Doctrine and Covenants 85:7. See Brian C. Hales, "John T. Clark: The 'One Mighty and Strong'" *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 39, no. 3 (Fall 2006): 46–63.

that as soon as he was prepared he would be called to go on a mission to preach the gospel of the kingdom of God. We hope that many more such men soon come into the order for in this day the Lord will gather his elect from all over the earth.”³⁴ As the man with the sealing keys and full claim to authority, Elden established a strict hierarchical leadership system based on obedience to priesthood.³⁵

Later doctrinal development based on Elden’s visions that shaped the trajectory of the new faith only furthered the Cooperative’s divergence from other Mormon fundamentalist groups, especially the Woolley group. Most notably, Elden claimed a direct lineage to Jesus Christ, which afforded him unquestionable standing in the group.³⁶ His apparent genetics was not a new argument among Mormon leaders and afforded him “unlimited health” according to faithful members of the group.³⁷ The health claim, however, did not always materialize. In 1948, Elden was diagnosed with cancer. He died the following year and was succeeded by John Ortell Kingston (Ortell Kingston, or “Brother Ortell”), who married Orlean’s daughter, making his first wife his niece. With this marriage, Ortell initiated a history of close family marriages intended to “perfect his own bloodline.”³⁸

Interrogation of Kingston bodily practice often begins and ends with the allegations of incest that stemmed from Ortell’s marriages

34. Hales, “John T. Clark.”

35. Elden taught a doctrine that became known as the “Law of One Above Another,” which instructed the faithful to obey those above them in the priesthood. In her diary, Orlean explained a Bible class instruction where Elden taught the principle: “He showed how necessary it was for him to be one with those above him and how necessary for us to be one with those above is” (Jan. 4, 1940, Orlean History, 86).

36. Hales, *Modern Polygamy and Mormon Fundamentalism*; Foster and Watson, *American Polygamy*, 385.

37. Foster and Watson, *American Polygamy*, 385.

38. Foster and Watson, *American Polygamy*, 386.

and eugenic experimentation.³⁹ However, in the quest toward physical and spiritual perfection, regulations regarding the body were not only sexual. Fasting and dietary restrictions became a hallmark of the DCCS and associated with the creation of Kingston embodiment. The body became the site of DCCS religious production and identity through these religious practices. Explaining the importance of "green drink," a thick comfrey concoction consumed by members of the group, one former member explained, "I remember hearing sermons from Ortell and other people about how sacred and important green drink was. . . . It really became entangled with your spirituality and strength of faith."⁴⁰ Like green drink, fasting and dietary restriction, even to the point of death, became markers of the most righteous.

The Word of Wisdom Diet

Fasting became part of Mormon practice in 1832 when Joseph Smith received a revelation for the Saints to "continue in fasting and prayer from this time forth."⁴¹ The Latter-day Saint body strengthened through fasting, and the mind became "more active" to better focus on spiritual things.⁴² From the earliest years of the faith, the physical and spiritual were intimately connected, most exemplified by Smith's teaching on a material deity. The faith collapsed any divides between the carnal and spiritual that remained among the Protestants around them and

39. Ortell's interest in bloodline ultimately led to experimentation on cows at the dairy farm owned by the DCCS. The "results" garnered through these experiments were translated onto people in the group, who sought to retain a perfected bloodline through incestuous marriage.

40. Jeremy, interview with author, Feb. 3, 2022.

41. Doctrine and Covenants 88:76.

42. "Chapter 25: Fasting," *Gospel Principles* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2011).

created a religion marked by embodiment.⁴³ As part of the early fasting practice, Latter-day Saints instituted a fast day, one Sunday per month designated for food abstinence and collecting an additional offering for the poor. On these days, Latter-day Saints gathered to offer “worshipful, inspirational accounts of God’s blessings in their lives,” strengthened by their weakened bodies.⁴⁴

Like others in the nineteenth century, Mormons “blended their own sense of spiritual discipline with material concerns about health and longevity.”⁴⁵ In addition to his teachings on fasting, Joseph Smith received a revelation in 1833 that shaped contemporary Mormon beliefs about diet and health. The revelation, known as the Word of Wisdom, outlined a system of health based on moderation and an emphasis on grain and seasonal produce. According to R. Marie Griffith, Mormon dietary restrictions and fasting became the “most lasting and, at least until very recently, most vigorous model of regular Christian fasting in the Anglo-American world.”⁴⁶ Currently, most members of the LDS Church interpret the revelation as a restriction on alcohol, tobacco, coffee, and tea. Outside the LDS Church, the Mormon health code expanded in some groups that added insights based on continuing revelation.⁴⁷ These expansions included increased attention to fasting.

43. Benjamin E. Park, “Salvation through a Tabernacle: Joseph Smith, Parley P. Pratt, and Early Mormon Theologies of Embodiment,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 43, no. 2 (Summer 2010): 1–44.

44. Griffith, *Born Again Bodies*, 38.

45. Griffith, *Born Again Bodies*, 47.

46. Griffith, *Born Again Bodies*, 47.

47. “Word of Wisdom,” *Gospel Topics* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2011). While the LDS Church is the largest Mormon group and promotes the most common interpretation of the Word of Wisdom, other Mormons support varying perspectives on food and beverage based on their own revelations or contemporary interpretation of the nineteenth-century passage. For example, the Righteous Branch of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints upholds the LDS Word of Wisdom but adds prohibitions on chocolate and pork.

While a member of the LDS Church, Orlean followed the Word of Wisdom and favored fasting as a spiritual and physical discipline. However, her practices around food changed in 1935 when she recorded a revelation she received that outlined a more complete Word of Wisdom based on foods that were most and least beneficial to the body and soul. The revelation was not an isolated instance. For the rest of her life, Orlean received visions, revelations, and dreams that offered her direct spiritual encounters to guide her life. These experiences were, at times, so powerful that they influenced the group beyond her immediate family. Orlean's diaries do not provide much information about the development of her interest in fasting. However, early dreams and revelations on the subject corresponded with the loss of her child, Elaine, who died at seven and a half months of age.⁴⁸ In these early years, her food abstinence and interest in health correlated with a desire to have more children, "Last night I dreamed that for 9 months I ate soaked wheat mixed with whole wheat flour with milk on for breakfast. Some raw vegetables for dinner and fresh fruit for supper. At the end of this time my fourth baby was born. She came within 15 minutes of the first warning without any pain. It seemed like it was easy to eat this way."⁴⁹ While a fourth baby did not arrive as revealed in her dream, a concern for the body, future posterity, and the spiritual benefits of a correct diet remained a lasting part of her religious life.

Central to Orlean's transcribed revelations were strict fasts and a raw diet of foods in their "natural" state. She gave particular attention

48. When Orlean contemplated the loss of her daughter, it often accompanied contemplation on the resurrection and the salvation of both body and soul. For example, in 1946, she wrote, "I dreamed different times she was resurrected and given to me. I never realized the resurrection was quite like this but when something is dead and decayed it is of no use to us so it is only natural that the resurrection should be another chance to take a body and save that body. The body is saved through obeying the word of wisdom, the spirit is saved by keeping the commandments of God, thus saving both body and spirit which together comprises the soul of man" (Jan. 30, 1946, Orlean History, 135).

49. Apr. 21, 1938, Orlean History, 72.

to avoiding salt and honey and promoted mono meals, using “only one food for each meal.”⁵⁰ Her spiritual insight into food ultimately led to detailed instruction on a complete Word of Wisdom diet that would sustain the well and heal the sick. By preparing food with “singleness of heart,” Orlean learned that her fasts would “be made perfect.”⁵¹ In this way, food preparation and combination became a spiritual science that nurtured a fit body to accommodate a fit soul. In 1940, she outlined the complete Word of Wisdom diet as follows:

The food combinations are:

Don't mix fruits and starches together.

Don't mix starch and protein together.

Don't eat of any one food until you are full.

Leave the table hungry

This brings us back to the following combinations. 1 starchy vegetable and 2 or more non starchy vegetables, protein and non starch and fruit, Wheat for breakfast.

Vegetables for dinner (starch with non starch)

Fruit for supper.

Don't mix two starchy foods such as bread and potatoes or winter carrots and potatoes or rice and potatoes etc. or rice and bread.⁵²

In addition to the above restrictions, Orlean learned that God called people to eat at least half of their food in an “unrefined” state. This excluded bread and milk, foods that frequently appeared in her diaries. By following this outline, the individual could receive the “added strength even strength promised in the word of wisdom . . . as the scriptures tells us and we will have health.”⁵³

50. June 25, 1935, Orlean History, 14. In a conversation with two current members of the DCCS, they explained that this is not representative of the group's view of food. However, several of Orlean's descendants continue to follow her instruction and eat like her.

51. July [1], 1940, Orlean History, 98. In her diary entry on food preparation, Orlean summarized D&C 59:18.

52. July [1], 1940, Orlean History, 98

53. July [1], 1940, Orlean History, 98

While Orlean did not hold the priesthood, her revelations on food and health were not only for her. The corporeal nature of her visions demonstrates the complex way women's spiritual insight acts within Mormonism. Through revelation, she learned that the health code she received would become the model Word of Wisdom for the entire kingdom of God. In one dream, she saw herself eating foods that were not compliant with her revealed diet. As she ate bread and sweets, she saw her brother Elden, who spoke to her in words of affirmation, "It seems hard sometimes to be the only one in the order to be eating this way (meaning the raw foods) and sometimes I start craving other food so hard I go and take some."⁵⁴ In response to her difficulty, Elden assured her, "When Our Heavenly Father sends an innumerable company of angels to join the church of the first born down to work in the fields with us then you'll have plenty of company in your eating."⁵⁵ She saw everyone rejoice in eating according to her diet. With time, she learned through revelation, "Knowledge of health is coming to this people and I am reminded of a prophecy that says, 'The day will come when it will be a sin to be sick because of the laws of health that everyone will know.'⁵⁶ Orlean was not formally a "prophet" or holder of priesthood keys, but her prophecy included everyone.

Orlean held authority through her influence on the people around her. One such woman was "Sister Beecie," a member of the DCCS whom Orlean described as a "very spiritual woman and servant for all." She confirmed Orlean's revelatory instruction through her dreams.⁵⁷ Orlean explained, "Sister Beecie dreamed: When secondary foods such as milk, eggs, butter and cheese are eaten then those cells have to change it and in so doing many of them die. But when live food such as fruits are eaten raw, then these cells multiply very fast[.] Secondary

54. Jan. 15, 1940, Orlean History, 88.

55. Jan. 15, 1940, Orlean History, 88.

56. Jan. 15, 1940, Orlean History, 88.

57. Oct. 13, 1049, Orlean History, 102.

foods are not included in the word of wisdom on this account.”⁵⁸ Although referenced as sick in several of Orlean’s recollections, Sister Beecie learned about the diet given through revelation and developed an interest in the promised spiritual insights.

Orlean’s dietary restrictions did not convince everyone. For some, the diet raised more questions than answers. Early in her devotional practice, leaders in the DCCS grew concerned and encouraged her to eat more than small quantities of raw foods. In one instance, her brother and spiritual leader Elden approached her and instructed her to “eat everything.”⁵⁹ This confused Orlean, who believed she “learned by the spirit” to avoid foods that were counter to her revealed Word of Wisdom.”⁶⁰ Elden’s concern is unsurprising and mirrors religious men in history who sought to modify women’s devotional practice out of concern for “weaker” bodies’ participation in strict ascetic practice.⁶¹ This concern, at times, was internalized by women, who then cautioned others about the practices that initiated their religious experience. Similarly, Orlean often encouraged other women in the community to eat as they wished and not follow her ascetic practice. By the time Elden confronted Orlean, she had been on her strict diet for two years. Out of obedience to her priesthood leader, she began to eat as Elden suggested.

Orlean’s obedience was short-lived. The night Elden approached her, she received a revelation explaining her leadership’s concern. From her dream, she learned that the problem was not necessarily her diet. The problem was the confusion it caused among her coreligionists. This revelation materialized in the growing discord in the community over her diet. In one instance, she upset her mother, who felt “the

58. Jan. 15, 1940, Orlean History, 88.

59. June 19, 1940, Orlean History, 96.

60. June 19, 1940, Orlean History, 96.

61. Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 85.

children were starving because they desired to eat as I [Orlean] did.”⁶² In response to the disagreement with her mother, Orlean took to prayer and received a vision that instructed her against confusion and making people feel bad for their food preferences. In the dream, she saw her mother, who explained, “You sure made me feel bad when the children didn’t eat. It sure hurt me.”⁶³ She sought her mother’s forgiveness and, like she did when confronted by her brother and priesthood leader, began to eat more than raw food. Like her obedience to Elden, this was similarly short-lived.

Considering Orlean’s continued fasting, Elden tried a second approach. Six years after she began following her Word of Wisdom, he attempted to explain that all foods are acceptable so long as they are consumed in limited quantities.⁶⁴ Limited food became an obsession for Orlean, a woman preoccupied with food. Today, some argue that this new preoccupation led to her early death. Her dreams confirmed Elden’s instruction. “I see now the meaning is that we can eat of every kind of food if we use mainly the word of wisdom foods and eat awful light on the others (secondary foods and meats). In other words he [Elden] was anxious that I be awful careful, be careful and eat light of those that are not so good for us. Concentrated foods are to be eaten sparingly according to their concentration. Natural foods can be eaten at all times.”⁶⁵ In this instance, her revelation coincided with her spiritual leadership. Over time, she ate less food.

Despite her interest in Elden’s opinion about diet and belief in his role as the priesthood authority on earth, her revelations eventually came into conflict with his instruction. In these moments, she cast aside

62. Oct. 20, 1940, Orlean History, 104. One former member of the community recalled concern over Orlean’s diet while pregnant, noting that she sometimes ate only one grapefruit per day.

63. Oct. 20, 1940, Orlean History, 104.

64. July 1, 1941, Orlean History, 115.

65. July 1, 1941, Orlean History, 115.

her leader's spiritual insight in favor of her own. "In other words if I receive light and truth and don't follow it and continue on in my old way then this light would go to my condemnation. Before I would be sinning in ignorance but now know of my sins for, we are to make our bodies as tabernacles of cleanliness where the spirit of the Lord will delight to dwell."⁶⁶ Based on her diaries, food and health was the only area of her life where she chose to counter her leader's revelation with her own.

Like Catherine of Siena and early women mystics who used rigorous food deprivation as a source of spiritual insight and subsequently justified their food abstinence by spiritual revelation, Orlean became increasingly convinced that her abstinence was not purely spiritual. In some instances, she went so far as to liken incorrect food consumption to suicide.⁶⁷ As she learned from her dreams, fasting was a medicine that healed the sick and strengthened the well. One evening, after an intense day of work, she had three glasses of milk, one at the home of a DCCS leader.⁶⁸ After she arrived home, she began to worry that she had not done the right thing by consuming milk. She went to sleep but awoke with a severe illness. A dream of a Fourth of July parade accompanied her illness. She had the impression that, unlike the others in the dream, she was not supposed to be in the parade. It was fine for the others to participate but not for her. If she participated, she would become gravely ill. The interpretation followed: "Thinking about this dream I got up and I felt well again except that my head still ached. I

66. July 1, 1941, *Orlean History*, 115.

67. Oct. 31, 1941, *Orlean History*, 118. In an earlier dream, Orlean saw a man tell her, "If you figured you were doing right by eating as you have been then you will be forgiven, but if not.' He shook his head just as if to say if not then it was just too bad for me" (July [1], 1940, *Orlean History*, 97). The threatening tone of the dream implied that she would die if she did not obey the strict dietary outline she received through revelation.

68. Apr. 5, 1940, *Orlean History*, 90.

prayed and told the Lord I understood and would try and do right. I knew that I had done wrong by taking the milk. . . . I knew that I had done wrong by taking the milk."⁶⁹ Despite her leader's warning to avoid a restrictive diet, Orlean was not supposed to eat everything. Confusion among other community members was not a concern for her. She was not like the others.

That Your Fasting May Be Made Perfect

Despite her leader's concern, Orlean increasingly relied on her revelations to guide her food intake, cutting her food consumption to about twelve ounces of food per meal.⁷⁰ Despite the weakness and pain that stemmed from her diet and long workdays, which she acknowledged, she believed her body was "renewing itself" through her fasting and diets.⁷¹ She explained, "This key is the key to the word of wisdom. It has been given to me, now I can take it and use it and receive health. . . . Thank you Father in heaven that you have seen fit to bestow upon me this wonderful knowledge and help me to put aside the worldly things that I may gain the health and strength and hidden treasures of knowledge which is promised therein. I ask in Jesus, Name Amen."⁷² Her prayers were answered time and again as she gained insight into the spiritual world, which offered more insight and accolades for her food abstinence. Each time, she attributed her spiritual health to her fasts. "I might say that the spirit of the Lord has been with me almost constantly and many have been the times it has spoken to me and revealed new

69. Apr. 6, 1940, Orlean History, 91.

70. Oct. 8, 1941, Orlean History, 117.

71. Oct. 8, 1941, Orlean History, 117. The most frequent manifestation of renewal for Orlean was the improvement of her eyesight (Nov. 13, 1938, Orlean History, 76).

72. Nov. 13, 1938, Orlean History, 76.

knowledge and truth. Many are the fasts I have been on.”⁷³ Eventually, these many fasts transformed into the extended fasting regimen that became part of DCCS religious life.

Early in her fasting practice, Orlean received insight into the people who joined the DCCS. They were people willing to sacrifice and strive for God, even to extraordinary limits. “We must be careful who comes and joins the order. They must be willing to make sacrifices and strivings of the Lord. This is the method always been used to get knowledge form [*sic*] the lord. Moses spent 2 forty-day periods fasting and praying. Jesus spent 42 days striving.”⁷⁴ In her work on diet in American Christianity, R. Marie Griffith argues that devotion is a “religious experience with limits,” with the limits intended to strengthen one’s connection with both a religious community and the divine. As Robert Orsi notes in his work on women’s devotion to the patron of impossible causes, painful situations bring individuals to the brink of their physical capacity and sometimes beyond.⁷⁵ While Orlean did not document her own forty-two-day striving period, she received insight into a thirty-four-day fast, during which time the “spirit of the Lord is very close to me [*sic*].”⁷⁶ In addition to the spiritual strength she received from her weakened body, she also documented several fasts and the subsequent health benefits.⁷⁷

Over time, a 42-day period of striving (i.e., fasting and prayer) became a practice of the righteous in the DCCS. While not commonly done by everyone, it was believed that the practice would “prove your

73. Jan. 30, 1946, Orlean History, 133.

74. Nov. 1, 1934, Orlean History, 17.

75. See Robert Orsi, *Thank You, St. Jude: Women’s Devotion to the Patron Saint of Hopeless Causes* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1996).

76. Jan. 30, 1946, Orlean History, 134. As her diaries stated before, Orlean specifically noted her improved eyesight from the fasting.

77. Jan. 30, 1946, Orlean History, 134.

devotion," as one former member noted.⁷⁸ He explained, "My maternal grandmother started manifesting MS in her early 30's and she'd do it [an extended fast] every few years. She's mid-eighties now. She credits the fasts and diets."⁷⁹ Through the extended fasts, the body of believers, both literal and metaphorical, became the location where membership in the community solidified. At the same time, their harsh bodily discipline became the foil by which they understood themselves in opposition to the LDS Church. "We used to mock them for their one-day fasts. Their one day fast is only 24 hours, at most. We'd eat regular dinner the night before, at around 7. Then nothing that night or the next day and then the following morning we'd wake up and break it with water, frozen pineapple juice, and later a small salad with vinegar and broth. BEST MEAL EVER!"⁸⁰ In health practices, as elsewhere, the fundamentalist movement has defined itself in relation to the movement they separated from after the end of polygamy.

The outline for correct fasting practice used by contemporary members of the DCCS credited priesthood leaders with the creation of the practice, "Brother Ortell usually planned going 42 days. However some of the time he went longer and a few times he had to shorten it because he didn't have the strength to continue. Most of the time, I went 42 days. Twice I went on a four week program. This was one week dry, one week with water, two weeks on grape juice and then 30 days (at least) on raw."⁸¹ Today, the forty-two-day fast includes one week with no food or water, two weeks with just water, and three weeks with grape juice. Following the fast, the individual spends ten days carefully breaking the fast with raw food. In a supplementary document on the

78. Jeremy, interview with author, Feb. 3, 2022. The idea that the fast is not for everyone was confirmed by a current member of the DCCS who explained that he had not completed a forty-two-day fast.

79. Jeremy, interview with author, Feb. 3, 2022

80. Jeremy, interview with author, Feb. 3, 2022

81. "Information on Fasting," N.p. N.d., 1. Photocopy in author's possession.

importance of fasting circulated within the community, the author explains, “Before you fast you must be sure that it is done under the direction of the Lord. By doing this, you will have His protection and help during the fast.”⁸² The fast is not without risk and warrants caution even for the most devout believer.

In addition to crediting Ortell’s leadership with the forty-two-day fast, the DCCS’s instruction for fasting highlighted the experience of priesthood leaders who used the fast for various purposes and received varying degrees of spiritual and physical benefit for their sacrifice. In “Information on Fasting,” instructions for the practice cited Elden, who “talked about fasting in the first of the Order.”⁸³ The overview also mentioned Ortell, who “paid a big price for all the secrets of knowledge he received. But because we haven’t had to go through the same trial and error studies and sicknesses and pain he has gone through we haven’t always appreciated this knowledge like we should.”⁸⁴ At certain times in his life, he fasted “just to keep alive.”⁸⁵ Notably absent from the DCCS’s document on the origin of the fast was Orlean and the rigorous experimentation she conducted with her own body for the spiritual benefit of the community despite the fact that remnants of Orlean’s practices remain part of DCCS practice. This includes her regulation on salt and sweeteners.

The DCCS was not alone in using rigorous fasts in the mid-twentieth century. When the DCCS fast developed, long-term food abstinence was becoming increasingly common, especially among men. R. Marie Griffith writes that between 1890 and 1930, during the Progressive Era, the people most associated with fasting were men, who

82. “Information on Fasting.”

83. “Outline Talk #3 on #8 Fasting and Self Healing,” N.p. N.d., 2. Photocopy in author’s possession.

84. “Outline Talk #3 on #8 Fasting and Self Healing.”

85. “Outline Talk #3 on #8 Fasting and Self Healing.”

framed fasting as demonstrating virility and success.⁸⁶ This period is distinct from older periods, where devotional food practices occupied a more prominent role for women.⁸⁷ The gendered aspect of the DCCS fast was significant for its lack of women's involvement and because it allowed practitioners to escape pathologizing. Because the forty-two-day fast in the DCCS became associated with men, it more easily moved beyond concern over disordered eating, which marks Orlean's memory among former members of the DCCS. Much like the fasters of the Progressive Era, who "ate plentifully when not fasting, refused food only at set intervals and for bounded durations, and carefully marked their behavior as masculine," DCCS men avoided clinical stigma.⁸⁸ This experience of Kingston men is contrary to Orlean's legacy, which is often riddled with concern over undiagnosed anorexia. The line Orlean drew between fasting for spiritual insight and "diet" blurred throughout Orlean's life, exacerbating the already present concern for her physical and mental health. For example, in 1940, she began referring to the fast as a "diet," even lamenting when she "failed":

December 26, 1940 Again I have failed to keep my diet

December 31 Again I have failed.

January 1, 1941 New Years Day. I'm fasting again this morning as I again feel sick because of disobedience.⁸⁹

The absence of Orlean in DCCS literature on fasting is further significant given the priesthood's continual worry about her fasting practices. Despite growing concern over her diet and the confusion it caused, she wrote to Elden to offer advice and insight she received through her dreams. On December 15, 1939, early into her fasts, Orlean spent the evening writing a letter to her brother about the dreams and

86. Griffith, *Born Again Bodies*, 112.

87. Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*.

88. Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 113.

89. Dec. 26, 1940–Jan. 1, 1941, Orlean History, 105.

visions that informed her choice to avoid cooked foods and only eat food in its “natural state.”⁹⁰ Based on her dream, she revealed, “In Moses’ time I [the Lord] commanded my people to eat Manna. In Nephi’s time; to eat meat. During the Millennium, I will give them all the good things of the earth, meat, manna, fruit, vegetables, etc., but you must eat them as I *have made them*.”⁹¹ Given the group’s current dietary practices, it is likely that at least some of Elden’s spiritual insight on fasting and the Word of Wisdom came from Orlean. Her letter to Elden and litany of dreams associated with fasting complicate the gendered nature of revelation in Mormonism and the role of women in Progressive Era fasting practices.

The outcomes of the forty-two-day fast were not always positive. This remains the case among contemporary members of the DCCS. People who eventually left the DCCS recall Orlean’s later life and wonder if the fasts ultimately cut her life short. However, the adverse outcomes are seldom discussed, as with other spiritual practices that risk death. When they are discussed, they offer glimpses of harrowing displays of dangerous devotion. “They don’t talk about the failures,” explained a former DCCS member in an interview. “But, the success[es] are definitely faith promoting. I remember sitting in public school biology classes and being told that a human couldn’t survive more than 3 days without water. Imagine hearing that as a ‘true saint.’”⁹² By “failures,” this former member recalled a step-grandfather who “went delirious at the end and chewed his finger-tips off” or multiple members in recent years who died from the fast that sought to call upon God to alleviate the effects of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. He explained, “My paternal grandmother had leukemia and instead of sending her to the Dr, they had her do the 42 day fast. She died under 60 pounds and her flesh would tear if you touched her.”⁹³

90. Dec. 15, 1939, Orlean History, 83.

91. Dec. 15, 1939, Orlean History, 84.

92. Jeremy, interview with author, Feb. 3, 2022.

93. Jeremy, interview with author, Feb. 3, 2022.

Unlike hagiographic accounts of Orlean's life from the faithful, others recall Orlean as an anorexic woman who tragically sacrificed her life for the DCCS. These recollections are not wholly distinct from Orlean's imagining of herself. Early in her fasts, she dreamed that "someone said if you keep on eating like you are you will die as a sacrifice to the order (as Joseph Smith did)."⁹⁴ Thinking through Orlean's memory, a former community member recalled the illness that Orlean experienced after ending a "grape diet" too quickly. Orlean did not offer details about this diet. However, it bears similarities to *The Grape Cure*, a book originally published in 1927 that advocated for an alternative medical practice known as "grape therapy."⁹⁵ Despite the claim that the fast led to Orlean's early death, she maintained her staunch belief in the fasts and the revelations that taught her the importance of food abstinence and its spiritual benefit.

Orlean died in 1956 at the young age of forty-four. She dedicated her life to fasting from "that which is not perfect for that which is perfect."⁹⁶ Although Orlean's leaders questioned her fasts, she retained her belief in a more perfect Word of Wisdom until the end. Members of the group remember Orlean as a great Saint who strove to attain latter-day perfection in both body and soul. But, more than a mere memory, Orlean's legacy survives in her many relatives who retain parts of her dietary practice, including abstinence from "unnatural" foods and long fasts. Through relatives who became prominent members of the group, her revelatory practices became common.

Conclusion

Orlean Harriet Kingston Gustafson's diary entries are primarily about food. However, a deeper look reveals an account of women in Mormon fundamentalist doctrinal development. Her daily documentation

94. Dec. 14, 1939, Orlean History, 84

95. See Joanna Brandt, *The Grape Cure* (self-published, 1925).

96. Feb. 3, 1946, Orlean History, 135.

of dreams and visions centered her own body in making religion. Although she did not hold a leadership position in the DCCS or have access to institutional authority, Orlean's dreams and visions had a lasting impact on the devotional practices of the community. While largely invisible from the historical record outside of faithful conversations, her revelations developed a complete Word of Wisdom that offered the community insight on the importance of a fasting body to attain physical and spiritual nourishment. Inspired by her own bodily experimentation, Orlean became convinced of the intimate connection between physical health and spiritual life. Her example influenced, confused, and worried her coreligionists and leaders, who seemed unable to comprehend her devotion. Nevertheless, her legacy remains in many DCCS families who use her dreams and revelation to guide their contemporary health practices.

Like women mystics and visionaries before her, Orlean's revelations came at the cost of her health. Her short life sheds light on the nature of health practices in religion, further illuminating the pathologizing divide along the lines of gender. Had Orlean been a man, she would likely have been listed in the DCCS devotional literature for fasting, with less speculation on possible anorexia. She might have also been a prophet. For this reason, the revelations that mark her life raise questions about women's authority in hierarchical religions. Orlean was the first in the community to receive revelation on foods such as salt, honey, and milk, foods avoided by some members of the DCCS. Guided by the spirit, she wrote to her brother, the founder and named leader of the DCCS, and encouraged a dietary system for the community's spiritual and physical health. Much of these insights still guide DCCS families. Through her daily recollections, Orlean portrayed an experience of Mormonism where personal revelation can supersede male leadership, and where bodily practice develops around a woman's embodied religious life.

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“MY INDIGNATION HAS GOT THE
BETTER OF MY INTENTION”:
A CASE STUDY IN LATTER-DAY
SAINT AND “GENTILE” FEMALE
FAMILY CORRESPONDENCE IN
NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICA

Bonnie Young

Although members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints shared many values with their Christian neighbors, the differences between Mormons and non-Mormons during the nineteenth century were enough to estrange even beloved family members. Peculiar Mormon practices intensified divisions between the Saints and Americans at large, especially practices such as their loyalty to prophet-leaders and plural marriage arrangements, as well as the intimidating political bloc that the Saints created. By the time they established a western mountain theocracy under Brigham Young, Mormons and their community were seen as foreign bodies so much that, in the popular imagination, they were distinguishable not only by alien practices but physical appearance.¹ For many Americans, Mormons were so wholly “other” that connecting deeply, or even casually, with them felt

1. W. Paul Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color: Race and the Mormon Struggle for Whiteness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 20; Lester E. Bush, “A Peculiar People: ‘The Physiological Aspects of Mormonism 1850–1975,’” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 12, no. 3 (1979): 61–83.

challenging and uncomfortable.² This paper will examine these dynamics through the correspondence of Martha Telle Cannon, a Mormon, and her “Gentile” half sisters, Sarah Telle King and Tabitha Telle Sykes.

In the late nineteenth century, after years of silence, Sarah and Tabitha reconnected with Martha. The circumstances of their initial estrangement fit into the Mormon-versus-American narrative in many ways: when Martha chose to marry into polygamy in 1868, her half sisters cut off all correspondence. In her half sisters’ eyes, Martha’s decision to commit to plural marriage disqualified her from a relationship with them. Yet deeper examination of both their estrangement and reconciliation illuminates important details that challenge the notion that people reject Mormons solely on religious grounds. The letters of Martha Telle Cannon and her half sisters introduce a more nuanced view of Mormon and non-Mormon relationships. They reveal both historical and personal forces that motivated the sisters to maintain a distance from Martha, then later to reach out in reconciliation. As their correspondence shows, important personal factors, including emotional pain and trauma, may have been as relevant as the cultural elements that divided and reunited the sisters.

While scholarship on Mormon women (especially polygamous Mormon women) in the nineteenth century abounds, few works exist that directly address how Mormon and non-Mormon family members navigated their relationships with each other. Several biographies of Mormon women demonstrate these dynamics in part yet lack specific focus on what believing and unbelieving family members felt and how they treated each other.³ Numerous works examine Americans’

2. Mrs. Benjamin G. Ferris [Elizabeth Cornelia Ferris], *The Mormons at Home: With Some Incidents of Travel from Missouri to California, 1852–3. In a Series of Letters* (Dix & Edwards, 1856).

3. Paula Kelly Harline, *The Polygamous Wives Writing Club: From the Diaries of Mormon Pioneer Women* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A House Full of Females: Plural Marriage and Women’s*

disgust at Mormons' violation of Victorian sexuality mores and the threat to American familial norms, yet to date, none adopt the specific interrelational lens that this study offers.⁴ While studies of anti-Mormonism have yet to include specific interfamilial perspectives, they are valuable to this particular study as they capture the climate in which non-Mormon and Mormon women addressed each other. Further, the letters between Martha, Sarah, and Tabitha Telle have never been examined by scholars. Only a few family historians—likely Martha's curious, white-haired descendants—have commented on the sisters' correspondence. The main focus of their commentary is the genealogy that the letters discussed.⁵ Analyzing private letters that the sisters never intended to be read publicly not only opens the door to the little-known world of feminine relationships between Mormon and non-Mormon kin but also enables us to understand the historical and emotional realities that motivated familial division and reconciliation.⁶

Rights in Early Mormonism, 1835–1870 (New York: Vintage, 2017); Annie Clark Tanner, *A Mormon Mother: An Autobiography* (1976); Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, *Eliza and Her Sisters* (Salt Lake City: Aspen Books, 1991).

4. Sarah Barringer Gordon, *The Mormon Question: Polygamy and Constitutional Conflict in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 30; Mary K. Campbell, "Mr. Peay's Horses: The Federal Response to Mormon Polygamy, 1854–1887," *Yale JL & Feminism* 13 (2001): 29; James L. Clayton, "The Supreme Court, Polygamy and the Enforcement of Morals in Nineteenth Century America: An Analysis of Reynolds v. United States," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 12, no. 4 (1979): 46–61.

5. Julie Cannon Markham, "The Telle Book," *Julie and Ben's Genealogy Page* (blog), <https://bsmarkham.com/julie/tellebook.html>.

6. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth-Century America," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 1, no. 1 (1975): 3.

Martha, Sarah, and Tabitha: The Telle Family

Sarah and Tabitha Telle were born to Josiah Lewis Telle and Tabitha Oakley in 1828 and 1837, respectively. After Tabitha Oakley died of malaria in Nauvoo in 1840, Josiah married Amelia Rogers. Five years later, Amelia gave birth to Martha. Thus, Sarah and Tabitha Telle are Martha's older half sisters. There were brothers as well, but they remained estranged from the three sisters' bond. In 1847, Josiah accidentally shot and killed Amelia,⁷ and the Telle family split apart. After the tragic death of her mother, eighteen-month-old Martha was adopted by her aunt and uncle Hester and George Beebe, who lived in Iowa. At this point, Martha began to be estranged from the rest of her family. Martha's aunt and uncle were devout Latter-day Saints, yet, despite their commitment to their faith, they did not follow the body of Latter-day Saints in their western exodus to Utah. Martha remained with her adopted parents in Iowa through her adolescence, pursuing an education and planning to eventually join the Saints in Utah. Although specific dates and details are not known, Sarah and Tabitha eventually traveled to New York to live with extended family and remained in New York through their adult years. These two sisters, although likely exposed to an early form of Mormonism, were never baptized or formally associated with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day

7. Julie Cannon Markham, "Biography of Martha Telle Cannon," *Julie and Ben's Genealogy Page* (blog), Nov. 2020, <https://bsmarkham.com/julie/Martha%20Telle/marthatelle.html>.

According to family records, Josiah kept a gun under his pillow at night in the case of intruders. One hot evening, Amelia left the house to get some fresh air while Josiah continued to sleep. As Amelia returned back into the house, Josiah mistook her for an intruder and opened fire. Amelia did not die immediately and was taken to the house of Emma Smith Bidamon to rest and heal. She eventually died from the wounds.

Saints. It is probable that they belonged to another Christian church. Despite the physical distance between Sarah, Tabitha, and Martha, letters indicate that they stayed in communication throughout Martha's childhood and adolescence.⁸

After graduating from the University of Iowa in 1865, Martha moved to Utah alone and began teaching. She was intent on being independent and planned on opening her own school. She was also determined to marry into polygamy. During a trip to Utah six years earlier, she learned that plural marriages were sanctioned by Church leaders and witnessed aspects of polygamy that were attractive to her.⁹ Martha's letters show multiple reasons for why polygamy appealed to her, such as believing that the practice was divinely appointed and that becoming a plural wife would ensure her and her children rewards in the afterlife. Further, it was not uncommon for women arriving to Utah alone to marry into polygamous families—surely the prospect of marrying into a prominent, established family was attractive to a young transplant seeking protection and stability. She also could have been drawn to the advantages of communal living, especially as she had no family in Utah and would be able to depend on an instant extended network of "aunts" and half siblings for her children. So when George Q. Cannon, one of the most prominent LDS men in Utah, proposed to Martha in February of 1868, she accepted without hesitation. On March 16, 1868, at age twenty-two, Martha married George Q. Cannon, age

8. George Cannon to Sarah Telle King, Mar. 29, 1880, George Q. Cannon correspondence, Brigham Young University Special Collections, MSS 7426, 3, 1-18-49.

9. Julie Cannon Markham, "Biography of Martha Telle Cannon."

forty-one, becoming his fourth wife and entering into a warm kinship with his three other wives.¹⁰

Upon hearing about Martha's polygamous marriage to George Q. Cannon in or around March of 1868, her half sisters ended communication with her. The reason behind the abrupt cutoff was no mystery to Martha—in fact, she might have anticipated losing the support of her family in this way. But even anticipation could not dull the pain of losing the ties of beloved kin: the loss of these relationships cut her deeply and became the “chief cause of [her] sorrow” during adulthood.¹¹ As Martha's children grew, she felt the isolation from her family more intensely and longed for more information about her ancestors—for her own comfort and to pass on to her children.¹² So, in 1880, when Martha's oldest half sister, Sarah, wrote to George at his post as a congressional delegate in Washington, DC, asking to be connected with Martha once more, George “promptly and kindly” responded to Sarah and gave her Martha's address.¹³ On March 29, 1880, after a

10. Relationships between sister wives are commonly assumed as being contentious. From surviving documents and firsthand accounts from the Cannon family, the relationships between Martha and her sister wives are described as warm and communal. Surely there were episodes and seasons of difficulty between them; however, such events were never recorded, even in accounts from all of Martha's children, who were not hesitant to criticize other aspects of polygamy. Out of all of George's wives, Martha seems to have been the most outspoken and strong-willed. Even then, we have no record of her complaining about her other sister wives. Her only recorded complaints related to her relationship with George.

11. George Cannon to Sarah Telle King, Mar. 29, 1880, George Q. Cannon correspondence, Brigham Young University Special Collections, MSS 7426, 3, 1-18-49.

12. George Cannon to Sarah Telle King, Mar. 29, 1880, George Q. Cannon correspondence, Brigham Young University Special Collections, MSS 7426, 3, 1-18-49.

13. Sarah Telle King to Martha Telle Cannon, Mar. 31, 1880, George Q. Cannon family correspondence, Brigham Young University Special Collections, MSS 7426, 2, 1-15-43.

long silence between the sisters, Sarah wrote to Martha, requesting information about their estranged brothers, who were scattered across the Midwest and had infrequent contact with the sisters. Sarah's curiosity about Martha's life also emerged in her letter. She wanted to know what had become of her younger sister since moving to Utah and marrying into polygamy and requested that Martha share about her life "under such peculiar institutions and circumstances."¹⁴ On April 12, 1880, Martha responded to Sarah's letter. Addressing Sarah as "My Dear Sister," Martha expressed her delight at hearing from her, relayed news of their brothers, requested more information about their ancestors, and expressed her desire for their continued correspondence.¹⁵

Although only parts of Martha's April 12 letter survive, the contents of the missing pages are somewhat revealed by Sarah's reply to Martha on April 19. In addition to thanking Martha for the information about their wandering brothers and providing the genealogy of their father's family that Martha had requested, Sarah's response not only requested that in future correspondence Martha avoid "any allusion to the 'beauties' of the Mormon Faith" but also included a string of attacks on Martha's religion, character, and family.¹⁶ For example, in response to Martha's reference to biblical polygamy, Sarah rebutted that "old Jews and Arabs of ancient times" were not "very brilliant examples of either decency or respectability."¹⁷ Surely, the implied jab at Mormon

14. Sarah Telle King to Martha Telle Cannon, Mar. 31, 1880, George Q. Cannon family correspondence, Brigham Young University Special Collections, MSS 7426, 2, 1-15-43.

15. Martha Telle Cannon to Sarah Telle King, Apr. 12, 1880, Personal Collection of Espey Telle Cannon.

16. Sarah Telle King to Martha Telle Cannon, Apr. 19, 1880, George Q. Cannon family correspondence, Brigham Young University Special Collections, MSS 7426, 2, 1-16-44.

17. Sarah Telle King to Martha Telle Cannon, Apr. 19, 1880, George Q. Cannon family correspondence, Brigham Young University Special Collections, MSS 7426, 2, 1-16-44.

morality was not lost on Martha. Sarah insinuated that all motivations for polygamy were carnal and questioned the equality of Mormon women.¹⁸ Then, in a strike even more personal than her previous ones, Sarah took a stab at Martha's family life, asking what kind of familial relationships could thrive when a father (or in this case, Martha's husband, George) was "divided up into half a dozen households." She asked, "Where does he reside? And which particular dinner table is blessed with his paternal presence?" Then, snidely, she asked, "If he is sick, which wife takes care of him? Or do they take turns?" At the close of her attack, she asked Martha for forgiveness, adding that her "indignation . . . got the better of [her] intention." (We must ask what Sarah's true intention was, as she could have started her letter over or omitted her attack.) Nevertheless, her letter replanted seeds of division and distance between the sisters. Perhaps to Sarah, Martha's description on April 12 of her "peculiar circumstances" bordered on evangelism, and she felt the need to retaliate.¹⁹ Like many Mormon women in the nineteenth century, Martha believed wholeheartedly in polygamy, and her loyalty and conviction likely emerged in her letter. Whether out of defense against Martha's testimony or more personal motivations, Sarah felt the need to censure Martha's ideas and practices.

When Martha sent no reply to the April 19 letter, Sarah sent another to her in June of 1880.²⁰ Although this letter is not available in the archive, we can assume that it was an effort to reconcile with her sister. Despite Sarah's endeavors to connect with Martha, two years passed before Martha responded to Sarah, and although she blamed babies

18. Sarah Telle King to Martha Telle Cannon, Apr. 19, 1880, George Q. Cannon family correspondence, Brigham Young University Special Collections, MSS 7426, 2, 1-16-44.

19. George Cannon to Sarah Telle King, Mar. 29, 1880, George Q. Cannon correspondence, Brigham Young University Special Collections, MSS 7426, 3, 1-18-49.

20. Martha Telle Cannon to Sarah Telle King, Feb. 26, 1882, Personal Collection of Espey Telle Cannon.

and housework for her delay, her emotional pain was likely the main motivation. Martha confessed that she "read and reread [Sarah's letters from April and June of 1880] a number of times," and that doing so caused her "sorrowful feelings."²¹ Martha expressed gratitude for the genealogical information Sarah shared but could not agree with Sarah's interpretation of the tragic events concerning their father, Josiah Telle. In Sarah's narrative, she held the Mormons accountable for their father's misfortunes. In response, Martha argued,

That [father] was ever wrongly treated in any respect whatsoever [by the Church], I am quite ready to dispute. We know that those who enter our church are not forced to do so, and if they accept our principles in the spirit in which they are given they can see the true beauties of "Mormonism," and will never feel like withdrawing from the Church. There is where I and my father are unlike.²²

Although Martha was not present (or even alive) for many of her father's tribulations among the Mormons, she could not tolerate the idea that the Church or its people could have done anything to wrong him. Her loyalty to the Church was absolute. Admitting fault on the part of the Church that she was so devoted to would have been disorienting and faith-shaking. So, Martha sided with her faith over her family. Martha's disposition to defend her Church combined with Sarah's unbridled disgust at Martha's lifestyle created conditions inconducive to reconciliation.

Historical Context

Sarah's abhorrence at Martha's religion and lifestyle was not unique in nineteenth-century America. Attitudes toward Mormons were harsh during this time, especially because of polygamy's direct opposition to

21. Martha Telle Cannon to Sarah Telle King, Feb. 26, 1882, Personal Collection of Espey Telle Cannon.

22. Martha Telle Cannon to Sarah Telle King, Feb. 26, 1882, Personal Collection of Espey Telle Cannon.

Victorian sexuality and the American social order. In an 1882 address given in the Broadway Church in Norwich, Connecticut, Reverend L. T. Chamberlain claimed that the sins of polygamy outweighed the combined immorality of the whole nation outside the Utah Territory. According to Chamberlain, even Americans' "utmost offence against chastity and marriage [were] nothing when put beside it."²³ Chamberlain's claims were understandable based on the information he likely had received about polygamy; easterners' ideas about Mormon polygamy were in large part informed by the exaggerated accounts of "Gentile" travelers more interested in "titillating audiences back home than in accurately portraying plural marriage."²⁴ Rumors spread rampantly via newspapers and other mediums, and the juicier the stories, the better. During the late nineteenth century, almost one hundred novels and several hundred newspaper and magazine articles about polygamy—including the first Sherlock Holmes story, *A Study in Scarlet*—were published, laying the foundation for antipolygamy fiction over the next half century. These works painted vivid pictures of the barbarous marital practices of Mormons: tales of "blushing brides" whose virgin hopes were destroyed by their husband's "self-indulgence under the mantle of religious difference" made "thrilling and disturbing reading."²⁵ Sarah would have been familiar with such tales of oppression and abuse and likely felt intrigued and disgusted at those stories.

Polygamy gave American women like Sarah the rare opportunity to talk about sex. The combination of the sexually repressed society and a culturally sanctioned reason to discuss sex created an unprecedented space for conversation around these issues.²⁶ This

23. L. T. Chamberlain, *Mormonism and Polygamy* (published privately, 1882), 11.

24. Richard S. Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy: A History* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002), 82.

25. Barringer Gordon, *The Mormon Question*, 30.

26. Charles A. Cannon, "The Awesome Power of Sex: The Polemical Campaign against Mormon Polygamy," *Pacific Historical Review* 43, no.1 (1974): 61–82.

newfound opportunity is apparent in Sarah's letters to Martha. Sarah's initial questions about the peculiar "institutions" and "circumstances" of Martha's family arrangements did not explicitly address sexuality, and she probably assumed that Martha would not share any intimate details of her marriage with her. However, in learning about Martha's "circumstances," Sarah knew that she would be able to fill in some blanks about Martha and George's sexual relationship. Sarah's response in her second letter about polygamous husbands' familial rotations—especially her comments regarding "sharing households" and "taking turns"—alludes to her interest in and disgust at the polygamous sex that occurred among Mormons. Her response fits into a broader trend of Americans using polygamy to both religiously other and racially other Mormons, as W. Paul Reeve describes in his research.²⁷ Because of their "barbaric" marital arrangements, Mormons often occupied a space in the American consciousness akin to "Mohammadans" or "Turks."²⁸ Sarah's initial inquiry, followed by disgust and disavowal, match the paradoxical nature of Americans' fascination with and revulsion to Mormon family arrangements.

While some American women may have appreciated the opportunity to talk openly about sex, the general consensus among Americans was still that sexual impulse was "alien and disruptive" and that the powers of sex were best employed when repressed.²⁹ According to William Alcott in *Physiology of Marriage*, "One incident of sexual indulgence per lunar month" was all that the "best health of the parties could possibly require."³⁰ Americans believed that the most dangerous of all man's desires was his sexual drive, and they feared that "any relaxation of sexual standards would lead to a complete breakdown

27. Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color*.

28. Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color*, 221–22.

29. Cannon, "The Awesome Power of Sex."

30. William A. Alcott, *The Physiology of Marriage* (Boston: Joseph P. Jewett, 1855), 118.

of the civilized order.”³¹ Because polygamy allowed for men to indulge their desires in an “abnormal way,” such men would be “consumed by unrestrained sensuality” and become “completely alienated from morality and virtue.”³² Polygamy also brought to light Mormonism’s tepid embrace of women’s sexuality. The prevailing belief in New England during the mid-nineteenth century was that women lacked carnal motivation and that their “passionlessness” gave them moral superiority.³³ Sarah must have felt disturbed at the thought that Martha’s husband was having sexual relations frequently with more than one wife and that Martha was a willing participant in these illicit relations. By the nature of Sarah’s attacking questions, she appears hyper-focused on this aspect of Martha’s life rather than viewing her sister in any other context or role. It is noteworthy that Sarah does not mention Martha’s children or motherly duties that were so frequently the topic of letters between female kin during this time. Rather, for Sarah, Martha’s conjugal arrangements eclipsed the rest of her life. Sarah was unable to see her sister as anything besides an oppressed religious zealot, stripped of agency and trapped in exciting yet immoral circumstances.

Martha, of course, viewed her sexual circumstances differently than most Americans assumed them to be. While Mormon women were conspicuously silent on the details of their sexual lives, they were outspoken defenders of chastity and sexual agency. As Laurel Thatcher Ulrich points out, some practiced—“even if they did not yet preach”—forms of “sex radicalism,” the idea that a woman should choose her sexual partners and when she would have sex with them.³⁴ To those who declared Mormon plural wives as harem-dwelling

31. Cannon, “The Awesome Power of Sex.”

32. Cannon, “The Awesome Power of Sex.”

33. Nancy Cott, “Passionlessness: An Interpretation of Victorian Sexual Ideology, 1790–1850,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 4, no. 2 (1978): 219–36.

34. Thatcher Ulrich, *A House Full of Females*, xiv.

victims "dominated by lascivious males with hyperactive libidos,"³⁵ Martha may have defended her sexual agency and virtue. Chastity was "strenuously inculcated" in Latter-day Saints, and the Church "most indignantly repudiated . . . all idea of sensuality as the motive of [polygamous] unions."³⁶ Interestingly, Mormons during this time generally thought of sexuality as much a part of one's potentiality as was charity or benevolence.³⁷ Orson Pratt, an original member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles,³⁸ taught that God was the author of sexual love, and that sexual love would exist in the afterlife.³⁹ Parley Pratt, another member of the Quorum of the Twelve, explained that the marital act was not solely for the purpose of procreation but "also for mutual affection, cultivation of [Godlike attributes], and for mutual comfort and assistance in this world of toil and sorrow."⁴⁰ Not all Mormons were able to translate such ideas about sexuality so comfortably into polygamous arrangements. Many individuals within the Church initially found polygamy repulsive and struggled to accept that such arrangements could be divinely sanctioned. However, by the late nineteenth century, polygamy became such a central tenet of Mormonism that members believed that one could not achieve the highest level of heaven without marrying polygamously.

In addition to challenging American sexual norms, polygamy also posed a threat to women's social roles and responsibilities. In

35. Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy*, 82.

36. Howard Stansbury, *Exploration and Survey of the Valley of the Great Salt Lake of Utah, Including a Reconnaissance of a New Route Through the Rocky Mountains* (Philadelphia, 1852), 137.

37. Cannon, "The Awesome Power of Sex."

38. Joseph Smith organized a Quorum of the Twelve Apostles after the manner of Jesus' original quorum. This organization continued under the leadership of Brigham Young and exists today.

39. Orson Pratt, *The Seer* (1852), 155–58.

40. Parley Parker Pratt, *Key to the Science of Theology* (Liverpool: F.D. Richards, 1855), 173.

nineteenth-century America, women were expected to help maintain “domestick purity” and support what “remain[ed] of religion in [their] private habits and publick institutions.”⁴¹ Women carried the call to raise the standard of character in men and to guard against the dangers of “impudence and licentiousness” for all people.⁴² This identity and calling gave American women power in public and private spaces. Religious identity empowered women to assert themselves by enabling them to call on an authority beyond the world of men.⁴³ So while women remained somewhat powerless in the political sphere during the nineteenth century, their religious influence gave them a strong, consistent voice. American women like Sarah believed that polygamy jeopardized this hard-earned power, for where women lost virtue, they also lost their voice. But Sarah’s motivations seemed to extend beyond values and power: through Sarah’s letters, we see that she possessed even more personal reasons for her strong feelings against her sister and the LDS Church.

Indignation: Personal Context

In many ways, Sarah’s life was shaped by misfortunes she labeled to be at the hands of the Latter-day Saints. By sharing her father’s history, which Martha had requested, she revealed her own traumatic relationship with the Church: Sarah’s letter described how after her parents, Josiah Telle and Tabitha Oakley, “fell in with the Mormons,” they were swindled out of all their savings by Church leaders, including “Jo Smith and his apostles, . . . Jos Smith himself borrowing a thousand dollars which he was never able to repay, if indeed he ever meant to, which is doubtful.” Upon arriving penniless to Nauvoo, Sarah’s family were among those

41. Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: “Woman’s Sphere” in New England, 1780–1835* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1997), 148.

42. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood*, 148.

43. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood*, 148.

who became ill with malaria, and Sarah's mother and her younger brother Lewis, only a baby, died "for want of proper care, which . . . was impossible to obtain, as everyone around [them] was sick and destitute." Sarah was only twelve when her mother and brother became sick, and as the oldest child and daughter, she likely felt an immense responsibility to care for them as their health faded. She also must have been devastated to lose her mother at such a young age. Following the death of his wife and son, Josiah returned to New York and "disposed of his [living] children among their mother's relatives." Following this, Josiah returned to Nauvoo, where he would die poor and alone. As Sarah finished the account of her father's life, she concluded:

Of course, it is impossible, in the brief and imperfect sketch I have made, to convey to you a thousandth part of the misfortunes which follows upon my father's conversion to the Mormons. The death of my mother, the loss of property, the alienation of my father, the separation of brothers and sisters who have grown old strangers to each other. The sickness, suffering, and misery all attributable to that cause. Can you wonder that I have no respect or even tolerance for the doctrines propagated by Jos Smith and his successors?⁴⁴

Sarah's personal loss at the hands of the Latter-day Saints was tremendous. Enduring the excruciating pain of losing both parents within a matter of years, followed by moving to Iowa to join distant family members at the significant age of twelve, would have created intense emotional trauma for young Sarah. Sarah was willing to reach out in correspondence with her sister, yet her deep emotional injuries blinded her from seeing her sister separately from the people and institution that had robbed her of so much. Sarah's rejection of Mormonism, and by extension her sister, was born from an amalgamation of moral and personal outrage.

44. Sarah Telle King to Martha Telle Cannon, Apr. 19, 1880, George Q. Cannon family correspondence, Brigham Young University Special Collections, MSS 7426, 2, 1-16-44.

Reconciliation: "My Heart Has Been True to You"

Like Sarah, Tabitha cut off correspondence with Martha after hearing about her polygamous marriage to George in 1868. Tabitha may have been outraged by the men who sanctioned such marital arrangements or felt confused as to why her own sister would degrade herself to such a position. She may have even hoped that the abrupt loss of familial support would dissuade her younger sister from marrying into polygamy. Whatever her motivations for cutting contact, the silence between the sisters lasted twenty-five years, extending nine years after Sarah's death in 1884. We don't know when Martha wrote to Tabitha to break the long silence, but by Tabitha's response, we know that Martha initiated the reconciliation. The purpose of Martha's letter, at least in part, was to get information about her paternal grandparents. Finally, in 1893, at age fifty-six, Tabitha sent a response to Martha, who was then forty-seven years old. Softened by time and regret, Tabitha was ready to reconnect with Martha.

Tabitha's response included the genealogical information that Martha requested, yet the majority of her letter addressed the sisters' broken relationship. Tabitha's desire to reconnect with her sister was more powerful than her disdain for Martha's lifestyle, and she paved the way to reopen their relationship. Tabitha began her letter with a humble plea for forgiveness for "the unkind and unsisterly manner in which [she] closed [their] correspondence" and confessed that for twenty-five years, her mistake weighed heavily upon her conscience. During that time, Tabitha "resolved times without number" to write and ask for forgiveness for that "thoughtless, inconsiderate, impulsive act of [her] youth."⁴⁵ Then, in detail, Tabitha described how much and often she thought of Martha during the polygamy trials of the 1880s, when George went into hiding and Martha and her children sought refuge in

45. Tabitha Sykes to Martha Telle Cannon, June 27, 1893, Personal Collection of Julie Markham.

Colorado to escape the federal prosecutors. Tabitha related that during this time, her heart was "full to overflowing with anxiety and sympathy" for her sister.⁴⁶ While it is impossible to know how much Tabitha knew about Martha's specific situation during the polygamy trials and raids, her "anxiety and sympathy" imply a certain level of understanding of the suffering her sister endured. Surely, even Tabitha's delayed empathy helped to mend Martha's wounds and draw the sisters closer together.

Tabitha's daughter, Anna (Annie) Marion Sykes, also began writing to Martha upon the sisters' reconciliation. Annie's letters to Martha were genuine and kind. For example, after the death of Martha's husband in 1901, Annie wrote,

I have been through so much trouble in the last few years in the illness and death of both father and mother, that I know how to sympathize in sorrow of this kind, for I know well what the heartache is. . . . In this [loss] you surely have and always will have, the comfort of looking back to your husband as a man to be proud of, whose life was one long success, and an honor to himself and all who belonged to him. I am not one to whom a difference in faith is of vital importance. It is the *life* I look at. And for Mr. Cannon, and his active and honorable career, I have always felt the greatest respect. I wish I might have met him.⁴⁷

One might assume that these were simply words of comfort made for a time of grieving. However, tenderness and respect are shown by both Annie and her mother before George's death throughout letters sent in 1893, 1896, 1900, and 1901. Further, the letters from Tabitha and Annie to Martha included multiple warm invitations to come and visit.⁴⁸ In 1896, Annie even extended an invitation to Mr. Cannon and Martha's

46. Tabitha Sykes to Martha Telle Cannon, June 27, 1893, Personal Collection of Julie Markham.

47. Annie Sykes to Martha Telle Cannon, Apr. 21, 1901, Personal Collection of Julie Markham.

48. Tabitha Sykes to Martha Telle Cannon, June 27, 1893, Personal Collection of Julie Markham.

children who were traveling in her “part of the world.”⁴⁹ Invitations for visits were quite common between kin during this era, not only between families in proximity but also families separated by more significant distances. But sincere invitations to those with such differences speaks to something greater than common practice.

On January 4, 1893, six months before Tabitha wrote her first letter to Martha, President Benjamin Harrison issued a proclamation that pardoned those living in polygamy on the condition that they abstain from unlawful cohabitation from then on. This move, combined with the LDS Church’s 1890 Manifesto announcing the end of polygamy, may have softened Tabitha’s and Annie’s feelings toward Martha. It may have felt easier to connect with Martha knowing that she would be leaving polygamy behind. Yet Tabitha and Annie were not ignorant of Martha’s continued marital status or arrangements. They mentioned Martha’s husband various times, expressed their high opinion of him,⁵⁰ and requested that Martha send a picture of herself and George.⁵¹ Warm communication between Annie and Martha continued even after George stated in an 1899 interview with the *New York Herald* that new plural marriages might be performed in Canada and Mexico.⁵² Tabitha was not alive to learn those details (she died in 1895), but Annie was likely aware of this interview with her prominent uncle. For many outside the Church, the 1890 Manifesto succeeded in showing that Mormonism had “honestly and forever” put its “greatest evil” away.⁵³

49. Annie Sykes to Martha Telle Cannon, Sept. 30, 1896, Personal Collection of Julie Markham.

50. Tabitha Sykes to Martha Telle Cannon, June 27, 1893, Personal Collection of Julie Markham.

51. Tabitha Sykes to Martha Telle Cannon, July 18, 1893, Personal Collection of Julie Markham.

52. Eugene Young, “Polygamy Is Reviving,” *New York Herald*, Feb. 5, 1899.

53. B. Carmon Hardy, *Solemn Covenant: The Mormon Polygamous Passage* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 153.

Yet as partial insiders with front-row seats to the actual events after the manifesto, Tabitha and Annie knew otherwise: George did not abandon Martha, and they continued to be married and live together. Still, their love and empathy flowed freely for Martha and her family.

Tabitha's and Annie's attitudes toward Martha and her religion seem to be much less mainstream than Sarah's, but closer examination reveals many positive interpersonal relationships that Mormons had with non-Mormon Americans. In an 1872 letter to Martha, George expressed that since arriving in Washington as a congressional delegate, he had been treated "with greater kindness and consideration than [he] could have expected."⁵⁴ George's treatment is especially noteworthy considering the political tension and moral outrage directed at Mormons during this time. Similarly, Elizabeth Wood Kane, wife of colonel and Mormon ally Thomas Kane, wrote her impressions of Mormons on an 1874 trip to southern Utah, where they visited for several months. Her account was less fantastical than others from the time, and she expressed admiration for Mormons' orderly lifestyle and religious devotion.⁵⁵ Although she felt that polygamy was unjust toward women, she held compassion for polygamous wives and argued that Congress should forbid further polygamous marriages but "legalize those that already existed."⁵⁶ In addition, Elizabeth Wells Randall Cumming, the wife of Utah's first "Gentile" governor, expressed understanding and warm feelings toward polygamists. As she wrote home to her sisters, she explained how her husband "lik[ed] some of the Mormons" and admired "their courage,

54. George Q. Cannon to Martha Telle Cannon, Apr. 18, 1872, George Q. and Martha Telle Cannon correspondence, 1872–1891, Brigham Young University Special Collections, MSS 7426, 1/2, 1-1.

55. Elizabeth Wood Kane, *Twelve Mormon Homes Visited in Succession on a Journey through Utah to Arizona* (Philadelphia, 1874), 10–18.

56. Wood Kane, *Twelve Mormon Homes*, 119.

intellect, [and] admirable horsemanship.”⁵⁷ Elizabeth also praised Mormons for their clean lifestyles and religious devotion. Not all she wrote about Mormons was flattering, but it is noteworthy that she was able to simultaneously acknowledge the negative and positive about a people who were perceived by most as barbaric. Those who had close associations with Mormons and could see that polygamy was not exactly the scandal that easterners made it out to be often expressed less harsh sentiments toward them.

Perhaps like Elizabeth Kane, Elizabeth Cumming, and George’s associates in Washington, DC, Tabitha and Annie were more exposed to the realities of polygamy than Sarah. They seem to have seen through (or simply compartmentalized) the sensationalism that dominated stories about Mormon women and polygamy and honored Martha’s humanity. Historian Spencer Fluhman argues that where Mormons have found acceptance, it has been through non-Mormon Americans’ ability to imagine them “apart from their religion.”⁵⁸ This hypothesis certainly applies to Tabitha, Annie, and Martha; Tabitha and Annie never mentioned Martha’s religion specifically (except to express tolerance for religious differences), and we have no evidence to assume that Martha described polygamy to them as she did to Sarah.⁵⁹ Rather, the majority of their communication centered around their relationship rather than Martha’s beliefs or opinions. Martha found acceptance not only through her family’s ability to imagine her apart from her religion

57. Elizabeth Wells Cumming to Anne Eliza Cumming, May 28, 1858, Alfred Cumming papers, University of Utah, MS 0630, 1-1.

58. J. Spencer Fluhman, *“A Peculiar People”: Anti-Mormonism and the Making of Religion in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 144.

59. This silence on Martha’s part may have been motivated by her exchanges with Sarah years earlier, which proved to be religiously adversarial. Martha may have intentionally omitted details about her religion to avoid the contention that erupted between her and Sarah.

but also through their ability to empathize with her suffering *because* of her religion.

Martha's loss of communication with her sisters as a young bride and continued loneliness, her oppression at the hands of the US government during the polygamy trials and raids of the 1880s, and the loss of her polygamous husband at such a young age (George was twenty years her senior) were all direct results of her being Mormon. The suffering caused by these events drew Tabitha and Annie toward her; Martha's pain humanized her. In contrast, Sarah's own emotional trauma blinded her to Martha's plight. She was unable to imagine Martha apart from the religion that took so much from her. These different interactions may in part be due to the disparity in Sarah's and Tabitha's childhood experiences. Compared to Sarah, Tabitha may have suffered much less (or remembered less) at the hands of the Mormons. Sarah was twelve when her mother and infant brother died of malaria in Nauvoo; Tabitha was only three. When their stepmother passed and they were sent to live with relatives, Sarah was nineteen; Tabitha was ten. Tabitha's age may have protected her from the relational and psychological scars created by their father's involvement with the Latter-day Saints.

An analysis of these sisters' letters reveals both the power of American prejudice and the bonds of female kinship. Sarah's view of her half sister remained congruent with typical sentiment toward Mormons in nineteenth-century America. Many of the prejudices apparent in her letters align directly with non-Mormon Americans' main arguments against Mormons. While Mormonism repulsed the majority of American society during the nineteenth century, Tabitha and Annie were able to feel compassion toward their family members who practiced polygamy, especially as they viewed their Mormon kin apart from their religion and empathized with their pain due to religious persecution. The sincere emotional ties between Mormon and non-Mormon family were strengthened by the power of empathy. Conversely, personal agendas (such as evangelizing from either side), personal trauma, and

popular views of Mormon immorality created grounds inconducive to connection. The relationships between Martha Telle Cannon and her half sisters provide historians with a fascinating case of both persecution against and compassion toward Latter-day Saint women in the nineteenth century. Their lives prove the damaging pervasiveness of cultural stigmas and intergenerational trauma and the connecting power of empathy.

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TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION:
REFLECTIONS ON THE FORTIETH
ANNIVERSARY OF THE LDS CHURCH'S
LIFTING THE PRIESTHOOD AND
TEMPLE RESTRICTIONS FOR BLACK
MORMONS OF AFRICAN DESCENT

Robert A. Rees

The Church has no power to do wrong with impunity any more than any individual.

—Brigham Young¹

America's history of racial inequality continues to haunt us. Many of the issues we face today are shadowed by an underlying narrative of racial difference and bias that compromise our progress. Our nation, now more than ever, is in desperate need of an era of truth and justice. We must first tell the truth about our past before we can overcome it.

—Equal Justice Initiative²

1. Brigham Young, "Interview with an Eastern Correspondent," *Salt Lake Herald Republican*, May 12, 1877, p. 3, available at <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s6rn4f2p/11686818>. It was also cited in the *Deseret News*, May 23, 1877, p. 2. The subject under discussion was the Mountain Meadows Massacre.

2. Equal Justice Initiative, *Segregation in America*, 2018, <https://eji.org/reports/segregation-in-america/>, emphasis added.

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Just as the Civil Rights Act of 1968 did not end racism in the United States, so the Church's Official Declaration ending the priesthood ban in 1978³ did not end racism in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, nor did its official statement "Race and the Church: All Are Alike Unto God" in 2012⁴ nor its 2013 Gospel Topics essay "Race and Priesthood."⁵ In spite of significant progress made over the decades, in substantial and disturbing ways racism is still a serious international, national, and regional problem. Like the poor, it seems to be always with us. According to a 2022 Gallup poll, the perception of "race relations by both white and Black Americans is at its lowest point in 20 years," with 57 percent of respondents saying such relations are "somewhat" or "very" bad. Furthermore, optimism about prospects for achieving racial harmony has significantly diminished among Black people. "Currently, there is a 20-point gap between Black adults (40%) and White adults (60%) that a solution to racial discord in U.S. society is possible. This is the largest gap recorded in Gallup's three-decade trend."⁶

Racism in Utah, which to some degree mirrors racism in the Church, reflects this trend. According to David Noyce, whose recent article in the *Salt Lake Tribune* encapsulated the history of race in

3. Doctrine and Covenants, Official Declaration 2, available at <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/dc-testament/od/2?lang=eng>.

4. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, "Race and the Church: All Are Alike Unto God," Newsroom, Feb. 29, 2012, <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/race-church>.

5. "Race and the Priesthood," Gospel Topics Essays, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics-essays/race-and-the-priesthood?lang=eng>.

6. Megan Brenan, "Ratings of Black–White Relations at New Low," Gallup, July 21, 2021, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/352457/ratings-black-white-relations-new-low.aspx>

Latter-day Saint history, “Today, the Utah-based faith trumpets that ‘all are alike unto God’ and has taken steps publicly in its policies, practices and preachings from the pulpit to call out the sin of racism. But the pains of prejudice persist to this day—in the church and the wider culture.”⁷ Such “pains of prejudice” are part of the long history of racial discrimination in the West, based on the deeply entrenched presumption of white supremacy, which means that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints emerged from a culture infected and afflicted by racism.

In large part as a consequence of such inherited Black prejudice that was then amplified under the leadership of Brigham Young, the Latter-day Saints—without revelation from above—conformed their theology to a general belief that Black people were inferior humans.⁸ The Saints developed a folk mythology based on the conviction that certain premortal spirits (those destined to inherit black bodies) were morally flawed because they were less valiant than others.⁹ This noxious fiction became deeply fixed within Mormon/Latter-day Saint consciousness and subconsciousness during the nineteenth century, continued into much of the twentieth century, and even now is still embedded in the hearts and minds of the majority of Latter-day Saints. A recent survey indicates that 61 percent of white and 70 percent of non-white Latter-day Saints believe that both the original policy instituted by Brigham

7. David Noyce, “In wake of volatile volleyball match, these stories shed light on race relations at BYU and in LDS Church,” Sept. 1, 2022, <https://www.sltrib.com/religion/2022/09/01/these-stories-will-help-you/>. See also, Laura Meckler, “Utah school district allowed ‘serious and widespread racial harassment,’ Justice Dept. finds,” *Washington Post*, Oct. 21, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2021/10/21/utah-school-racial-discrimination/>.

8. See Matthew L. Harris and Newell B. Bringhurst, “Brigham Young, the Beginning of Black Priesthood Denial, and Legalization of Slavery in Utah, 1844–1877,” chap. 3 in *The Mormon Church and Blacks: A Documentary History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015).

9. Harris and Bringhurst, chap. 3.

Young and its reversal in 1978 were the result of divine revelation to respective prophets.¹⁰

In the nineteenth century, the policy that originated with Brigham Young resulted not only in the withholding of ordinances and blessings from Black Latter-day Saints but also in justifying slavery and keeping Black people in emotional, social, political, and spiritual bondage. The extent of the dehumanization of Black people among Americans in general, including nineteenth-century Latter-day Saints, is seen in Brigham Young's statement, "You see some classes of the human family that are black, uncouth, uncomely, disagreeable and low in their habits, wild, and seemingly deprived of nearly all the blessings of the intelligence that is generally bestowed upon mankind."¹¹ Young's extremely racist views bore poisonous fruit in his theology, as seen in his pronouncement that interracial (i.e., Black–white) marriage was such an egregious affront to God that it could only be atoned for by shedding the offenders' and their children's blood:

And if any man mingles his seed with the seed of Cane [*sic*] the only way he Could get rid of it or have salvation would be to Come forward & have his head Cut off & spill his Blood upon the ground. It would also take the life of his Children.¹²

This shocking statement—reflecting the law of the land, which criminalized miscegenation well into the twentieth century¹³—

10. Jana Riess, "Forty years on, most US Mormons still believe the racist priesthood/temple ban was God's will," *Flunking Sainthood* (blog), <https://religionnews.com/2018/06/11/40-years-later-most-mormons-still-believe-the-racist-priesthood-temple-ban-was-gods-will/>.

11. Brigham Young, Oct. 9, 1859, *Journal of Discourses*, 7:290–91.

12. Brigham Young, Mar. 8, 1863, *Journal of Discourses*, 10:110.

13. Anti-miscegenation laws were first introduced in North America from the late seventeenth century onward by several of the thirteen colonies and, subsequently, by many US states and US territories and remained in force in many US states until 1967.

remained the belief of some Church leaders until at least the end of the nineteenth century. According to his journal entry, First Presidency member George Q. Cannon stated in an 1897 meeting of the Quorum of the Twelve:

President [John] Taylor had taught me when I was a boy in Nauvoo concerning this matter; he had received it from the Prophet Joseph, who said that a man bearing the Priesthood who should marry or associate with a negress, or one of that seed, if the penalty of the law were executed upon him, he and her and the offspring would be killed; that it was contrary to the law of God for men bearing the Priesthood to have association with that seed. In this case submitted to us a white man had married a woman with negro blood in her ignorantly; yet if he were to receive the Priesthood and still continue his association with his wife the offspring of the marriage might make a claim or claims that would interfere with the purposes of the Lord and His curse upon the seed of Cain.¹⁴

Such inhumane beliefs were in keeping with Taylor's contention that the Black race was created by God so that the spirits of Black people, who had given allegiance to Lucifer in the premortal world, could be visibly identified: "And after the flood we are told that the curse that had been pronounced upon Cain was continued through Ham's wife, as he had married a wife of that seed. And why did it pass through the flood? Because it was necessary that the Devil should have a representation upon the earth as well as God."¹⁵

The extent of the institutional unawareness of the existence, let alone the offensiveness, of such a sentiment is evidenced by its inclusion a little over a decade ago in a "Church Employee Gift Edition" of Taylor's writings, *The Gospel Kingdom: Selections from the Writings and*

14. The Journal of George Q. Cannon, Dec. 16, 1897, available at <https://www.churchhistorianspress.org/george-q-cannon/1890s/1897/12-1897?lang=eng>.

15. John Taylor, Aug. 28, 1881, *Journal of Discourses*, 22:304.

Discourses of John Taylor.¹⁶ Clearly, no one was checking. This might explain why in 2012, Brigham Young University religion professor Randy Bott did not foresee a rebuke when he told the *Washington Post* that “the denial of the priesthood to blacks on Earth—although not in the afterlife—protected them from the lowest rungs of hell reserved for people who abuse their priesthood powers.”¹⁷

The official response of the Church rejected Bott’s assertions in unambiguous language:

The positions attributed to BYU professor Randy Bott in a recent *Washington Post* article absolutely do not represent the teachings and doctrines of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. . . . The Church’s position is clear—we believe all people are God’s children and are equal in His eyes and in the Church. We do not tolerate racism in any form.¹⁸

The Church’s unequivocal rejection of Bott’s attempt to justify the priesthood ban as somehow protective and thus a kindness was followed by a clear-cut repudiation of the folk mythology on which Bott’s comments were based, obviating all such justifications:

It is not known precisely why, how, or when this restriction began in the Church but what is clear is that it ended decades ago. Some have

16. G. Homer Durham, comp., *The Gospel Kingdom: Selections from the Writings and Discourses of John Taylor* (Salt Lake City, 1990). An online listing for a used copy of this book is available at <https://picclick.com/The-Gospel-Kingdom-by-John-Taylor-LDS-401300050231.html>.

17. Jason Horowitz, “The Genesis of a Church’s Stand on Race,” *Washington Post*, Feb. 12, 2012, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/the-genesis-of-a-churchs-stand-on-race/2012/02/22/gIQAQZyFR_story.html.

18. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, “Church Statement Regarding ‘Washington Post’ Article on Race and the Church,” Newsroom, Feb. 29, 2012, <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/racial-remarks-in-washington-post-article>.

attempted to explain the reason for this restriction, but these attempts should be viewed as speculation and opinion, not doctrine.¹⁹

While Latter-day Saint historians may not know the precise date or the exact circumstance under which the teaching originated, what seems clear is that, reacting to reports of Black men taking white wives, in one instance polygamously, Brigham Young issued a decree that Blacks could not be ordained, even though Joseph Smith had approved such ordinations before his death. There is little question that Young's decision on priesthood ordination, as well as his prohibition against the endowment and temple sealing of Black members, was rooted in the belief that Latter-day Saints and other white people were pure, literal descendants of Abraham and that intermarrying with what was considered a less pure and less favored race would not only corrupt the purity of Abrahamic lineage but also, because many Americans believed that such interracial marriages produced sterile offspring,²⁰ impede the plan of salvation by preventing God's more favored pre-mortal spirits from coming into mortality.²¹ In the face of abundant evidence that the offspring of such interracial marriages did produce children, it is astonishing that such a myth was believed and that it persisted. Equally troubling was the widely held belief, including among Latter-day Saints, that one drop of African blood was enough to pollute a person and assign him or her to a lesser status than whites. A

19. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, "Church Statement Regarding 'Washington Post' Article on Race and the Church."

20. According to one source, "During the 1880s and '90s, . . . common belief held that mulattoes—the word comes from the Spanish for 'mule'—were genetically weakened hybrids that would sink into sterility and cease to exist within a generation or two; blacks generally would be eliminated before too long in the battle for survival of the fittest." James Kinney, "Miscegenation: The Long, Cruel History of Our Last Taboo," *Washington Post*, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/1986/02/23/miscegenation-the-long-cruel-history-of-our-last-taboo/9e285f6e-6edc-4ddb-ab6d-22cb8ab271a8/>.

21. Harris and Bringham, chap. 3.

number of states, including Utah, passed legislation enshrining this discriminatory distinction.²² Ironically, we now know through modern genetic studies that almost everyone of Middle Eastern and Southern European heritage has at least some trace of African DNA. In fact, a diverse array of Jewish populations can date their sub-Saharan African ancestry back roughly seventy-two generations, on average, accounting for 3 to 5 percent of their genetic makeup today.²³ Furthermore, according to genetic studies, some Black Africans in Zimbabwe are shown to be literal descendants of Jews who left Jerusalem and migrated to Africa two thousand years ago. Of significance to our discussion of the priesthood ban, their DNA reveals the “Cohen modal haplotype,” indicating they are paternal-line descendants of priesthood holders from the time of Aaron and Moses.²⁴

22. See F. James Davis, “Who Is Black?: One Nation’s Definition,” Frontline, PBS, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/jefferson/mixed/onedrop.html>. F. James Davis is a retired professor of sociology at Illinois State University. He is the author of numerous books, including *Who is Black? One Nation’s Definition* (1991), from which this PBS excerpt was taken.

23. Harvard Medical School, “Population genetics reveals shared ancestries: DNA links modern Europeans, Middle Easterners to Sub-Saharan Africans,” *ScienceDaily*, May 24, 2011, <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/05/110524153536.htm>. While the researchers detected no African genetic signatures in Northern European populations, they found a distinct presence of African ancestry in Southern European, Middle Eastern, and Jewish populations. Modern southern European groups can attribute about 1 to 3 percent of their genetic signature to African ancestry, with the intermingling of populations dating back fifty-five generations, on average—that is, to roughly 1,600 years ago. Middle Eastern groups have inherited about 4 to 15 percent, with the mixing of populations dating back roughly thirty-two generations.

24. In “Y Chromosomes Traveling South: the Cohen Modal Haplotype and the Origins of the Lemba—the ‘Black Jews of Southern Africa,’” Mark Thomas, Tudor Parfitt, et al. distinguish among the three groups of Jewish males: “Today, Jewish males can be divided into three castes: Cohanim (the paternally inherited priesthood), Leviim (non-Cohen members of the paternally defined priestly tribe of Levi), and Israelites (all non-Cohen and non-Levite Jews).” *The American Journal of Genetics* 66, no. 2 (2000):674–86.

As noted above, there is a direct correlation between racism in America and in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. As Paul Reeve says in his book *Religion of a Different Color: Race and the Mormon Struggle for Whiteness*, “In telling the Mormon racial story, one ultimately tells the American racial story.”²⁵ Black writer Richard Wright’s mid-century portrait of the white power structure of the American South was in most particulars a portrait of Utah during that period: “We cannot vote and the law is white. There are no black policemen or justices of the peace, black judges, black juries, black jailers, black mayors or black men anywhere in government.”²⁶ The law did not protect or defend Black citizens. According to the website of the new National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery, Alabama, there were 4,400 lynchings of Black people in the United States between 1877 and 1950,²⁷ including an innocent Black man in Price, Utah, in 1925,²⁸ which drew nearly one thousand spectators. In 1998, a “Day of Reconciliation” ceremony “to dedicate a headstone at the previously unmarked grave” of the Black coal miner was organized by Craddock Matthew Gilmour, one of those spectators. The headstone in the Price cemetery reads: “Robert Marshall, lynched June 28, 1925, a victim of intolerance. May God forgive.”²⁹

25. W. Paul Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color: Race and the Mormon Struggle for Whiteness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 3.

26. Quoted in Jon Meacham, “A Racist World, Described by Those Who Knew It,” *New York Times*, Aug. 22, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/22/books/a-racist-world-described-by-those-who-knew-it.html>.

27. Equal Justice Initiative, “Lynching in America: Confronting the Legacy of Racial Terror,” third edition, <https://lynchinginamerica.eji.org/report/>.

28. Marcos Ortiz, “The Justice Files: The Last Lynching in the West,” ABC4, Nov. 1, 2020, <https://www.abc4.com/news/justice-files/the-justice-files-the-last-lynching-in-the-west/>.

29. “Utah Town Remembers 1925 Lynching,” *Associated Press*, Apr. 4, 1998, <https://apnews.com/article/4730c24097e5beb3ab7992416c991bd4>.

Although things have improved since 1959 when the US Commission on Civil Rights reported that “the Negro is the minority citizen who experiences the most widespread inequality in Utah,”³⁰ conditions for Black people living in the state are still far from what they should be considering political and policy changes over the past half century. Citing the Church’s official essay “Race and Priesthood,” Black convert Janan Graham-Russell wrote in a 2016 article in *The Atlantic* that while the purpose of the document was to “repudiate the racism and racist folklore that had been used to explain the restriction in the past . . . the attitudes of white members, who make up the majority of the Church in the U.S., have not necessarily changed.”³¹

There is considerable documentary and anecdotal evidence to support such a charge. In fact, President Dallin Oaks acknowledged the persistence of racism among Latter-day Saints following the 1978 policy change. As he said at the fortieth anniversary celebration, “Changes in the hearts and practices of individual members did not come suddenly and universally. Some accepted the effects of the revelation immediately and gracefully. Some accepted them gradually. But some, in their personal lives, continued the attitudes of racism that have been painful to so many throughout the world, including the past 40 years.”³² Reflecting more optimistically on the 1978 change, Oaks also stated,

Institutionally, the Church reacted swiftly to the revelation on the priesthood. Ordinations and temple recommends came immediately.

30. As cited in Janan Graham-Russell, “Choosing to Stay in the Mormon Church Despite Its Racist Legacy,” *The Atlantic*, Aug. 28, 2016, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/08/black-and-mormon/497660/>.

31. Graham-Russell, “Choosing to Stay.”

32. Peggy Fletcher Stack, “‘Be One’ celebration thrills the audience with stories of trailblazing black Mormons and songs of rejoicing and reflection from Gladys Knight, multiracial choirs and others,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, June 1, 2018, <https://www.sltrib.com/religion/2018/06/02/be-one-celebration-thrills-the-audience-with-stories-of-trailblazing-black-mormons-and-songs-of-rejoicing-and-reflection-from-gladys-knight-multiracial-choirs-and-others/>.

The reasons that had been given to try to explain the prior restrictions on members of African ancestry—even those previously voiced by revered Church leaders—were promptly and publicly disavowed.³³

But that was not entirely the case. As Matthew Harris and Newell Bringhurst note in *The Mormon Church and Blacks: A Documentary History*, “The Mormon hierarchy lifted the ban in 1978, but persistent questions remained about the racist teachings related to the now abandoned practice.” Perhaps because leaders didn’t perceive the need, questions about lineage and premortal behavior “were not initially addressed by the First Presidency, let alone by the revelation itself.” A distressing result of this critical omission was that “Deseret Book—the LDS owned and operated bookstore—continued to print and sell books that contained anti-Black teachings by Joseph Fielding Smith, Bruce McConkie, and other authors.” Clearly, there was no committee assigned to expurgate or retire these texts. Was it hoped or expected that members would mentally do so? This was unlikely given that, as Harris and Bringhurst observe, “the church had failed to officially denounce such anti-Black teachings in church-sponsored venues, specifically General Conference, the *Ensign* magazine, or the *Church News*.”³⁴ It is worth noting that for such a profound change in Church policy there was scarcely a mention of it during the general conferences following the announcement.

Given the persistent racism in Latter-day Saint culture, one of the questions confronting us today is: what is the moral responsibility of the Church and individual Latter-day Saints to address the traumas, injustices, and inequities resulting from our past racism that relegated Black people to a lower intellectual, social, and spiritual status? One could argue that, to whatever extent possible, our religion imposes a

33. Dallin H. Oaks, “President Oaks Remarks at Worldwide Priesthood Celebration,” Newsroom, <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/president-oaks-remarks-worldwide-priesthood-celebration>.

34. Harris and Bringhurst, 118.

moral obligation for us to apologize for, repent of, and (if possible) make reparations for the ocean of pain and suffering we have caused our Black brothers and sisters. Instead, we have tended to diminish the magnitude and seriousness of our false teachings, obscure and distort the historical record, and excuse and justify why we failed to understand the true meaning of scripture. As Jana Riess so cogently put it, “The problem is that Mormons *want* to engage in a collective amnesia because to do otherwise would be to admit the truth: that Brigham Young made a colossal and tragic mistake.”³⁵

The persistence of the Church’s racial mythology is seen in the embarrassing disclosure in 2022 that Young Men general presidency member and BYU religion professor Brad Wilcox had been teaching Church youth that white people also suffered without the priesthood for over 1800 years and that Black people simply had to wait another 150 years beyond that, his intended message being that believers of all races should learn to trust in the Lord’s timing.³⁶ It is astonishing that anyone, let alone a Church leader and BYU professor, could make such an assertion given the contemporary awareness of the history of race relations in the Church, including the fact that Joseph Smith had ordained Black men to the priesthood in the 1830s.

What we seem reluctant to acknowledge is that the 1978, 2012, and 2013 statements by the Church amount to a condemnation of 160 years of false doctrine and practice, not a revelation of new truth. The teachings and practices that evolved after Brigham Young instituted a priesthood ban had no basis in past doctrine or new revelation. Yet the language surrounding the 1978 policy change did not convey this reality. As Lester Bush observed, “The First Presidency statement of 8 June 1978 announcing that ‘all worthy male members of the Church

35. Riess, “Forty years on,” emphasis in the original.

36. Peggy Fletcher Stack and Tamarra Kemsley, “LDS leader Brad Wilcox apologizes for remarks about Black members; BYU ‘deeply concerned,’” *Salt Lake Tribune*, Feb. 8, 2022, <https://www.sltrib.com/religion/2022/02/08/lds-leader-brad-wilcox/>.

may be ordained to the priesthood without regard for race or color' was very carefully worded, without reference to blacks, per se, and without reference to any past doctrine on the subject. . . . [A] revelatory experience was alluded to, the priesthood made available to all 'worthy males,' and the subject quietly but firmly declared dead."³⁷

Had the Church never instituted its prejudicial policy, had it fully and consistently embraced the Book of Mormon ethic—"all are like unto God . . . black and white" (2 Nephi 26:33)—and adopted doctrines and instituted practices that made no distinctions regarding African and non-African heritage, it is by no means inconceivable that the Church would have been at the vanguard of various racial equality movements in the United States and other nations. More significantly, many more Black Church members could have been spared the rejection, humiliation, and pain they suffered because of the policy and instead enjoyed the full blessings of the restored gospel—not only those related to priesthood and temples but to full fellowship.

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No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite.

—Nelson Mandela³⁸

Every soul has its South.

—Karl Keller³⁹

37. Lester Bush, "Writing 'Mormonism's Negro Doctrine: An Historical Overview' (1973): Context and Reflections," *Journal of Mormon History* 25, no. 1 (1999): 270.

38. "Long Walk to Freedom," in *Oxford Essential Quotations*, edited by Susan Ratcliffe (2017), <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780191843730.001.0001/q-oro-ed5-00007046>.

39. Karl Keller, "Every Soul Has Its South," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 1, no. 2 (1966): 72–79.

I grew up in a racist home, a racist community, and in a series of racist Latter-day Saint congregations. As a young man, I harbored deeply racist sentiments and attitudes toward Black people (as well as other racial minorities). I can remember clenching my fists on a street in Long Beach, California, when as a teenager I observed a Black man and white woman walking toward me holding hands. The N-word and other racial slurs were used frequently in my home and community. Further, I had been taught that Black people had been unvaliant in the premortal existence and were therefore unworthy to hold the priesthood or receive certain temple blessings. I was also taught that they were cursed with a dark skin to mark their lower status. I believed they were not as intelligent or as industrious as white people. As a student at BYU and as a young missionary in the 1950s, I made racist jokes about Black people that were readily tolerated. In addresses by General Authorities, I was taught that interracial marriage, especially between Black and white couples, was counter to the law of heaven as well as the law of the land. There is no question that such teachings affected my attitudes and behaviors toward Black people.

It wasn't until the late fifties when I went into the army following my mission and spent time in the Deep South that I began to recognize how the teachings of my church were part of a larger, deeper American racial reality. In the South, I witnessed racist language, attitudes, and behaviors that were both more overt and more disturbing than what I had previously encountered. Seeing segregated drinking fountains and other public facilities, witnessing segregated public transportation, and observing firsthand the discriminatory language and behavior of racial tyranny brought about a shock of recognition that initiated a change of both my heart and mind.

The scales of racial prejudice finally fell from my eyes during the civil rights movement when I was in graduate school. When I read about lynchings in the newspaper and saw Black people beaten on television, when I saw an increasing number of white allies becoming

involved in the struggle for Black justice and equality, I realized that this was an issue that concerned me. In literature courses I learned, to whatever extent was possible, about what it meant to be Black in America through reading Langston Hughes's poetry, Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, Richard Wright's *Native Son*, James Baldwin's *Notes of a Native Son*, Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, and other works by Black writers. It was also about this time that I read Karl Keller's 1966 *Dialogue* article, "Every Soul Has Its South"⁴⁰ and realized that my soul indeed had its South.

However, my full awakening in relation to race and the priesthood took place when, as editor of *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, my coeditors and I published Lester Bush Jr.'s landmark article, "Mormonism's Negro Doctrine: An Historical Overview."⁴¹ Accompanying his article submitted to the journal was a thick document, "Compilation on the Negro in Mormonism," which he later described as a "single-spaced anthology [that] totaled over a thousand items distilled into four hundred pages of historically sequenced source material."⁴² A model of careful, measured, and responsible scholarship, Bush's article laid bare the true history of the Church's teachings on race and priesthood. We now know that Bush's article was the beginning of the unraveling of the mythology that had sustained the Church's erroneous doctrine and practice relating to Black people of African descent for over a century. Bush's own account of what transpired before, during, and after the article's publication, "Writing 'Mormonism's Negro Doctrine: An Historical Overview' (1973): Context and Reflections," documents its discussion among some top Church leaders and its ultimate influence on President Spencer W. Kimball's 1978 decision

40. Keller, "Every Soul Has Its South."

41. Lester Bush Jr., "Mormonism's Negro Doctrine: An Historical Overview," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 8, no. 1 (1973): 11–68.

42. Bush, "Writing 'Mormonism's Negro Doctrine,'" 246.

to lift the ban, although Bush is careful not to make that influence definitive.⁴³

I clearly remember the day I heard the news of the Church's change in policy on the priesthood ordination of Black men and temple endowment and marriage for Black men and women. It was something my family and I prayed and worked for but were uncertain would ever happen in our lifetimes. The news came in a call from our friends David and Susan Egli, who had moved several years previously from our ward in West Los Angeles to Salt Lake City. My wife, Ruth, and I were at first incredulous and then jubilant. The long-awaited day had finally come and with it a profound sense of relief, especially knowing that not only our Black brothers and sisters but also non-Black members, including our own children, would no longer have to live with that particular shadow over their lives. What we didn't realize at the time was that that day need not have been either long *or* awaited, since Black people had always been entitled to the full blessings and privileges available to all God's children, as acknowledged by the Church decades later.⁴⁴

As welcome as it was, then, President Kimball's 1978 announcement of a policy change was not entirely satisfying because the justification for the practice was still firmly entrenched in Latter-day Saint folk doctrine and culture. Although relieved that the burden of denying ordination and full temple blessings had finally been lifted—literally

43. See Bush, "Writing 'Mormonism's Negro Doctrine,'" especially sections III and IV. See also, Edward L. Kimball, *Lengthen Your Stride: The Presidency of Spencer W. Kimball* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2005), 219–20. See chapters 20–24 for a detailed exposition of President Kimball's years-long search for enlightenment.

44. David O. McKay, who was troubled by the Church's practice, which he considered an inspired policy rather than a doctrine, "wrestled with the subject for years and years, making it a matter of intense prayer on many occasions." Gregory A. Prince and William Robert Wright, *David O. McKay and the Rise of Modern Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2005), 103. I have wondered why there is no recorded response to his petitions.

from our faithful Black brothers and sisters and emotionally from those of us who had suffered with them—we were still troubled knowing that many Saints harbored the conviction that the origin of the practice under Brigham Young had been as inspired as its cessation. It was not until the Church’s official statement in 2012 (some thirty-four years later) and its official acknowledgement that the practice had been wrong all along in the “Race and the Priesthood” essay in 2013 that we could finally begin putting the sad history of this unfortunate—and in many ways tragic—practice behind us.

In 2018, as we approached the fortieth anniversary celebration of the lifting of the priesthood ban, many Latter-day Saints hoped Church leaders would use the occasion to reiterate the candor of the 2012 and especially the 2013 documents and make a full and frank acknowledgement of and apology for the errors of its past teachings and the suffering they had caused. Instead, the celebration took place without mention of the dark racist history of the origin of the “doctrine” that preceded the change and, to a significant degree, followed it. Rather than acknowledging that the restrictions had no basis in Latter-day Saint scripture or revelation, leaders advised that members of the Church should emphasize the positive and look forward rather than backward, even though many considered that doing so would hinder progress because it omitted the important gospel principles of apologizing and asking forgiveness—actions the Church itself advises its members to take, beginning in their youth.⁴⁵

By not making a clear and decisive break from the past, those who spoke at the celebration gave the impression that such a past did not exist. For example, in speaking of his own wrestling with the doctrine in the 1960s, President Oaks admitted, “I studied the reasons then being given and could not feel confirmation of the truth of any of them.” By

45. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, “Learn to Apologize and Forgive,” <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/youth/activities/new/goal/learn-to-apologize-and-forgive?lang=eng>.

doing so, he echoed the sense so many of us had during that time that this practice was not of God. But then he added, “As part of my prayerful study, I learned that, in general, the Lord rarely gives reasons for the commandments and directions He gives to His servants.”⁴⁶ This comment seems to imply that Brigham Young’s teachings about race and the priesthood could be considered “commandments and directions” from the Lord. Thus, President Oaks gave the impression, intentionally or not, that somehow the Lord had either inspired, affirmed, or allowed what we now know to be not only erroneous but harmful and hurtful to his Black children—and to the Church as a whole.

Make no mistake: the First Presidency’s “Be One” celebration of the fortieth anniversary of the revelation on the priesthood was impressive and inspiring, and I was pleased to be there, especially to see Black Latter-day Saints express their joy and jubilation over the lifting of the ban—as well as their grief and sorrow at being denied blessings—in song, story, dance, and the spoken word. Nevertheless, I am proposing that more be done to reverse misconceptions that sustain ongoing racist attitudes. Since we know that temple and priesthood blessings were not taken away by God, wouldn’t it be more healing to state that truth, to acknowledge that in 1978 President Kimball was inspired to correct a man-made error that had stood for over a hundred years? In his address at the celebration, President Oaks declared, “Most in the church, including its senior leadership, have concentrated on the opportunities of the future rather than the disappointments of the past.”⁴⁷ As stated above, while focusing on the future is understandable, a successful future depends on coming to terms with the past as a Church and a people.

46. Church News Staff, “President Oaks’ Full Remarks from the LDS Church’s ‘Be One’ Celebration,” *Church News*, June 1, 2018, <https://www.thechurchnews.com/2018/6/2/23221509/president-oaks-full-remarks-from-the-lds-churchs-be-one-celebration>.

47. Church News Staff, “President Oaks’ Full Remarks.”

III

The practice of peace and reconciliation is one of the most vital and artistic of human actions.

—Thích Nhất Hạnh⁴⁸

We are Christians, disciples of Christ, yet when we allow the attitudes of the world to infiltrate our minds to the point of blindness about their existence, we limit our progress toward that which our Father expects us to become, and we enter into a sin that often has lasting consequences.

—Darius Gray⁴⁹

In his book *All Abraham's Children*, LDS sociologist and scholar Armand Mauss reports that at the turn of the twenty-first century, the Church considered but then backed away from making a formal institutional repudiation of past racist teachings and practices.⁵⁰ That repudiation has now been made in the “Race and the Priesthood” essay, but it will not be in full force until the body of the Church knows about it. Instead, “Race and the Priesthood” was tucked away among the Gospel Topic Essays published on the Church’s website in December 2013. It attempts to explain the context in which the original doctrine emerged, what led to the 1978 change, and what transpired following that change. It also seeks to draw a clear demarcation between the historical “realities” of previous centuries and the present “modern reality” of policies relating to non-discrimination and racial integration. The fact that many Latter-day Saints have not read the document and in fact do not know of its existence, much less its contents, seems related to the low-profile nature of its publication. As Tamu Smith, coauthor of *Diary of Two*

48. Arnold Kotler, ed., *Peace in Every Step: Mindfulness in Everyday Life* (New York: Bantam Books, 1991).

49. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, “Healing the Wounds of Racism,” *Gospel Living*, Apr. 5, 2018, <https://www.lds.org/blog/healing-the-wounds-of-racism?lang=eng>.

50. Armand L. Mauss, *All Abraham's Children: Changing Mormon Conceptions of Race and Lineage* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 248–50.

Mad Black Mormons,⁵¹ observed, “It was neither signed nor penned by the governing First Presidency, nor has it been mentioned, alluded to, or footnoted in speeches by LDS authorities at the faith’s semiannual General Conferences.”⁵² Indeed, this does seem strange for such a remarkably significant document, but it’s also lamentable—a missed opportunity to right a terrible wrong.

I believe the essay needs to be brought to center stage with an acknowledgement of the emotional as well as spiritual wounds suffered by Black Latter-day Saints, in addition to the harm done to those Saints who suffered institutional disapproval, censure, and punishment for challenging the Church and championing the cause of their Black brothers and sisters. Although not claiming revelation for the Church itself, these Latter-day Saints through rigorous study and earnest prayer had received answers that left them with the unsettling conclusion that their leaders were wrong. I also believe that making the essay more visible and emphasizing its message might help diminish racism in the contemporary Church, the persistence of which is not only sinful but surely has a deleterious impact on the Church’s mission—not only in the United States and Europe, but also, perhaps especially, in Africa, where, according to a 2018 article in the *Wall Street Journal*, the Church is likely to see significant growth.⁵³

While it seems possible that the Church considered its various attempts to address its racial policy and practice sufficient, the fact that historical mythology persists and racism continues in the Church and

51. Tamu Smith and Zandra Vranes, *Diary of Two Mad Black Mormons: Finding the Lord’s Lessons in Everyday Life* (Salt Lake City: Ensign Peak, 2014).

52. Quoted in Peggy Fletcher Stack, “This Mormon Sunday school teacher was dismissed for using church’s own race essay in lesson,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, May 10 2015, <https://archive.sltrib.com/article.php?id=2475803&itype=CMSID>.

53. John G. Turner, “Mormonism’s Global Future,” *Wall Street Journal*, Apr. 20, 2018, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/mormonisms-global-future-1524177760>.

in Mormon culture suggests that the persistence of racism presents an ongoing challenge for the Church.

So, if official statements in the news and essays on the Church's official website are proving ineffective, what more can we do? I suggest that nothing short of an official truth and reconciliation initiative by the Church, patterned perhaps to some extent after the campaign to end apartheid in South Africa, is likely to significantly diminish racism in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and Mormon culture, especially given its endurance in American society. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission established by the South African government to resolve issues related to racial conflict in that country produced remarkable results, especially in healing the wounds caused by apartheid in all its official and unofficial manifestations. In many ways, what happened in South Africa has had a transforming influence on that country and has spread its healing influence to other parts of the world where ethnic, racial, and religious conflict have destroyed communities and divided nations.

In his *No Future without Forgiveness*, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, chair of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, speaks of the courage and love that were necessary for the commission to do its work: "There is a movement, not easily discernible, at the heart of things to reverse the awful centrifugal force of alienation, brokenness, division, hostility and disharmony."⁵⁴ That movement, Tutu argues, requires both the seeking of forgiveness from those responsible for the wrong and the willingness of those who have been wronged to forgive. This movement worked in South Africa because, as Tutu writes, "Our leaders were ready . . . to say they were willing to walk the path of confession, forgiveness, and reconciliation with all the hazards that lay along the way. . . . It is crucial, when a relationship has been damaged or when a potential relationship has been made impossible, that the

54. Desmond Mpilo Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 265.

perpetrator should acknowledge the truth and be ready and willing to apologize.”⁵⁵

In reflecting on the nineteenth-century world during which the Church was organized, “Race and the Priesthood” speaks of a time when slavery was practiced and “racial distinctions and prejudice were not just common but customary among white Americans.” Failing to acknowledge that they were also common among Latter-day Saints and claiming that such “realities” are “unfamiliar and disturbing today” are simply the products of wishful thinking; as we all know, racial distinctions and prejudice remain an undeniable part of American and Latter-day Saint culture (as well as many other cultures). One thing seems clear: in relation to race, there is enormous resistance to progress on many levels and in many regions of the nation, including in the Mormon heartland.

Obviously, a truth and reconciliation initiative is more complicated when those needing to ask for forgiveness may not have been guilty of the transgressions themselves but may be the present-day representatives of those persons, policies, and institutions responsible for the wrongs. Nevertheless, it seems that they must take the risk of responsibility if true healing is ever to take place. As Archbishop Tutu has said, “True reconciliation exposes the awfulness, the abuse, the pain, the degradation, the truth. It could even sometimes make things worse. It is a risky undertaking, but in the end, it is worthwhile, because in the end dealing with the real situation helps to bring real healing. Spurious reconciliation can only bring spurious healing.”⁵⁶

There is considerable evidence that the Spirit of Christ is moving strongly today among both the leaders and the general membership of the Church regarding race, prompting a desire to extend love equally to all God’s family—past, present, and future. This growing

55. Tutu, *Forgiveness*, 269.

56. Tutu, *Forgiveness*, 271–72.

desire to heal and reconcile where we and our predecessors have done harm should inspire the official Church to give voice to this spirit of true reconciliation. There is no way to calculate the humiliation, the degradation, or the emotional, physical, and spiritual violence suffered by Black individuals within the Latter-day Saint community. It is important for the Church to acknowledge that no matter what it does, the evil perpetrated in the name of revelation and divine sanction cannot be erased nor can the festering harm of justifications invented to explain it. But it can be diminished and forgiven if the Church publicly takes full responsibility and sincerely and humbly asks for forgiveness.

I make such statements as someone who believes in continuing revelation and who has sustained ten prophets/presidents of the Church and hundreds of apostles in my lifetime, including all our current leaders. I raise this issue in part because the Church asks me to look inward and acknowledge if there are any unresolved matters in my own life that would prevent me from worthily entering the temple. And I do so because the New Testament teaches that I need to repent of past errors, seek forgiveness of any I have offended, and take responsibility for my actions. Can the Church ask less of itself?

The answer must clearly be no. As Brent Staples observes of racism in the United States, “The notion that the country might somehow move past this deeply complex, historically layered issue by assuming an attitude of ‘color blindness’ is naïve. The only real hope of doing that is to openly confront and talk about *the powerful, but submerged, forms of discrimination that have long since supplanted the undisguised version.*”⁵⁷ Eradicating what Staples correctly identifies as “powerful but submerged forms of discrimination” is precisely the challenge that faces Latter-day Saint leaders and members today.

57. Brent Staples, “The Racist Trope That Won’t Die,” *New York Times*, June 17, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/17/opinion/roseanne-racism-blacks-apes.html>, emphasis added.

It is significant that the Church has acknowledged the error of past pseudo-doctrines, policies, and practices in relation to Black members, and relevant that it places the genesis of such false teachings within the larger dominant culture. It is heartening to have the Church publicly denounce white supremacist attitudes, as was done following the 2017 “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville, Virginia: “White supremacist attitudes are morally wrong and sinful, and we condemn them. Church members who promote or pursue a ‘white culture’ or white supremacy agenda are not in harmony with the teachings of the Church.”⁵⁸ It is also helpful that the Church emphasizes such things as not having racially segregated congregations and its present nondiscriminatory posture toward minorities.

But there is one thing missing from such declarations and explanations: the answer to the question that we as a people have generally been disinclined to ask, namely, why, when Latter-day Saints believe in modern prophets and claim revelation on a variety of issues—both momentous and minor—there was apparently no revelation to Latter-day Saint prophets and apostles from 1852 to 2013 (a period of 161 years) countering and correcting teachings of which the Lord must have disapproved and that the Church now admits were erroneous? Although the racial priesthood and temple ban ended in 1978, the admission that its primary justifications were wrong didn’t come until 2013. It might seem unpolite and impolitic to ask this question, but it is imperative that we do so for the spiritual health of the Church and the wellbeing of its members.

One answer is that God, who is surely not a racist, *was* trying to tell us—leaders and followers alike—but we were not interested in

58. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, “Church Releases Statement Condemning White Supremacist Attitudes,” <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/church/news/church-releases-statement-condemning-white-supremacist-attitudes?lang=eng>.

or perhaps even capable of hearing the still small voice that prompts but does not coerce. But the next question quickly arises: Is a prophet capable of making mistakes in his prophetic calling? Could he believe he is inspired but actually be following his own inclinations? Is that not what we are saying Brigham Young did by establishing the priesthood and temple policy and subsequent prophets did in enforcing it? I admit that these are uncomfortable questions, but they are also essential to address if we are to move forward. In the Church we have a strong desire to revere leaders and reverence prophets, but we are not asked to surrender our responsibility to seek personal confirmation and inspiration. In fact, it was Brigham Young himself who said the Latter-day Saints should not take all he said as truth—only that which the Holy Ghost confirmed to their hearts and minds:

Some may say, “Brethren, you who lead the Church, we have all confidence in you, we are not in the least afraid but what everything will go right under your superintendence; all the business matters will be transacted right; and if brother Brigham is satisfied with it, I am.” I do not wish any Latter-day Saint in this world, nor in heaven, to be satisfied with anything I do, unless the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ, the spirit of revelation, makes them satisfied. I wish them to know for themselves and understand for themselves, for this would strengthen the faith that is within them. Suppose that the people were heedless, that they manifested no concern with regard to the things of the kingdom of God but threw the whole burden upon the leaders of the people, saying, “If the brethren who take charge of matters are satisfied, we are,” this is not pleasing in the sight of the Lord. Every man and woman in this kingdom ought to be satisfied with what we do, but they never should be satisfied without asking the Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, whether what we do is right.⁵⁹

We revere and sustain our leaders because they humbly seek the Spirit to reveal the truth to them on our behalf as a church—not

59. Brigham Young, Oct. 6, 1855, *Journal of Discourses*, 3:45.

because we believe they act infallibly. Presuming that this truth of prophetic fallibility might undermine members' confidence in divinely inspired leadership sells faithful members short. We worship no one but Christ through the Spirit of truth and love. Painfully aware of our own fallibility, we will continue to sustain, support, and love our leaders and offer them the same forgiveness we seek from the Lord and his church.

This seems to be what President Kimball had in mind when he addressed the Church just a year after his inspired 1978 change in the Church's teaching about race and priesthood:

Now, my brothers and sisters, it seems clear to me, indeed, this impression weighs upon me—that the Church is at a point in its growth and maturity when we are at last ready to move forward in a major way. Some decisions have been made and others pending, which will clear the way, organizationally. But the basic decisions needed for us to move forward, as a people, must be made by the individual members of the Church. The major strides which must be made by the Church will follow upon the major strides to be made by us as individuals. We have paused on some plateaus long enough. Let us resume our journey forward and upward.⁶⁰

IV

“Without truth there is no reconciliation.”

—Bryan Stevenson⁶¹

It might seem a bold and risky thing for the Church to be apologetic as well as clear and scrupulously honest regarding its history restricting

60. Spencer W. Kimball, “Let Us Move Forward and Upward,” Apr. 1979, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/1979/04/let-us-move-forward-and-upward?lang=eng>.

61. New York Encounter, “‘Without truth, there is no reconciliation’ | Bryan Stevenson | New York Encounter 2022,” YouTube video, 1:01:43, Feb. 23, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uJ9sZIKOcI4>.

Black members from receiving priesthood and temple blessings, but I don't see how, morally, it can do otherwise. Indeed, the members crave transparency and will welcome—even celebrate—leaders finally resolving this thorny historical, cultural, religious, and spiritual issue, one that has been a burden to bear for both the Church and its members. Were the Church to seek for truth and reconciliation with its Black members and with Black investigators who found the ban an impediment to their joining the Church, it would take a major step toward healing what is not yet fully healed in the hearts of all members—and won't be healed until it is faced. Prophets often must do things that reverse historical error, that expose false beliefs and go against the grain of society, to set their people on a more correct course. This, in turn, will free us as followers of Christ from those things in our past (and still manifest in our present) that inhibit the complete unfolding of the kingdom of God.

Let me defer here to Black convert and ward Relief Society president Bryndis Roberts:

Before joining the Church in January 2008, I struggled mightily with the fact that, before 1978, there was a ban on men of African descent having the priesthood and a ban on all persons of African descent participating in temple ordinances. In practical terms, this ban meant that all of the people who looked like me were relegated to a second-class form of Church membership. From the first time I learned of the priesthood/temple ban, I knew without a doubt that no part of the policy was from God. That knowledge made it possible for me to join the Church despite the ban's previous existence and the many hurtful statements Church leaders and members had made to justify it. Consequently, when the Church issued the *Race and the Priesthood* essay on December 13, 2013, as part of its series on Gospel Topics, that essay simply confirmed what I already knew—that racism was the only reason for the ban. Almost every religion has some history of racism. However, the history and sanctioned Church-wide practice of racism in the LDS Church lasted way too long. Moreover, the effort put into

justifying that history and practice left investigators and members of African descent feeling doubly wounded.⁶²

Roberts then itemizes five steps toward the goal of truth and reconciliation:

I commend the Church for issuing the Race and the Priesthood essay, but I do not believe it has done nearly enough to rid itself of the stain of exclusionary practices of the past. Here is what I wish the Church would do:

- Issue the Race and the Priesthood essay as a letter from the First Presidency, an Official Declaration, or a proclamation.
- Have that official document translated into all the languages that the Church uses to communicate with its worldwide membership.
- Read it at General Conference and make it clear that neither the ban nor the justifications for the ban came from God.
- Direct that it be read from the pulpit in every ward, branch, “cluster,” and mission in the world.
- Incorporate it into all levels of the Church’s curriculum and teachings.

By doing these things, I believe the Church will begin to make amends for the racism that permeated Mormon life in the past and the racist remnants that continue to haunt us in the present. Preaching the truth about racism out loud, from the pulpit—repeatedly if necessary—will hasten the day when there are no distinctions in the Church because of race.⁶³

62. Jana Riess, “African American Mormon convert: LDS Church needs to ‘make amends’ for past racism,” *Religion News*, Mar. 19, 2015, <https://religionnews.com/2015/03/19/african-american-mormon-convert-lds-church-needs-make-amends-past-racism/>. According to Riess, Roberts “calls on the Church to stop hiding its Gospel Topics statement under a bushel, and use it to take a bolder stand to rectify the racist sins of the past.”

63. Riess, “African American Mormon convert: LDS Church needs to ‘make amends’ for past racism.”

Jesus' entire life was devoted to truth and reconciliation. His entire mission was devoted to teaching the truth and calling us to follow him—as radical and uncomfortable as it might be for us to do so at times—in order that the entire human family might be reconciled to God. As his followers, we should be no less committed to a process that acknowledges the truth of our behavior—both as individuals and as members of a collective—and to do all we can to make amends for any harm we have done to others. Christ died on the cross to reconcile us to God; we should do all in our power to seek reconciliation with others whose lives have been damaged or diminished by our failure to fully live his gospel. Let us hope that in the next few years we can establish those conditions in our personal lives, in our congregations, in our Church, in our communities, in our nation, and in our world in which all are alike not only unto God but unto one another as well.

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Nicole Woodbury,
Deepening Thoughts, 2015,
mixed media, thread, 32" x 19"

KNOT THEORY

Aurora Golden-Appleton

A knot can be a beautiful thing. A knot can reveal truths about how the world works. Some people are so enraptured by knots, they dedicate their lives to studying them.

I'm devoting no energy to the mathematical grandeur of knots as I pull a brush through my bedraggled hair in quick strokes. There's not enough light to imagine much of anything at 4:00 a.m., when I awaken for work. My hair goes into a simple ponytail, and a stretchy headband holds everything in place. Any glimmer of aesthetic creativity is decisively stifled by the knowledge that I'll soon be donning a rather unfashionable N95 mask for thirteen hours.

I pull the front door closed, hit shuffle on today's Taylor Swift playlist, and wend a solitary two-mile sidewalk route to my hospital flush with the Wasatch Mountains. A novel virus emerged in a bustling port a world away two months before my seventeenth birthday, and now I'm here at 5:21 on a Saturday morning. Life comes at you fast.

A month ago, you were probably waking up to make breakfast for your three kids. Two weeks ago, you arrived here, with tubes galore snaking around your bed to pump medicines into your blood and blow oxygen into your flared nostrils. Last week, the doctor held your husband on the phone as your oxygen levels dropped lower and lower, a nurse silenced the alarm that's been ringing in her head for the last ten months, and they inserted a tube down your throat to help you breathe.

This essay reflects the author's authentic experience and recollection. Out of respect for patient privacy, identifying details about patients have been modified.

Today, a team of six of us crowded into your room, where you were lying face down on the plastic mattress, positioned to relieve the pressure on your inflamed lungs. We packed sheets onto your body before counting to three and moving fluidly to flip you to your back for a few hours of respite from “adult tummy time.”

The respiratory therapist hit “Three!” and that’s when we met. I didn’t want to, but I winced. Bloated and twisted—there’s still something so viscerally shocking to me about seeing the face of a really, really sick human being. Your face.

You have a team of world-class clinicians who will titrate your medicines and do the work for and in behalf of your lungs. And a family who will skip breakfast, lunch, and dinner today as a collective demonstration of their faith and love for you. What I am here to share with you is my time. My job right now is detangling deaconess, at one with the standard-issue plastic comb I grabbed from the supply room before suiting up and entering your world.

And so, a few weeks into your brutally long disease course, I find myself sitting on a stool at your bedside, talking to you as I comb through your tangled ICU crown. I start at the bottom and work upward in sections, wetting your hair with detangler and teasing apart knot after knot.

In mathematics, we talk about knots as a kind of closed loop, two ends married together and rendered inseparable. Unlike a tied shoelace, by definition, these knots can’t be undone.

But to be connected to other people so deeply that we can hold in our hands another’s life, or find our own destiny entangled in so many others’—this represents our deepest, most human vulnerability. As we ache for understanding, security, and stability in the midst of this global whirlwind, coworkers, leaders, and friends push back against the political: *God works in mysterious ways*. Viruses, too. But people? People are predictable, safe, separate. They tell themselves that. We tell ourselves that.

The virus made it here because the world is ineffably connected. You are lying in this bed because we forgot that it is. I meet you with my hands on your head, linking us in a narrative only I will ever write. In seeing you, I commit to restoring that connection.

The miracle that is subsequently enacted will not save your life, but as neat, damp waves of red hair take shape and fall down your shoulders, I can see the life in you.

A knot is described by its number of crossings, and where they occur.

In a different life, we never would have met. But in this one, every tangle I unravel draws our humanity closer.

The nurse slips silently and expertly around your bed, adjusting the drips we hope are keeping you comfortable. Together, we wash your body with warm wipes and drape you in a fresh gown. We exchange a knowing glance that holds as many layers as our protective garb.

I pour your now-smooth hair into a final ponytail. It's much like the one in the photo your family chooses for the obituary I'll read in a few weeks' time.

Some knots can't be undone. These are the most important kinds.

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Nicole Woodbury,
Wisdom, 2021,
mixed media, thread, 18" x 42"

THE QUEST FOR MUTUAL EMPATHY IN THE GOSPEL

Ben Bailey

Relational-cultural theory suggests that the primary source of suffering for most people is the experience of isolation and that healing occurs in growth-fostering connection.

—Judith V. Jordan

“For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ.”

—1 Corinthians 12:12

I have a question. Are you Mormon?

Coming from a therapy client, this question always has the potential to be full of meaning. What will it mean to this client if I disclose my religious affiliation? What assumptions will she make about me? How will this impact the relationship and her healing? My client is a religious minority; will she think I am trying to convert her?

I believe I offer a somewhat sheepish *Yes, I do belong to that faith*, hoping that somehow, I have expressed that my relationship with the Church will not prevent me from understanding and empathizing with her perspective of it. Then, I explore with the client the meaning behind her question. *Would you be willing to share with me the reason you are asking?*

Last time when we discussed your theory about how clients get better, you said that empathy is what you believe heals clients. Isn't that what your church believes about how Christ heals people? This insight catches me off guard. Not because I haven't thought about it; my training as a counseling psychologist at Brigham Young University challenged me

to consistently analyze how theories of psychotherapy either aligned with or contradicted gospel theology. I think I am surprised because my clients usually perceive my interventions to be based upon psychological theory rather than religious convictions.¹ Furthermore, the theory she is referring to has deep feminist roots. But now I am questioning myself. Am I evangelizing the gospel?² Of course, I am not going to try to convince my client that Christ is her Savior or that Joseph Smith saw Him as a teenage boy, but ultimately, I do believe that empathy is what will heal her and all of us. Furthermore, I believe that mutual empathy

1. There is a long-standing tension between psychotherapy and religion. I think this is due to some overlap between the two fields: sometimes psychotherapists have been referred to as secular priests. Furthermore, religion and spirituality have been maligned in psychotherapy since its beginning with Sigmund Freud considering belief in God to be an infantile illusion. Given this historical tension, I am used to religious clients approaching me with skepticism and fear that I will challenge their faith. However, it is also true that given the religious saturation of Utah, I am also used to clients who have perceived their treatment from more religiously zealous therapists as dogmatic and preachy. These clients are relieved that I am not suggesting that they will heal solely from more prayer or scripture study.

2. Some therapists may be appalled by the idea of therapy as a form of evangelism and still assume they can do therapy without instilling their own values in their clients. However, I think this form of thinking is antiquated in modernist ideas of objectivity. While I certainly honor and implement psychotherapy's ethic of self-determination, I believe it is impossible to not influence our clients' development. In my opinion, even theories that have the organizing value of client self-determination, like Rogerian-style therapy, still instill their values by what they choose to empathize with and indirectly teach the clients the individualistic notion that their most ideal self exists inside them. All this said, I am using the term "evangelize" here broadly and will concede that the term is loaded. Hopefully the process of therapy looks different from a one-sided lesson from an eighteen-year-old missionary, which only intends to convert the listener to the speaker's way of thinking. Instead, I believe our best hope for therapy is that both the therapist and client will be changed by their encounter with each other.

is what will heal the membership of the Church and help us progress to becoming a more Zion-like community.³

My client asked me this question because we had been discussing how I believe that clients get better through psychotherapy in our previous session. Psychology, especially psychotherapy, is as much a philosophy as it is a science, and this means that psychological opinions about how clients heal vary and sometimes flatly contradict each other. Like most therapists, I integrate many theories, but much of my theoretical ontology is largely found in relational-cultural theory (RCT). The roots of RCT can be found in Jean Baker Miller's work *Toward a New Psychology of Women*.⁴ One of the central claims of this book is that strengths typically associated with women, such as service to others, openness to vulnerability, and desire for affiliation with others, are not valued and sometimes even disparaged as unhealthy due to the patriarchal foundation of modern psychology. The book further claims that theories of psychotherapy erroneously prioritize independence and self-interest rather than interdependence and relationships. According to RCT, the progression toward psychological health is not from dependency to individuation but rather from dependency toward a more mature mutuality. We don't grow out of our need for relationships but rather into more mature relationships where differences can be met with empathy and understanding. Furthermore, it is in such relationships where deep meaning and deep joy meet.

I do think my client is right, that my socialization in the theology of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints makes RCT appeal to me. Culturally, my experience growing up in the Church was filled

3. This type of community is envisioned in Elder Dale G. Renlund's talk from general conference in October 2021. Dale G. Renlund, "The Peace of Christ Abolishes Enmity," Oct. 2021, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2021/10/43renlund?lang=eng>.

4. Jean Baker Miller, *Toward a New Psychology of Women* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1976).

with service to and affiliation with others. I recently had a friend who has stopped attending church tell me that she feels as though the people she encountered outside the Church were more selfish. She does not believe that they are inherently selfish, just that they haven't been raised in an institution where service for others is emphasized. While I haven't observed this myself, this insight reinforced for me some of the goodness of my upbringing and its focus on service and the value of affiliation.⁵ As far as vulnerability, while I was socialized in a hegemonic masculinity, I do think that in the Church there were at least some proper venues to express more vulnerable emotions, even if that was largely limited to the fast and testimony meeting pulpit and priesthood blessings.

While I do appreciate how the Church has functioned as a counterculture to my indoctrination to radical American individualism, I also believe that we as a church could grow by applying the principle of mutual empathy found in RCT. As psychologist Judith V. Jordan explains, mutual empathy is experienced relationally when both participants “know, and feel the responsiveness of the other person. Mutual empathy involves mutual impact, mutual care, and mutual responsiveness.”⁶ However, Jordan continues, mutual empathy should not be “misconstrued” as a vehicle for “harmonious and cozy relationships. Founder Jean Baker Miller argued strongly that ‘good conflict’ is necessary for change and growth, and she suggested that we undergo our most profound change and grow most deeply when we encounter difference and work on conflict or differences in connection.”⁷

5. This point was recently reiterated in President Nelson's talk given to the men in April 2021. Russell M. Nelson “What We Are Learning and Will Never Forget,” Apr. 2021, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2021/04/36nelson?lang=eng>.

6. Judith V. Jordan, *Relational-Cultural Therapy*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2018), 7.

7. Jordan, *Relational-Cultural Therapy*, 7.

In my own experience, mutual empathy is mutually discovered as we navigate the dance between expressing our own authenticity and having an empathic understanding of how this expression will impact the receiver. In a dialogue where both people are mindful of this tension and navigate this often difficult path together, both participants are impacted and changed by the other intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually. This encounter creates a closer and stronger relationship where both participants feel better understood themselves and more understanding of the other person. Both individuals experience mutual growth with more relational courage, deeper wisdom and less felt isolation.⁸

Three Cultural Barriers

I think we have several cultural barriers to mutual empathy in the Church, and while there may be more, I would like to discuss three of these below. I also would like to own that this is my experience of the Church and that others may have different experiences.

First, the certainty with which we as members of the Church hold to truth claims can inhibit our ability to consider other viewpoints.⁹ Fast and testimony meetings are filled with claims of belonging to

8. These types of conversations can be emotionally difficult, especially when both people feel passionately or are hurt by the other's actions. An analogy I heard at a psychotherapy conference and use often with the couples I work with is that of two soldiers at war. Both soldiers are injured in the middle of active gunfire but luckily have a jeep. The first soldier turns to the second and hollers, "You need to drive, I am injured." The second soldier excitedly replies, "No way, you must drive. I am injured worse." One of them needs to drive or they will both die. "Drive" in the case of therapy means to do the work of empathy by understanding both intellectually and emotionally why the other is hurting and then trying to make the necessary changes. And if both people are hurting, this often means taking turns driving.

9. Philip Barlow, "The Only True and Living Church?" *Faith Matters*, Apr. 12, 2020, <https://faithmatters.org/the-only-true-and-living-church/>.

God's "one and only true Church." In these testimonies, I often can hear a genuine love and gratitude for how the Church has dramatically improved the lives of some. However, I also understand how such unwavering certainty can isolate those who have doubts about these claims, and those who, perhaps in the spirit of the thirteenth article of faith, find new truth in other worldviews. On a personal level, I had a lot of shame about my doubts when I was growing up in the Church because there appeared to be only one way to be a faithful member. There was an expected trajectory, and the pinnacle was believing the Church's truth claims with certainty. This expectation meant that when I expressed my sincere feelings or thoughts, I was judged to be less developed spiritually and even sometimes judged to be "against God." My heartfelt concerns were either dismissed or, worse, derided. From my perception, the certainty of other members prevented them from empathizing with and understanding me.¹⁰ In contrast, mutual empathy requires that people be willing to learn from, and be changed by, the experience of another person. This type of empathy requires humility about our own position and a willingness to embody another's perspective and pain. Providentially, I have since met many other Latter-day Saints who could empathically hold my concerns and be changed by them, and this has allowed me to find more empathy for those who approach the Church with more certainty.¹¹

10. I would like to note here that I also could have had more empathy for these members. As I have grown older and gained more experience, I understand better the desire to defend a beloved institution, especially one that has profoundly blessed one's life. I also understand the personal pain one can feel when a beloved institution with which they deeply identify seems to be under attack, even if this attack is in actuality just another person expressing their pain.

11. These experiences that destigmatized my genuine doubts and questions have also strengthened my faith, making my faith more broad, deep, and flexible.

Second, in an effort to avoid “the spirit of contention,” we sometimes avoid the real unity that can only come through good conflict. Being a “happy people”¹² is a deep cultural identity for LDS people, and I admire the ability of members of the Church to focus on such fruits of the spirit as goodness and kindness. I also appreciate our desire to avoid contention. In the book of 3 Nephi, the Savior teaches that “he that hath the spirit of contention is not of me, but is of the devil, who is the father of contention, and he stirreth up the hearts of men to contend with anger, one with another.”¹³ In my experience, many LDS members interpret this to mean that all conflict is bad. Even further, some people may believe that any encounter that makes you feel uncomfortable means that the Spirit has left. Sadly, this can prevent people from more meaningful and fulfilling relationships as well as meaningful personal growth because they are never pushed outside their comfort zone. I believe that the deep growth Miller describes as coming through “encountering difference”¹⁴ is similar to the baptismal covenant to “mourn with those that mourn.”¹⁵ For me, this call means more than mourning events that we are comfortable mourning. If we are to take the baptismal covenant seriously and try to emulate the Savior, this means that we work to understand and have empathy for experiences different from our own, even the suffering of our enemies.

Third, we as Church members and leaders can be insufficiently aware of how power differentials impact genuine empathy. I appreciate the ability of members of the Church to obediently submit to divine authority, and I consistently see how following Church leaders allows for members to forfeit selfish desires for the greater good. However,

12. Gordon B. Hinckley, “Each a Better Person,” Oct. 2002, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2002/10/each-a-better-person?lang=eng>.

13. 3 Nephi 11:29.

14. Jordan, *Relational–Cultural Therapy*, 7.

15. Mosiah 18:9.

our respect for and obedience to authority sometimes means that we disregard the voices of our most marginalized members, and this disregard can lead to “unrighteous dominion.”¹⁶ From an RCT perspective, “unacknowledged privilege and the subtle or blatant use of power over others inevitably create[s] division, anger, disempowerment, depression, shame, and disconnection.”¹⁷ Furthermore, when conflict occurs between people in power and those not in power, “open engagement with difference is made problematic, as the dominant group moves expeditiously and often unconsciously to suppress conflict.”¹⁸ Sadly, I witness this type of power and unrighteous dominion sometimes used within the Church. I witness it when members use prophetic counsel or Church statements to silence other members’ sincere questions or different experiences. I witness it with “colorblind” responses when we as white, cisgender, and heterosexual members assert that our most important identity is as children of God so that we don’t have to really consider the different experiences of other children of God—people of color, LGBTQIA+ folx, and other marginalized individuals—or empathize with the trauma of racism, homophobia, and other isms. These kinds of responses erode empathy because they dismiss genuine concerns without doing the loving work to understand them. While focusing solely on our identity as children of God provides some important relatedness and connection, it does not allow for those disempowered within our community to have a voice. This in turn disempowers the whole membership of the Church, just as a body who would say to the feet or hands, “I have no need for thee.”¹⁹

16. Doctrine and Covenants 121:41–42.

17. Jordan, *Relational–Cultural Therapy*, 9.

18. Maureen Walker, “How Therapy Helps When the Culture Hurts.” *Women & Therapy* 31, nos. 2–4 (2008): 90.

19. 1 Corinthians 12:21.

We need all parts of the body of Christ, and all “are necessary.”²⁰ Again, God has said “if ye are not one, ye are not mine”—and such oneness can be neither complete nor authentic if it is purchased by suppressing, coercing, or ignoring part of the community.

My Hope of Mutual Empathy

I have hope for our church that we can work toward more mutual empathy. I hope that we as Church members can recognize that our perception of the truth is not invariably more valid than the perspectives of people who hold different opinions. I hope for a church where members of differing beliefs will engage with each other with mutual empathy and respect. Where we can approach a range of ideas with curiosity and openness. Where we can recognize that our truth is developing and welcome the refinement that comes from engaging others’ notions of truth. Where we can come to understand that the words of prophets and the Church president aren’t necessarily infallible. Where we will approach the prophet’s words charitably but also with personal honesty and integrity. Where we will value his wisdom and humanity but also our own. Where the Church realizes that, like each of us individually, it too has the freedom to repent and become better.²¹

I have hope that we as members of the Church can learn that sometimes empathy for others is painful. I hope for a church where “good conflict” is normalized as part of the growing process of becoming a more Zion-like people. Where members of the Church are frequently taught the difference between “good conflict” and contention. Where

20. 1 Corinthians 12:22.

21. The Lord Himself said as much, according to the Church’s founding prophet. From its very early days, the errors of vanity and unbelief—perhaps even a failure of empathy—had “brought the whole church under condemnation,” which “resteth upon the children of Zion, even all.” *Doctrine and Covenants* 84:54–58.

Sunday school is a place where different opinions can be expressed with less fear. Where we realize that uncomfortable emotions are often not a sign that the spirit has left but a part of the work of empathy and growth. Where we can authentically share, tempered with an anticipatory empathy about how it will impact others in the room, especially those marginalized in our community. Where we further temper our desire to share with “compassionate concern for others” and “bridle the passion to speak . . . contentiously for personal gain or glory.”²²

I have hope for a church where members and leaders with privilege and power will do the empathic work to understand those with less privilege and power. Where, as Blaire Ostler so concretely writes, we become more like Christ by empathically trying to “experience what it is like to be a queer kid who is constantly bullied . . ., the fear of every black mother who kissed her son before he left the house . . ., having our child taken away at the border due to ‘legal complications.’”²³ Where we take seriously the Savior’s charge that we will find Him when we serve those regarded by the community as “the least.”²⁴ Where we as a religious body consistently lead out on this type of empathy and share with others our experiences of doing this type of work.²⁵ Where we members and leaders clearly understand “that ignorance, allied with power, is the most ferocious enemy justice can have”²⁶ and consistently

22. Russell M. Nelson “The Canker of Contention.” Apr. 1989, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/1989/04/the-canker-of-contention?lang=eng>.

23. Blaire Ostler, *Queer Mormon Theology: An Introduction* (Newburgh, Ind.: By Common Consent Press, 2021), 45.

24. Matthew 25:40. It has been one of the greatest joys of my profession to serve and gain empathy for those marginalized by society. I experience the love of God more frequently in this type of work.

25. Perhaps a good example of this is President Nelson’s recent work and partnership with the NAACP.

26. James Baldwin, *No Name in the Street* (New York: Vintage Books, 1972).

invite people from marginalized populations to speak to the general membership. Where we open ourselves up to be impacted and changed by the pain but also the resilience and gifts of those marginalized by our community. Where “power” is only ever “maintained by . . . persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned . . . kindness, and pure knowledge.”²⁷

I have hope for these changes because I consistently find people in the Church with this same vision. I am grateful for so many people in the Church who are doing the sometimes painful but always rewarding work of mutual empathy. I am grateful for a stake president who took me under his wing after my mission. Who listened to all my anxious doubts with a compassionate smile and affirmed that I was a part of the body of Christ. That I belonged. I am grateful for several mentors like him who have listened to and empathized with my questions and pain. I have hope because I am currently trying to do this work myself and know it is good work. For me, this experience of mutual empathy is messy and awkward. Perhaps in one respect I resemble Joseph’s rough stone rolling: it is as I bump against other narratives that I am refined. Working on mutual empathy is difficult but meaningful work, and I believe it is God’s work. And if it is God’s work, then I have hope that it cannot fail.

Returning to my client’s question, I think I was also surprised by her insight because sadly I do not always see the mutual empathy described by RCT in the Church. Perhaps this is because the Church is comprised of members like me: sometimes self-deluded and afraid of growing pains but still striving to be an empathically aware Saint. Although not entirely appropriate for a therapy appointment, perhaps I could have answered her: *I can understand how you would think that. Theologically and philosophically, I think that you are correct: the Church does teach that ultimately we are healed by the atonement of Jesus Christ, and that*

27. Doctrine and Covenants 121:41–42.

healing occurs through His perfect empathy for us. However, too often we meet one another with objectification and minimization, especially those from marginalized communities. So, while we as a membership often fail at this endeavor, I frequently do grow when I experience empathy for and from other Saints. Insofar as the gospel is centered on mutual empathy, then yes, I do believe it will heal you and me, and, if shared with others, our community and perhaps eventually the world.

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A MISSIONARY FAREWELL

Justin Goodson

A crowd of several thousand poured into the Provo Tabernacle. They filled the wooden pews, the kind that are never quite comfortable but perfect for keeping you awake during a sermon. Above the main floor, a balcony wrapped around the perimeter of the long rectangular room. The middle was open from floor to ceiling, just like a concert hall. A hundred missionaries from across Utah Valley sat in front of the crowd on the rostrum. Behind them was the organ. Its gold-colored pipes spanned the back wall, perfectly symmetrical from top to bottom. During the day, sunlight streamed in through the many windows. On this evening in December 1998, generous lighting made the room glow for the missionary Christmas concert. Young missionary Dale Rhodes¹ had organized the event, and he would perform. Aside from Dale and a few others, none of us had any notable musical talent. But in Utah Valley there's no shortage of enthusiasm for Mormon elders and sisters whether they're musical or not, so every seat was occupied.

The journey to this point began months earlier. As Dale bounced around the state of Utah with the typical missionary transfers, he put the program together piece by piece: an elder in the valley, a sister serving in rural central Utah, an ensemble hailing from St. George. This kind of remote coordination is commonplace in our pandemic era. But pre-2000, a time when the world had barely discovered email and more than two decades before Zoom, it was no small task.

On one of those transfers, Dale spent a month with me in Mexican Hat, Utah. We made our home in a trailer next to the tiny LDS church building. The trailer lived up to every stereotype. The furniture was

1. Name has been changed to protect privacy.

old and musty. The potatoes in the kitchen cabinets must have been there for months because the sprouts were a foot tall. The bathroom was scary even when it was clean. The door had hatchet marks from when someone tried to break in. The trailer and the church sat just north of the San Juan River, which marked the border of Navajo Nation. Each day, Dale and I would drive a small red Ford Ranger through the reservation, usually to Monument Valley and surrounding areas. Two twenty-year-old boys with white shirts and ties roaming the desert in a pickup truck was an odd sight, I'm sure.

"It's here!" Dale exclaimed one night when picking up the mail. "I've been waiting for this for weeks!" It was a solo copy of "O Holy Night," which Dale intended to perform months later at the Christmas concert. The arrangement was in the key of D major, which put the climax of the piece on a high A. This was at the very top of Dale's range, and he practiced regularly to keep his vocal cords in shape to reach that note. "Will you accompany me on the piano?" he asked. "President transferred me here so you and I could practice together. He'll transfer you to the valley for the concert."

That was the beginning of my musical relationship with Dale. He sang and I played. We performed most weeks at the Mexican Hat church service. On one Sunday, Dale wanted his solo performance of "How Great Thou Art" to have a gospel-music feel. He asked me to max out the bass on the tiny electric organ. The congregation was a motley crew consisting of a few Native Americans and half a dozen white teachers from the local school. They weren't sure what to think about a short, round missionary belting out "O Lord, my God" while his tall, slender companion treated the organ like a 1980s boombox. Later, at a mission conference with general Church leadership, we performed "O Divine Redeemer." If memory serves, at one point we even slipped in a rendition of "Ave Maria," a piece that at the time sat on the fringe of what was acceptable music for a Mormon chapel.

After our short stint together on the reservation, Dale and I were transferred to separate areas of the mission. He mailed me my own

copy of “O Holy Night.” I practiced it, along with other music for the concert, in Salem, where my new companion and I were stationed. We lived in a small house with a rinky-dink piano in the back storage room. The room wasn’t heated, so I wore gloves when practicing in the winter cold. In hindsight, I’m not sure how that worked. Playing the piano while wearing gloves is just as clumsy as tying your shoes while wearing gloves. Somehow my accompaniments came together.

In the weeks leading up to the concert, Dale ran a rehearsal in the Utah Valley area. In one of our numbers, Dale directed the entire valley’s complement of missionaries as a choir. There were too many cooks in the kitchen, and everyone seemed to have an opinion about pronunciation or dynamics or tempo. The mission president made quick work of our small uprising. “Dale is trained in music. He knows how to do this. We’re going to do what he says.” We did, and Dale made our collection of average voices sound much better than the sum of its parts.

A good performance of “O Holy Night” is like running a five-minute mile. With three verses and three choruses, it’s a high-performance endurance event. Every note is like a measured stride. Each musical phrase is like a bend in the track. Pacing and control are paramount. A strong finish is important too. Just like botching the final lap loses the race, if the ending “power and glory” is off in any way, the whole piece sours. Dale knew this. He had trained and he was ready.

An idea that hatched in a dimly lit trailer in a remote corner of southern Utah culminated in a standing-room-only performance in a glowing Provo Tabernacle. If you’ve ever stared down a crowd of thousands, like Dale did that night, you know something about dread. And if you did it without flinching, like Dale did that night, you know something about composure. From the first note to the last, Dale’s voice commanded attention and created a sense of awe. Each verse grew with intensity, each chorus swelled with emotion. The climactic high note was spot-on. I played as flawlessly as he sang. It was a perfect five minutes. As the sound of the final chord on the piano faded away, Dale didn’t move. The audience was silent. Then, an eruption of applause.

The concert ended with the missionary choir singing “O Come, All Ye Faithful.” On the last verse, Dale turned from directing the choir to face the audience. We all sang together, the choir on the rostrum, those seated on the floor, and those crowded into the balcony. My position was at the pipe organ, where I had literally pulled out all the stops for the final verse. But where I sat didn’t matter because the sound of voices and harmony and music completely consumed the space. For a few brief moments, music made us perfect missionaries. All of us felt the pure message of Jesus.



Dale and I didn’t stay in touch much after our time together as missionaries. By 2009, social media had given us a semblance of reconnection. We exchanged Christmas-card-style updates. Dale was working on an MBA at the University of Utah and his second daughter had just been born. He sent me pictures from his recent visit to Navajo Nation. He was so excited to tell me about a new chapel in Monument Valley and renovations to the chapel in Mexican Hat. Mercifully, the trailer we once lived in was no longer there.

Nine years passed before we corresponded again. This time the message from Dale was much shorter. “Hi” was all he typed. The message wasn’t audible, but its 2-a.m. delivery came with a tone of defeat. Dale was in a rehab facility. We had a long phone call.

I learned that the last decade had served more than its fair share of ups and downs to my former partner in music. Like many who live with bipolar disorder, Dale suffered from deep depression and extreme mood swings. He struggled to hold a job, went through a divorce, came out as gay, and even lived homeless for a year. In August 2018, six months after our phone call, Dale celebrated one year of sobriety, a major milestone in his road to recovery from alcohol and drug addiction. Two years later, Dale celebrated his three-year anniversary. As far as I know, Dale walked the difficult path of sobriety all the way to his passing in 2021.

You can't visit the Provo Tabernacle anymore. At least not how it was when we performed there in 1998. The tabernacle stood from the late 1800s, when it was built by Mormon pioneers, through to 2010, when it was destroyed by a blaze. Some might look at Dale's life and see that fire-ravaged building. They see an interior ruined by the flames of choice and circumstance. They see something that was once beautiful but that ultimately toppled, leaving only a burned-out shell of a man. "Dale was great," they say. "But he made mistakes. He knew the gospel was true and didn't live up to it. He wasn't in good standing with the Church."

Aside from being narrow-minded, in my experience, these same people often fail to understand that the person who overdoses and the person who manages to live up to a strict set of rules may be committing the same sin. They may both avoid life, one by indulging passion and the other by purging it. Neither lives life, and that is a sort of death. It's true that Dale crashed and burned over and over again. But stopping his story at one of these low points ignores so much of the living he did in between. At times Dale had all the appearances of a sturdy structure, and at other times he literally lived among ashes. His efforts to build up again are just as important as the downward spiral.

Dale wore many hats across his various endeavors. Before he was a missionary, Dale ran his own lawn care business. He was proud to have earned enough money to buy a Ford F-150, the workhorse of his first career. Years later, Dale worked in the financial services industry but eventually left after becoming disenchanted with greedy big banks. Dale's vocal training came in handy as an unlikely bounty hunter. When he rang the doorbell at a fugitive's home, he would belt out, "Papa John's delivery! Better ingredients! Better pizza!" Apparently, this line always opened the door. Maybe we should have tried that when tracting as missionaries. Dale taught voice lessons and performed in operas. He was even a member of the world-famous Mormon Tabernacle Choir. After being laid off in the middle of the pandemic, Dale turned to more artistic endeavors. He made memory quilts. Send him your T-shirts

and Dale would turn them into a quilt. He even launched a podcast. With his typical humor, Dale's podcast discussed the ins and outs of making a living, something he had a lot of experience with. The last time I spoke with Dale was as a guest on the second episode. Dale's final entrepreneurial endeavor was as a voice artist. Just before his passing, he wrote and recorded a short story. Dale wasn't flighty or fickle. He was king of the side hustle. He lived.

An analogy between the Provo Tabernacle and the life of Dale Rhodes should include what happened after the fire. Following more than five years of reconstruction, the tabernacle opened its doors again in 2016, this time as a Mormon temple. It no longer plays host to missionary choirs. The uncomfortable wooden pews have been replaced by upholstery. The exterior looks like the old tabernacle, but the interior has been completely redesigned. The building serves a different function and sometimes a different audience, but it still has tremendous value to those who use it.

The man who passed away looked a lot like the missionary I met in 1998, just older. I couldn't see it by looking at him, but Dale's insides had been yanked out and put back together. This new man wasn't designed by architects nor built with premium materials, but he had been painstakingly reassembled, piece by piece, just like the Provo Tabernacle. In both cases, what appeared outwardly unchanged was inwardly altered beyond recognition. Mental illness, addiction, love, loss, coming to terms with your sexuality—these things change a man. These things are living, and living changes us. Without its fiery demise, the Provo Tabernacle wouldn't be what it is today. And without what it is today, the tabernacle's story wouldn't be complete. Life is the same way, mine and yours and Dale's. Living includes the falling down as well as the getting up.

Not many people speak at their own funeral, much less sing at it. In December 2021, twenty-three years after Dale's performance in the Provo Tabernacle, a recording of Dale singing "O Holy Night" concluded his own memorial service. From a small stereo in a nondescript Salt Lake

City church building, Dale made his final performance. Another perfect five minutes passed. This time there was no applause, only silence.

My favorite lines from “O Holy Night” are these:

Long lay the world in sin and error pining,
Till he appear'd, and the soul felt its worth.

...

In all our trials born to be our friend;

...

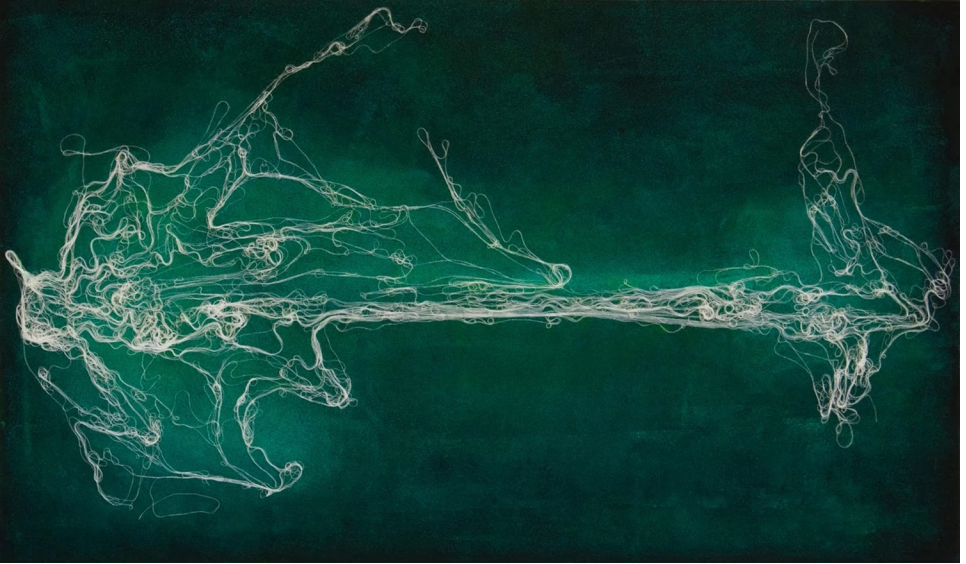
He knows our need,
To our weakness no stranger;

...

Truly He taught us to love one another;
His law is Love and His Gospel is Peace.
Chains shall He break, for the slave is our brother,
And in His name all oppression shall cease.

The miracle of Jesus is not that he somehow saved us from weakness or triumphantly stamped out oppression. The miracle is seeing the worth of a soul despite its shortcomings. The miracle is realizing that all we can really do for another person is love them. A celebration of Dale's life landscape doesn't require that we look down at the valleys with judgement or up at the mountains with admiration. It only requires that we close our eyes and appreciate the entire terrain. When I close my eyes, I see my companion, my friend. I hear his music. It's fast and then it's slow. It's joyful and then it's hopeless. It's silly and then it's serious. It's breaking and then it's healing. It's always full of life. I love you, brother. Until we meet again.

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Nicole Woodbury,
Rising Thoughts, 2012,
mixed media, thread, 32" x 35"

HEALING TOGETHER: THE LONELY INTERSECTION OF FAITH AND SEXUALITY

Matt Koster

Content warning: This essay contains a reference to suicidal ideation.

It was a cold, bleak winter Saturday morning in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic. I was working at a psychiatric hospital over the weekend in my last year of training as a psychiatrist. I was expecting a quick day of seeing patients, checking on their safety, making some minor medication changes, and providing therapeutic support for individuals who were struggling.

I knocked on one of the patient's doors and quietly walked into the dark room. Lying on the bed I saw a young man covered in blankets up to his neck. I could only see his head on the pillow and the outline of his still body underneath the blankets. He glanced at me, acknowledging my presence without saying a word. I introduced myself and asked, "How are you feeling today?"

With his eyes closed he responded, "I can't get out of bed. What's the point?"

A feeling of hopelessness exuded from him as he spoke. His mood matched the frigid, gloomy weather outside.

"Do you mind sharing what's been going on lately?" I asked.

"I have demons in me," he responded.

I was not sure if this was delusional or if he was speaking metaphorically, so I waited for him to continue.

“God has abandoned me. I have sinned beyond forgiveness. I am destined to be miserable and go to hell,” he continued. I wondered what he had done to feel so alienated from God.

“My wife has left me because I’m attracted to men. I can’t live with myself for hurting her. God has abandoned me for going against the teachings of the Bible. I don’t deserve to be alive.” His despair was overwhelming.

I had learned over the past several years how to hold compassion for hurting individuals without feeling overwhelmed by their pain. I considered it one of my hard-earned strengths to provide a safe space for others to share their deep personal pain without my own “stuff” getting in the way. But that day, I suddenly felt my own struggles crashing down on me. No amount of training had prepared me for this. My own feeling of brokenness left me wondering if I could help him.

During my training to become a psychiatrist, I decided to start going to therapy so I could understand myself better. After all, I recommended that my patients go to therapy, so why shouldn’t I? I had gone to therapy as a child after my parent’s divorce and for other “issues” that I felt confident were not a big deal anymore . . . until I went back to therapy.

As a child, I was socially anxious and struggled with low self-esteem. I continued to struggle forming meaningful connections with others in adulthood because of my anxiety. This was something I wanted to address as I started back in therapy. During our first session together, my therapist asked me what I thought might be contributing to my difficulty connecting with others. I took a moment to think. I had an idea. But there was no way I was going to say it out loud. I was convinced that it wasn’t the real answer. There had to be a more important reason that I was having trouble thinking of. I sat there frantically searching for other reasons I could possibly give him to explain my difficulty opening up to others. I gave up after what felt like several minutes of silence and finally said, “My sexuality.” *What?!* How did I let that out?

I had told a previous therapist and a Church leader about my attraction to men. I had been counseled that if I followed God's teachings, he would help me overcome this "trial." I felt so ashamed and disgusted with myself for admitting my attraction to boys that I vowed to *never* speak of this with anyone else. This would be my secret forever! No one would ever know, and it would silently disappear. That had not been working as well as I thought. Instead, I had now unleashed a monster: coming to terms with my sexuality.

Over the course of the following months, I was furious with myself. I wished I had never gone to therapy. I wished I had never talked about it. I desperately wanted to be attracted to my wife and live in accordance with cultural expectations I had for myself. I had been so faithful in the Church. I had gone on a mission, married my best friend in the temple, and we had a beautiful family together. I was at the end of my training as a psychiatrist and felt I had almost "made it." I was following the plan that God had for me. Hadn't I proven to God and myself that I wasn't really gay? If God really loved me, wouldn't he "heal me" after I had sacrificed so much for him?

Over the next several months, this secret weighed on me heavily. It consumed all my mental energy, and I had no idea who I was anymore. I felt guilty that I had kept this secret from my most trusted person, my wife. I held on to the hope that this was all a joke, just a phase, and I could pretend it never happened. But that wouldn't really solve my problem. I had been doing that for over a decade and it was not working.

I was exhausted by that nagging feeling and finally got the courage to tell my wife that I am gay. After the kids had gone to bed, I told her I wanted to talk. I ended up sobbing for twenty minutes before I could even utter the words to her.

I wasn't sure what would happen. I was absolutely terrified. What if she left me? Instead, she responded with love and support by listening to me and being there for me. I found out that she had been holding

onto my secret after finding a half-written letter I had written to her several years earlier telling her I was gay. We had been keeping this secret from each other this whole time! My heart broke for her to carry that by herself, but I also felt loved after learning that she was willing to carry that burden with me unknowingly.

The next several months were awfully painful as we processed what this new information meant for us personally and as a couple. What did it mean for my relationship with the Church? Could I continue to be active in a church that had caused me so much pain? Would I feel accepted or welcomed at church if I were to accept myself as a gay man?

It was a little over one year after embarking on this journey of accepting my sexuality that I found myself sitting next to a patient who was going through a situation eerily similar to my current struggle. In some ways, I wondered if I should be there instead of him. I had felt many of those feelings as well. Could I really provide hope when I too was feeling hopeless about my very similar circumstance?

How many times had I cried to God to take away my longing to be with a man? I too wondered why God would ask me not to love someone to whom I was so naturally drawn. My sexual orientation was more than just wanting sexual gratification. It was the way in which I viewed myself, felt connected to others, was able to love and feel loved. I had spent my own dark times contemplating if there was a place for me in the world. Wondering if it would be easier not to be alive. I had been taught for so long that this “affliction” would be removed in the next life. I had been so tempted to skip the suffering by cutting my mortality short to finally be “healed.”

I often felt confused about why God was allowing this to happen. People reassured me that God made me this way. Others told me that that it was a trial that I should persevere through with self-discipline. I did not know whom to trust.

I had told myself for so long that being gay was the “natural man,” and if I just aligned myself with God, I could put off the natural man

and become more like a saint as we are taught in the Book of Mormon. Although heterosexual wasn't listed in the characteristics that follow that verse in Moroni, I was convinced it was an unwritten qualification to being worthy of God's love. I had concluded a long time ago that I just had to suffer through mortality so I could finally be free from my same-sex attraction when I died. It felt God had left me out of his plan of happiness.

I felt an extreme amount of empathy for this man in the hospital and what he was going through. I wanted to cry, "I know! Isn't this all messed up? It's a miserable, hopeless position to be in." Instead, I put aside my own pain and feelings of hopelessness and attempted to offer some comfort, maybe even some hope if possible. Honestly, I had no idea what to say in that moment. It felt like all I could do was validate the awful struggle he was facing and provide hope that there are people surrounding him to help him heal from his despair. I felt honored that he felt safe enough to share his deeply personal struggle with me. While it may not take away the pain, confusion, and heartbreak, I encouraged him to lean on others while he heals his soul and mind.

I found myself wondering if I was offering this for him or for me. I suppose it was for us. I thought I had to be whole myself before I could help others. But maybe I do not have to be completely healed to help others. Perhaps we can heal together. Amid a pandemic, with uncertainty in the world and the uncertainty I face in my own life coming to terms with my sexuality, I can better understand that we are all suffering. And yet in the suffering we are helping one another to heal.

In the end, isn't that what we are all trying to do, strengthen and heal each other from the pain and struggle we face? That's what makes life beautiful. Not being free from all the pain, but joining together to listen, comfort, and support one another.

I continue to feel grief and pain when I learn of how many individuals find themselves in a similar situation to me and my patient. The intersection of faith and sexuality can be an incredibly frightening,

lonely, and a seemingly hopeless place. I do not have the power to heal by changing the Church's doctrines on LGBTQ+ issues. But I do have the power to ease the suffering of others by standing together with them, offering my validation that the journey is painful, and providing hope for the future. Hope that comes not from having the answers, the solutions, or being completely healed. But hope in the form of peace that we find helping one another to heal and knowing we are not alone.

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A SUPERIOR ALTERNATIVE

Julie J. Nichols

I'm an Aries with my sun in the sixth house, which means, according to astrology, that since the moment I was born, health has been my top priority.

I had a hard time believing that when I first heard it. Since I was little, *writing* has been my top priority. Well, okay, after church and family. While I was growing up in the San Francisco Bay Area in the sixties, my goodly LDS parents taught us well in the words of God. Still, following a strong K-12 education as a writer ("we all know what Julie likes: to talk, to read, to write; someday we're sure to see her name in print or neon lights!" as my fifth-grade teacher once wrote), I barreled off to BYU, declared an English major, and sailed on through to grad school in the same department. When Professor Don Norton caught me in the department workroom one afternoon in mid-1978 and asked me if I'd be interested in writing a book with a lay midwife from American Fork, I jumped at the chance. I hadn't had my birth chart done in those days, so I had no idea about the health thing, but I'd always intended to be a writer, and this sounded like a great opportunity. Married just recently enough to have produced a baby, I was a California transplant who ate whole foods and rode her bike to school, and Don prefaced his proposal by saying, "You're pretty eccentric, aren't you? You might like this job."

"Sure," I said, "I'll help a lay midwife write a book! I don't even know what a lay midwife is! Introduce us!"

Polly Block must have been in her late fifties then. She'd been teaching midwifery classes out of her home for years and had reams of lecture notes to organize into a persuasive tome she titled *A Superior*

*Alternative: Childbirth at Home.*¹ We liked each other immediately and spent the next few months immersed in a conversation that was half about writing (“This is what I want, Julie, fix it so it works”) and half about natural healing.

Natural healing? What did that mean?

With chapter titles like “Assume the Responsibility—It’s Your Health,” “From Home to Hospital and Back,” and “Midwives: Our Heritage and Our Hope,” the book (long out of print) was more than generous with information about specific techniques and instructions for preparing and experiencing successful home birth, on the well-supported assumption that hospital maternity wards were set up for convenience and efficiency, not for the best interests of the mother or the child. I’d had one baby safely in the hospital, but I hadn’t liked the presumptive epidural and intuited that there were better ways to bring my kids into the world. I’ll confess: Polly had me at “hello.” No drugs? Herbal support throughout pregnancy? Fully aware preparation via “zonal and massage therapy, natural supplements, hydrotherapy, and so forth—in short, no screaming, no drugs, no panic” (xvii)? It all sounded awfully attractive.

By the time the book was finished and on local shelves, I was pregnant with my second son, and I planned a drugless, non-interventionist hospital experience, a compromise between Polly’s full-on home birth and the conventional experience I’d undergone with my first baby eighteen months earlier. When, in the new birthing room at Utah Valley

1. Polly Block, *A Superior Alternative* (American Fork, Utah: self-published, 1979). Cover by Sharon Lusko, sketches throughout by the author. Even when I was working on this book, I was pro-choice and headed for an academic career, so the chapters on abortion and family dynamics (men working, women in the home) didn’t resonate. But I respected Polly, and I believed in so much else in the book that I kind of ignored those ultra-right-wing sections for the sake of finishing the project to her liking. Anyway, there was no chance to write a disclaimer—I’m acknowledged nowhere in the book, and she probably wouldn’t have included a single word of mine even if I’d asked for it.

Regional Medical Center, I refused the fetal heart monitor and labored without painkilling or labor-inducing meds, at least one of the nurses made it clear she thought I was totally irresponsible. Nevertheless, I felt sure of my decision, proud of my own strength.

By the time we conceived our third child three years later, I had helped Polly edit and prepare a second book, *Polly's Birth Book: Obstetrics for the Home*, a more technical manual for midwives detailing actions, interventions, and contingencies for every stage of pregnancy, labor, and birth.² I was ready to try home birth for myself. The new book convinced me, if the first one hadn't, that she and her associates could handle nearly any emergency and that they knew when and how to enlist the aid of doctors and hospital equipment if necessary. I also knew that if I followed her regimen of nutritional, herbal, social, and exercise support, chances were good that that aid would be unnecessary.

And so it was. No hospital at all. After the successful delivery in our bedroom, my husband cut baby Jessie's cord, and the team of midwives cleaned up and disappeared just like the Cat in the Hat. It was a great experience. Four years after that, women who had been Polly's students helped me again to deliver my fourth child in my home.

But this story isn't just about home birth.

Polly's books laid out spiritual and practical reasons why allopathic medicine, certainly in the case of childbirth but elsewhere as well, doesn't always best serve the patient. *A Superior Alternative* was mostly personal anecdote, stories of women who respected birth as a natural process, completely manageable with appropriate support in the nurturing environment of their homes. Through these narratives, she appealed to the Mormon instinct for listening to the Spirit, for personal responsibility, and above all for embracing foundational earthly gifts like bodily intuition, an inborn capacity for health, and the intentional allyship of plants. I was hooked.

2. Polly Block, *Polly's Birth Book: Obstetrics for the Home* (n.p.: Sunrise Publishing, 1996).

Fast forward a dozen years.

Even a healthy lifestyle can't always stave off hard times. The stories in my head about perfect marriage and grown-up happiness interfered with reality, and when some dear friends from California saw that I was slipping down a vortex of despair with four young kids and a sense of thwarted ambition, they reminded me about taking responsibility for my (including mental) health. "You already have your answers," they said. "You just have to find them." So I started actively looking.

The Polly story was behind me. I was done giving birth to babies. I needed to give birth to my sun, my essential self. A few years before, an institute teacher at the University of Utah had told a group of us grad students that everything Jesus did, except the Atonement, we could do ourselves—every miracle, every healing, every outreach to greater truth. So at this juncture I asked, "How? How did Jesus do what he did?" I also prayed, fervently.

When I tell friends about this now, the more scripture-studious among them point to text after scriptural text about Christ's (and the ancient prophets') use of body structure, natural substances, star data, and visions to enact all types of healing. At the time, though, I was on my own, and when books about all those things fell from their shelves into my hands, I felt heard by Heavenly Father and Mother, felt taught in a Christlike way. Energy and consciousness, patterns of times and seasons, plants and the proper words—invoking the vibes—these were how Jesus did what he did. I had my birth chart done during those years. When the astrologer told me my sun was in the sixth house, I said, "Really? But I want to be a writer!" She just smiled, and I kept looking.

Because my California friends had said, "You have to find your answers," I let myself see answers everywhere. I found and worked with psychic intuitives, bodyworkers, purveyors of feminist spirituality, energy healers. When I entered a doctoral program in 1987, I wrote stories from my eccentric experience, taught writing as a healing modality

at a woman-owned massage school in Salt Lake City, and through a guest instructor there I met a healer from Northern California who offered workshops on a long-term basis right there in my old home. (Finding true home, living within its vibe, can be an important facet of healing.) I became his apprentice, practicing hands-on energy work to fascinating effect, and then a teacher of his work.

During that period, I was fired from my position as adjunct faculty at BYU for the heretical fiction I published in journals like *Dialogue* and *Sunstone*. I knew that writing is an expression of energy and consciousness to be used for good or ill—for healing or not—and I proposed to my teacher that I write a book for him. In 1999 and 2002, we coproduced two books he used to promote his teaching.³ In the first—just as in *A Superior Alternative*—the procedures and protocols of the modality are described through personal experience (my own, as it happens). The second includes philosophy and technical instructions. Collaborating with healers as they articulated their practices corroborated for me what I was coming to know for myself: that everyone has power to embrace the structures and energy of this planet; for most health issues, “there’s an herb for that” or “there’s an oil for that.”

I *have* used allopathic medicine. When nutrition, herbs and oils, energy work and movement aren’t enough for either prevention or relief, I’ve had surgeries and procedures (appendectomy, neuroma, ACL repair, lithotripsy, colonoscopy), with immense appreciation for the technology and human expertise that make my healing possible. My children were vaccinated, stitched, and otherwise cared for properly as their normal risk-filled kid lives unfolded. I would never advocate turning away from such options. They are miraculous in their own way.

3. Julie J. Nichols and Lansing Barrett Gresham, *Ask Anything and Your Body Will Answer: A Personal Journey Through Integrated Awareness* (n.p.: NoneTooSoon Publications, 1999); and Lansing Barrett Gresham and Julie J. Nichols, *The Body’s Map of Consciousness, Vol. 1: Movement* (n.p.: NoneTooSoon Publications, 2002).

But our roots, our indigenous and Mormon roots, are in folk magic and folk healing. Plant medicine is ancient and effective. Healing by means of energy flow and consciousness, slow consistent striving for balance on many levels, with or without supportive herbs, adaptogens, yoga and other movement therapies, light and electromagnetic therapy, essential oils, flowers and shrubby helpers, as well as the speaking and hearing of multiple stories—all have profound roles in the deep history of healing. Jesus knew this. Joseph Smith knew it too. It is common knowledge cultivated and transmitted by women and men in every culture at every phase of our evolving world.

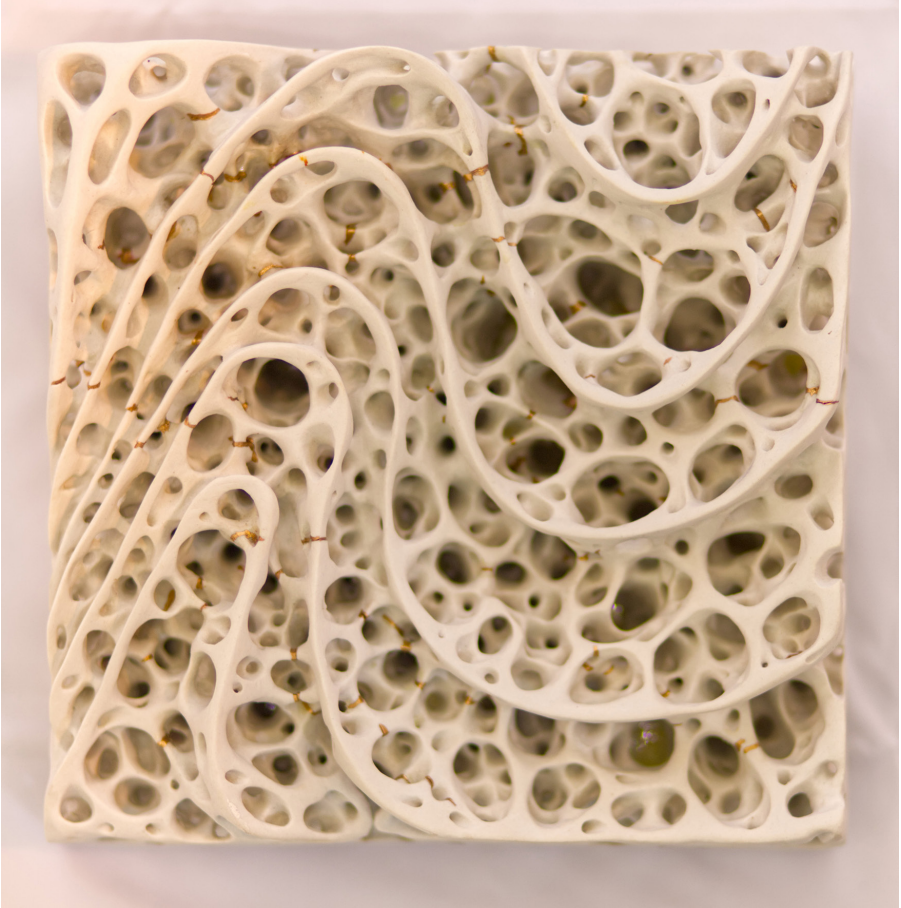
Toward the end of my novel *Pigs When They Straddle the Air*, a troublemaker lies in a hospital bed in a coma, surrounded by six people whose lives have intersected with his (and each other's) throughout the book: an herbalist, a lawyer, a businessman, a trained charismatic energy healer, and two members of the family of the unconscious man.⁴ Some of these people are men, some are women, some are Mormons, some are not. In this scene, the Mormon men perform a blessing while the women call the sick man's name and hold the space. The energy healer directs the energy, and the man's autistic child guides the entire event. Although he does not leap recovered from his bed in this scene, or even by the book's conclusion, everyone present at his bedside is purified and changed by the collaborative work of multiple healing modalities.

I loved imagining this gathering of people of differing faiths, all working together for good. When I helped Polly write her first book, I thought, perhaps naively, that Mormons would know instinctively that what she said made gospel sense. When I helped my California teacher write his, where he declares that everything is energy and consciousness, and when, under his direction, I laid my trained hands on bodies whose energy I indubitably felt, I wondered why anyone should doubt the

4. Julie Nichols, *Pigs When They Straddle the Air* (Zarahemla Books, 2016), 130–33.

truth. I acknowledge that we're immersed in a world of human-centric materialism, but I thought, when I helped compose those books, that we Mormons should be above all that. If it often seems that the institutional Church isn't into self-empowerment or reverence for inherent powers of body and mind in cooperation with nature, nevertheless I believe God is. The sun in my sixth house tells me so. Imagining, speaking, and enacting practices that favor faith in those inbuilt earthly powers—*these* are the superior alternative.

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Nicole Woodbury,
Within the Marrow, 2021,
porcelain and gold paint, 12" x 12" x 12"

Heart Sutra
(In the guest bedroom at dawn,
after the pandemic)

Charles Shirō Inouye

1

Today we scorn Russians,
But we were invaders, too.
Our lifestyle at stake in Iraq.
Searching but not finding.
Blood and bones and dirt.
Infection and tears.
Fighting to prove . . . what?
Truth? America? God on our side?

Twenty years ago, I heard the monstrous jets
Hauling tools of war to the battlefield.
Tanks, helicopters, candy bars, beer.
The sound shook the glass in our windows.
Lexington. Home of minutemen, Hanscom Base, and patriot missiles.
Good schools for my three kids.

Again this morning, the rumble as heavy
As twenty years before.
Now to Ukraine.
Basso profundo.
Doing the bidding of hollow men.
The blood lust of Khan mixed with goat's milk.
“Hurry out of town, Monster Planes,
Before someone sees you!”

lying next to me—
my young dog yelps in his sleep
front paws quivering

2

I look to the far wall.

An amber bottle catches the weak light of dawn.

who put that perfume
on the shelf in the middle?
the glimmering vile

I'm not a child!

Once fascinated with color, I held your beauty before my eyes.

Now, I'm a gray beard with aching joints.

So why does that bottle still tempt me?

I've seen the edge of the world.

I've done enough searching!

The only place I really wanted was home.

Here not Heaven.

Locale not location.

Nothingness not nihil.

Love not desire.

to be a great man
you have to be willing to kill—
it's just that simple

Not enough light! Too much light!

Lack and abundance share a color.

Get dressed in the dark, and you will never know

If your socks are black or brown.

Look to God as Truth (with a capital T),

And you will go blind.

色不異空、空不異色。色即是空、空即是色。¹

Form is no different from emptiness,

Emptiness is no different from form.

1. This is the very heart of the *Prajnaparamitahrdaya*, the *Heart Sutra*.

Form equals emptiness.
Emptiness equals form.

3

After the pandemic comes spring,
When the buds on cherry trees swell.
What did I learn from sickness and disease,
From two years of masks, zooming, and vaccinations?
What did I learn from the death
Of my favorite brother?

on the night after
we pulled the plug on Dwight—
my puppy was born

I know now. Know now I. Now I know. Know I now. I now know.

Now know I.

Life is no different from death.

Death is no different from life.

Life equals death.

Death equals life.

Co-coo, coo, coo, coo.

Co-coo, coo, coo, coo.

The pandemic struck me in the gut.

Overcoming nothing.

Understanding nothing.

Dizzy.

Clumsy.

Spinning.

Striving for *wuji*.²

2. *Wuji*, 无极 “without extremes, not-polar.” Beginning as opposition in all things, yin and yang create motion, which allows us to move toward the center, where woman is no-woman and man is no-man, extremes opened up to nothingness, all things present without separation.

My footnotes to Nagarjuna
 Rather than to Plato.
 Once again, we have a failure
 To communicate.

Ah, to be my bird dog, chasing pheasants in my sleep!
 Better yet, to be the woodcock in his colorless dreams!
 Then maybe I could be present,
 Knowing the now I once knew.

4

Here I am, send me.
 Such a bastard.
*Shikata ga nai.*³
 Blame us for living in the briars,
 Caught up in sex, color, and form (色),
 Our days acquiring, our nights scheming.
 Form is nothingness.
 Thing and spirit
 One and the same.

Is this the agony of Gethsemane—
 The present unopened?
 Pushing through sorrow,
 Rebelling,
 Mourning,
 Choosing an opening.
 Falling back to the burning house.
 Condescending toward an
 Eternal waste of melted nails, masks, and bombs.

Is this the true beginning?
 Or the false end?

3. “There is no other way.” Lucifer’s Japanese-sounding truth to Eve, before her planned escape from Eden.

If now is the end, it comes too early.
If the beginning, it comes too late.

5

Surely, someday, someone
Will drop a nuclear bomb on Lexington,
My perfect American town.
Bowman, Harrington, Clarke, Diamond—all good schools!
Maybe next week.
Every frozen pizza cooked to perfection.
Every million-dollar house
Spread like crunchy peanut butter
Over the scorched earth.
Each green tree and blush of a child's cheek
Reduced to ash.

then comes the dawn
when our sinful world ends—
brilliance without hope

And in the dove's unblinking eyes,
A demand for more justice! More punishment!
Lucifer, Prince of Light,
Take your glorious moment
And go straight to hell.
Who are you fooling?

Charles Shirō Inouye
Lexington, Massachusetts
March 21, 2022

CHARLES SHIRŌ INOUE {Charles.Inouye@tufts.edu} is the author of several books, including *The End of the World, Plan B* (Greg Kofford Books) and *zion earth zen sky* (Maxwell Institute), winner of the Association for Mormon Letters Creative Nonfiction Award (2022). His first collection of short stories, *Hymns of Silence*, will appear from By Common Consent Press in 2023.

Homemade Medicine

Emily Updegraff

Grandpa filled gelcaps with his own mix
of dried herbs. Before clean food,
before expensive organics, before
wellness became photogenic,
he was a health nut. I asked him
why did he grind dried leaves
the color of new hay,
why did he make his own medicine.
I don't remember his answer
but I know they were meant to remake him
after all the years of alcoholism.
I wonder if he intended to swallow
a homemade pill for every drink
he'd ever had. He lived as clean a life as
I can imagine. He shaved sometimes twice a day.
He turned off our trashy soap operas because,
he said, they chased away the spirit of the Lord.
He talked to God out loud,
as to a friend. He said
he never stopped wanting a drink.
I long for a change of heart.
But I know from the pills that
it's not what you want that matters,
it's what you reach for.

Mormon Tea

Emily Updegraff

I.

They left
Denmark's ripening wheat fields,
crossed moss-covered paths
of England and Wales, forsook
the saturated air
of Tennessee to build homes
on ground glazed in the open-air kiln
of the western sun.
Called by God,
they did not think to ask
first peoples for their blessing,
and the land gave nothing without struggle.
But one palatable thing,
they learned from the Diné,
thrived already.
So-called Mormon tea.

II.

I have read the book
they changed their lives for. I have made
the same promises to the same God.
But I start my days
by filling the kettle, waiting
for the whistle
and the alchemical union
of fermented leaves and hot water.
I could not make those promises again.
I have traded

Ephedra nevadensis,
dust-dweller
of the west,
for *Camellia sinensis*,
cultivated evergreen
of the east.

III.

I remember the feeling when friends
stopped living the Word of Wisdom—
like a thread between us
snapped.
They are my people still.
The men who sent my ancestors
to the desert are still speaking their instructions
through the mouths
of their children's children.
They are not my cup of tea.
But their God is my God also.
Mormon tea tasted like inside knowledge,
peculiar, ferrous.
My breakfast tea,
color of the eastern brink,
tastes of my own
ripening.

EMILY UPDEGRAFF {emilyupdegraff@gmail.com} lives in Wilmette, Illinois, where she works in university administration and is raising two teenagers. She has published poems in *Third Wednesday Magazine*, *The Orchards Poetry Journal*, *Exponent II*, *Irreantum*, and other journals. She is a bimonthly book review contributor at *Great Lakes Review* and has served as a features editor for *Exponent II*. She is her ward's music coordinator.

No Man Can Serve Two Masters

Gregory Brooks

But my diagnosis says otherwise. Depression oozes
 under my door: the destroying angel visits:
 until I can't get out of bed. One week later I'm waving
 bloody hyssop like glow sticks at a rave
 nudging sushi on the plate convinced it might
 multiply as it rests against a hillside of rice.

I stare back at the orderlies who marinate within
 interminable silence eyebrows raised to the square.
 Tally marks on the wall: counting how many Jesuses
 they'd met that morning. Maybe they want me to magnify
 my calling as a manic depressive. *O God, where are you?*
 And why does this psych ward have no bishop?

Straitjacket orthodoxies apologetics like soft walls.
 If there are two masters two poles, then every fruit
 grows between them: plum rage and peach naïveté.
We must know the bitter Lehi says, so we can better
taste the sweet. He knew the gulf: euphoria in raw meat
 how it felt to be buried: like gold in a barrel of beans.

Throwing Up in the DC Temple

Gregory Brooks

Maybe it was envy that churned inside me
as I looked around the room. Wondering
what healthy Mormons felt instead of fear.

My body forced everyone to consider
what it meant to be sick in such a holy place.
Scarlet sins on white carpet white shoes.

I remember the shock of the workers
as I prayed for Jesus to return right then
and translate me into a parable

a nameless miracle who walked away
touching his stomach in sheepish gratitude.

That morning a green tie had coiled around
my Adam's apple miles of dark highway
chauffeured me to the endowment.

I swear I saw Satan hurtle past us
on the Beltway weaving through traffic
exhaust belching smoke like an omen.

But it was just a guy running late
to a construction site sipping coffee
blasting Metallica to stay awake.

GREGORY BROOKS {gregorymbrooks95@gmail.com} is an exmo poet with work published in venues such as *Psaltery & Lyre*, *Utah Life Magazine*, *Irreantum*, and *Touchstone*. Greg believes that ex/post-Mormon poetry is a significant and undervalued aspect of LDS literary culture, with many more stories that deserve to be told. Diagnosed with bipolar disorder in 2013, he believes in frank, honest poetry as one tool for cathartic recovery. Read more of his work at linktr.ee/bipolargreg.

Passion

Alix Brobbey

“And he said unto me: Knowest thou the condescension of God?”

—1 Nephi 11:16

A body so light, it floated
across wind-whipped waves
and did not sink. So full of life,
it survived empty forty days,
no wheat for forty nights.
A body so blindingly pure,
its hands purified other bodies.
This body drew the first sunrise,
still wept at a friend’s last breath.
This light body was flogged
and trapped and displayed.
Had life squeezed out through
stripes. Suffered bruises and
is still scarred from wounds
so I could be sanctified.

ALIXA BROBBEY {alixawrites@gmail.com} spent portions of her childhood in the Netherlands and Ghana. She has a BA in English from Brigham Young University, where she won the Ethel Lowry Handley Poetry Prize in 2020. Her work has been published or is forthcoming in the *Blue Marble Review*, *Segullah*, *Inscape Journal*, the *Albion Review*, the *Susquehanna Review*, the *Palouse Review*, *Exponent II*, and others. She is currently a law student at Brigham Young University.

Fierce Passage

Darlene Young

Today while researching ancestors, sifting through nested petals
of records for names that belong to me, people
who've left their bloody signatures in my genes,

I found Melissa, some sixth great-great of mine, tucked
into a corner of a census under her husband's name,
given one word to describe her vocation in life: *invalid*.

Besides her children, that one word is all she left behind.

I've been ill myself for four years—four and a half,
really, but who's counting?—long enough
that when I meet someone I wonder whether to tell them.

“You really don't know me,” I could say, “unless
you know this one thing.” Instead I play
with being a different person, one who is whole,

in the eyes of strangers, simply a human being, anyone.

After all, four years is hardly any time, not even a fifth of my life,
is not my life. I don't want to see the lowered eyes, be filed

into that box. But no account of me is complete without
an accounting of the days, long afternoons
of people talking in other rooms, people outside

my window. I see them on talk shows where,
though full of other problems, they have energy enough
to jump around a stage, screaming. Daytime TV

is weight-loss ads, wrinkle creams, ask Dr. Oz.

Appearance matters. A toothpaste
can change your life. It's a sin

to assume anything. Those pea-green, seasick days
tell me this: we know nothing of each other.

We are all moving through some fierce
defining passage. Everyone has come from somewhere.

A Good Sick Girl Never Gives Up

Darlene Young

A good sick girl would never give up.
She pushes on in search of a cure,
working as if all depended on her.
“Not knowing beforehand” what she should do,
she moves doggedly from doctor to doctor
and test to test, would never rest

except, of course when money is tight
(which it always is). A good sick girl
knows when to stop wasting her family’s money
on that which bears no fruit, the useless pursuit
of miracle cures

except, of course, for miracles
that come from God. A good sick girl
always seeks those, remembering Sarah
who laughed at the angel. She adds her name
to prayer rolls, requests heavy-handed
administrations, repeatedly and in variety

except, of course, when it’s God’s will
that she not be healed. And then she’ll yield
her will to God patiently, knowing he
will strengthen her back. She doesn’t lack
humility.

She would never complain
except, of course, to us,
her true friends, her safe space—
we answer with grace when she asks for help,
never notice, as we drop off casseroles,
her manicure, the craft she completed, though laundry
stacks up and the children run wild.

A good sick girl looks clean and neat
for her doctor so he'll know
she's not wallowing, know she wants
to get well.

But she mustn't look too neat
or he'll doubt that she means it
when she says she can't cope.

Being good, she won't question
the advice that he gives her,
and proves her desire for healing
with exact and detailed obedience

except for when
he's mistaken, which he often is. And so
a good sick girl will research her symptoms
herself, allow the guidance
of Spirit and common sense,

though she would never
Google her symptoms, an obvious
trick of the hypochondriac, proof
of negative thinking, something she avoids
like the plague (which she probably
doesn't have, though she'll check).

Nor would she chase after quacks
and shamans of alternate therapies,
knowing it is a waste of her family's money,
a pitiful lack of faith—

unless it's something God has led her to
by putting someone right in her path like a drunk Laban—
for example, that guy who helped Aunt Fern—
now *he's* obviously got a God-given gift,
and if she refuses to even give him a chance,
she's being close-minded, just giving up,

and a good sick girl never gives up.

Hippocrates

Darlene Young

The doctor calls her *sweetheart* when she cries
at hearing there is nothing he can find.
He pats her back but will not meet her eyes.

He doesn't really mean to patronize,
and in his rosy health thinks himself kind
when he calls her *sweetheart*. So she cries.

Sweet and *heart*. As if illness implies
some pale and docile virtue! She is defined
by what she has imagined in his eyes.

He checks his watch, advises exercise,
perhaps some daily yoga to unwind.
She's heard it all before. And as she cries,

cold from the table seeps into her thighs.
She's only a pale body his mind—
she knows because he will not meet her eyes.

And when he looks toward the door, hope dies.
He shakes her hand and smiles, harmless, blind—
even calls her *sweetheart* when she cries.
The nurse gives her a tissue for her eyes.

Migraine Suite

Darlene Young

Prelude

Something is not right.
A haunting quaver
to the world. Your mind
feels viscous, your body
watery. The lights have dimmed.
The sense
of the smell
of ozone.

Allemande

A greasy fingerprint on the lower right
of the screen of the world becomes
a tiny crescent of jazzy spangles,
expanding, growing toward you
like the titles on a superhero movie.
A takeover is in progress. You discover
you cannot see faces or sentences
in entirety. Focus on a single eye,
a mouth. When mouths speak,
you cannot recognize the words.
When you speak, the words
shirk and cavort. You are drifting
out to sea.

Courante

The neon scythe-

shaped sparklers become the burr
of a dental drill,
dull-saw shriek on hardwood,
all that is jagged,
splintered, pluck- tangled, zipper- snagged. Snarled
steel wool claxon, burnt
skillet egg-ash, earwigs, asterisks. Sand
in the eyes, a broken
tooth, scraped frost, roadkill. You watch
this dizzy dance
behind closed eyes, limp, an over-full dull
pail of bolts.

Sarabande

Time, soggy paper,

thins into nothing. You drift

in a forever, existing everywhere

and nowhere, like God. You are still here.

You are still here. You are still
here. You realize the brouhaha is quieting,
slightly. And slightly.

As the tide ebbs, you find yourself

standing in nausea
like rank seaweed. Your middle
expands to fill the universe,

scummy and foamed. Not a churning
but a slow rot. Time is. Is
time. Is
stagnant.

Gigue

Retroflux.

The air is clear
but wobbly. You slink,
haggard and flimsy, poke
tentatively the corners of your mind—
is it over? Are all the termites
dead? You cannot yet laugh,
but sit on the porch, rocking,
smiling faintly, like Grandma.
You might decide
to live.

DARLENE YOUNG {youngbookshelf@gmail.com} has published two poetry collections, *Homespun and Angel Feathers* (BCC Press, 2019) and *Here* (BCC Press, 2023). She teaches creative writing at Brigham Young University and has served as poetry editor of *Dialogue* and *Segullah*. Her work has been noted in *Best American Essays* and nominated for the Pushcart Prize. She lives in South Jordan, Utah.

Thanksgiving in Kindergarten *Salt Lake City, Utah, 1996*

Hilary Brown

We grew up in a city named for water we could not drink.
Our ancestors walked for miles to find
a home that would not burn so easily,
then stumbled on salt, which meant preservation.

In 1996 we walked to Westbrook Elementary
past neighborhood dogs named Lobo
and Lamanite music spilling from one-car garages,
brass trumpeting on the asphalt.

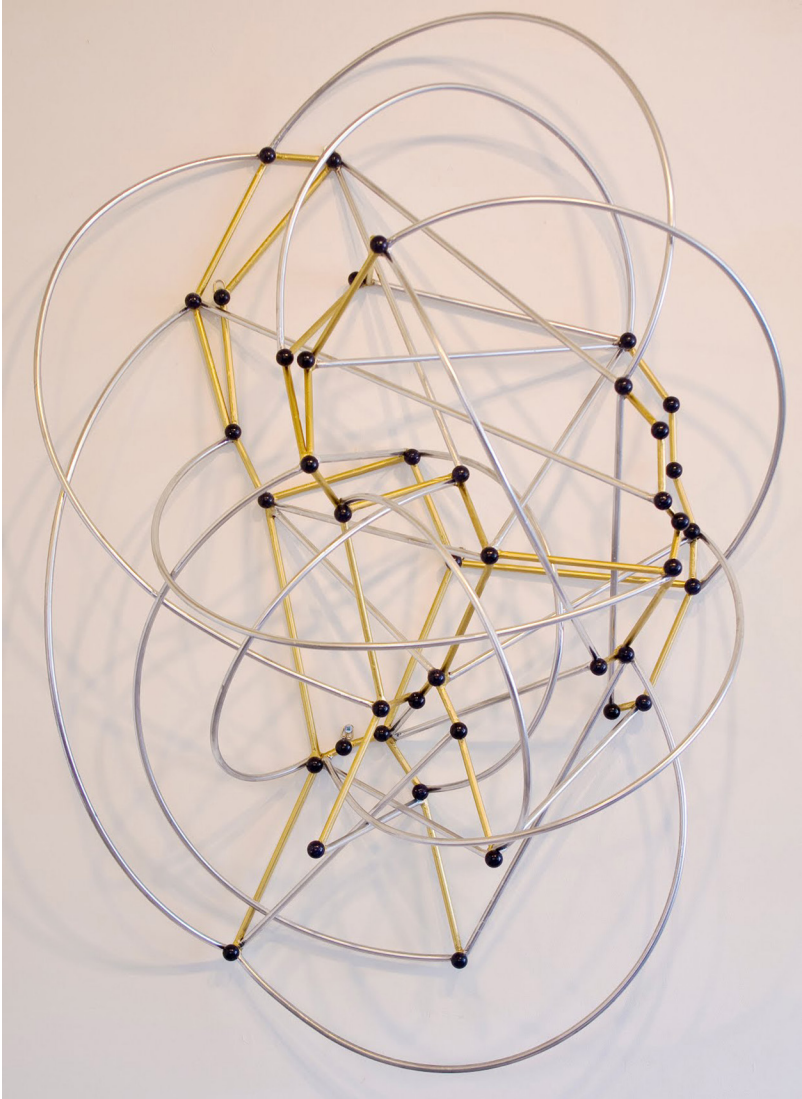
When the teacher gave us feathers to wear on Thanksgiving,
I didn't know about the Mountain Meadows Massacre,
or Mormon militias marching, meaning to baptize
Shoshone lands with the salt of the earth.

My father taught me to keep
my hands open, facing sky, expecting light.
He collected miracles like shells
and placed them at my feet.

I didn't know yet
this land was holy before we arrived.

I didn't know—
water we couldn't drink could still cleanse.
A burning bush without a prophet
could still heal.

HILARY BROWN {hilaryawbrown@gmail.com} was born in Salt Lake City and is the oldest of six sisters. She graduated from Utah State University and is a proud public school teacher in a border town, where she works in alternative education and drop-out prevention. Her current project is a memoir written in verse detailing her personal experiences with scrupulosity. Hilary lives in Arizona with her husband, Neil, recently adopted baby daughter, and two dogs.



Nicole Woodbury,
Orion Constellation, 2017,
steel rod and glass, 36" x 72" x 13"

THE LAST DAY

Jacob L. Bender

“Scott Eccles?”

“Yes!”

“Please follow me.”

Scott Eccles leapt from his seat, straightened his tie, and surreptitiously placed his fists on his hips in the Superman pose, for he had watched a video online that said doing so can spike one’s testosterone and in turn one’s self-confidence. As he followed the nurse down the hall, his stride made clear: something big was about to happen.

“Mr. Eccles, please have a seat,” said the doctor distractedly as he was shown into the examination room. The doctor for his part avoided eye contact (a submissive tic, Scott had heard), folded his hands, pursed his lips, and fell silent—so Scott seized his chance.

“Doc!” he said with a smile, “Have you thought any more about that opportunity?”

The doctor snapped awake. “Sorry?”

“Why, the Ameriway opportunity!” said Scott. “Don’t tell me you’ve forgotten. Did you read those brochures I left last time? Now, I’m no doctor, but lawsuit insurance! Doesn’t that practically sell itself?”

“Sell what now?”

“Now, now, now, I know what you’re gonna say, you already have malpractice insurance. Required by your profession, I know, I know, I’ve read all about it. Terrible state of our country nowadays. But how much does malpractice insurance pay you *back*, I ask you!”

“Pardon?”

“That’s precisely the genius of it,” Scott continued, “It’s so simple! I sell you lawsuit insurance, and you sell it to two, just two, others—just

two others, mind you. I automatically collect a portion of the premium from you, and you likewise collect a cut from the two under you. As I'm sure you're aware, most MLMs require up to eight or even twelve recruits before you start collecting what's yours, but with Ameriway it's only *two*. Just your own two legs to stand on! No waiting for months on end, no grinding it out, you start making money almost immediately—growth is exponential, never-ending, worlds without end!”

“Mr. Eccles, I . . .”

“I mean, it's something absolutely everybody needs, right? Not like scented candles, or oils, or meal plans, or any other nonsense like that, no—just the sheer peace of mind that comes from knowing that you'll never have to pay for a lawsuit again! In our easily offended day and age, that ain't nothing to bat an eye at. A single lawsuit, it could just ruin a man—and then everything you've built up for yourself, your big house, your wonderful family, all those sacrifices you made to make it through med school, *swoosh*, gone in a flash.”

“I'm sorry?”

“There's not another system like it. I have an old friend who, after networking for One Health, was NFL . . .”

“. . . NFL?”

“NFL, No Friends Left,” Scott quickly clarified. “He'd driven off everyone in his potential network. He'd gotten mixed up with those One Health folk in the wrong way, you see—which really *is* a scam, I'll have you know—trying to rope everyone into health supplements, preaching the sky falling about how all the nutrients that have been sucked out of the ground by pollution and pesticides and whatnot—I mean, it's true and all, but One Health was going about it all wrong, their network was in shambles, and Henry got the worst of it.”

“Sir.”

“Anyways, my friend Harry—that was his name, Harry—he was broke as a joke, bank was gonna foreclose on his lovely duplex, his wife and college sweetheart was leaving him and everything, but then he

started with Ameriway just a year ago, and can you believe he's already pullin' in ten grand a week? A *week*? Even for a successful doctor like yourself, you gotta admit, that's a pretty hefty chunk of change." Scott paused for emphasis.

"Mr. Eccles, I have your—"

"Yes, yes, the tests," said Scott happily. "Thank you so much for doing those for me! You came *very* highly recommended from my wife's friends, you know. That pain in my lower back, well, it ain't been killing me or nothing, but it hasn't left me alone for *weeks* now, I tell you what. In fact, one good turn deserves another! Doc, why don't Emma and I invite you over for dinner? We can you treat you and the missus to a good ol'-fashioned barbecue and talk more about these exciting opportunities over some cuts of my finest brisket. . . ."

"Mr. Eccles, you have three months."

"Oh, challenge accepted, I can have you turning a profit in two—"

"No, no, I'm sorry, I mean, you have *three months*. That's all." And with that, the doctor at last let loose a flurry of medical jargon that did nothing to clarify anything for poor Scott Eccles save the fact that he had only three months.

"Now that's not funny, doc. . . ." Scott finally said.

"I sent the tests to the lab twice, just to be sure," continued the doctor. "I even reached out to the university hospital where I did my residency, but each time the prognosis came back the same: you have three months. Maybe four. Words can't express how sorry I am."

Scott shifted uncomfortably in his chair. "So, you're not coming over on Friday. . . ."

"I'm afraid I will not."

"Listen, I may need a second opinion—"

"You are right to seek one, and I sincerely hope it'll be different. But it won't."

"But surely there are. . . ."

"There aren't."

“Should I, um, exercise . . .”

“Won’t make any difference.”

“Medication . . .”

“Scarcely any under development. None even close to market.”

“Treatments . . .”

“Experimental. Long shots. Not covered.”

“I have very good insurance . . .”

“You might as well not for all the good it would do you.”

“I can pay you anything . . .”

“I could bleed you dry. But it still wouldn’t change a thing.”

“So what should I . . .”

“Get your affairs in order. Call old friends. Reconcile with old enemies. Make love to your wife. Visit Paris if you haven’t already. Make peace with your God if you have one. Whatever you must do.”

A pause. “So what you’re telling me . . .”

“Mr. Eccles, I’m profoundly sorry this happened to you, I can run the tests again if you wish . . .”

But Scott Eccles was already wandering out of the office.

Between the hallway and the front door, Scott Eccles’s thinking underwent a shift. Not a gradual one, he had no more time for that, but a seismic cataclysm across the landscape of his mind.

By the time he passed the door frame, he was desperately trying to remember his Ameriway sales pitch—not out of any sort of lingering affection for it but just to hold on to something, anything, as it actively drained from his tongue like water between his fingers. By the time he got halfway down the short hallway, he’d forgotten it completely, and many others besides.

As he reentered the waiting room, he had already forgotten every name in his entire network. And as he passed the magazine he’d been leafing through just minutes before, he tried to remember if he’d wanted to be an astronaut or an archaeologist when he grew up. And as he passed an old lady reading a romance, he tried to remember what the last book was he’d read that wasn’t for a class or a seminar.

And as he stepped into the sunshine, some bored kids in the parking lot snickered because he'd been running his fingers through his hair and the strands of his comb-over were now high in the air. Scott turned abruptly to face them—not in anger but bewilderment, for though he seemed to remember being a child, he couldn't remember what that was like.



As the congregation began to slowly break into parts for the second verse, David Warner, a young graduate student visiting home for the weekend, entered from the west foyer and sat down quietly in the back row for possibly the last time. He wore a weary old white shirt, an un-cinched tie, some stained and wrinkled slacks, and the first sprouting stubble of an attempted beard. Though he refused to tell another soul about it, he was in the throes of a full-blown faith crisis.

And he hated it—not because he felt the faith of his fathers actively slipping away per se, but because of the horrid cliché he felt himself becoming. Just yesterday, he had actually uttered aloud “I’m on a spiritual journey” and winced. Good God, what was next, posting on Reddit? Writing angry letters to Church HQ? Last week, he'd stumbled across some ex-Mormon blog (he could no longer say by accident) wherein someone cited Arcade Fire's *The Suburbs* as his chief consoling comfort as he exodused the Church. Seriously, not even *Neon Bible*. What is it about losing faith that makes folks as clichéd and sentimental as the religion they are leaving?



With a start, Scott Eccles awoke; it appeared he had fainted on the hood of his car, parked under the tree in the shade. His keys were still in his hands. A thin line of sweat had collected on his brow and upper lip. As his mind slowly collected, he briefly entertained the possibility that this had all been a dream. He calmly considered how the shadows

of the leaves weaved across the windshield before him, the sun peeking and shimmering through, all while the branches swayed softly in the wind, almost as though counting down . . . *a moment gone . . . and another . . . and another—*

Scott Eccles leapt to his feet and dashed away from his car in a wild panic.



He already knew the normal litany of reasons people leave, as well as every ready response he'd once relied upon, for example: the Lord uses imperfect men to do his work; Mormon polygamist wives were among the foremost suffragists in the western United States; folks who bring up Mountain Meadows always conspicuously ignore Missouri; declaring that the Book of Abraham is just the Book of Breathings belies the fact that we don't know what the Book of Breathings is either; and he had something for horses in the Book of Mormon, too. He also used to have something inspiring, even Abrahamic, to say about the Church's treatment of LGBTQ people but didn't anymore, not since November 2015. Increasingly, he didn't have a response to any of it.



Though he had lived in the area for years, Scott Eccles quickly became disoriented as he wandered the sidewalks. Oddly, it did not occur to him to pull out his phone for directions. He now realized he only knew this area by the blur of landmarks as he drove them by, or pauses at traffic lights, or how hard he hugged each curve of the road. But on foot, the streams of faceless storefronts suddenly had faces; they became unfamiliar, strange, new. Frightened, he broke into an unpracticed jog.



His dad had long said that the Lord had a perfect church till he let all of us in, for are we not all hypocrites—but lately, the religious hypocrisy was getting to him above all else. He remembered as a teenager getting picked up by his new home teaching companion Scott Eccles outside the Del Taco at the strip mall. They passed a panhandler on a corner, the sight of which sent Brother Eccles off on a long rant about the laziness, unthriftiness, and sinful entitlement of the homeless, how they simply didn't want to work but preferred to leech off of others—all within minutes of him trying to recruit David into his latest pyramid scheme. “Do this right, and you'll never have to work a day in your life again,” Brother Eccles had said with a galling lack of self-awareness. David's dad had later instructed him to just laugh it off, to bear with him as the Lord God bears with us—though rumor had it that his dad later told Brother Eccles in private to stay the hell away from his son.



The sun was particularly hot today, which was unusual this late in the fall. Yet Scott Eccles did not think to remove his suit jacket, nor loosen his collar, nor remove his Sunday shoes, no matter how they blistered his feet as he staggered down the broken pavement. Though he was profoundly uncomfortable, he nevertheless experienced a primal, unthinking need to feel every part of his aching body while he still could.



If the rumor was true, then his dad was especially gutsy, for Scott Eccles was a member of the bishopric at the time. Of course, was not his spot on the stand a tacit sort of institutional approval for whatever Brother Eccles represented? Did the Lord God Almighty really inspire the bishop by his Holy Spirit to select *him*, that snake-oil salesman, as a counselor? And did the stake president really feel inspired to call and

anoint such a bishop? And then who called that stake president? And up and up the ladder he went, and David wondered—and feared.



So many thoughts and memories had already drained through his pores that it was with a most curious and vague sense of recognition that he paused before the stake center. That *had* been why he had worn his suit that morning, was it not? So as to not need to change between the doctor's office and the two-hour block? Why had it not struck him as unusual that the doctor would ask him so urgently to come in on a Sunday morning? But he was past all wonder now. Without either wanting or not wanting to, his feet stumbled toward the entrance; he gripped the door handle hard, trying desperately to feel it as familiar.



Mechanically, habitually, David Warner partook of the bread of the sacrament, and he felt nothing—and what's more, he feared he had never felt anything to begin with. When a certain friend on the edge had once argued that his faith was based on no more than “subjective experience,” David had blurted out, “But *everything* is subjective experience! We *never* know if what we're experiencing is real or not! We *all* walk by faith alone.” That's just basic Descartes, he said, Plato's allegory of the cave, the plot to *Inception*, or *The Matrix*, first-week Philosophy 101. David had applauded himself for his sophistication and cleverness. But now, all he could see was that his friend had a point all along—it *was* all just subjective, and his faith was vain.

As the testimonies portion of the meeting began, David leaned forward on the bench, rubbed his face, and offered one last silent prayer: *God, if there is a God, if there was ever a God, I need a sign.*



But nothing felt familiar. Not the blue carpets, not the white brick walls, not the correlated art that hangs in every North American chapel. Not even the faces of the congregation, no matter how many years he had seen each of them, no matter how each of them stared back as he stumbled down the aisle—with a shock and catastrophic regret, he realized he didn't know any of them at all.



David's heart groaned within him; Scott Eccles was going to bear his testimony first. Rolling his eyes, he decided he might not even wait until the end of the meeting. If this was the best sign the Almighty could deliver, then this indeed was the Last Day, Great and Terrible, of his association with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.



Standing awkwardly before the podium, the words did not come to him as they usually did. An uncomfortable silence fell upon the congregation.

Then Scott erupted, in convulsing sobs that filled the chapel. Hot tears streamed down his face, his cries reverberating through the feedback of the microphone. He crumpled forward onto the podium and continued to cry out loudly, showing no signs of ceasing. His shoulders, his whole being, shook terribly. The bishop leapt to his feet and tried to help Scott stand back up, but Scott only slid off the podium and continued wailing wildly and recklessly on the floor. Even the bawling babies in the chapel fell silent as the congregation sat transfixed, an awful knot twisting in their collective stomachs, for all they could make out between his heaving sobs was, "We're all gonna die, we're all gonna die . . ."



The responses varied across the ward. Some left sacrament meeting early, in a disturbed and distraught haze. Others felt a profound pity for Brother Eccles and wondered if maybe they should bring by a meal, even as they were fully aware of how little such a gesture might mean—both to him and themselves. Still others couldn't help but feel a touch of resentment toward Scott, who had so ruined their one desperately needed hour of peace a week, while others were just grateful that something new had happened at church for a change.

As for David Warner, he sat in absolute silence the rest of fast and testimony meeting. After the closing prayer, he stood up slowly, deliberately, and then paced out the building, ignoring all greetings. In the parking lot, he fumbled with his keys and dropped them to the ground. Instead of bending down to reach them, he gazed up and beheld the sun shimmering through the trees as the branches swayed softly in the breeze. Abruptly, his eyes began to water, and his soul swooned within him. Slowly, he brought his fist up to his teeth, and with a swelling in his breast and tears on his cheeks, he whispered: *The Church is true, the Church is true, thank God Almighty, the Church is true . . .*

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Discerning Between Truth and—

John Bennion. *Spin*. Art by Amy Bennion. Newburgh, Ind.: By Common Consent Press, 2022. 460 pp. Paper: \$12.95. ISBN: 978-1-948218-53-5.

Reviewed by Julie J. Nichols

What would I do if cast out of my life with nothing?

Forced to ask ourselves this question in the first two chapters of this genre-bending, disturbing novel—John Bennion’s most complex yet—we get, early on, a glimpse of what he’s up to: the verb tense shifts from scene to scene, as Lily, our protagonist, is cast out of her life, deprived by a vicious ex of money, credit, phone, home, and child, and she must now cite paragraph-long lists of privileges and possessions impossible to obtain without those keys to entitlement. Her memories recount the story of her wealth-endowed marriage and her checkered past before that, with accompanying art, ostensibly by Lily herself. All she has now are dire uncertainties, both about what will happen next and what is actually happening now. Does Lily have borderline personality disorder, as her ex insists, or not? Who has been abusing whom? Has her ex really done what it seems he has done? Who would do that? Where can she get help? Who is telling the truth? Is there a truth that can be told about this situation?

So far, in these first two chapters, less than 10 percent of the book’s total length, we’re cast into the depths of anxiety, not only for Lily but for ourselves. We don’t know whom to believe. It does seem clear that Lily’s in a world of hurt. With a few of the three hundred and fifty dollars she has in her wallet—all the money she has now, given that her ex has closed down her bank accounts and stolen her belongings with all legal approbation—she goes to Deseret Industries to buy herself a

change of clothes. There she finds and buys, for fifty cents, an “Executive Decision Maker.” It is this device that she spins to help her decide what to do—in the process providing the novel’s title. The theme, Lily’s life, and the devices of storytelling spin far from the ordinary and expected.

It isn’t until the third chapter that we see another device Bennion uses to spin this tale: an insertion of authorial self, the first of a series of passages interrupting the story to comment from Bennion’s own voice. There’s no mistaking it: he identifies himself as the author of this novel, with self-reflective questions about theme and craft, verisimilitude and verifiability, choice and possibility. He liberally quotes Emmanuel Levinas, “[his] Virgil on this journey of self-exploration” (167), Kant, and many other writers, ruminating on the ethicality of what he’s doing as a novelist as well as on the implications of Lily’s choices (which are, of course, his).

At this point the reader—just like Lily—has little choice but to say, *Okay, we’re in for an unsettling ride. Might as well settle in. Take one chapter at a time and figure out how to do it.*

How does someone determine right from wrong? . . . One implication of [Kant’s] thinking is that all our ways of knowing are limited. We can’t know the world independent of our subjective perception of it. . . . Intellectually I [Bennion] embrace the idea of an ordered disorder in both ethics and reality, but as I drag my pilgrim flesh along my journey, I long for a simple pathway, where decisions are clear and life is free from obstacles and mishaps. (187–88)

But there’s no such path. Bennion says that in real life, an actual Executive Decision Maker (a vintage novelty toy) determined the course of the plot—of Lily’s happenstance—as he wrote (80). He says that he even allowed his students to cast the lot at least once and that, just as Lily commits to doing what her device tells her to do (though she herself sets the rules, since the cast-off machine is blank), he always wrote what the device directed, even if it wasn’t what he, or we, would want for Lily.

Spinning the Executive Decision Maker, she determines

- which direction to travel in to run away from her spouse and the law enforcement he enlists
- what transportation to use
- how long she will stay at each new place

Soon she realizes she needs the EDM to anchor her, as she has no other anchor. She is “outside the institutions that help most of us” (123), so she goes where the EDM says to go, looking for what it says to use, because she can’t trust anything else. Though she knows on one level that this is crazy behavior, she knows on another that she has to do it or risk becoming even crazier, even less grounded in any reality. Neither the church nor the law, neither capitalism nor social organizations grant her what she needs. Only following the spin of the wheel can she feel any semblance of control.

By increments her perceptions turn upside down. She is now the homeless undesirable her former affluent self ignored or detested. She now detests even more the people inside the stores and agencies who refuse to see her because she has no money. Utilizing the shoplifting skills that entertained her in high school, she scavenges food for her daughter and herself, resolving to do whatever she has to in order to flee her husband and the legal system that says her daughter isn’t hers to keep. She’ll steal; she’ll hide; she’ll change her identity; perhaps especially, she’ll lie. “In writing there are rules,” says Bennion. He continues:

In the fictional parts of this book it’s expected that I’m making things up. When I essay in my own voice, as here, I’m not to lie. The problem comes with mixing the two, especially when I say that some of Lily’s choices are random, but I determine what happens when she makes those choices. When am I lying and when telling the truth? Even I don’t know for sure. . . . [Lily’s] lies expand the potential of the universe . . . to bring possibilities into being. We lie to change the past and create the future. (141)

Lily lies herself through several mercies: people know she's lying about herself and her daughter, but they're kind to her anyway, observing her destitution, and she gets far enough away from the punitive ex-husband that she becomes safe for a relatively long time. In this new situation, largely built on lies, she creates a life. I'm vigorously avoiding spoilers here because this is a novel in which much of the pleasure is in the push-pull of not wanting to see the protagonist in worse trouble than she's already in and wanting very much to know what happens next, how she will survive, what choices she will make when she's found out.

As a new life builds itself around her fabricated identity, quite far from the moneyed, narcissistic husband (but is he?), Bennion reveals more devices, more manipulations, demonstrating how communities evolve, member by member, need by need, individual by individual, and how there is never the option of complete safety. We watch out for each other, but then other priorities arise and we can't depend on each other as we thought we could. Gangs, random acts of violence as well as kindness, narrow escapes, and generous helpers—all these ask us what we would do if there were nothing to trust but chance.

Another identity change for Lily later, Bennion reveals one more layer of his own project:

Why would a man in his late sixties write a novel about a lovely young woman? [Am I] a voyeur of my own character? I admire Lily's intelligence, will, determination, and devotion to her child. . . . Writing, I feel a tension between myself and Lily, that of host and guest. I've invited her into my head, but as host I am obligated to care for her. . . . I have come to believe that my own emotional health depends on my ability to open myself to the Other, [to welcome] guests into the house of my mind and [become] respectful of how they perceive themselves. (293–95, 319)

Through the roller coaster of Lily's post-divorce-court life, Bennion is working with (I was going to say "playing with," but it's more serious than that) notions of free will, cosmic forces, individual capacity,

and social justice. How much of anything that happens to us is in our control? How much can we blame any one factor, any one person, for the vicissitudes of their—or our own—lives? How much of what is said and done is constructed? What constitutes reality? Can we extricate ourselves from dire circumstances, ever, even for a moment? Whom can we trust?

Good things happen to Lily, and bad things happen. How will it end? You'll keep reading this book to find out, as with every new chapter in her story, every new philosophical mini-essay in Bennion's voice, your assumptions about possibilities—in life or in novel-reading, in Mormon upbringing or in secular education—are upended.

There are as many meanings to the word “cast” as there are directions in the spin of the Executive Decision Maker. I would not want to be cast out of my life with nothing, but I believe one of the things Bennion wants us to think about is that we are all castaways. Nothing, not our wealth or our place in society or our health or our safety, is cast in stone. We must—we *do*—all cast our futures in the spinning devices of our brains and hearts. *Spin* may not be the most optimistic book you'll read this year, but it's sure to be one of the most provocative and compelling. We are lucky indeed to have John Bennion in our midst, spinning his ever-evolving magic; we are lucky indeed to have BCC Press to publish that magic as we attempt to discern the impossibly slippery castings of trust, survival, and truth.

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Joseph Smith and the Long Eighteenth Century

Colby Townsend, ed. *Envisioning Scripture: Joseph Smith's Revelations in Their Early American Contexts*. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2022. 316 pp. Paper: \$18.95. ISBN: 978-1-56085-447-0.

Reviewed by Stephen Thomas Betts

The ten essays in this volume were brought together to facilitate engagement between scholars of “early Mormonism and early American religious and literary history” (ix). With a designedly inter- or transdisciplinary ambition, *Envisioning Scripture* assembles the likes of narrative analysis, print culture studies, and translation studies—to name only three—to establish an early American context for Joseph Smith’s scriptural productions. Unique among similarly disposed volumes such as *Americanist Approaches to the Book of Mormon*, *Envisioning Scripture* considers the “long eighteenth century, roughly spanning 1660 to 1830” (vii) as Smith’s cultural environment. In Mormon studies, scholarship on the long eighteenth century has historically centered, among other things, the myths of scattered Israel and the metaphysics of Western magic, but the comparative and thematic work in the present volume highlights less common approaches to this period vis-à-vis early Mormonism. These include American revolutionary culture, the formation of the public sphere, prophetic culture in the late eighteenth century, and the radical changes that such factors produced in the activities of interpreting and producing scripture and religious authority.

While not formally organized into thematic sections, the essays in *Envisioning Scripture* fall into two broad categories: seven essays that directly treat Mormonism, and three others that do not. In the former group, William Davis challenges traditional accounts that accepted

Joseph Smith's family's claim that he had little formal education, arguing instead that Smith had at least "seven full school years" (64) and ample access to print media. Unpacking the implications of this analysis is part of the central labor of Davis's 2020 monograph, *Visions in a Seer Stone: Joseph Smith and the Making of the Book of Mormon* (UNC Press). Elizabeth Fenton reads the Book of Mormon as a performative critique of canonicity itself in which "history and . . . history-making" are shown to be fissured with "erasure, failure, and loss" (75). The Book of Mormon as a new sacred (Anglo-)American history is a tale of "conting[ency]" in which, far from a definitive account of history, Fenton finds it "endlessly open to proliferation" (96). Kathleen Flake argues for an understanding of Smith's "translation" as an appropriation of the narrative time in the Bible that "gave his believing readers a sense of what was experientially real, not merely philosophically true" (154). This embodied experience of Smith's "myth-making imagination" entailed "the power to shape reality, not merely describe it" (155). Paul Gutjahr contends that "the Book of Mormon's initial material design, narrative format, linguistic peculiarities, and marked preoccupation with American history" (159) are features that rendered the book "credib[le]" and "trustworthy" in the idiom of "early nineteenth-century American print culture" (176). Roberto A. Valdeón introduces the translation studies terms of "pseudotranslation" (179), "intralingual translation," and "intersemiotic translation" to describe functionalist arguments familiar to Mormon studies about the authenticity of Smith's translations (186). Laura Thiemann Scales conducts a comparative assessment of the ways in which Black revolutionary Nat Turner and Joseph Smith both "strategically revise the formal grammar of prophecy" (236), using a narrative "apparatus of multiple voices to produce divine authorship" (231). This literary performance of vocal multiplicity reveals a "prophetic personhood [that] provides an alternative to liberal individuality and interrogates the very value of individuality" (227). Jared Hickman reads "the Book of Mormon's formal logic and not just

its eschatological content” (277) as a self-deconstructing “metacritique of [the book’s own] theological racism” (279) culminating in what he calls the “apocalypse” in/of “the text” (287)—namely, a conspicuous undermining of literalist biblical hermeneutics in antebellum America via the apocalyptic unveiling of the text’s own “human conditions of scripture writing and scripture reading” (288), a “metatextual navel-gazing [that] profoundly destabilizes its self-canonizing narrative, opening it to ethical critique from without and within” vis-à-vis theological racism (293).

The remaining three essays consider contextual features of early American print culture and its relationship to religious authority and religious experience. Catherine A. Brekus writes about the increase in women’s religious writings during the mid-eighteenth century, which she keys to the discursive opening in a male-dominated print culture introduced by evangelicalism’s embrace of the evidentiary value of religious experience during the First Great Awakening. Seth Perry addresses how Alexander Campbell’s complex view of making transparent the meaning of the New Testament through translation and editing resists scholarship that has “miss[ed] the historicizing impulse at the core of primitivist thought: [namely,] the biblical texts had to both have a history and transcend it” (120). Susan Juster discusses the gendered expectations about millenarian prophets in revolutionary America, most especially that women’s oral- and mystical-based authority were viewed as a challenge to the emergent male-dominated republican public sphere of rational, deliberative, democratic communication. Ironically, she notes, “it was republican prophets who found themselves pushed to the margins of Anglo-American political culture after 1815 rather than the mystagogues they scorned” (265). Case in point? Joseph Smith (267).

Envisioning Scripture is a useful introduction to the early American context of Joseph Smith’s revelations. While Mormon studies specialists will find much familiar territory covered, the mixture of classic and

lesser-known essays will reward multiple readings. Although the volume would have benefited from an index and more robust editorial summary in the introduction, *Envisioning Scripture* is highly recommended for anyone interested in early Mormonism.

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No Country for Nostalgia

Todd Robert Petersen. *Picnic in the Ruins*. Berkeley, Calif.: Counterpoint Press, 2021. 336 pp. Paperback: \$16.95. ISBN: 9781640093225.

Reviewed by English Brooks

Even in the modesty of its title, *Picnic in the Ruins* is a deceptively ambitious novel. At once wry and gentle, its depiction of the various lives and stories that become snarled up in a nonstop eleven-day western thriller is set in the borderlands of southern Utah and northern Arizona. Mormon country, sure. But as Petersen demonstrates, this is a region shot through with multiple fiercely competing claims to lands, their management, use, meaning, and history. Based primarily in Kanab, *Picnic's* action ranges to Bryce Canyon National Park, the Kaibab Paiute Indian Reservation, the Short Creek Community, and various corners of a newly designated (and even more recently rolled back) national monument. The contested boundaries of this monument—which, while never explicitly named, is clearly a fictionalized amalgamation of Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante—constitute the stakes of the novel, in life-or-death terms for some of the characters. Thematically,

Picnic in the Ruins takes on questions of ownership, patrimony, and repatriation (of both lands and artifacts) and of problems of authenticity in an American West under the ever-increasing pressures of industrial tourism, energy resource extraction, and debates about how best (and for whom) to preserve what remains of its past. In doing so, the novel manages to hold parties accountable while avoiding the polemics of oversimplified finger-pointing. More than anything, though, it's a compelling ride, balancing sequences of desert-road car chase and overland on-foot pursuit with nuanced, often witty, dialogue and the development of characters that manage to be both colorful and uncannily believable.

Sheriff Patrick Dalton is a veteran of army tours in Afghanistan and Iraq who we find now recently divorced and trying to decide whether to respond to a text he receives in the middle of sacrament meeting. It's about a homicide, one that becomes readily attributable to homegrown scapegrace delinquents the Ashdown brothers. Observant and canny in ways that evoke a Philip Marlowe-esque detective, Dalton also exhibits a social worker's care and temperance in his interactions with the local community. For example, in conversations with a deputy about the likelihood of the Ashdowns' implication in the crime, the two discuss the brothers' hard-knock past as latchkey kids looking after each other. But neither Dalton nor the Ashdowns are the novel's only protagonists, as Petersen extends a pretty ecumenical narrative voice across a variety of central players. Sophia Shepard, an idealistic doctoral student in anthropology from Princeton, is working in the area as a volunteer, researching for her dissertation. Her keen interest in and commitment to the ethics of preservation collide with a somewhat gonzo artifact repatriation project being carried out by her new friend Paul Thrift, a chivalrous and earnest national park ranger who quotes Thoreau and reads from Buddhist spiritual texts.

The novel's action accelerates with the involvement of a wonderfully terrifying and charmingly cynical assassin named Nicolas Szczesny, whom we get to know as simply "Scissors." Initially hired by a shadowy

figure named Frangos as a fixer to clean up after the Ashdowns' botched robbery and murder of Bruce Cluff (former dentist, pothunter, and local good old boy), Scissors comes into focus over the course of the novel as a rare type of monster in the style of *No Country for Old Men's* Anton Chigurh. However, some nice touches here include this assassin's proclivity for loud shirts, sleight-of-hand conjury, constantly wolfing down junk food, and driving a silver Sebring with a spare tire on it. (Think McCarthy via the playful hand of the Coen brothers.) Along the way, a German tourist and sort of guileless innocent named Reinhardt Kupfer eavesdrops on a conversation in a diner about a special map and finds himself also dragged into the action. A dermatologist back home, Reinhardt has come to Utah with a sincere—but fetishizing—lifelong desire to experience an authentic Native American West. When he finally decides to abandon the gimmicky "Ranches, Relics, and Ruins" adventure tour he initially signed up for, he begins a Campbellian hero's journey to "see something quiet and real and true" (69), tying his fate to that of the other protagonists. In the case of these and other characters, and of the action that ensues, *Picnic* rises to the level of a T. C. Boyle thriller, populated by a cast as fully formed as that of a Barbara Kingsolver novel. And fans of classic western fiction will likely hear echoes of Zane Grey's *Riders of the Purple Sage* and even Owen Wister's *The Virginian*.

Fortunately, in Petersen's telling of this story, the places involved are treated with the same level of attention and subtlety as the characters. His depictions of the sky, for example, are frequent, often lyrical, and attuned to unique desert phenomena like petrichor and virga. In one passage, for example, "As [Dalton] drove, he spotted a cluster of thunderheads to the south. They were deeply shadowed at the base and almost specular at the top, the light shearing them into flat stacked planes. A thin flicker of lightning pulsed twice in the core of the cloud, and in the gathering dusk the evening star came on in a single pulse" (198). Elsewhere, "The sky above them was a swirl of purple, gray, and abalone" (206). And, reflecting the heightening tension later into the

novel, “A helix of turkey vultures rotated and lifted in the distance like shattered bits of creosote” (243). If such passages aren’t reliant on the metallic color palettes of Cormac McCarthy’s skies, other aspects of Petersen’s novel do make more deliberate nods to McCarthy’s obsession with ongoing cycles of violence in American frontier lands.

By far the most horrific scene in *Picnic in the Ruins* involves a shoot-out that converges on the brutal, active looting and desecration of an ancestral burial ground with a backhoe. In its depiction of excavation and theft, the episode seems to collapse time in ways that reveal layers of violence and intergenerational trauma lying just under the surface in much of *Picnic*. In such moments, the displacement and erasure of Native people in the past and the ongoing silencing of their claims on the present are brought to the fore. Indeed, with a few exceptions, actual Native characters constitute a generally absent presence throughout the book. As one character points out, they “seem to be hidden” (59). In short, this is not a Tony Hillerman novel, and some readers might characterize this choice as a failure or omission. Though I wouldn’t speculate on Petersen’s motivations in this regard, one effect of this aspect of the novel I find as a reader is that of allowing an appropriate measure of responsibility for the past to reside with settler culture. That is, although they impact Native people, the problems remain white people’s problems, to either deal with or continue repeating. Reflecting on the aftermath of the shoot-out, Sheriff Dalton—who maintains a kind of public agnosticism about the politics of pothunting and repatriation—remarks “This thing is just a black hole. . . . We’re all gonna end up sucked into it” (254).

Kimball Tillohash, one of Paul’s fellow NPS workers and Kiabab Paiute, however, offers another perspective. “Look, you want to save this place. We’re a little sick of saviors, but okay. I want to save it for different reasons. We’ve been trying to use white people’s tools to tear down white people’s walls. It works for a little while, then it stops. It always breaks down” (286–87). Also implicated in this cycle of violence

is the aggrieved petulance and brittleness that manifests in white settler culture. For example, readers are treated to a quick glimpse of a cartoonish “Freedom Jamboree” held by an anti-government community characterized by Bundy family–style standoff antics. “You remember the folks that took over the tortoise preserve in Nevada? A guy blew off his own hand trying to dynamite a boulder so it would block the only road in and out? . . . This is their celebration” (260). Even the novel’s initial crime is presented as a fictional reworking of the suicides that famously followed a 2009 federal raid on men trafficking Native artifacts from the region. Although portrayed generously and sympathetically throughout, Mormon characters are not held harmless here.

But for Mormon readers, the novel’s depiction of Mormon characters may also provide one of its more rewarding and refreshing pleasures, as these range from conventional churchgoing types to Jack Mormons to fundamentalists, among others. One especially touching episode occurs when Sophia, Paul, and Reinhardt are taken into hiding by Euphrenia Hamblin and her polygamist family to spend the night in their home. As Euphrenia and her daughters tend to Sophia’s injuries, then oil and braid her hair, their conversations, however haltingly, eventually turn to commonalities in the Hamblins’ and Sophia’s family’s experiences. Sophia comments on similarities between the deserts of Iran (her mother’s homeland) and the Colorado Plateau, comparing Euphrenia’s hospitality with that of her Persian culture. Although Sophia explains how her mother fled from Khomeini-era repressions, Euphrenia still muses, “Muslims are some of the only other people with families like ours. . . . I’d like to talk to somebody else who’s living this way” (266–67). Action and adventure aside, such moments of intimacy are when *Picnic* comes in most movingly, as they allow for the dissolution of the otherness and alienation that plague our current social and political relations.

It is, in large part, by pushing beyond Mormon and other western character types that Petersen’s novel is able to succeed with some of

its larger project. Writer and scholar Theodore Van Alst suggests one way of understanding how this works. In his appraisal of the delight he finds reading the fiction of Stephen Graham Jones, Van Alst declares that “finally, *finally*, when I read these stories, unless I am told otherwise, all of the characters are Indian. But best of all, very best of all, they’re incidentally Indian.”¹ In some similar ways, in *Picnic*, Petersen has gifted us a novel in which the incidentally Mormon characters in all their variety, though in many ways characterized by their Mormonism, are not merely essentialized by it. This characterization leaves room for us as readers to not only appreciate their uniqueness but also to more readily see some aspect of ourselves or our own story in them. Furthermore, it allows us to consider critical and often difficult questions about the West we’ve inherited and who is no longer here in order for us to be here. As is indicated in the distortions of memory and nostalgia at play in the novel’s title, *Picnic in the Ruins* invites us to reckon more honestly with our relationship with these histories of displacement and dispossession.

ENGLISH BROOKS’s creative and scholarly work has appeared in *Aztlán*, *Dark Mountain*, *Ecozon@*, *Green Letters*, *ISLE*, *MELUS*, *Pacific Coast Philology*, *salt-front*, *Sunstone*, *Terrain.org*, *Western American Literature*, and several edited collections from academic and popular presses. In the summer, he volunteers with Birch Creek Service Ranch. For the rest of the year, he teaches at Snow College in central Utah.



1. Theodore C. Van Alst Jr., ed., *The Faster Redder Road: The Best UnAmerican Stories of Stephen Graham Jones* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2015), xiv.

Wickies for the Lord

Ronald V. Huggins. *Lighthouse: Jerald & Sandra Tanner, Despised and Beloved Critics of Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2022). 390 pp. Paper: \$24.95. ISBN: 9781560854548.

Reviewed by Jeremy M. Christiansen

Growing up in the 1990s in a strong Mormon household, I learned that my religion had its own Index Librorum Prohibitorum. It was not published for the faithful to see but transmitted orally, through hushed but stern warnings. And always among the names mentioned: “the Tanners.” They wrote anti-Mormon books. The kind filled with calumnies, the kind that make you lose your testimony and wind up like Elder Kinegar from *God’s Army*. Flash forward a couple of decades and as I was making my own way out of the LDS Church, I found myself reading a number of the Tanners’ publications, seeing their names everywhere, and coming to the startling conclusion that their work was not only much less sensational than I was led to believe but was as foundational to understanding Mormon history as the writings of more credentialed writers like Fawn Brodie or D. Michael Quinn.

As Ronald Huggins rightly notes in his remarkable new biography, *Lighthouse: Jerald & Sandra Tanner, Despised and Beloved Critics of Mormonism*, “given the large number of historical disputes the Tanners’ research contributed to, it would be impossible to trace the course of Mormon history and historiography over the past sixty years without an understanding of their involvement” (viii). Seer stones and salamanders, First Visions, alterations to the Book of Commandments and Book of Mormon, and the production and contents of the Book of Abraham—the Tanners were vital contributors on each of these issues and more, bedeviling everyone from Joseph Fielding Smith to Ed Decker.

Huggins sets out to provide us a “credible biography of the Tanners,” i.e., one that does “not involve breathing our love or hate into it” but rather, through scholarly detachment, presents “a depiction of what the world looks like from [the Tanners’] perspective . . . and how that vision moved them to think and act as they did” (x). He achieves his goal in spades. As Huggins recounts it, the Tanners experienced powerful personal conversions to Jesus in their early young-adult lives, conversions that took them from mainstream Mormonism to niche offshoot Mormonism to evangelical Protestantism. This spiritual journey is anticipated in Jerald’s and Sandra’s very blood, as Huggins traces their ancestries through a complex web of Protestantism and religious disputes. To see their progenitors go from Baptists to old Seventh Day Baptists and Freewill Baptists to miracle-seeking restorationists to Mormons, one is primed for, and perhaps unsurprised by, Jerald’s and Sandra’s own conversions from one faith to another.

Fittingly, those conversions are sparked by what would dominate the Tanners’ lives for decades to come: historical investigation. For Jerald, it was digging into David Whitmer’s 1887 pamphlet “An Address to All Believers in Christ.” For Sandra, it was reading the sermons of her great-great-grandfather Brigham Young on blood atonement. One is left with a distinct image of two young lovebirds in the late 1950s and early 1960s investigating Mormonism. (And I could not help but smile at Huggins’s description of their courtship, sharing their findings with one another—falling in love over Mormon history.)

Initially, the two retained their beliefs in the Book of Mormon and appear to have at least flirted with the modalism of the Missouri-based Mormonism led by Pauline Hancock. But I ask you, reader, did *you* know that the Tanners’ early tryst with modalism (something they later abandoned) played a role in the famous story of Joseph Fielding Smith unwittingly telling Sandra Tanner that the Church possessed the 1832 First Vision account? Neither did I, but *Lighthouse* is full these kinds of vignettes, and it is where Huggins’s work really shines. He transports us back to a Mormonism that seems distant, even quaint. We may take it

for granted that we can look at full-color, high-resolution images of the Book of Commandments published by *the Church itself* without realizing the absolute doggedness—and there is no other way to describe it—required for the Tanners to publish the first ever photo reprint of it. Neither the *Salt Lake Tribune* nor the *Deseret News* would advertise it. Too hot. It is impossible to read *Lighthouse* without having a deep sense of gratitude for the hard and sometimes risky work the Tanners (and others) did.

Lighthouse covers the topics you expect it to (all while revealing new and interesting information) like the salamander letter episode and the discovery and printing of the “Grammar and Alphabet of the Egyptian Language,” but also some unanticipated topics. Chapter 11, “Watergate and Wiretapping,” is a roller coaster of allegations of wiretapping by Mark E. Petersen on polygamist groups, Mormon connections to Watergate, an FBI file on the Tanners (“trouble makers and Communists” [175]), an appearance by Howard Hughes, CIA-connected operatives, and more. Huggins asks, “How were two people with a small printing business in Salt Lake City suddenly in the middle of charges and counter-charges by two men who may or may not have been CIA agents?” (188). Indeed.

Chapter 17, “I Just Need Some Rest,” is painful to read, bringing into all too vivid detail Jerald’s slow demise at the merciless hands of Alzheimer’s. There is a heartbreaking irony of “a brilliant analyst of detail, with an almost uncanny ability to spot textual inconsistencies that demand explanation” (321) being “no longer [able] to coherently write or perform basic math” (304). Your heart bursts for Sandra throughout.

Ultimately, *Lighthouse* is about the Tanners’ implacable mission of “getting at the truth” (xi). Whether you agree with their worldview or not, their conclusions or not, their methods or not, this is the best way to understand the Tanners—on their own terms. Like Augustine, whose zeal moved his unmatched intellect to write, and write tirelessly, against Manichaeism, so too the Tanners brought to bear all the gifts God gave

them to write on Mormonism. Rather than publishers, scholars, critics, or gadflies, the Tanners understood themselves as wickies for the Lord's lighthouse, sending out a beacon. Reflecting on their story and their ministry, wonderfully recounted by Huggins in a work that will hold an important place in Mormon historiography for years to come, I cannot help but faintly hear a men's quartet intone:

Brightly beams our Father's mercy
From his lighthouse ever more,
But to us he gives the keeping
Of the lights along the shore.
Let the lower lights be burning;
Send a gleam across the wave.
Some poor fainting, struggling seaman
You may rescue, you may save.

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SO THEN THEY ARE NO
MORE TWAIN, BUT ONE:¹
AN EXPLORATION OF LIMINALITY

Tony Brown

Delivered on July 21, 2022 to the Prague EuroSeminar, a forum for young Latter-day Saints in Europe, which was held at Cumorah Academy, located near Prague, Czech Republic.

When the curtain rises on the Judeo-Christian garden story, we encounter a series of in-between or liminal phenomena: 1) Adam and Eve, who represent neither fallen humanity nor exalted deities, who “have no status, property, insignia, secular clothing, rank, kinship position, nothing to demarcate them structurally” from each other and who thus, in the words of King Lear, represent “naked unaccommodated man”;² 2) the garden paradise located neither here nor there, neither in a state of temporality nor atemporality, betwixt and between as it were life and death, good and evil, heaven and hell; and 3) two commands—to multiply and replenish the earth and not to partake of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil lest their eyes should be opened and they should die—insoluble commands on their own terms, a Gordian knot if you will, thus leaving the two first humans suspended in an endless state of limbo.³

1. Matthew 19:6.

2. Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1967), 99.

3. Genesis 1:28; 2:17.

In this remarkable feat of literary brevity, we discover the very blueprint that defines the human condition: the conundrum of opposites, or “immortal antagonists” (using a term coined by Freud). Like Adam and Eve, we wander as strangers on earth “from a more exalted sphere”⁴ with eyes that see “through a glass, darkly”⁵ and perceive the world in terms of explicit separateness or opposites (what in Christian parlance we term “the Fall”), but in our journey we have the potential to reclaim a state of at-one-ment by recovering lost sight, or put another way, by developing in-sight, and thereby see again for the first time the implicit oneness or wholeness of all things.

Through his characters, the Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky explored the murky depths of the human psyche to try to pinpoint the source of unconscious drives and behaviors motivating violence, ideology, addiction, and the like. He ruthlessly probed opposing aspects of his characters’ personalities and in doing so gave voice to his own raging internal debates, many of which coalesced around the subject of religion. With one character, Dostoevsky might assume the role of the Christian apologist and persuasively argue for the necessity of faith, while with another character he might discard faith in favor of reason and discount religion as nothing more than mere children’s fantasy, and in both instances, “each Dostoevsky would have been expressing himself with the utmost sincerity.”⁶

Supposing, though, that the tension between faith and reason could be resolved, what would the polarities look like? “Well,” you might say, “reason entails sense, rational thinking, logic, and the like,” but you see, every one of those descriptions of reason gets you no closer to understanding its meaning unless paired with its respective opposite. In other words, reason or sense exists as a concept only in relation

4. “O My Father,” *Hymns*, no. 292.

5. 1 Corinthians 13:12.

6. Steven Cassedy, *Dostoevsky’s Religion* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2005), 87–88.

to non-sense and vice versa, and to insist on an either-or dichotomy ultimately amounts to calling for the end of existence itself. “The sad truth,” writes Swiss psychoanalyst Carl Jung, “is that man’s real life consists of a complex of inexorable opposites—day and night, birth and death, happiness and misery, good and evil;”⁷ and, I might add, war and peace. You see, the Russian novelist and author of *War and Peace*, Leo Tolstoy, understood that you cannot have war except in relation to peace, thus eliminating the possibility of a war *or* peace scenario.

I want us now to step back for a moment and consider ideas about marginal or liminal persons in our faith tradition. “These are people who are somehow left out in the patterning of [church culture and hierarchy], who are placeless,” writes anthropologist Mary Douglas in her treatise on the concepts of pollution and taboo in various societies and cultures. “They may be doing nothing morally wrong, but their status is indefinable.”⁸ Often, for them going to church is less about finding comfort and getting prejudices validated and more about comforting others and even being afflicted by them.⁹ Such individuals can struggle at times to connect emotionally and spiritually with their fellow brothers and sisters in the body of Christ, and yet the very symbol of the body of Christ speaks to the mystery of sacraments, or re-membering otherwise dis-membered opposites—the body and blood of Christ. As such, as Alan Watts writes, “What has been chopped and scattered becomes re-membered. So, in the Christian scheme, ‘Do this in remembrance of me.’ You see, the Christ has been sacrificed, chopped up, but the mass

7. Carl G. Jung, ed., *Man and His Symbols* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company Inc., 1964), 85.

8. Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), 95.

9. Eugene England, “Why the Church Is as True as the Gospel,” *Sunstone* 10, no. 10 (1986): 30–36; republished with additional material in *Sunstone* 22, nos. 3–4 (June 1999): 61–69. The updated version of the essay is also available online at <https://www.eugeneengland.org/why-the-church-is-as-true-as-the-gospel>. The quotation here is from the online version.

[sacrament] is celebrated in re-membrance. One of the old liturgies says the wheat which has been scattered all over the hills and grows up is gathered again into the bread. Re-membered.”¹⁰

Indeed, Jesus of Nazareth epitomizes the archetype of the liminal figure by virtue of his resisting classificatory boundaries and stripping off pretensions of social rank and status. Such marginal types represent an open versus closed type of morality and predictably run afoul of established norms just as they likewise infuse much-needed humanity.¹¹ Holy people are whole, which is to say, they have reconciled the opposites, and so, “there’s always something slightly scary about holy people. And other people react to them in very strange ways; they can’t make up their minds whether they’re saints or devils. And so holy people have, throughout history, always created a great deal of trouble, along with their creative results.”¹²

However, the tradition into which Jesus was born identified the “holy” as something or someone “set apart,” hence the myriad Levitical rules designed to separate, purify, demarcate, and punish transgressors. Accordingly, “only by exaggerating the difference between within and without, above and below, male and female, with and against”¹³ did Jews seek to ensure a semblance of order in the face of otherwise disorder or impurity.

In this context, consider the account that the author of the Fourth Gospel, the book of John, records, namely that of Jesus’ encounter with a Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well; however, bear in mind that John

10. Alan Watts, “The Middle Way,” available on Alan Watts Searchable Speech, <https://wattsalan.github.io/speechv2/vpoPC9H6DxCM.html>.

11. See Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1969), 110–11.

12. Alan Watts, “The Web of Life, Part 10: The Nature of Selfishness,” track 28 on *Out of Your Mind: Essential Listening from the Alan Watts Archive* (Louisville, Co.: Sounds True, 2004), transcript available at <https://genius.com/Alan-watts-the-web-of-life-part-10-the-nature-of-selfishness-annotated>.

13. Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 4.

chooses the location of this encounter for symbolic reasons. In the Hebrew scriptures, one went to a well to find a wife. Take, for example, Abraham, who sends his servant to his place of origin to find a wife for his son Isaac. Abraham's servant travels to the town of Nahor and stops at a well where he meets Rebekah—the future wife of Isaac. Jacob, the son of Isaac and Rebekah, likewise finds his wife Rachel at a well in the town of Haran. Finally, take Moses, the Old Testament precursor to Jesus of the New Testament, who, fleeing pharaoh, travels into the wilderness, where he sits next to a well and encounters seven daughters of a priest from Midian who come to draw water from the well. A skirmish with some rogue shepherds ensues, but Moses rises to the occasion and fends them off, for which the father of the seven daughters gives one of his daughters, Zipporah, to Moses to become his wife. Now to John's account.

In writing this account, John doesn't have Jesus ask just any woman for a drink of water. Rather, he specifically mentions that Jesus entreats a Samaritan woman to give him drink, thus underscoring the tension between the Jews and the Samaritans. In response to the woman's surprise at his asking her, a Samaritan, for a drink of water, Jesus immediately invites her to drink of the living water that only he can provide. Listening to Jesus' words with literal ears only confuses the woman further, who questions how he could give her drink when he doesn't so much as have a bucket with which to draw water. Jesus pushes her further to listen with metaphorical ears when he teaches, "whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life."¹⁴ The literal meaning of Jesus' words gives way to the metaphorical meaning, as evidenced by the Samaritan woman's earnest supplication: "Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw."¹⁵ Instead of perpetuating boundaries, Jesus offers

14. John 4:14.

15. John 4:15.

living water that weds (hence the symbol of the well) opposites and emphasizes their inherent oneness. As such, when viewed through the lens of living water, it suddenly becomes clear that people and things are “joined together by the boundaries we ordinarily take to separate them, and are, indeed, definable as themselves only in terms of other [people and] things that differ from them,” as Alan Watts describes.¹⁶

Consider also an episode involving a woman, whom we’re told “was a sinner,” who unexpectedly entered the home of a Pharisee with whom Jesus was dining, and, according to Luke, “stood at [Jesus’] feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment.”¹⁷ Jesus straightway forgave the woman her sins, “for she loved much,”¹⁸ but rebuked the Pharisee, who falsely supposed that setting himself apart from seeming impurity constituted holiness. In one of his short stories, the Welsh author and mystic Arthur Machen explored this misguided assumption:

We are naturally inclined to think that a person who is very disagreeable to us must be a very great sinner! It is very disagreeable to have one’s pocket picked, and we pronounce the thief to be a very great sinner. In truth, he is merely an undeveloped man. He cannot be a saint, of course; but he may be, and often is, an infinitely better creature than thousands who have never broken a single commandment. He is a great nuisance to *us*, I admit, and we very properly lock him up if we catch him; but between his troublesome and unsocial action and evil—Oh, the connection is of the weakest.¹⁹

Jesus thus reproaches the Pharisee who eschewed becoming “emotionally involved with life and people as was the woman who was a sinner,”

16. Alan Watts, *The Two Hands of God: The Myths of Polarity* (Novato, Calif.: New World Library, 2020), 243.

17. Luke 7:38.

18. Luke 7:47.

19. Arthur Machen, “The White People” (1904), quoted in Watts, *The Two Hands of God*, 169.

writes John A. Sanford. “She found greater love than the Pharisee, and she was made whole, for in spite of her sins she had lived.”²⁰ Indeed, Jesus proclaims, “I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.”²¹ In this account, we’re dealing with two liminal figures, two outcasts as it were—Jesus and the woman we’re told was a sinner—both of whom defy the social norm of the day and occupy that unique in-between space that on the one hand threatens the established order and on the other awakens and revitalizes it.

Relatedly, if you’ve read Dostoevsky and ever wondered why prostitutes and otherwise sexually compromised women who belong to this liminal category of despised or outlawed individuals ultimately redeem the hyper-rational and aloof protagonists, now you understand why. These were women who self-sacrificed to the point of offering their own bodies to strangers in order to mitigate the suffering of others, who embodied a “compassion springing not from any theoretical doctrine of social pity, with its implied sense of distance and hierarchy, but out of a frame of mind and heart placing the forgiver on exactly the same moral-human level as the forgiven,” as literary scholar Joseph Frank wrote in his study of Dostoevsky.²² Curiously, this archetype of the benevolent prostitute frames Matthew’s story of Jesus’ virgin birth, which he prefaces with a seventeen-verse genealogy intended to establish Jesus’ messianic credentials.

Matthew quite intentionally weaves four women into this genealogy, all of whom were known to readers of the Hebrew scriptures; however, these women were Gentiles, not Jews. Moreover, they would have been considered sexually compromised by the standards of their day. As such, Matthew’s genealogy is proclaiming that “the line that produced Jesus of Nazareth flowed through the incest of Tamar, the prostitution of Rahab,

20. John A. Sanford, *The Kingdom Within: The Inner Meaning of Jesus’ Sayings* (New York: HarperOne, 1987), 97.

21. John 10:10.

22. Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky: A Writer in His Time* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2010), 271.

the seduction of Ruth, and the adultery of Bathsheba” and that to be born into an otherwise questionable lineage “makes no difference, because God can bring holiness out of any human symbol of brokenness, inadequacy, or even evil. God can bring holiness out of incest, prostitution, seduction, and adultery. . . . God can work through any set of human circumstances to bring holiness out of life.”²³ Accordingly, for Dostoevsky as with the writers of the Gospels, who sought in words to capture the life of Jesus of Nazareth, redemption comes through transcending human categories and opposites, not through promoting detachment and insisting on hard lines and rigid concepts. Thus, drinking deeply the living water of the New Testament rather than the purifying water of the Old Testament unites people and nations spiritually such that nothing can come between them and the love of God.

Returning to the subject of faith and doubt, Paul Tillich, a German-American theologian, in his short but profound book titled *Dynamics of Faith* addresses these opposites within the context of what he calls “ultimate concern”:

Ultimate concern is ultimate risk and ultimate courage. . . . If doubt appears, it should not be considered as the negation of faith, but as an element which was always and will always be present in the act of faith. Existential doubt and faith are poles of the same reality, the state of ultimate concern. The insight into this structure of faith and doubt is of tremendous practical importance. Many Christians, as well as members of other religious groups, feel anxiety, guilt and despair about what they call “loss of faith.” But serious doubt is confirmation of faith. It indicates the seriousness of the concern, its unconditional character.²⁴

Indeed, meditating on something’s opposite can prove highly generative. For example, Shakespeare has Hamlet meditate on death by gazing at the skull of Yorick. Doing so may seem like a rather morbid and gloomy

23. John Shelby Spong, *Biblical Literalism: A Gentile Heresy* (New York: HarperOne, 2016), 77.

24. Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: HarperCollins, 1957), 20, 25.

enterprise, but the deeper one penetrates the darkness of death, the more one understands its opposite, the radiance of life, “in the same way that manure is contributive to the perfume of the rose.”²⁵

Ironically, then, “To doubt the God you believe in is to serve him. It’s an offering. It’s your gift.”²⁶ In an interview with Blair Hodges, Mary Rakow, author of the novel *This Is Why I Came*, observed,

I believe that there is this other, this Holy One, and what this Holy One wants is relationship with us. God could have made robots . . . [but] we have freedom. And if we can’t say no, then we can’t say yes. So, I think saying “no,” if that’s what we’re feeling, then that’s our prayer . . . [and] that doesn’t hamper God’s love for each of us. It doesn’t make God pull back. It doesn’t make God wince. I believe what God wants is what we want in all of our love relationships. Even if we have to hear painful things, we want the other person to speak truthfully to us. We want to be really intimate, and God’s love is a perfect love. So it can hold everything.²⁷

Accordingly, in Isaiah, the Lord declares, “I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things.”²⁸ Now there’s a god who can hold everything, or, put another way, can transcend opposites.

In one of my favorite movies, *Life of Pi*, the protagonist, Pi, whose very name connotes irrationality or the opposite of reason, describes to a writer precisely what Mary Rakow asserts, i.e., God’s capacity to hold everything:

PI: Faith is a house with many rooms.

WRITER: But no room for doubt?

25. MindPotNetwork, “Alan Watts on Carl Jung,” YouTube video, 56:20, Oct. 16, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jr_20uEVOiE.

26. Joshua Barrus, quoted in Blair Hodges *Fireside* podcast, “New Words,” <https://www.firesidepod.org/episodes/rakow>.

27. Mary Rakow, “New Words with Mary Rakow,” *Fireside with Blair Hodges*, Sept. 13, 2021, podcast, <https://www.firesidepod.org/episodes/rakow>.

28. Isaiah 45:7.

Pi: Oh plenty, on every floor. Doubt is useful; it keeps faith a living thing. Afterall, you cannot know the strength of your faith until it's been tested.²⁹

Indeed, by merely holding an intention to make space for doubt, more often than not we discover that we have more capacity than we originally thought; we have, as it were, a spare bedroom inside to host both faith and doubt, and a realization of this expanded capacity in turn enables us to host others' faith and doubt, to make beloved space for deepened interpersonal connections, and to give others the experience of "feeling felt."³⁰

For understandable reasons, humans in general gravitate to a unipolar universe, and members of our faith tradition are no exception. We want to take a side, as evidenced by a cursory examination of our scriptural canon and published hymns, e.g., "Who's on the Lord's Side?"³¹ or "I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth"³² or "He that is not with me is against me,"³³ and so forth, but at the same time we're reminded that "it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things,"³⁴ from Joseph Smith, "By proving contraries, truth is made manifest,"³⁵ or from the poet William Blake, "Without contraries is no progression."³⁶

29. *Life of Pi*, directed by Ang Lee (20th Century Fox, 2012), DVD, 21:16–21:29.

30. From Mindfulness Session 6 at Brigham Young University with Thomas McConkie, Winter 2021. The phrase "feeling felt" originates with neuroscientist Daniel Siegel.

31. "Who's on the Lord's Side?," *Hymns*, no. 260.

32. Revelation 3:15–16.

33. Matthew 12:30.

34. 2 Nephi 2:11.

35. "Letter to Israel Daniel Rupp, 5 June 1844," 1, The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/letter-to-israel-daniel-rupp-5-june-1844/1>.

36. William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, plate 3 (1790).

Far less burdensome to adopt a unipolar view of life that allows one to “escape pain, to seek quiet harbors, to find secure absolutes, even at the cost of worshipping idols”³⁷ than to hold the tension of opposites, but such was not the spirit of the early Saints who valued the pursuit of truth through reasoned debate. In fact, during the Kirtland and Nauvoo years, the Prophet Joseph frequently participated in debates, which “afforded an excellent exercise in logical thinking and expression. Joseph valued the practice, that his followers ‘might improve their minds and cultivate their powers of intellect in a proper manner,’” as Terryl Givens writes in *People of Paradox*.³⁸

William Blake recognized the underlying unity of opposites and “used the image of marriage to convey his sense of a redemptive *fusion* of the various sets of conflicting values as opposed to compromise—or suppression or victory of one or the other poles. In the true marriage, neither individual is destroyed, but their individual loneliness and limitation is transcended in their mutual creative acts and the fruit they bear—which they could not bear alone.”³⁹ In this regard, the late Eugene England, professor of English at Brigham Young University, taught, “Tragedy does not have to do with presence or lack of ultimate guarantees but with present suffering in the face of the paradoxes [the opposites] that reality progressively unfolds to the tragic quester,”⁴⁰ which is to say that once one pierces the veil of duality and perceives the world in terms of a both-and interdependent relationship, there’s no going back to a simple either-or dichotomy. Hence, tragedy lies in the irreversibility of expanded consciousness and the burden associated

37. Eugene England, “Joseph Smith and the Tragic Quest,” in *Dialogues with Myself: Personal Essays on Mormon Experience* (Midvale, Utah: Signature Books, 1984), 6.

38. Terryl Givens, *People of Paradox: A History of Mormon Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 81.

39. Eugene England, “Obedience, Integrity, and the Paradox of Selfhood,” in *Dialogues with Myself*, 34.

40. England, “Joseph Smith and the Tragic Quest,” 2.

therewith. Indeed, as Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. pointed out, “A mind that is stretched by a new experience can never go back to its old dimensions.”⁴¹

Christianity calls us to hang, as it were, suspended between two opposites, simple faith and intellectual rigor, and to discover truth that unites them. Herein, I would assert, lies the underlying liminal meaning of the Christian cross: nailed to the cross as a living historical man being put to death, Christ transcends death as he transcends life. The symbolism is obvious: to his left and right are the opposed thieves; he himself, in the middle, will descend with one and with the other ascend to that height from which he has already come down. Thus, Christ is bound to neither of the opposed terms, neither to the vertical nor the horizontal beam of his cross, though in a temporal-historical sense he is indeed bound, even crucified, as are we all when we see the implicit oneness in all things but choose to stay and live in a world defined by explicit duality.

In Mahayana Buddhism, the term “bodhisattva” refers to such a person who has penetrated this world of illusion and tasted the divine but, rather than depart it to enjoy everlasting burnings, chooses to stay and awake in others the same experience: “The Bodhisattva is one who comes back and appears in the everyday world and plays the game of the everyday world by the rules of the everyday world, but he brings with him *upaya*, he brings with him some way to show that he’s been on the journey, that he’s come back, and he’s going to let you in on the secret, too, if you—if, if, if—play it cool, and also come back to join in the everyday life of everyday people,” as Alan Watts explains.⁴² As such, the bodhisattva “returning to the world” means that s/he has discovered

41. Peggy Noonan, “Everyone Has Gone Crazy in Washington,” *Wall Street Journal*, Oct. 15, 2020, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/everyone-has-gone-crazy-in-washington-11602806459>.

42. Infinite Wisdom, “Alan Watts – How to See Through the Game – The Secret to Life: Happiness,” YouTube video, 10:47, Feb. 12, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_h-FswIACKE.

that you don't have to go anywhere to find nirvana: nirvana is where you are.⁴³ Indeed, the verbal root *buddh-* from Buddha means "to awake, know." We find a marvelous analogue in our own faith tradition in the personage of Ammon, who chose to live among his heretofore enemies, the Lamanites, after having awakened to the eternal oneness of life: "And the king inquired of Ammon if it were his desire to dwell in the land among the Lamanites, or among his people. And Ammon said unto him: Yea, I desire to dwell among this people for a time; yea, and perhaps until the day I die."⁴⁴

In the Church, we're taught that the "glory of God is intelligence, or, in other words, light and truth."⁴⁵ Light serves as a powerful metaphor of the birth of consciousness into the world, as illustrated in the opening lines of the creation story: "Let there be light."⁴⁶ In other words, the quest for light and truth represents coming of age and leaving the comforts of hearth and home, or in spiritual terms, leaving the security of others' testimonies and discovering one's own path in life, yet the danger of searching for light and truth arises when one discovers aspects of one's faith that seem to contradict past instruction and study. Sincere questioning sometimes can meet resistance from peers and leaders who regard a skeptical attitude as a mark of imperfect faith, and it's in these moments of vulnerability when such individuals understandably can opt for safe harbors replete with security and validation.

But I would push back by saying that unity is not sameness: one can't have an experience of *self* without having an experience of *other*, and yet in our efforts to promote unity, whether it be social, political, religious, or otherwise, we somehow forget that unity implies duality, which is to say relatedness, and thus attend to only one term of a

43. See Alan Watts, *Out of Your Mind: Tricksters, Interdependence, and the Cosmic Game of Hide-and-Seek* (Louisville, Colo.: Sounds True, 2017), 166.

44. Alma 17:22–23.

45. Doctrine and Covenants 93:36.

46. Genesis 1:3.

relationship (the figure) and neglect the other (the ground). You could say that it's the difference between seeing "either a chalice or kissing faces; for the logic of thought the two images are mutually exclusive."⁴⁷ Seeing a figure in relation to its ground likewise lends new meaning to Paul Tillich's description of God as "the ground of being," for just as our being is conditioned by the existence of a ground, so, too, God's work and glory is conditioned by our being.⁴⁸ Hence, the inner meaning of Jesus' supplication, "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us."⁴⁹ The two depend on one another for their existence and, thus, constitute a unified whole.

Likewise, without the serpent, you can't have God and vice versa; the two are one. Is it any wonder, therefore, that in the Old Testament the serpent takes on a dual persona as both poisonous and healing? Consider the example of Moses, who made a snake out of bronze and attached it to a pole. Anyone who was bitten by a snake could look at the bronze snake and be healed.⁵⁰ Just as Moses' staff turned into a serpent and then back into a staff, his hand became diseased before it regained its wholeness. A cycle occurs from the top to the bottom of reality and back again. God exists in one eternal round and can hold the tension of opposites together. By letting the serpent act as his agent, God willed evil but accomplished good. One ascends to godhood by transcending the devil; one transcends the devil by accepting his necessity.⁵¹ Christian imagery builds on this underlying relationship and reminds us that "as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up."⁵²

47. Watts, *The Two Hands of God*, 24.

48. See Moses 1:39.

49. John 17:21.

50. Numbers 21:9.

51. Christian Swenson, email correspondence with author, Dec. 6, 2021.

52. John 3:14.

This recognition of God and nature as an integrated whole rather than a system of competing opposites plays out in a Chinese fable popularized by the British author and philosopher Alan Watts:

Once upon a time there was a Chinese farmer whose horse ran away. That evening, all of his neighbors came around to commiserate. They said, "We are so sorry to hear your horse has run away. This is most unfortunate." The farmer said, "Maybe." The next day the horse came back bringing seven wild horses with it, and in the evening, everybody came back and said, "Oh, isn't that lucky. What a great turn of events. You now have eight horses!" The farmer again said, "Maybe."

The following day his son tried to break one of the horses, and while riding it, he was thrown and broke his leg. The neighbors then said, "Oh dear, that's too bad," and the farmer responded, "Maybe." The next day the conscription officers came around to conscript people into the army, and they rejected his son because he had a broken leg. Again, all the neighbors came around and said, "Isn't that great!" Again, he said, "Maybe."⁵³

In the unassuming liminal figure of the farmer, we find someone who resists his neighbors' proclivity for reducing life's consequences to one of two poles and instead sees fortune and misfortune as mutually arising opposites that give way to a transcendent third or middle way, as expressed in the farmer's reply, "Maybe." Such a perspective neither negates opposites nor clings to them but sees the two as an undulating current flowing together "without compulsory means," as is so with all pure intelligence.⁵⁴ A person who taps into this flow experiences anew the original totality of the paradisaical garden "with its four mysterious rivers flowing in the four directions from a common source at the center"⁵⁵ and

53. Jade Panugan, "The Story of the Chinese Farmer," *Craftdeology*, <https://www.craftdeology.com/the-story-of-the-chinese-farmer-by-alan-watts/>.

54. See Doctrine and Covenants 121:46 and *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 151.

55. Diane K. Osbon, ed., *A Joseph Campbell Companion: Reflections on the Art of Living* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), 144.

spontaneously acts from that center in a manner consistent with Jesus' instruction: "Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth."⁵⁶

Nobody wants to admit that there must be an opponent for the game to go on; instead, we tirelessly labor to eliminate the enemy only to discover that we're fighting ourselves. Indeed, as a widely shared aphorism attributed to Jung reminds us, "Wholeness is not achieved by cutting off a portion of one's being, but by integration of the contraries,"⁵⁷ for without the shadow there can be no substance. Now, there's a danger associated with letting the cat out of the bag, so to say, and opening others' eyes to this reality, and one of those dangers is that when people realize that Team A only can exist in relation to Team B, then the energy requisite to go on fighting against the other will dry up. People will see through the game and refuse to keep playing. Indeed, instead of loving our "enemies" with the intent of converting them, we realize that they're terribly important to our knowing that we're nice.⁵⁸ Such a paradigm shift puts us in the embarrassing position of feeling indebted to those whom we previously considered the recipients of our charity and goodwill. So, what I want you to consider is a scenario where you have come to this realization, and then, like Ammon and the Buddha, you stay grounded in your community and impart your new-found wisdom in such a manner that unifies rather than estranges. This requires a certain art, and I would argue that it's precisely for this reason that Jesus likewise lived among the people and taught in parables.

I hope that in our search for truth, each of us will have the courage to endure some dark nights of the soul, similar to what Jesus experienced

56. Matthew 6:3.

57. This quotation is widely attributed to Jung, though the original source is unclear. See, for example, Lawrence Chan, "Systems Engineering," in *Engineering-Medicine: Principles and Applications of Engineering in Medicine*, edited by Lawrence S. Chan and William C. Tang (New York: Routledge, 2019), 78.

58. Alan Watts, "Spectrum of Love," audio and transcript available at <https://alanwatts.org/transcripts/spectrum-of-love/>.

during his forty-day sojourn into the desert, to take on “some pain, including the pain of doubt and indecision.”⁵⁹ Those who evade such a crucible, “who believe they believe in God, but without passion in the heart, without anguish of mind, without uncertainty, without doubt, and even at times without despair, believe only in the idea of God, and not in God himself.”⁶⁰ After all, as Fiona Givens writes,

If we assume that religion exists to answer our questions, we will be disappointed, for that is not its purpose. Many of the Savior’s sermons seemed calculated to disturb rather than to reassure. After one particularly disquieting discourse, many of the Lord’s disciples “walked no more with him.” Jesus turned to His apostles and asked: “Will ye also go away?” They responded simply: “To whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.” They were as uncomfortable as any of the other disciples, but they understood that Christ was indeed the Messiah. They had committed themselves to Him. There was nothing to do but follow Him in spite of the cost.⁶¹

For you and me, the cost likely will not entail martyrdom, or an exclamation point at the end of our lives; rather, it will entail quietly learning how to embrace ambiguity of expression over unequivocalness. It will entail mustering the “courage to live in a radically insecure world with continued integrity.”⁶²

In Peter we find the embodiment of this tension, and Jesus clearly foresees that before Peter can rise to the stature of the head of the Church, he first must descend to the depths of hell by thrice denying him. In other words, the ascent only exists in relation to the descent.

59. Cornelius Plantinga Jr., *Engaging God’s World: A Christian Vision of Faith, Learning, and Living* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2002), 125.

60. Miguel de Unamuno, quoted in Madeleine L’Engle, *Walking on Water: Reflections on Faith & Art* (New York: Bantam Books, 1982), 32.

61. Fiona Givens, “Spiritual Pathogens,” *LDS Living Magazine* (Jan./Feb. 2014): 24–25.

62. “Bishop Spong ponders eternity,” Minnesota Public Radio, Sept. 16, 2009, <https://www.mprnews.org/story/2009/09/16/midmorning1>.

“Thy mind, O man!” begins Joseph Smith in a letter dictated from the depths of Liberty Jail, “if thou wilt lead a soul unto salvation, must stretch as high as the utmost heavens, and search into and contemplate the darkest abyss, and the broad expanse of eternity—thou must commune with God.”⁶³

If any of you feel spiritually incomplete, I urge you to find a place in this patchwork quilt of questers collectively referred to as the body of Christ, which “needs its full complement of members—the devout, the wayward, the uncomfortable, the struggling.”⁶⁴ For me, a hallmark of God’s grace lies in his working with our strengths *and* weaknesses to build his kingdom. I take Alma at his word when he testified that “*all* things denote there is a God,”⁶⁵ which, in the context of the Church, reaffirms in my mind the beauty of broken or dis-membered people coming together to re-member Christ through the dualistic emblems of the sacrament and in so doing experiencing at-one-ment.

During a discussion with a student in 2019, I compared finding truth to assembling shards of a stained-glass window, the collective result of which transcends the pieces alone and offers a stunning glimpse into the eternal Self. Shortly after our conversation, she penned the following poem, which you’ll notice alludes to Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, and which I think represents a sublime expression of wholeness.

“Stained Glass”⁶⁶ by Shannon Bairett

A shard pressed in the palm draws blood.
Turned delicately, by its edges, the light stabs too.
Admiration—pain; and truth—
Truth is violence.

63. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 137.

64. Terry Givens and Fiona Givens, *The Crucible of Doubt: Reflections on the Quest for Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2014), 107.

65. Alma 30:44, italics added.

66. Shannon Bairett, “Stained Glass,” *Humanities* (Fall 2019): 3. Reprinted with permission of Shannon Bairett Murphy.

I didn't ask for pieces.
I came here for wholes and found holes. I pulled a nail from my shoe
the other day
Without thinking to ask where it came from.
Only that it found its rest in my sole.
That drew blood too.

What can I tell you? Two decades isn't long for research,
However assiduous.
This doesn't even rhyme.
Most truths I find in fragments by the road.

A wise man said
That wayside seeds don't grow.
But I protest that sometimes they shatter
And those of us who aren't rooted yet
Seek out what sustenance we can.

Where do my fragments leave me?
Bleeding out handfuls of glass on the same road I've always walked.
There are several roads, they say, but I've only ever found this one.
In sunlight, the gravel shimmers like gold
And I cover my eyes.

Thinking back, the nail probably came from the burning church
It was old, and the antique glass I found there
Bubbled over, distorted, but more intact than most
Offered a fuller reflection
Than any yet.
I retrace my steps.

Before the altar I found the nail. And now, I look up to find:
Another hole.
A bleeding palm.
Sandals worn from roads lonelier than mine
(And from mine too.)

An impeccable reflection in eyes that finally teach me who I am.
Weary in worn and punctured sneakers
Beneath a roof burned through to heaven

Rays shine down to
 Bathe me in colors.
 A spectrum born of the Son.

And standing
 Splashed
 In pieces of white,
 I finally understand
 Why we paint the Savior in stained fragments made whole.

Here we find an eloquent rendering of separateness comprising an underlying wholeness, which unity I would assert likewise relates to the Prophet Joseph's teaching regarding the living and the dead, specifically that "we without them cannot be made perfect; neither can they without us be made perfect."⁶⁷ Carrying out ordinances for the dead necessitated constructing temples, houses of liminality, if you will, wherein God might dwell with his people as in the days of the children of Israel, who constructed tabernacles in the wilderness that bridged the gulf separating the sacred and the profane and reconciled God and his people.⁶⁸ As such, latter-day temples straddle these two spheres and create a space in which both the temporal and spiritual exist, as Samuel Brown puts it, "in an interwoven cosmic structure of interdependence."⁶⁹

In Dostoevsky's final novel *The Brothers Karamazov*, the character Ivan, an atheistic superman, recounts a story of Christ returning to

67. Doctrine and Covenants 128:18.

68. See Daniel L. Belnap, "'That I May Dwell Among Them': Liminality and Ritual in the Tabernacle," in *Ascending the Mountain of the Lord: Temple, Praise, and Worship in the Old Testament*, edited by David Rolph Seely, Jeffrey R. Chadwick, and Matthew J. Grey (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2016).

69. Samuel Brown, *Joseph Smith's Translation: The Words and Worlds of Early Mormonism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 263.

earth at the time of the Spanish Inquisition. Concerning this account, clinical psychologist Jordan Peterson writes,

The returning Savior makes quite a ruckus, as would be expected. He heals the sick. He raises the dead. His antics soon attract attention from the Grand Inquisitor himself, who promptly has Christ arrested and thrown into a prison cell. Later, the Inquisitor pays Him a visit. He informs Christ that he is no longer needed. His return is simply too great a threat to the Church. The Inquisitor tells Christ that the burden he laid on mankind—the burden of existence in faith and truth—was simply too great for mere mortals to bear. The Inquisitor claims that the Church, in its mercy, diluted that message, lifting the demand for perfect Being from the shoulders of its followers, providing them instead with the simple and merciful escapes of faith and the afterlife. That work took centuries, says the Inquisitor, and the last thing the Church needs after all that effort is the return of the Man who insisted that people bear all the weight in the first place. Christ listens in silence. Then, as the Inquisitor turns to leave, Christ embraces him, and kisses him on the lips. The Inquisitor turns white, in shock. Then he goes out, *leaving the cell door open*.⁷⁰

This easily overlooked detail of the Grand Inquisitor leaving the cell door open likewise speaks to an easily overlooked door in the modern Church that remains ajar to the seemingly unwanted or marginal. Even the Grand Inquisitor, the epitome of everything corrupt and deceitful in Christianity, couldn't deny Christ a seat at the table, so to say. The same invitation, spoken or implied, applies to you and me, regardless of where we fall on the spectrum of faith and doubt.

Whether you have or haven't wrestled with such feelings, I urge you to avoid becoming spiritually and intellectually complacent. Take seriously the divine admonition to learn "things which have been, . . . things which must shortly come to pass; things which are at home, things which are abroad; the wars and perplexities of the nations . . .

70. Jordan Peterson, *12 Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos* (New York: Random House, 2018), 190, italics added.

and a knowledge also of countries and kingdoms.”⁷¹ We are to “become acquainted with all good books, and with languages, tongues and people.”⁷² I take this charge to mean not just learning languages in a linguistic sense but understanding the languages of other faith traditions, whether it be Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, or any number of branches of Christianity. In this regard, I’m reminded of Ukrainian-born Samuel Wohl, who at age fifteen wrote to Leo Tolstoy and explained his spiritual predicament: “I admire you a great deal,” he begins his letter, “but how can I follow your work when every other word is about Christ and I am a Jew?” Tolstoy thoughtfully replied: “The words of Christ are not important because they were said by Christ. On the contrary, they are important because they are true and inscribed on the heart of every human being.” Wohl treasured that advice and later emigrated to America and became a prominent rabbi in the Jewish community.⁷³

I also take this charge to mean saving in our faith tradition “what is eccentric and singular from being sanitized and standardized,”⁷⁴ i.e., becoming acquainted both with the clean, unequivocal narrative that dismisses ambiguity and uncertainty as well as with the blemished, messy narrative that embraces the full spectrum of the human condition and God’s saving grace. Elder Hugh B. Brown, someone with whom I feel a particular kinship both spiritually and ancestrally, captured this expansive manner of thinking when he implored members to “preserve freedom of the mind in the Church and resist all efforts

71. Doctrine and Covenants 88:79.

72. Doctrine and Covenants 90:15.

73. Academic Studies Press, “Irwin Weil Podcast,” YouTube video, 1:00:40, Apr. 10, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k5Ibdu7QW0>.

74. Faith Matters Foundation, “Risk-Taking Discipleship – Terryl Givens with Thomas F. Rogers,” YouTube video, 50:30, Nov. 3, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IzoRUw4V1fA>.

to suppress it. The Church is not so much concerned with whether the thoughts of its members are orthodox or heterodox as it is that they shall have thoughts.”⁷⁵

If what I’ve shared with you rings true or if, in the words of Joseph Smith, “it tastes good,”⁷⁶ then I invite you to hold the tension of opposites and pursue the middle way, which is to say to walk into the mystery of God with its attendant safety and insecurity, truth and deception, light and darkness, joy and suffering. By choosing the middle way you likewise choose to participate in a community of believers with whom you may share little in common, but opposites when joined precipitate the birth of a new third, which in Christian vernacular speaks to the manifestation of the Holy Spirit of truth.⁷⁷ As such, emphasizing community-building over individual interests amounts to crucifying, as it were, our ego, to dying to a life of duality preparatory to awakening with eyes that see the interdependence of the universe. When one has this realization, suddenly one is “at once the least significant atom in the universal whole *and* that universal whole,”⁷⁸ hence the esoteric meaning of the familiar saying, “He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.”⁷⁹

But make no mistake, “the path of ease, recognition, and casual sameness is not the way of the cross Christ calls us to bear,” as Patrick

75. Hugh B. Brown, “Freedom of the Mind: An Eternal Quest,” May 13, 1969, <https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/hugh-b-brown/eternal-quest/>.

76. King Follett Sermon, Nauvoo, Apr. 7, 1844, “History, 1838–1856, volume E-1 [1 July 1843–30 April 1844],” 1974, The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-e-1-1-july-1843-30-april-1844/346>.

77. See M. Scott Peck, *The Different Drum: Community Making and Peace* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987), 75.

78. Watts, *The Two Hands of God*, 241.

79. Matthew 10:39.

Mason writes.⁸⁰ Indeed, the very symbol of the cross reminds us that beams fashioned opposite each other rather than in the same direction bear wholeness, and just as Jesus' body hung on the cross, so too do we as the collective body of Christ hang on the cross when we bear one another's burdens and when we rediscover wholeness in our brokenness.

And so, having obtained the treasure of in-sight and wholeness, we begin the process of becoming as children,⁸¹ shedding the very titles and masks associated with this world of opposites, and returning to the garden of our original wholeness, albeit as conscious or awakened travelers capable of experiencing the eternal in the temporal. The twentieth-century British poet T. S. Eliot eloquently captured this journey in the last of his *Four Quartets*, titled *Little Gidding*:

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.⁸²

Such a return to the primordial garden of our souls speaks to a millennial rest, which rest in no way suggests an absence of duality, for if that were the case, we would not use metaphors like a wolf dwelling with a lamb, a leopard lying down with a kid, a calf and a young lion and fatling together, and a child leading them;⁸³ instead, such a metaphor speaks to a reconciliation of our own inner beasts, an unlearning, if you will, of categories and constructs that heretofore divided our inner and outer worlds, and when one has this epiphany, the world that one

80. Patrick Mason, *Planted: Belief and Belonging in an Age of Doubt* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Neal A. Maxwell Institute, 2015), 147.

81. See Matthew 18:3.

82. T. S. Eliot, *T. S. Eliot Collected Poems 1909–1962* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers, 1971), 208.

83. See Isaiah 11:6.

thought depended on competing opposites indeed does come to an end. And so, by saying “yes” to the world, words and noises that once gave the illusion of separateness give way to a unifying wholeness and bring to fulfillment the command “Be ye therefore perfect,”⁸⁴ which is to say, be ye therefore an integrated whole. Thus, true integrity transcends moralism and dogmatism in that it recognizes the impossibility of taking sides, except in play or illusion, “for no being lives except in relation to the whole community of being.”⁸⁵

May our exploration lead us to an awakening of the implicit oneness of all things is my prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

84. Matthew 5:48.

85. Watts, *The Two Hands of God*, 206.

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IN THE NEXT ISSUE

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